

Media and Participation

To Irena
for her brave struggle

Media and Participation

A site of ideological-democratic struggle

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Introduction¹

In November 1941 the Nazis transformed the garrison town of Theresienstadt (or Terezín in what is now the Czech Republic) into a concentration camp that became ‘home’ to more than 50,000 Jewish people who were forced to live in extremely harsh conditions, while they awaited deportation to the Auschwitz extermination camp. There were many children in the Theresienstadt camp, often segregated from the adults in children’s homes. The group of young boys who were housed in Barracks L417 (or Home One) started, in secret, to produce a newspaper, *Vedem* (which translates as ‘We lead’), which was a remarkable collection of essays, reviews, stories, drawings and poetry, written by the 13-, 14- and 15-year-old boys in Home One².

Vedem’s first and only editor-in-chief was Petr Ginz (1928–1944), who took on the role aged 14. *Vedem* was produced weekly, from December 1942 to July 1944. The 800 pages of *Vedem*, 1–190 typewritten, the rest handwritten, survived the war and are now housed in the Memorial of Terezin. The 100 or so occupants of Home One were less fortunate; only fifteen boys survived the war. *Vedem*’s editor-in-chief, Petr Ginz, was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944 (Křížková et al., 1995).

One of the boys, Walter Roth, delivered the following address, which was (quite soon after) published in *Vedem*:

The banner has been raised. Home Number One has its own flag, the symbol of its future work and its future communal life. The Home has its own government. Why did we set it up? Because we no longer want to be an accidental group of boys, passively succumbing to the fate meted out to us. We want to create an active, mature society and through work and discipline transform our fate into a joyful, proud reality. They have unjustly uprooted us from the soil that nurtured us, from the work, the joys, and the culture from which our young lives should have drawn strength. They have only one aim in mind – to destroy us, not only physically but mentally and morally as well. Will they succeed? Never! Robbed of the sources of our culture, we shall create new ones. Separated from all that gave us pleasure, we shall build a new and joyously triumphant life! Cut off from a well-ordered society, we shall create a new life together, based on organization, voluntary discipline and mutual trust. Torn from our people

by this terrible evil, we shall not allow our hearts to be hardened by hatred and anger, but today and forever, our highest aim shall be love for our fellow men, and contempt for racial, religious and nationalist strife. (Roth, in Křížková et al., 1995: 36)

Vedem remains a beautiful and at the same time horrific symbol of the human capacity to endure hardships without surrendering humanity. *Vedem* demonstrates the importance of communication to articulate this same humanity: To speak, to write and to publish is to enjoy, to resist, to live and to be human. *Vedem* uniquely symbolizes human capacity and need to communicate. It demonstrates the importance – to all of us – of the media as a tool and structure to organize this communication, and our capacity to produce these media ourselves, even in the face of the most difficult circumstances.

This book explores media and participation in much less horrendous circumstances, but against the backdrop of the vigour that the editors of *Vedem* displayed in order to democratize their communication in a place where democracy had ceased to exist. In the contemporary era, participation still sometimes meets with resistance, contempt or indifference, but it is no longer punished by persecution, at least not in most western democracies, and not most of the time. This is not to imply that participation is an easy concept, either theoretically or empirically. Its ideological role in the democratic-political realm renders it a floating signifier, which tends to complicate matters.

The first part of this book attempts to grasp the concept of participation and its role within the mediascape through a detailed discussion of the articulations of participation in the theoretical-academic debates in five societal fields: democracy, spatial planning, development, arts and museums, and communication. This detailed analysis, which is in its structure inspired by Foucault's archeo-genealogy, highlights the complexity and contingency of the signifier participation, by showing the wide variety of – sometimes contradictory and sometimes mutually reinforcing – meanings that have been attributed to the concept of participation in these different fields in the second half of the twentieth and first years of the twenty-first century. My broad theoretical and empirical approach is to ground media participation within its twentieth-century intellectual history but without reducing it to a linear-historical narration, and to contextualize it by linking it to a series of similar debates – often forgotten in analyses of media participation – in other societal fields. In order to achieve this objective, I use the strategy of 'thick' theoretical description, in which a high level of theoretical detail is provided in order to show the fluidity, contingency and diversity but also the rigidity and fixity of the signifier participation.

The ultimate impossibility of fixing the signifier participation is explained by its intimate connection with the political, the ideological and the democratic. Participation is seen as a political-ideological concept that is intrinsically linked to power. This becomes obvious in the discussion of democratic theory, where participation is in permanent tension with the concept of representation. And when we move beyond the field of institutionalized politics into the realm of the political, we again see how participation captures the power

relations within a variety of societal spheres. What this book shows is that the political nature of participation manifests itself in the struggles to minimize or to maximize the equal power positions of the actors involved in the decision-making processes that are omnipresent in all societal spheres.

In the second part of the book I use five keywords to deepen these debates on participation. It is no accident that, for the reasons mentioned above, the first keyword addressed in this second part is power. I then discuss four structuring elements that play enabling or disabling roles within participatory processes: identity, technology, organization and quality. The chapters in part two of this book that deal with these structuring elements allow me to re-emphasize – but from a different angle, and through its interactions with these other concepts – the complexity of the notion of participation. All five keywords are notions that have been approached in many different ways, and for that reason each of the five chapters in part two of the book starts with a theoretical-conceptual discussion that combines discursive and materialist approaches³ and that articulates and links these concepts to participation.

These theoretical discussions – combined with the instruments developed in the first part of this book – are used to develop a series of case studies within a variety of media spheres. The audience discussion programme *Jan Publiek* and the access TV programme *Barometer* are used to show the workings of power within the mainstream (public) television sphere, focusing especially on the role of the media professional. In chapter 3 on identity, a reception analysis of *Jan Publiek* combined with an analysis of the reality TV programme *Temptation Island* and the online debates it triggered shows the importance of the identities and subject positions that circulate within the media sphere. These subject positions, often embedded already in the media texts and the production process, structure the reception of the ordinary participants and their interventions. Chapter 4 discusses the importance of organizational structures as key locations where participatory practices are embedded. The BBC's *Video Nation* project illustrates the capacity of mainstream broadcasters to organize more maximalist forms of participation, while the *RadioSwap* case shows the limits of the participatory ambitions of alternative and community radio stations. Chapter 5 looks at another of the structuring elements, technology, through the Czechoslovak *Kinoautomat* case study. The greater detail of this discussion of *Kinoautomat* due to the need to document this exceptional 1960s film project allows me to analyse the role of technology in participatory projects. Finally, in chapter 6 the importance of the concept of quality as a discursive tool that impacts on the acceptance or rejection of participatory media content is illustrated by the reception analysis of two subcases (*16plus* and *Barometer*). The second case study in this chapter, on the negotiations over quality in Swiss and Austrian community radio stations, shows that this discourse on quality is not completely rigid, and that these media organizations managed to include the quality definition in their participatory praxis.

Through all these theoretical elaborations and empirical case studies, participation reveals itself as a valuable entry point to the ongoing democratic revolution, which

requires continuous protection from regression, and continuous stimuli to deepen it. The protection and further democratization of our democracies is the best possible tribute to the hope and creativity of the *Vedem* boys, and the many others who have struggled to get their voices heard.

Notes

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2. The boys did almost all of the writing themselves, but they were assisted and motivated by a number of adults, most notably Valtr Eisinger.
3. This also entails a very modest attempt to bridge the Cultural Studies and Political Economy traditions.

Chapter 1

Defining Participation: An Interdisciplinary Overview



The concept of participation features in a surprising variety of frameworks, which have been transformed through an almost infinite number of materializations. This first chapter analyses the articulation of participation in five theoretical frameworks, without focusing too much (yet) on their actual materialization in participatory practices; however, I do not lose sight of the basic fact that theorizations are often grounded in reflections on specific and actual materializations. The five fields I scrutinize are democracy, spatial planning, development, arts and museums, and communication, all of which are rich in what they have to offer on participation. This chapter juxtaposes the different fields, with a series of discourse-theoretical techniques¹ working in the background, to provide a detailed and interdisciplinary mapping of the ways that participation has been articulated in and across these fields. Together, these five fields are evidence of the social need for participation and the desire of people to exert control over their everyday lives, but also of the difficult relations people have with the ways that their participation is organized, structured and (thus) limited.

1. Democratic theory and participation

1.1 An introduction

Democracy, because of its concern with the inclusion of the people within political decision-making processes, is one of the key sites of the articulation of the concept of participation. The centrality of people's participation is described in Held's (1996: 1) definition of democracy as "a form of government in which, in contradiction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule. Democracy entails a political community in which there is some form of political equality among the people". Held's work provides an immediate and excellent overview of the complexity of the notion of democracy. In his *Models of Democracy*, Held (1996: 3) initiates the debate by referring to Lively's (1975: 30) list of ways to organize this form of political equality in practice. Lively distinguishes seven variations: (1) all should govern; (2) all should be involved in crucial decision-making; (3) rulers should be accountable to the ruled; (4) rulers should be accountable to the representatives of the ruled; (5) rulers should be chosen by the ruled; (6) rulers should be chosen by the representatives of the ruled and (7) rulers should act

in the interest of the ruled. This list first highlights the strong emphasis in democratic theory on the difference between rulers and ruled, with the important consequence that the concept of participation is articulated exclusively in relation to the ruled, ignoring the rulers. The list can also be seen as an initial indication that democracy is not a stable concept with a fixed signification, but encompasses a multitude of meanings.

The meaning of the concept of democracy is complicated by three elements: the variety of democratic manifestations and variants; the distinction between formal democracy and democratic cultures and practices; and the distinction between the narrow-political system ('politics') and the broad-political dimensions of the social (the 'political'). One of the crucial dimensions structuring the different democratic models is the minimalist versus maximalist dimension, which underlies a number of key positions in the articulation of democracy.

One of these key positions is the always-present balance between representation and participation, which, for instance, provides structuring support for Held's (1996) typology of democratic models. As Held describes it, "Within the history of the clash of positions lies the struggle to determine whether democracy will mean some kind of popular power (a form of life in which citizens are engaged in *self-government* and *self-regulation*) or an aid to decision-making (a means to legitimate the decisions of those voted into power)" (Held, 1996: 3 – emphasis in original). The notion of representation refers here to political representation, *Vertretung*, or speaking-for, in contrast to the other main meaning of representation, *Darstellung*, or standing-for (Spivak, 1990: 108).² Political representation is grounded in the formal delegation of power, where specific actors are authorized on behalf of others "to sign on his behalf, to act on his behalf, to speak on his behalf" and where these actors receive "the power of a proxy" (Bourdieu, 1991: 203). Obviously, one of the basic democratic instruments for the formal delegation of power is elections, where, through the organization of a popular vote, political actors are legitimized to gain (at least partial) control over well-defined parts of the state's resources and decision-making structures. This control is not total, but structured through institutional, legal (often constitutional) and cultural logics.

On the other side of the democratic balance is the notion of political participation, which refers to the involvement of the citizenry within (institutionalized) politics. As Marshall (1992: 10–11) explains in his discussion of political citizen rights, this not only includes the right to elect, but also the right to stand for election: "By the political element [*of citizenship*] I mean the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political power or as an elector of such a body". Again, these forms of political participation are not total, but structured through institutional, legal and cultural logics (see Dahlgren, 2009). One important example is the limits imposed by the concept of citizenship itself, which is not only a democracy-facilitating concept, but also has an exclusionary component.

Different democratic models (of democratic theory and practice) attribute different balances between these concepts of representation and participation. When the political is

defined, following Schumpeter (1976), for instance, as the privilege of specific competing elites, thus reducing the political role of the citizenry to participation in the election process, the balance shifts towards representation and the delegation of power. This is what we can consider the first characteristic of the minimalist version of democratic participation. In this model, the societal decision-making remains centralized and participation remains limited (in space and time). In contrast, in other democratic models (e.g., participatory or radical democracy – see below), participation plays a more substantial and continuous role and does not remain restricted to the ‘mere’ election of representatives. These democratic models with more decentralized societal decision-making and a stronger role of participation (in relation to representation) are considered here to be maximalist forms of democratic participation.

Figure 1: The minimalist versus maximalist dimension.

<i>Minimalist democratic participation</i>	<i>Maximalist democratic participation</i>
Focusing on representation and delegation of power	Balancing representation and participation
Participation limited to elite selection	Attempting to maximize participation
Focusing on macro-participation	Combining macro- and micro-participation
Narrow definition of politics as institutionalized politics	Broad definition of the political as a dimension of the social
Unidirectional participation	Multidirectional participation
Focusing on a homogeneous popular will	Focusing on heterogeneity

Figure 1 shows that the archetypical minimalist–maximalist dimension is characterized not only by the balance between representation and participation, but on the distinction that Thomas (1994) makes between micro- and macro-participation. While macro-participation relates to participation in the entire polis, country or political imagined community, micro-participation refers to the spheres of school, family, workplace, church and community. More minimalist models tend to focus more exclusively on macro-participation, since the political role of citizens is limited to the election of political representatives at the macro-level. A classic definition of political participation by Verba and Nie (1987: 2) states that political participation is “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take”, which situates political participation within the field of macro-participation (see also Milbrath, 1965; Milbrath and Goel, 1977). Brady (1997: 737) uses a slightly broader definition of political participation as “any activity of ordinary [³] citizens with the aim of influencing the political outcomes”, but on the next page adds that these participatory efforts are “directed at some government policy or activity” (Brady, 1997: 738). More traditional public sphere models tend also to focus

on macro-communicative processes, in the establishment of 'the' public opinion. This is a viewpoint echoed in Habermas's (1974: 49) old definition of the public sphere: "By the 'public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens". In contrast, models of maximalist democratic participation tend to combine (attention for) the different spheres of the social, without ignoring participatory practices within the field of institutionalized politics, at a variety of levels, including local politics, interest group politics and activist politics. But these strong (er) forms of citizen involvement are not restricted to institutionalized politics; participatory practices can also be embedded within the structures of everyday life (which can be located in civil society, businesses or families). For instance, in *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Giddens formulates a warm plea for the "radical democratisation of the personal" (Giddens, 1992: 182) on the basis of the argument that a symmetry exists between "the democratising of personal life and democratic possibilities in the global political order at the most extensive level" (Giddens, 1992: 195–196). Pateman (1970) also emphasizes the role of (macro-participation in) representative democracies, but combines this with attention for participatory processes in other societal spheres, such as the workplace:

Apart from its importance as an educative device, participation in the workplace – a political system – can be regarded as political participation in its own right. Thus industry and other spheres provide alternative areas where the individual can participate in decision making in matters of which he [or she] has first hand, everyday experience. (Pateman, 1970: 35)

A third characteristic of the minimalist–maximalist dimension, which tries to capture the process of broadening the locus of participation (and which is closely related to the role played by micro- and macro-participation), is based on the distinction between politics and the political. Here, minimalist democratic participation is focused more on institutionalized politics, which renders it mono-sited. In contrast, maximalist democratic participation is embedded in the political, which makes it multi-sited. Mouffe, for instance, describes the distinction between politics and the political as follows:

By 'the political,' I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations. 'Politics' on the other side, indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'. (Mouffe, 2000: 101, see also Mouffe, 2005: 8)

In other words, according to Mouffe (1997: 3), the political "cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of

society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition". The phrasing of Mouffe's distinction confusingly diverges from a series of (structurally similar) arguments that maintain the word politics, while broadening its meaning (see, in this context, for instance Beck's (1997) concept of sub-politics, Giddens's (1991) concept of life politics and cultural studies' use of the politics concept (see e.g. Hall, 1997a: 257)). Despite these differences we find in these intellectual projects the tendency to broaden the concept of politics (and the political) beyond the confinements of institutionalized politics. This, in turn, allows me to further characterize minimalist democratic participation as mainly concerned with the field of (institutionalized) politics, while maximalist democratic participation relates to the political.

The debate over the locus of participation and decision-making brings us to the fourth characteristic of the minimalist–maximalist dimension, namely the difference between unidirectional versus multidirectional participation. In minimalist forms of democratic participation, participation is aimed at one specific field – that of institutionalized politics. But in the less extreme versions of minimalist democratic participation, which include participatory practices in other fields of the social, the unidirectional objective of participation is also to influence institutionalized politics. One already-mentioned example is Verba and Nie's (1987: 2) definition, where participatory practices are aimed at "influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take". Similarly, a number of theoretical models that deal with the public sphere and public opinion, a societal field which is still structurally different from institutionalized politics, tend to focus on the capacity of the public sphere(s) and public opinion(s) to impact on institutionalized politics. For instance, Burke (discussed in Splichal, 2001: 22–23) emphasizes the importance of public opinion, and the need for government to be ruled by public opinion. Slightly more recent communication models, such as the agenda-setting model, focus very strongly on the relationships between public (and media) agendas and the agenda of institutionalized politics (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

Maximalist democratic participation tends to see participatory processes as multidirectional, without privileging the relationship of the sites of participation with institutionalized politics. Although the connections with institutionalized politics are not severed, the broad definition of the political, combined with the inclusion of micro-participation in maximalist democratic participation, allows for the validation of participatory practices within the field in which they take place, and through their interconnection with other fields. For instance, participation within the field of museums (as defended by some of the proponents of new museology – see e.g. van Mensch (2005) on the third shift of museology) is considered relevant in itself, as it provides visitors and stakeholders with opportunities to influence these symbolic environments. Moreover, the interconnectedness of the participatory practices is deemed important for strengthening a participatory culture within the social. From this perspective, then, the

participation of museum stakeholders is considered relevant since it contributes (as all participatory practices in specific societal fields) to the democratization of democracy (Giddens, 2002: 93).

Another characteristic of the minimalist–maximalist dimension is the attributed homogeneity or heterogeneity of the actors involved in the decision-making processes. Especially in cases where these decision-making processes are aimed at reaching decisions and establishing outcomes (which does not always apply), there is an attempt to reach communality and collectivity through a procedure that allows for negotiation among a diversity of positions. An obvious example is election procedures, which aim to achieve a specific outcome (selecting a limited number of political representatives) through a specific procedure (based on ‘universal’ suffrage), which allows for negotiation between the diversity of individual preferences. The negotiation procedure always carries a specific cost, which, in the case of for elections, for instance, might be the extremely limited impact of the individual’s action on the election outcome (Aldrich, 1993). Nevertheless, the procedure allows the diversity of positions to be translated into a decision that (often) is accepted as legitimate. But this translation remains a tension, which may be resolvable. One strategy is to homogenize the actor(s) involved in the decision-making process. The concepts that provide discursive support for this homogenization strategy are ‘popular will’ and ‘public opinion’ (especially when public opinion is behaviouralistically defined “as opinion expressed by the public” – see Splichal (2001: 41) for a discussion and critique). In these cases, the participatory procedures are seen to be resulting in the expression of a collective and homogeneous public will (‘the people have spoken’). In other cases, specific actors (such as the mainstream media) are seen as legitimate channels for the expression of ‘the’ public opinion, or the people’s vanguard, again homogenizing the diversity of positions. These processes of homogenization and hegemonization are strengthened by the ignorance about the positions and voices of the minorities (in number or substance) who took another position. Another (related) strategy consists of recognizing the existence of diversity beforehand, but the procedure is seen as suspending or halting the existence of diversity. This type of strategy could be used after a majority vote, but the Habermasian *Diskurs*⁴ – where the “forceless force of the better argument” (Habermas, 1999: 450) rules – is also based on a logic where diversity ends after the procedure. In addition, the strategy of the compromise suspends diversity, albeit to a lesser degree, as different positions are articulated and remain visible as part of the outcome. But in the case of a compromise, the outcome continues to suspend diversity because positions become integrated into the outcome of the negotiation. A third strategy to deal with the tension between position diversity and outcome singularity defines the procedure itself as an intervention that only temporally fixes a singularity, which is considered as always particular and contestable. Here, an outcome is still achieved, but the opportunity to reconsider and to rebalance the different positions is enshrined in the decision itself. One other variation here is so-called non-decisions, where the position diversity makes decision-making impossible or undesirable. Arguably, the more minimalist forms of democratic participation tend to

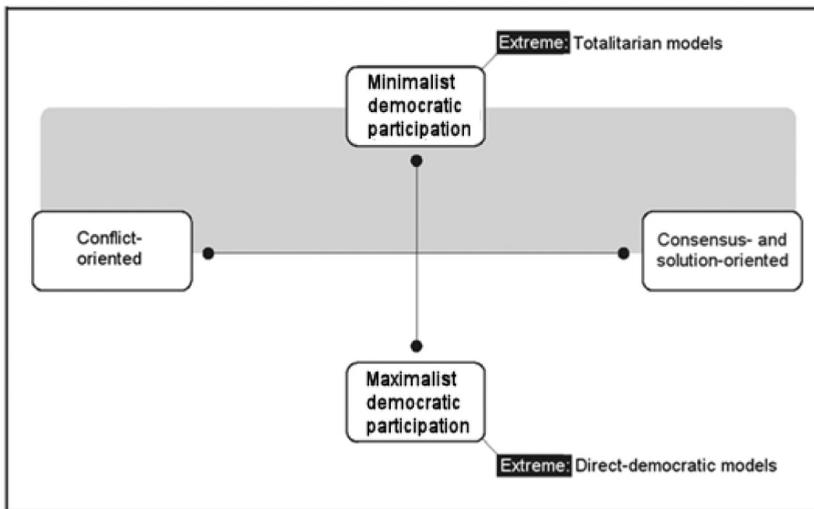
focus on the strategies of homogenization, because of the large-scale decision-making processes (or in other words, the focus on macro-participation), and their significance in generating legitimacy for institutionalized politics, the state and the nation (which is related to the unidirectional focus of minimalist democratic participation). In contrast, maximalist democratic participation is characterized more by heterogeneity, which is triggered by the diversity of decision-making loci in the political field, generated through the combination of micro- and macro-participation, and the multidirectional nature of participatory practices.

The discussion about homogeneity and heterogeneity is also informed by the distinction between the consensus and conflict-oriented approaches of the political, although here the link between minimalism and maximalism is less straightforward. For that reason, it remains important to take into account both the consensus- and the conflict-oriented approaches. The rationale for this can be found in the radical contingency of the social that leads to an oscillation between stability and conflict. A mere focus on stability and consensus would foreclose the openness of the social and would imply an almost Hegelian belief in the end of history. An exclusive focus on conflict would be unable to account for the stabilization of the political and its sedimentation into the social. In conflict-oriented approaches, the socio-political is seen as being dominated by manifest and latent conflicts, possibly within the context of hegemonic projects. The confrontation between different societal groups leads to (heated) debates and claims of victory. Although even these approaches still need to be based on a total (hegemonic) consensus regarding basic democratic values, within the boundaries of this core consensus, a complete lack of consensus on any other theme is perfectly possible and acceptable. In such a pluralist democracy, decision-making takes place on the basis of political struggle and debate. As Mouffe (1994: 109) writes, “The prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions, nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to mobilize these passions, and give them a democratic outlet”. Following Mouffe, it remains important to emphasize that the concrete interpretation and articulation of core democratic values are embedded in political struggles. In the second case, consensus is seen as the main societal organizing principle, focusing on the presence and achievement of societal harmony and unity. Here, processes of deliberation and dialogue support a harmonious polis and (if necessary) aim to stabilize disruptions to this harmony. Consensus-oriented models of democracy largely built upon the notion of societal dialogue and deliberation, where collective decision-making takes place based on rational arguments, “with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or by their representatives. [...] it includes decision making by means of arguments offered by and to participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality” (Elster, 1998: 8). As Glasser and Craft (1998: 213) rightly remark, this does not necessarily mean that everybody is given the floor, but it does mean that “everything worth saying gets said”.

Figure 2 provide an overview of the field of participation in democratic theory. The minimalist and maximalist dimensions constitute one axis of the model; the consensus-

and conflict-oriented approaches are the second axis. The grey area indicates that the role of the concept of participation is limited here. At the same time, Figure 2 depicts the consensus- and conflict-oriented approaches allowing for high levels of participation, which has analytical consequences, since our attention is directed also towards models that thematize participation, enabling for a more extensive discussion of the concept of participation.

Figure 2: Field of participation in democratic theory.



Source: Adapted from Carpentier and Cammaerts (2006).

1.2 Legitimization of participation in democratic theory. Protective and developmental arguments

In contemporary discussions on participation, its importance is often taken for granted, and its legitimizations are rarely discussed. Participatory theory, too, has a tendency to isolate the concept of participation, and to ignore the conditions allowing the possibility of its relevance, appreciation and significance. The often (implicit) assumption is that participation is necessarily beneficial: If it is enabled, all those involved will also appreciate it, and can only gain from it. (Part of) this assumption is problematic because it de-contextualizes participatory practices, and disconnects them from a very necessary articulation with democratic values such as equality, empowerment, justice and peace. This de-contextualization leads also to the belief that the societal appreciation

and impact of participatory practices will not be affected by the political-ideological, communicative-cultural and communicative-structural context.

Returning to the genesis of participation and democracy in general allows the concept of participation to be rooted firmly in its political context, opening up a series of arguments that legitimize the importance of participation. Again, we can turn to Held's (1996: 45) work as a starting point, and to his discussion of republicanism in which he distinguishes between the protective and developmental traditions. Both traditions contain core arguments that ground the importance of participation within democracy and the social. Held (1996) argues that the protective arguments take us back to the Roman historians, materialized in the work of Machiavelli, and later in that of Montesquieu and Madison. Here, the main legitimization for participation is based on its role in protecting citizens from the consequences of strong (or even extreme) power imbalances, where rulers retain almost full control over the lives of these citizens. By decreasing the power imbalances through the logic of participation, the opportunities for rulers to abuse their governmental powers are restricted. Support for this type of argument can be found in critical analyses of leadership that result in an emphasis on structural distrust towards rulers. A famous summary of this argument can be found in a letter written in 1887 by John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, the first Baron Acton, to Bishop Mandell Creighton: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men".

An extended version of this argument can be found in Machiavelli's theorizing about a (proto-) democratic model of mixed government, combining components of monarchy, aristocracy and (ancient) democracy. The need to combine these three models is grounded in Machiavelli's argument that all three models tend towards degeneration into, respectively, tyranny, oligarchy and 'ochlocracy' (or mob rule). Political participation (in the formulation of law) thus became grounded in the avoidance of tyranny, a situation where a ruler "assumes extraordinary authority and introduces laws disruptive of civic equality" (Machiavelli, 1984: 393 (III, 3)). Machiavelli explicitly contrasted civil freedom with tyranny, in which the tyrant's whim becomes law and violence is applied unnecessarily. Machiavelli (1984: 177 (I, 26)) considers the methods that tyrants are bound to use to protect their position to be "exceedingly cruel" and "repugnant to any community, not only to a Christian one, but to any composed of men. It behoves, therefore, every man to shun them, and to prefer rather to live as a private citizen than as a king with such ruination of men to his score". One way to limit the dangers posed by the existence of a tyrant is through the participation of citizens. Strauss (1978: 278) summarizes this argument as follows: "Political society fulfils its function through political power, and political power is apt to threaten the very security for the sake of which it was established. To avoid this danger, the majority must have a share, commensurate with its capacity, in public power".

The unpleasantly long history of dictatorships and tyrannies shows that, from the perspective also of political praxis, the protective argument for participation is

supported. In *Violence and Democracy*, Keane (2004: 2) points first to Nazi atrocities, using the example of the 1939–1941 euthanasia programme⁵ to show that the Nazi regime was obsessed with “unifying the body politic through the controlling, cleansing and healing effects of violence, which was often understood through ‘medical’ and ‘surgical’ metaphors”. But Keane immediately draws attention to the violence wrought by democratic states:

It might even be said that a distinctive quality of democratic institutions is their subtle efforts to draw a veil over their own use of violence. There are also plenty recorded cases where democratic governments hurl violence against some of their own populations. Such violence is called law and order, the protection of public interest, or the defence of decency against ‘thugs’ and ‘criminals,’ or ‘counter-terrorism’. (Keane, 2004: 2)

One should indeed take care not to de-contextualize participation and fetishize its protective capacity, since political praxis shows also that numerous democratic systems have failed to protect their citizens (and even more ‘their’ non-citizens) from abusive state power, either their own, or originating from some other actors. One of the instruments used to legitimize the use of violence in democratic states is the state of exception, a concept that Agamben (2005) sees as the increase of state power in supposed times of crisis, where the rights of individuals can be reduced or even completely suspended. Agamben argues that the state of exception is used frequently in modernity, and not only to legitimize state violence. It should be considered a form of state violence in itself, because during the state of exception, specific types of knowledge and specific voices are privileged, while other types of knowledge and many other voices are discredited and become muted. For Agamben, this oppressive dichotomy is itself a form of violence, exercised (in some cases) by democratic states. One of the examples he discusses is US President George W. Bush’s military order, issued on 13 November 2001. Agamben (2005: 3) writes the following about this:

What is new about President Bush’s order is that it radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnameable and unclassifiable being. Not only do the Taliban captured in Afghanistan not enjoy the status of POW’s as defined by the Geneva Convention, they do not even have the status of people charged with a crime according to American laws.

The developmental tradition allows for another set of legitimizations of the concept of participation. Major voices exemplifying this type of argument are Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, and later Marx and Engels, but Held (1996: 45) also points to the philosophers of the ancient Greek democracy, and to the work of Marsilius of Padua. In the developmental strand, two types of argument are used. First, democracy and participation matter because of their intrinsic values: Participation allows the

performance of democracy, which is deemed an important component of the social in itself. Through participatory processes, the existing civil reservoirs (for instance of knowledge and praxis) are used and become articulated as respected. Because of the multitude of these voices, a greater diversity is taken into account, which is (together with the increased levels of self-control) deemed to result in more societal happiness and is seen as a better guarantee of good decision-making. Second, democracy and participation matter because of their educational component. Performing democracy through participation generates learning processes that strengthen civic identities. Similarly, empowerment is seen as a pedagogical instrument to generate better citizens, and increase societal happiness.

In Rousseau's work, the notions of the state of nature and the social contract serve as tools to describe how humanity has been characterized by freedom and equality, even when humans came to the realization that they had to develop forms of cooperation in order to subsist. By attributing core democratic values to the 'original' state of nature, Rousseau naturalized these values and legitimized his preference for a social configuration based on a high degree of popular participation (within small-scale political entities). This type of self-rule is based on the principle that sovereignty originated from the people and cannot be alienated from them:

Sovereignty cannot be represented, for the same reason that it cannot be alienated; its essence is the general will, and will cannot be represented [...] Thus the people's deputies are not, and could not be, its representatives; they are merely its agents; and they cannot decide anything finally. Any law, which the people has not ratified in person, is void. (Rousseau, 1968: 141)

Participation thus becomes the exercise of the inalienable and indivisible rights of citizens, which results in the generation of societal happiness and respect for the position of all citizens. As Pateman (1970: 23) argues, the logic of self-rule will result in only accepting policies that equally share benefits and burdens: "[T]he participatory process ensures that political equality is made effective in the decision-making assembly". But Pateman also emphasizes the educational component of the argument, claiming that the central role of participation in Rousseau's theory is an educational one. She refers to Plamenatz (1963: 440), who wrote that: "[Rousseau] turns our minds [...] to considering how the social order affects the structure of human personality", and continues by saying that Rousseau's democratic model aims to develop individual and responsible political action through the participatory process, where "the individual learns that the word 'each' must be applied to himself [...] he learns to be a public as well as a private citizen" (Pateman, 1970: 25).

Again, the developmental capacity of participation should be contextualized: It is not a *deus ex machina* that can redress all societal problems and guarantee continuous social well being. If we follow Mouffe's (2005) argument that the social is inherently

conflictive, we see also that participation will never be able to deal with all (sometimes contradictory) societal demands (and certainly not simultaneously). Moreover, keeping Spivak's (1988), Norval's (2007) and Couldry's (2010) work in mind, not all societal voices can and will be heard, or respected. Rousseau's strong belief in the respectful position of a majority towards different minorities (see Held, 1996: 61-62) from this perspective might be slightly optimistic, and based on the homogenization of 'the people'. Without any correctives, this could lead to a tyrannical system, as argued, for instance, by Berlin (1969). And the educational component might turn out to be dysfunctional, since democratic learning can easily slip into counter-democratic pathways or end up in political apathy. Rousseau (1968: 140) in part recognizes the problem of apathy, but relegates responsibility to the government when he writes that:

In a well-regulated nation every man hastens to the assemblies: under a bad government no one wants to take a step to get to them, because no one feels the least interest in what is done there, since it is predictable that the general will will not be dominant, and, in short, because domestic concerns absorb all the individual's attention. Good laws lead men to make better ones; bad laws lead to worse. As soon as someone says of the business of the state – 'What does it matter to me?' – then the state must be reckoned lost.

Much later, DeLuca (1995: 11) agreed that one of the faces of political apathy is triggered by "forces, structures, institutions, or elite manipulation over which one has little or no control", but added a second 'face' to this picture. Political disinterest (or apathy) might also be based on the free and informed choice of citizens not to become involved, or on the choice not to become informed. This brings us to the right of citizens not to participate, which permanently frustrates the developmental capacity of participation.

1.3 Maximalist versions of participation in democratic theory

Although the field of democratic theory is extensive, and characterized by an almost unsettling degree of diversity, I want to focus in this part of the chapter on the democratic models that share a strong(er) commitment to what earlier was described as maximalist democratic participation. It nevertheless remains important to stress that also this cluster of democratic models is characterized by a high level of diversity, which is even further enhanced by their partial translations into contemporary democratic practice. This implies that participatory maximalism has been – and still is – articulated in many different ways. Another implication of this diversity is that in this section only a selection of the models is discussed, a decision that inevitably leads to the exclusion of some other, still relevant, models (such as Giddens's (1998: 113–117) model of dialogical democracy⁶). The models I discuss are Marxism, anarchism, the New Left models of

participatory democracy, deliberative democracy and radical democracy, which I deem to be the most representative models showing the workings of the more maximalist participatory articulations.

1.3.1 The old Left: Marxist perspectives on participation

Marxist theory takes a strong emancipatory position that is embedded in a critique of the bourgeois domination of society. It is through the Hegelian logics of thesis, antithesis and synthesis that Marx develops the societal model of communism that is based on a high degree of participation. In order to flesh out Marx's position on participation within this communist model, it is thus necessary first to reconstruct the constitutive outside of communism: the bourgeois capitalist society.

This bourgeois capitalist society is characterized by a base-superstructure model, in which Marx attributes a privileged position to the social relations of production (which sediments the power position of the bourgeoisie). These social relations of production are seen as the core of society, which implies that they also determine the political and ideological environment. This in turn means that in the Marxist model, the state is seen to serve specific elitist class interests. Although Marx sometimes attributed considerable independence to the state (see Held, 1996: 131–135), in a number of more polemical texts, the state is seen as the direct instrument of the bourgeoisie. An example is the *Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels, 2002: 221): “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”. But whether capital directly controls government, or whether this influence is more indirect and a dominant class dominates society without being part of government, is not very significant for my argument here. What is important is that in Marx' view of the bourgeois capitalist society, the political-ideological environment serves the interests of the bourgeoisie, which minimizes participation and makes societal equality (and more maximalist forms of participation) impossible, even when bourgeois capitalist society becomes more democratized.

But Marx foresaw a structural change, through a series of class conflicts and revolutionary struggles, fed by logics internal to capitalism, establishing a communist society. Despite its inevitability, Marx did not envisage this change as being immediate: He distinguished two stages in the development of communism. In the first and transitional stage (later referred to as socialism by Lenin), most productive property would become collectively owned, but some class differences would persist, because society would “still [be] stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges” (Marx, 1994: 315). In practice this meant that the worker (in this transitional phase) would receive “[t]he same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form, [...] back in another”. Not until the second phase would society have completely transcended capitalism, and would “the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour [have ...]

vanished” (Marx, 1994: 321). And, “Only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” (Marx, 1994: 321). Although Marx was reluctant to describe the communist utopia in detail, he and Engels, in *The German Ideology*, provide the following description:

in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. (Marx and Engels, 1970: 53)

The vagueness of this description applies also to its political-ideological dimension, although Marx’s perspectives on the state, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the end of politics offer valuable insights on the Marxist position on participation. Marx and Engels saw the bourgeois state as a supporting structure of capitalism, which made mere transformation impossible; after all, as Engels describes, “the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy” (Engels, 1993: 22). And, “in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy, this working class must [...] do away with all the old repressive machinery previously used against it itself” (Engels, 1993: 22). In the transition to communism, the state would continue to exist in order to guarantee the inclusion of the economy into the political, the abolition of private property, the centralization of credit, communication and transport, and the protection of society against the remnants of the bourgeoisie (see Marx and Engels, 2002: 243–244). At the same time, though, the state needed to be democratized in this transitional phase through what Marx calls the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.⁷

Engels, and arguably Marx also, found an example of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Paris Commune of 1871. Marx (1993: 60) described it as follows: “It was essentially a working class government, the product of the struggle of the producing class against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor”. Engels was even clearer writing in 1891, twenty years after the Paris Commune, “Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat” (Engels, 1993: 22). The Commune was formed by municipal councillors,

chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men,

or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time. (Marx, 1993: 57)

Other officials, such as the police and the judiciary, also had “to be elective, responsible, and revocable” (Marx, 1993: 58). Moreover, Marx expressed his explicit appreciation that in the Paris Commune “From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at *workmen’s wages*” (Marx, 1993: 57 – emphasis in original).

In *The Civil War in France*, Marx expands on the blueprint provided by the Paris Commune and develops it to extend to the national level. This national Commune model was based on a council structure⁸ and delegation to higher decision-making levels:

The rural communes of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents. (Marx, 1993: 58 – emphasis in original)

This pyramid structure of the model of direct (or delegative) democracy (Held, 1996: 145–146) allows for (and requires) high levels of participation, through the selection of and subsequent actions of delegates.

Marx’s emphasis on participation can be found in a number of texts. A year after the Paris Commune, Marx (1988) wrote in his *Notes on the ‘American split’*, “Political Equality means the personal participation of each in the preparation, administration, and execution of the laws by which all are governed”. And in his 1843 critique of Hegel, Marx (1977: 118) stated that, “The drive of civil society to transform itself into political society, or to make political society into the actual society, shows itself as the drive for the most fully possible universal participation in legislative power”.

Once the transitional phase had passed and full communism had been realized, there would have been the birth of a new (wo)man who cherished communality and cooperation. Here, participation is articulated as multidirectional and the sites of decision-making become ultra-heterogeneous (to the degree that decision-making is articulated as (almost) non-existent). For Marx, communist society is constructed on the basis of a new conception of the self, which is highly altruistic and non-conflictual: For instance, labour is performed to please the others, and not out of a sense of duty. As Ollman (1979: 73) formulates it, “We can approximate what takes place here if we view each person as loving all others such that he or she get pleasure from the pleasure they derive from his or her efforts”. Love for the other plays a structuring role; as Ollman (1979: 73) comments, “Marx is universalizing this emotion, much enriched, to the point where each person is able to feel it for everyone whom his/her actions affect, which in communism is the whole of society”.

Under communism, the state was expected to wither away. Removal of the source of conflict, namely class difference, would allow for consensual decision-making and self-government. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels describe how communism implied the end of politics (in the narrow sense):

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of associated individuals, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. (Marx and Engels, 2002: 244 – translation modified based on Ollman (1979: 96))

In this utopian situation, the need for repressive state apparatuses would also have disappeared, rendering unnecessary the army and the police, for instance. Love of all for all would mean crime would be highly exceptional and should it occur the perpetrator would be devoured by feelings of guilt. Only a series of basic coordination, purely administrative tasks would require elected coordinators. This “labour of supervision and management” (Marx, 1992: 507) could be compared to the role of the conductor of an orchestra, as Marx (1992: 507) writes in *Capital*:

in all labour where many individuals co-operate, the interconnection and unity of the process is necessarily represented in a governing will, and in functions that concern not the detailed work but rather the work place and its activity as a whole, as with the conductor of an orchestra. This is productive labour that has to be performed in any combined mode of production.

Even then, the role of the ‘conductor’ was not considered to be crucial, as Ollman (1979: 82) explains: “Marx, however, prefers to play down the role of coordinating authority in the new society, emphasizing instead the power which comes through direct cooperation”. Through the logics of cooperation, participation would become maximized in the egalitarian communist society. This implied the disappearance of the principle of power delegation, as participation was organized through everyday life. Obviously, this required a radical shift in the identity of the citizen:

we can say that the citizen of the future is someone who is interested in and skillful in carrying out a variety of tasks, who is highly and consistently cooperative, who conceives of all objects in terms of ‘ours,’ who shares with others a masterful control over the forces of nature, who regulates his/her activities without the help of externally imposed rules, and who is indistinguishable from other persons when viewed from the perspective of existing social division. She (he) is, in short, a brilliant, highly rational and socialized, humane and successful creator. (Ollman, 1979: 89)

1.3.2 A forgotten component of the old Left: Anarchist theory and participation

Frequently ignored in debates on maximalist versions of participatory democracy is the legacy of anarchist theory (cf. May, 1994). Arguably, this neglect does justice to neither anarchist nor democratic theory. Anarchism's emphasis on decentralization and local autonomy led to a strong emphasis on participation within what Godwin (1971) called 'parishes' or voluntary federations. Representation (or power delegation) is still acceptable in this societal model, but in a downsized version, without any binding capacities.

The most dominant feature of anarchist theory is distrust of government, which is seen as a threat to individuals' and communities' autonomy and freedom. Given the primacy attributed to individual freedom, the constraints and coercions generated by the machineries of government are rejected. Proudhon's (1989: 294) famous quote illustrates the articulation of government as threatening and disciplining.

To be GOVERNED is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so. To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality. (Caps in original)

Although often intimately connected, the rejection of government (or better, of being governed) does not necessarily imply the total rejection of the state. Crowder (1991: 64), for instance, claims that anarchist theory accepts the state, as long as it does not govern, but performs only purely administrative functions. May (1994: 47) captures this difference by pointing out that anarchist theory consists of the rejection of representation, and that "the state is the object of critique because it is the ultimate form of political representation, not because it is founding for it".

This distrust of government and rejection of (political) representation are fed by a discourse of anti-authoritarianism, which resists the establishment of societal hierarchies and systems of domination and privilege (Bookchin, 1996: 29). Illustrative of this is Bakunin's (1970: 31) statement, "It is the characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the mind and heart of men". The problematization of privilege concerns not only the political sphere, but also the economic realm, where

classic anarchist theory was “critical of private property to the extent that it was a source of hierarchy and privilege” (Jennings, 1999: 136). But this does not imply that private property is totally rejected: Even Proudhon’s famous dictum – property is theft – relates only to situations where the power balance is disturbed through so-called windfall earnings in the form of interest on loans and income from rents, which move structurally beyond legitimate ownership of what is needed in everyday life. In contrast to domination, privilege and struggle, anarchist theory legitimizes itself by (often implicitly) reverting to what May (1994: 65) calls a “humanist naturalism”, foregrounding harmony, solidarity and a belief in a “benign human essence” (May, 1994: 63). A case in point is Kropotkin’s (1902) engagement with Darwinism in *Mutual Aid*, where he tries ‘scientifically’ to establish an evolutionary model that is built on survival of the altruistic, not survival of the fittest.

In anarchist theory, these discourses of anti-authoritarianism and solidarity are combined with a rejection of (political) representation, which leads to the third feature of anarchist theory: a strong emphasis on maximalist participation and decentralization as principles of decision-making. As Jennings (1999: 138) formulates it, there is a “generalised preference for decentralisation, autonomy and mass participation in the decision-making process”. Through the free and equal participation of all in a variety of societal spheres, government as such becomes unnecessary, and an equal power balance in these decision-making processes can be achieved, which, in turn, maximize individual autonomy within a context of societal heterogeneity. Similarly, within the economic realm, the principle of capitalist struggle is replaced by a decentralized gift economy.

The fourth and last feature of anarchist theory is the voluntary association as an organizational principle, as a site of self-organization and participation. Anarchist theory attempts do not lapse into individualism and atomism, but strive for a balance between the individual and the community. The privileged organizational structure to achieve this balance has had many different names in the course of anarchism’s intellectual history: Proudhon’s natural group, Kropotkin’s voluntary association, Godwin’s parishes, Bookchin’s affinity groups, etc. Despite some differences, these small-scale structures are seen as tools – again to protect individual freedom and autonomy; as Kropotkin (1972: 145) formulates it, “And with our eyes shut we pass by thousands and thousands of human groupings which form themselves freely [...] and attain results infinitely superior to those achieved under government tutelage”. The scale of these organizational structures is sufficiently large to approximate civil society, as mentioned, for instance, by Kropotkin (1902) when he refers in *Mutual Aid* to the “countless societies, clubs, and alliances, for the enjoyment of life, for study and research, for education”. More contemporary authors – such as Graeber (2004: 40) – have broadened the scope ever further in describing anarchist forms of organization that “would involve an endless variety of communities, associations, networks, projects, on every conceivable scale, overlapping and intersecting in any way we could imagine, and possibly many that we can’t. Some would be quite local, others global”.

1.3.3 New Left theories on participation

The New Left conceptualizations of participatory democracy – developed by Pateman (1970, 1985) and Macpherson (1966, 1973, 1977) and later by Mansbridge (1980) and Barber (1984) – focus on the combination of the principles and practices of direct and representative democracy. The problems of coordination in large-scale industrial societies bring the latter to accept representation (and power delegation) as a necessary tool at the level of national decision-making. For instance, Pateman (1970: 109) writes:

In an electorate of, say, thirty five million, the role of the individual must consist almost entirely of choosing representatives; even when he could cast a vote in a referendum his influence over the outcome would be infinitesimally small. Unless the size of national political units were drastically reduced then that piece of reality is not open to change.

At the same time Pateman (1970: 1) critiques authors such as Schumpeter (1976), for attributing “the most minimal role” to participation, and for basing their arguments on a fear that the implementation of more developed forms of participation might jeopardize society’s stability. Macpherson (1980: 29) also points to the role the discourse of stability plays in legitimizing minimalist versions of participation: “We are left with the conclusion that the possibility of a genuinely participatory democracy emerging in Western liberal-democratic states varies inversely with their electorates’ acceptance of system-stability as the overriding value [...]”. This situation creates a dilemma: On the one hand, the large size of political entities and the fear of instability restrict the possibilities for high levels of participation, and on the other hand, there is Pateman’s and Macpherson’s strongly expressed belief that there is a need to increase these levels of societal participation. This induces Pateman and Macpherson to introduce a broad-political and multidirectional approach to participation and to look at what Pateman (1970: 110) calls “alternative areas”, in order to maximize participation:

The existence of representative institutions at national level is not sufficient for democracy; for maximum participation by all the people at that level socialisation, or ‘social training,’ for democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place through the process of participation itself. (Pateman, 1970: 42)

It is only through participation in these ‘alternative areas’ of the political that a citizen can “hope to have any real control over the course of his life or the development of the environment in which he lives” (Pateman, 1970: 110). This expansion of participation into these ‘alternative areas’ is deemed a necessity, since “for a democratic polity to exist

it is necessary for a participatory society to exist, i.e. a society where all political systems have been democratized [...]” (Pateman, 1970: 43). For Pateman, this also implies a broadening of the concept of politics: When discussing participation in the industry, she explicitly defines this realm of the social as “political systems in their own right” (Pateman, 1970: 43).

In *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Pateman (1970) focuses on participation in one specific ‘alternative area’: industry. Building on Cole’s (1920, 1951) work on industrial democracy, workers’ self-management and the cooperative movement, Pateman (1970: 43) claims that “[t]he most important area is industry”. She legitimizes this choice first by pointing to the importance of work for everyday life: “most individuals spend a great deal of their lifetime at work and the business of the workplace provides an education in the management of collective affairs that is difficult to parallel elsewhere” (Pateman, 1970: 43). She finds additional arguments in the political nature of the sphere of the industry, and the importance of economic equality. At the end of the book (Pateman, 1970: 110), she refers very briefly to ‘alternative areas’, such as the (higher) education system, (public) housing and the family.⁹

Macpherson’s (1977) work takes a different angle: He remains committed to the pyramidal structure of delegate democracy. He describes the (first) model of participatory democracy, which he develops in *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, as follows:

One would start with direct democracy at the neighbourhood or factory level – actual face-to-face discussion and decision by consensus or majority, and election of delegates who would make up a council at the next more inclusive level, say a city borough or ward or a township. [...] So it would go up to the top level, which would be a national council for matters of national concern, and local and regional councils for matters of less than national concern. (Macpherson’s, 1977: 108)

At the same time, Macpherson (1980: 28) acknowledges that “[t]he prospects of a participatory pluralist system [...] appear rather slight” and investigates how some of the principles of participatory democracy can be reconciled with (and supported by) a competitive party system. Macpherson is suggesting the reorganization of the party system on less hierarchical principles, which would increase organizational democracy within political parties, rendering them “genuinely participatory parties [*that*] could operate through a parliamentary or congressional structure” (Macpherson, 1977: 114). Again, this brings us to forms of participation that are situated more at the level of micro- (or meso-) participation and then combined with forms of representative democracy at national level.

An important achievement of these multilevel approaches to participation is that the overwhelming problems of implementing participation on a large scale can be bracketed by focusing on the meso- and micro-level. This allowed Pateman, for example, not only to broaden the span of politics beyond institutionalized politics, but also to develop

definitions of participation that stress the decision-making focus and processual nature of participation, combined with an emphasis on influence and power. The two definitions of participation that Pateman introduces take account of the difference between influence and power through reference to ‘partial’ and ‘full participation’. Partial participation is defined by Pateman as “a process in which two or more parties influence each other in the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only” (Pateman, 1970: 70), while full participation is seen as “a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions” (Pateman, 1970: 71).

1.3.4 *Deliberative democracy*

The model of deliberative democracy also tries to (re)balance the participatory and representative aspects of democracy, but, here, the participatory moment is located in communication, as deliberative democracy refers to “decision making by *discussion* among free and equal citizens” (Elster, 1998: 1 – emphasis added). Elster (1998: 8) points to the two main characteristics of this model: Its democratic nature is ensured because of its focus on “collective decision making with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or their representatives”, and its deliberative nature lies in the focus on “decision making by means of arguments offered *by* and *to* participants who are committed to values or rationality and impartiality” (emphasis in original).

Habermas’s work is one of the main sources of inspiration for the model of deliberative democracy.¹⁰ His older work on communicative rationality and the public sphere plays a key role in grounding deliberation in the inter-subjective structures of communication, where the “speakers’ orientation toward mutual understanding entails a commitment to certain presuppositions rooted in the idea of unconstrained argumentation or discourse” (Flynn, 2004: 436). These presuppositions are structured by the ideal speech situation, where everybody with the competence to act and speak is allowed to participate, everyone can introduce and/or question any assertion, and express her or his attitudes, desires and needs, and no coercion is used during the process (Habermas, 1990: 86). Later, Habermas described these presuppositions as follows: “The conditions for entering a rational discourse require participants to assume an undogmatic attitude, to treat all relevant norms and traditions hypothetically, to be open to objections, to be honest and to yield to the forceless force of the better argument, to learn from others and to view from their perspectives” (Habermas, 1999: 449–450). In Habermas’s work, the public sphere is (one of) the crucial sites¹¹ where these deliberations take place, although (in his older work) he problematizes the public sphere’s deliberative capacities because of its colonization by the systems of economy and state.¹² This implies, in Kellner’s (2000: 264) words, that “[a]s the public sphere declined, citizens became consumers, dedicating themselves more to passive consumption and private concerns than to issues of the common good and democratic

participation”. In this configuration, democratization implies the “shifting of forces” and the erection of “a democratic dam against the colonizing *encroachment* of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1992: 444 – emphasis in original).

In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas (1996) further develops his model of deliberative democracy (and its relationship to law). The deliberative model is contrasted to liberal and republican models, based on its crucial characteristics of the extension of the scope of politics beyond the aggregation of self-interest, and the emphasis on negotiating and bargaining that transcend the republican notion of a shared ethical-political dialogue. As Habermas (1996: 298) writes, “According to discourse theory, the success of deliberative politics depends not on a collectively acting citizenry but on the institutionalization of the corresponding procedures and conditions of communication, as well as on the interplay of institutionalized deliberative processes with informally developed public opinions”. In the Habermasian model of deliberative democracy, participation is multidirectional because of the strong emphasis on the procedural-deliberative, and on the role that institutions play in the transformation of public opinion into communicative power. In his two-track model of deliberative politics, the public sphere becomes a ‘warning system with sensors that, though unspecified, are sensitive throughout society’ (Habermas, 1996: 359) and that can problematize issues, while deliberative procedures in the formal decision-making sphere focus on cooperative solutions to (these) societal problems, without aiming for ethical consensus.¹³ This does not imply that the earlier emphasis on participation (through the public sphere) disappears. For instance, in the following description of the deliberative model, participation features prominently:

The deliberative paradigm offers as its main empirical point of reference a democratic process, which is supposed to generate legitimacy through a procedure of opinion and will formation that grants (a) publicity and transparency for the deliberative process, (b) inclusion and equal opportunity for participation, and (c) a justified presumption for reasonable outcomes (mainly in view of the impact of arguments on rational changes in preference). (Habermas, 2006: 413)

1.3.5 Radical democracy and post-Marxism

Laclau and Mouffe (1985), aiming to de-essentialize Althusser’s and Gramsci’s work (and thus also the work of Marx and Engels),¹⁴ developed a post-Marxist democratic model. Their work parallels the work on the deliberative model, but was developed differently because it was inspired by a post-structuralist agenda. They considered their democratic project to be radically pluralist because of its embeddedness in a social ontology, which emphasized that “subject positions cannot be led back to a positive and unitary founding principle” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 167). This implies also that the radical pluralist democracy advocated by Laclau and Mouffe was not radical in the sense of identifying

‘the true and pure democratic model’: “Its radical character implies, on the contrary, that we can save democracy only by taking into account its radical impossibility” (Žižek, 1989: 6). For this reason, Mouffe (1997: 8) refers to radical pluralist democracy as a democracy that will always be ‘to come’.

In spite of this, the pluralism advocated by Laclau and Mouffe aims to realize specific and clearly demarcated objectives. First it aims for the “generalization of the equivalential-egalitarian logic” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 167). Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 190) continue to situate themselves within the “classic ideal of socialism”, and plead for a “polyphony of voices” in which the different (radically) democratic political struggles – such as antiracism, anti-sexism and anti-capitalism – are all allotted an equally important role (Mouffe, 1997: 18). In other words, Laclau and Mouffe want to “broaden the domain of the exercise of democratic rights beyond the limited traditional field of ‘citizenship’”, claiming that the distinctions between public/private and civil society/political society are “only the result of a certain type of hegemonic articulation” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 185). Again, we can identify a call to extend the political into the realm of the economy, where the importance of the “anti-capitalist struggle” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 185) is emphasized. But through Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985: 176) emphasis on the plurality and heterogeneity of the social, the broad definition of the political and “the extension of the field of democracy to the whole of civil society and the state”, also the notion of participation moves to the foreground. Although the concept of participation is used only rarely, its importance becomes clear in Laclau and Mouffe’s critique on the “anti-democratic offensive” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 171) in neo-conservative discourses. These neo-conservative discourses are seen as the antipode of their radical democratic model because they want to “redefine the notion of democracy itself in such a way as to restrict its field of application and limit political participation to an even narrower area” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 173). Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 173) continue by stating that these discourses would “serve to legitimize a regime in which political participation might be virtually non-existent”.

The increased level of (political) participation that radical pluralist democracy has to offer is still delineated by the need to “agree on the liberal-democratic rules of the game”, although this is not taken to mean that “the precise interpretation of the rules of the game” would be given once and for all (Torfing, 1999: 261; Mouffe, 1995: 502). In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 176) state explicitly that the contemporary liberal-democratic ideology should not be renounced, but rather reworked in the direction of a radical and plural democracy, which generates sufficient openness for a plurality of forms and variations of democracy, which correspond to the multiplicity of subject positions active in the social. It is at this level also – combined with their dealing with “a very different theoretical problematic” – that Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 194) explicitly distinguish their position from the work of Macpherson and Pateman, who they see as defending a too specific and too well-aligned democratic model. But Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 194) add that they “nevertheless share [*with them*] many important concerns”.

In recent years, Mouffe (and Laclau) have been propagating an agonistic model of democracy, as opposed to a deliberative model (Mouffe, 2000, 2005). The agonistic model of democracy, which is based explicitly on the 'older' model of radical pluralism (Mouffe, 2000: 99), contains a more sophisticated elaboration of Laclau and Mouffe's normative democratic-political thought. Echoing Connolly (1991, 1993), and also Lyotard (1984), the agonistic model of democracy builds on the distinction between antagonism (between enemies), and agonism (between adversaries). While the existence of an adversary is considered legitimate and the adversary's right to defend his or her ideas is not questioned, enemies are (to be) excluded from the political community (Mouffe, 1997: 4). The aim of democratic politics then becomes "to transform an 'antagonism' into 'agonism'" (Mouffe, 1999a: 755), to "tame" or "sublimate" (Mouffe, 2005: 20–21) antagonisms, without eliminating passion from the political realm or relegating it to the outskirts of the private. Seen this way, "far from jeopardizing democracy, agonistic confrontation is in fact its very condition of existence" (Mouffe, 1999a: 756). While the concept of participation does not feature prominently in the agonistic model of democracy, it remains (rather silently) present through the pluralist nature of the agonistic model and its basis in the broad definition of the political.

Although Mouffe (2005) has fiercely critiqued Hardt and Negri's (2000, 2005) work, there are some important similarities between Laclau and Mouffe's work and Hardt and Negri's autonomist approach¹⁵ that are relevant here. Apart from the shared critical nature of their projects, they both focus on difference and diversity. In developing the democratic potential of the multitude, Hardt and Negri (2005: 355) write, "This new science of the multitude based on the common [...] does not imply any unification of the multitude or any subordination of differences. The multitude is composed of radical differences, singularities, that can never be synthesized in an identity". Hardt and Negri (2005: 349) see the multitude as "a diffuse set of singularities that produce a common life; it is a kind of social flesh that organizes itself into a new social body". This collective social subject, explicitly articulated as a (broadly defined) class concept (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 103), appears in the "cooperative and communicative networks of social labour" (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 349) and uses (amongst other strategies) the carnivalesque and biopolitical strategies of the alter-globalization movement, weapons that are said to be "constructing democracy and defeating the armies of Empire" (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 347). Participation thus becomes a key concept (although again not often explicitly used) as it captures the ongoing collaborations within these social networks. Moreover, Hardt and Negri's use of the concept of multitude implies a very strong attack on the idea of sovereignty: "The project of democracy must today challenge all existing forms of sovereignty as a precondition of establishing democracy" (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 353). These egalitarian logics, based on the combination of self-organization and the utmost respect for disobedience, incorporate the promise of full participation: "When the multitude is finally able to rule itself, democracy becomes possible" (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 340).

2. Beyond democratic theory

In late (or post) modern societies, the frontiers of institutionalized politics have also become permeable. Discussions within the field of democratic theory indicate that it would be difficult to confine the political to the realm of institutionalized politics. Democratic theory has (sometimes) incorporated such transformations, but these theoretical expansions did not develop in a void. They grew out of a diversity of political practices that originated from actors that often were (strictly speaking) situated outside the realm of institutionalized politics. Whether they are called interest groups, old/new social movements, civil society or activists, these actors broadened the scope of the political and made participation more heterogeneous and multidirectional.

In some cases these political practices were still aimed at impacting directly on institutionalized politics, but in other cases their political objectives diverged from the 'traditional' and were aimed at cultural change. In many cases, several objectives and 'targets' were developed in conjunction. For instance, the feminist movement aimed for the re-articulation of gender relations, within a diversity of societal spheres, combining identity politics (see e.g. Harris, 2001) with (successful) attempts to affect legal frameworks. Not only do we witness a broadening of the set of actors involved in political activities, but also an expansion of the spheres that are considered political. One example here is the feminist slogan "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970), which claimed the political nature of social spheres such as the body and the family. Kate Millett (1970), for instance, coined the term sexual politics, extending the notion of the political into the sphere of the private. In her chapter on the *Theory of Sexual Politics*, she introduces her sociological approach with the simple sentence "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family" (Millett, 1970: 33). A few pages on she notes that "The chief contribution of the family in patriarchy is the socialisation of the young (largely through the example and admonition of their parents) into patriarchal ideology's prescribed attitudes toward the categories of role, temperament, and status" (Millett, 1970: 33).

In these feminist projects we see (a plea for) the political (to) move further into the social. We can apply a similar logic within democratic theory, since a considerable number of authors who tend towards the more maximalist versions of democratic participation have sought (and found) solutions to the scale problem in large democracies by reverting to civil society, the economy and the family as sites of political practice. Here, Mouffe's (2000: 101) concept of the political, as the "dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations", can be used to argue that the political touches upon our entire world, and cannot be confined to institutionalized politics. Here, also, the difference Mouffe makes between the political and the social is helpful because she locates this difference in the sedimented nature of practices. To use her words:

The political is linked to the acts of hegemonic institution. It is in this sense that one has to differentiate the social from the political. The social is the realm of sedimented

practices, that is, practices that conceal the originary acts of their contingent political institution and which are taken for granted, as if they were self-grounded. Sedimented social practices are a constitutive part of any possible society; not all social bonds are put into question at the same time. (Mouffe, 2005: 17)

At the same time hegemony and the taken-for-grantedness it brings is never total or unchallengeable. Sedimented practices can always be questioned, problematized and made political again. This is what democratic and social movement theorists, together with political activists, have attempted to do in a variety of societal fields: to disrupt the taken-for-grantedness of a specific social ordering and to show its political nature.

These logics do not apply only to the realms often discussed in democratic theory (such as the economy); they apply also to the cultural/symbolic realm, which has been implicated in the broadening of the political. In other words, the representational is also political. The concept of the politics of representation (see e.g. Hall, 1997a: 257) can be used to refer to the ideological logics in representational processes and outcomes. Dominant and/or hegemonic societal orders feed into these representational processes and outcomes, and at the same time are legitimized and normalized by their presence (or in some cases by meaningful absences). Organizations such as museums, publishers and broadcasters – to mention but a few – act as discursive machinery that produces these representations, but at the same time they are organizational environments with specific politics, economies and cultures where, for instance, the politics of the expert or the professional create power relations that impact on the organization itself, but also on the ‘outside’ world.

This all-encompassing process of the broadening of the political, where all social realities become (at least potentially) contestable and politicized, means also that the notions of democracy and participation can no longer remain confined to the field of institutionalized politics. All social spheres are the potential objects of claims towards democratization and increased participation, although these claims (and the struggles provoked) do not lead necessarily to their realization, and the resistance in some societal realms turns out to be more substantial than in others. Claims for the democratization of these societal realms (beyond institutionalized politics) are based on a multitude of arguments that can be sketched within the above-mentioned protective/developmental framework. An argumentation based on the protective component starts from the broadening of the political, which implies also that there is no longer one power centre in society, but a diversity of power centres. As a diversity of societal structures and institutions can strongly impact on people’s everyday lives, and power imbalances can occur everywhere, there is a need to protect citizen’s rights in this diversity of spheres. The developmental argumentation is based on the ideas that the performance of democracy matters in all societal spheres, and that the use of and respect for existing societal reservoirs empowers citizens, generates social integration and happiness, and potentially improves the social quality of decision-making in institutions. At the educational level,

the participation and empowerment of citizens is claimed to create better citizens, also because these participatory activities at micro-level allow for democratic learning, which then can support macro-participation.

The claims for democratization and increased participation (beyond institutionalized politics and its extensions) have strong resonances in a number of social realms. In this part of the chapter, I discuss three of these areas (spatial planning, museums and the arts, and development), and show how the discussions on participation are played out. In the next part, I move to the realm of communication and media, to map the articulation of participation in this area. The ‘thick’ theoretical description will highlight the differences and similarities of these articulations of participation, since the internal context of these social realms generates different fields of discursivity, which (sometimes strongly) affect the meanings attributed to the concept of participation. Simultaneously, the articulations of participation are not confined to these social realms, but are part of a broad societal and cultural configuration, which provides a more general cultural-ideological context to what can be said and thought about (the intensity) of participation, and what degree of participation is considered desirable (or not). Without wanting to suggest the existence of clearly demarcated eras (or even *epistèmes*) of participation, it nevertheless will become clear that the temporal dimension plays an important role in the articulation of participation.

2.1 *Spatial planning and participation*

The field of spatial planning is still closely related, of course, to politics, but at the same time it is a field where participation is widely accepted (albeit in varying degrees of intensity¹⁶) and has become embedded in the legal frameworks of several countries. For instance, Querrien (2005: 106) points to the long history of public participation and urbanization in France, but also to recent initiatives, such as the French Urban Solidarity and Renewal Act passed on 13 December 2000, requiring that approval be sought from residents for any work planned in their neighbourhood. In 2002, participation was made obligatory for regeneration projects throughout France. Describing the situation in the UK, Richardson and Connelly (2005: 77–78) write that “[t]own and country planning in Britain, for example, is one of the few areas where policy and practical decisions affecting people’s quality of life have long been subject to formal public involvement in varying forms”. The Town and Country Planning Act introduced statutory public participation in planning in the UK in 1968 (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2002: 360).

Of course, spatial planning has not always emphasized public participation explicitly. The so-called pioneers of planning, Howard and Geddes (see Hall, 1992; Lane, 2005: 287), with their respective focuses on the garden-city and on structured forms of regional planning, based their ideas on blueprint planning that privileged the planner. As Hall (1992: 61) formulates it, “Their vision seems to have been that of the planner as the omniscient ruler,

who should create new settlement forms [...] without interference or question”. Or in Lane’s (2005: 289) words, “At its heart, blueprint planning assumes science to be all seeing and the planner omnipotent”. Blueprint planning was criticized for its (impossible) reliance on predictability, certainty and control, which led to over-simplifications of social reality, and to difficulties in dealing with decentralized political systems and reconciling the omnipresent tensions between different positions. Although the importance of blueprint planning decreased in the 1960s, its legacy – with a focus on homogeneity of the political will and an apolitical ethic – would not totally disappear (Kiernan, 1983), and would delay the integration of participatory principles (Lane, 2005: 289).

In the 1960s, planning theory evolved towards a synoptic model, which emphasizes the need to specify goals and targets, evaluate means and ends, analyse the environment, and consider different policy options. This re-articulation of planning theory also enabled the integration of participation, through the logics of consultation. As Lane (2005: 292) puts it, the two most important developments regarding participation in this period were “(1) the institutionalisation of a limited role for public comment in planning and (2) the inclusion of actors from outside the formal policy-making arena in the incremental mode of planning”. This also affects the privileged position of the planner, which according to Hall (1983: 44) led to the disappearance of the “benign, omniscient scientist-planner”. But even within this synoptic model, participation remained limited because the political will was still homogenized (Faludi, 1973), and “public participation was constrained to providing a commentary on the goals of planning” (Lane, 2005: 290). Also a number of variations within the synoptic model, such as the applications of Lindblom’s (1959) incrementalism and Etzioni’s (1967) mixed-scanning approach in planning theory, still left limited room for participation. Incrementalism – based on Lindblom’s 1959 article *The Science of ‘Muddling Through’* – does create spaces for (informal) interventions from outside the political (planning) field. Mixed scanning (combining a wide scan and a zoom (Etzioni, 1986: 8)) motivated planners to make more explicit strategic choices first, and then turn to incrementalism, a method that increased the range of possible alternatives.

Nevertheless, there were calls for more radical and maximalist forms of participation. A necessary step towards participation becoming integrated into spatial planning was the recognition that planning was a political activity and the rejection of its articulation as a neutral-technical decision. Taylor (1998: 83) points to the work of (mostly American) planning theorists such as Norton Long (1959), to articulate the political nature of planning. Long (1959: 168) is quoted as saying, “Plans are policies and policies, in a democracy at any rate, spell politics. The question is not whether planning will reflect politics but whose politics it will reflect”. Davidoff (1965) also questions the technocrat perspective embedded in planning, and equates planners with advocates, who serve the interest of specific client groups at the expense of other groups (especially disadvantaged and minority groups (Kurzman, 2000)). In contrast, Davidoff (1965: 279) pleads for pluralism, where (city) planners “represent and plead the plans of many interest groups”,

a recommendation that is based on “the need to establish an effective urban democracy, one in which citizens may be able to play an active role in the process of deciding public policy”. He then continues to emphasize the importance of choices to “remain in the area of public view and participation” (Davidoff, 1965: 279). In the UK, the Skeffington Committee on Public Participation in Planning (1969 – quoted in Taylor, 1998: 87), established by the UK minister responsible for planning, also highlights participation, defining it as “the act of sharing in the formulation of policies and proposals”. The report (quoted in Taylor, 1998: 87) continues:

Clearly, the giving of information by the local planning authority and of an opportunity to comment on that information is a major part in the process of participation, but it is not the whole story. Participation involves doing as well as talking and there will be full participation only when the public are able to take an active part throughout the plan-making process. There are limitations to this concept. One is that the responsibility for preparing a plan is, and must remain, that of the local planning authority. Another is that the completion of plans – the setting into statutory form of proposals and decisions – is a task demanding of the highest standards of professional skill, and must be undertaken by the professional staff of the local planning authority.

As Taylor (1998: 88) points out, the Skeffington report contains a series of proposals to translate participatory intentions into practice, such as ‘community forums’ to liaise with local authorities, and the appointment of ‘community development officers’ for community outreach. At the same time, participation is often translated as consultation, and planning authorities use “prepare, reveal and defend” – and in some cases even “attack and respond” – strategies (Rydin, 1999: 188, 193; Cullingworth and Nadin, 2002: 360). This situation led to a seminal critique by Arnstein, who in 1969 published *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* in which she links participation explicitly to power, saying “that citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power” (Arnstein, 1969: 216). She continues:

It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. (Arnstein, 1969: 216)

Arnstein develops a categorization of participation (the ‘ladder’ – see Figure 3), in which she distinguishes three main categories (citizen power, tokenism, non-participation) and eight levels. The category of non-participation consists of two levels: manipulation and therapy. Here the objective is “not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable power holders to ‘educate’ or ‘cure’ the participants”

Media and Participation

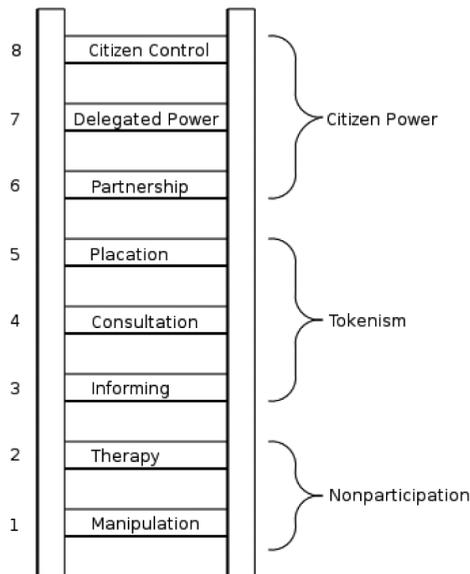


Figure 3: Arnstein's ladder of participation. Source: Arnstein (1969: 217).

(Arnstein, 1969: 217). Arnstein discusses a series of examples aimed at illustrating manipulative and therapeutic practices where – for instance in cases of so-called Citizen Advisory Committees – “it was the officials who educated, persuaded, and advised the citizens, not the reverse” (Arnstein, 1969: 218). In depicting the ‘classic misuse of consultation’, she describes the role of a Community Action Agency Director, Spitz, at a community meeting held to consult citizens about a proposed Model Cities¹⁷ grant:

Spitz told the 300 residents that this huge meeting was an example of ‘participation in planning.’ To prove this, since there was a lot of dissatisfaction in the audience, he called for a ‘vote’ on each component of the proposal. The vote took this form: ‘Can I see the hands of all those in favor of a health clinic? All those opposed?’ It was a little like asking who favors motherhood. (Arnstein, 1969: 220)

Tokenism has three levels, informing, consultation and placation. Arnstein defines informing as forms of one-way communication, which although important, still allow people little opportunity to influence decisions. Consultation is based on the invitation to people to communicate their opinions, but this level is “still a sham since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account” (Arnstein, 1969: 219). Placation is seen as a higher level of tokenism in which have-nots are entitled to advice, but power holders still have the right to decide. Arnstein's example of the

placation strategy is “place a few hand-picked ‘worthy’ poor on boards of Community Action Agencies or on public bodies like the board of education, police commission, or housing authority” (Arnstein, 1969: 220). The risk that they are “outvoted and outfoxed” (Arnstein, 1969: 220) remains substantial.

The last (maximalist) category is citizen power, which has three levels: partnership, delegated power and citizen control. In the case of partnership, the responsibilities of citizens and power holders are shared through “joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses” (Arnstein, 1969: 221). Arnstein uses the example of a Model Cities grant application in Philadelphia, where officials attempted to obtain endorsement from community leaders without their having seen the application. Following protest from the community leaders, which led to more review time, at the next meeting, the community leaders confronted the city officials with “a substitute citizen participation section that changed the ground rules from a weak citizens’ advisory role to a strong shared power agreement” (Arnstein, 1969: 222). The changes to the application were accepted with – according to Arnstein (1969: 222) – the following consequences:

Consequently, the proposed policy-making committee of the Philadelphia CDA [*City Demonstration Agency*] was revamped to give five out of eleven seats to the residents’ organization, which is called the Area Wide Council (AWC). The AWC obtained a subcontract from the CDA for more than \$20,000 per month, which it used to maintain the neighbourhood organization, to pay citizen leaders \$7 per meeting for their planning services, and to pay the salaries of a staff of community organizers, planners, and other technicians. AWC has the power to initiate plans of its own, to engage in joint planning with CDA committees, and to review plans initiated by city agencies. It has a veto power in that no plans may be submitted by the CDA to the city council until they have been reviewed, and any differences of opinion have been successfully negotiated with the AWC.

In the case of delegated power, citizens achieve dominance in decision-making authority for a particular plan or programme. In an example based on New Haven (Connecticut), Arnstein (1969: 222) describes that “residents of the Hill neighbourhood have created a corporation that has been delegated the power to prepare the entire Model Cities plan”. The majority of the grant went to the neighbourhood corporation, enabling it to hire its own planning staff and consultants, and have a majority in the City Demonstration Agency. Finally, citizen control increases the power position of citizens, although Arnstein warns against faith in a situation of full control. The model that Arnstein refers to is when there is no intermediary between the neighbourhood corporation and the funding source. Arnstein (1969: 223) cites the following example:

Approximately \$1 million (\$595,751 for the second year) was awarded to the Southwest Alabama Farmers' Cooperative Association (SWAFCA) in Selma, Alabama, for a ten-county marketing cooperative for food and livestock. Despite local attempts to intimidate the coop (which included the use of force to stop trucks on the way to market) first year membership grew to 1,150 farmers who earned \$52,000 on the sale of their new crops. The elected coop board is composed of two poor black farmers from each of the ten economically depressed counties.

In the 1970s, these more maximalist versions of participation became more dominant in planning and architecture theory. For example, De Carlo's (2005: 13) work, originally published in 1970, includes the famous statement "architecture is too important to be left to architects". De Carlo (2005: 13) calls for a metamorphosis in architects' and planners' practice, with the result that "all barriers between builders and users must be abolished, so that building and using become two different parts of the same planning process". This means that the "intrinsic aggressiveness of architecture and the forced passivity of the user must dissolve in a condition of creative and decisional equivalence" (De Carlo, 2005: 13). In his model of transactive planning, Friedmann (1973) emphasizes mutual learning through interpersonal dialogue, which positions participation as integral to the planning process. Lane (2005: 293) describes this model as follows: "The professional planner became a conduit for information dissemination and feedback and the public were encouraged to actively engage in policy and planning processes. A new era for public participation had begun". Pacione (2001: 325) refers to the notion of popular planning, which implies

planning by local communities in their own neighbourhoods. It involves the formulation of planning proposals and their implementation by local community organizations, and rests on close collaboration between the community and the local planning authority that agrees to adopt the popular plan as official policy.

Pacione (2001: 325–327) also describes in detail the impact of popular planning, in a redevelopment project in the Coin Street area of Waterloo in Central London, at the end of the 1970s. After several years of inquiries, protests and demonstrations, and legal actions, the commercial developers sold the land to the Labour-controlled Greater London Council, which eventually cleared the way for the implementation of the popular plan for the area. At the same time, Pacione (2001: 127) points to the failure of communities to take control, for instance in the London Docklands area, where the support of a "sympathetic local authority was missing". Also the earlier model of advocacy planning (see Davidoff, 1965) continued to play a role. A decade later, Mazziotti (1974), in particular, developed advocacy planning further, but even before this elaboration it remained an important component¹⁸ of what Pacione (2001) labelled the field of progressive planning policies. For instance, many aspects of advocacy planning

(including a section on the responsibilities of the client) can be found in the *Guidelines for the Social Responsibility of the Planner*, which was adopted in 1972 by the Board of Governors of the American Institute of Planners (AIP) (Kurzman, 2000).

As Smith (2005) remarks, the triumph of neo-liberalism since the 1980s has impacted strongly on planning processes, including the role of the planner and the importance attached to participation. Smith (2005: 48) contends that planners became “bureaucratic administrators expected to follow procedures in an efficient and consistent manner”. This new form of professionalism was characterized by a “capacity to combine understanding of the aspirations and expectations of different stakeholders with innovation in the design and delivery of services in a flexible manner” (Smith, 2005: 48). Also, the willingness to invest in cities, for instance, decreased; Pacione (2001: 173) mentions a 59 per cent reduction in federal spending on US cities between 1980 and 1992. Nevertheless, the (very end of the) 1980s saw a rise in the communicative approach to planning (e.g. Forester, 1989; Healey, 1992), which again reserved an important role for participation. The communicative approach can be seen as a migration of the notion of deliberation into the field of planning, which is seen as an interactive and interpretative process. Healey (2003: 241 – emphasis in original) considers one of the key issues of the communicative approach to distinguish between discourses on planning matters that “reinforce existing relations of power and conventional understandings of issues” and those that “have the potential to *transform* those relations, in ways which are more relevant to the way we live now, and which have the capacity to open up the public realm to ‘inclusionary argumentation’”. In his book *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes*, Forester (1999: 3) describes how the planner, in his or her intermediary position between neighbourhood and corporate representatives, and between elected officials and (other) civil servants, does more than just shuttling back and forth: “They work to try to encourage practical public deliberation – public listening, learning and beginning to act on innovative agreements too – as they move project and policy proposals forward to viable implementation or decisive rejection (the ‘no-build’ option).” This also generates an important role for participation, as planning is intrinsically linked to communication, argumentation, debate and engagement in discourse (Lane, 2005: 296). In the 1990s and 2000s, this emphasis on participation was strengthened by a focus on the possibilities of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to support participatory processes. This includes the use of virtual environments/realities to model plans (Howard and Gaborit, 2007; Lim, et al., 2009) and more ‘traditional’ uses of e-participation (Åström and Granberg, 2007). Kunzmann’s (1997: 28) description of what he calls the communicative city provides a broader perspective on the role attributed to ICTs in relation to participation:

New information and communication technologies could and should be used more skillfully to meet local and regional information needs, and to supply regional residents with the kind of civic information they require to live comfortably in an

active community. Both access to information and opportunities to use various communication technologies are required to initiate and maintain critical discussions on the future of a city region, to create local identity and civic pride, and to enhance participation in and commitment to urban development.

These more recent evolutions confirm that Alfasi's (2003: 185) words are still very applicable to the field of spatial planning: "Public participation is an idea that has been around for a long time, as long as modern urban planning. Yet it refuses to exhaust itself or become jaded".

2.2 Development and participation

The participation debate within development has been more heated than in the case of the spatial planning field because it is firmly embedded in the problematic power relations between North and South. Not surprisingly, critical authors have not only discussed the general lack of structural equality between North and South from both a historical-colonial and a present-day postcolonial perspective, they have also attacked the replication of this structural imbalance in development theory and practice. These imbalances are both situated at the macro-level: As Cowen and Shenton (1996) argue, there is a wide range of 'trustees' that are directing the development process, ranging from states, to multilateral agencies to non-governmental organizations. This implies that (the critique on) the imbalanced power relations can also be found at the micro-/local level where development professionals interact with to-be-developed citizens from the South. Thus, the introduction of (and the emphasis on) the notion of participation can be seen as a strategy to counter the reduced agency of developing countries and their populations, and to increase the focus on their empowerment. At the same time, these articulations of participation are very much influenced by the interventionist nature of development theory and practice, which leads to the presence of a multi-layered concept of participation that, on the one hand is seen as the means (a tool for better project outcomes), and on the other as the ends (as enhancing societal equity, empowerment and social justice) (Oakley, 1991; Nelson and Wright, 1995; Cleaver, 2001).

Servaes (1999) provides a general starting point in his discussion of the modernization and dependency approaches to development.¹⁹ In the modernization paradigm, development is (often) articulated within a modernist model of linear progress, in which western democracies (and especially their economies) are the examples to be imitated. Development is defined as an evolution from the traditional to the modern, as illustrated by Rostow's (1953) take-off model, which distinguishes five stages that developing societies have to go through: traditional society, pre-take-off stage, take-off, the road to maturity and the mass consumption society. In addition to stage theories like Rostow's, Tehranian (1977: 22) mentions index theories, differentiation theories and diffusion

theories, which respectively focus on economic change (measured by specific indices), political and social differences, and the diffusion of specific ideas, attitudes or practices as stimuli for development. This paradigm does not exclude the notion of participation, but it assumes a minimalist form because it is focused on the creation of elites within the colonial framework and, later, on the political participation of citizens in homogeneous communities (Hickey and Mohan, 2004: 6).

The second model Servaes (1999: 31–35) distinguishes is the dependency model, which originated as a critique of the modernist paradigm. This critique was (at least partially) organized at the international level, by the so-called Non-aligned Movement. Latin American scholars, such as Prebisch and Singer, in particular, but also scholars from the western Marxist tradition (such as Baran, Frank and Sweezy), played a crucial role in the attempt to rearticulate development. Although the dependency model is characterized by paradigmatic diversity, its main argument is that development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin, and that the developed ‘imperialistic’ centre is responsible for the underdevelopment in the dependent periphery. Although economic characteristics are still seen as the main explanatory factors, the power of the centre is seen to be based on an always-specific combination of economic, political, military and cultural factors. For dependency theorists, the solution to this problem can be found in the detachment of the developing countries’ economies from the world market, and their increased self-reliance. As Sweezy argues, this solution has to have a revolutionary nature:

for the vast majority of the peoples of the periphery, dependent development yields not a better life and a brighter future but intensified exploitation and greater misery. The way forward for them is therefore through a revolutionary break with the entire capitalist system [...] (Sweezy, 1981: 80, quoted in Servaes, 1999: 34)

As Grosfuegel (2000: 357) argues, the *Dependistas* not only tackled the modernization paradigm, they also critiqued the orthodox Marxist positioning of the Latin American communist parties that had forged strategic alliances with the Latin American bourgeoisies. Inspired by the Cuban revolution, the *Dependistas* considered their ‘national’ bourgeoisies to be reactionary forces, which blocked the road to socialism. Thus, “[t]he Cuban revolution became the myth of socialist national development” (Grosfuegel, 2000: 361). At the same time, the *Dependistas* continued to be locked into a Marxist-structuralist perspective, which led to a strong focus on the economy and the nation state, and to the underestimation of culture and ideology, but which also kept them firmly locked into the communist utopia as a sense-making tool.

Dependency theory exerted a strong influence on several other authors who placed a more explicit emphasis on the notions of participation and empowerment. Apart from the authors working in the field of liberation theology (see Gibellini, 1987), particularly Freire and Fals-Borda (see Mato, 2004) were prominent in what Hickey and Mohan

(2004) call the field of emancipatory participation. Fals-Borda is strongly associated with the development approach called Participatory Action Research (PAR), which relies on an empathic researcher to enable communities to define their own research questions, to lead the research and to develop their own solutions for change (Mertens, 2008: 182 – see Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991; Kindon et al., 2007). Fals-Borda (1998: 161) emphasizes the radical-political nature of participation as “always radically conceived as a struggle against political and economic exclusion from exercising control over public resources”. Freire’s work focuses on the topics of the educational process and the struggle against illiteracy. Freire’s (1992) *Pedagogy of the Hope* initially is opposed to the traditional educational system, which is seen as paternalistic and non-participative in considering knowledge as something to be passed on as a readymade package instead of through a dialogic meeting between subjects. Freire contends that people passively accept this content and rarely question the validity of the knowledge (Thomas, 1994: 51). He situates his claim in the context of the ‘culture of silence’ in Latin America, which implies that “the ruling class has such superior power that the repressed end up seeing themselves as the oppressors do, namely as inferior. [...] The most important consequence of the culture of silence is the assuming of an apathic attitude by the repressed. In the culture of silence no development can be realized” (Servaes and Lie, 1996: 29 – my translation). In his alternative pedagogy, Freire emphasizes the importance of both action and reflection, combined in the term *conscientization*. *Conscientization* still requires input from a tutor, so that arousing critical awareness is related to development and to the political struggle against injustice. At the same time, conscientization means that tutor and apprentice together are involved in the (re)search for (of) knowledge: “Authentic participation would then enable the subjects involved in this dialogic encounter to unveil reality for themselves” (Thomas, 1994: 51). Participation in this context is seen as being the reduction in the power imbalances. This is situated at two levels: the educational situation (the relations between tutor, apprentice and knowledge), and the social, political and economic situation (the relations between oppressor and repressed).

In 1975, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation published its report *What Now? Another Development*, the second phrase in the title indicating the ambition to develop another type of development grounded in a focus on the people’s basic needs (such as eradication of poverty), self-reliance, ecological sensitivity, sustainability and participation (Servaes, 1999: 78–79; Potter et al., 2008: 114). This report considers previous approaches to development as reductionist and top-down, and more supportive of transnational capital than development and poverty reduction. It elaborates another development characterized by a diversity of approaches. Mefalopulos (2008: 51) mentions the multiplicity approach (Servaes, 1983, 1999), the empowerment approach (Friedmann, 1992) and the autonomous development approach (Carmen, 1996). As Potter et al. (2008: 117) point out, they all have one crucial characteristic in common: “They share the characteristic of arguing that development and change should not be concentrated at each higher level of the social and settlement systems, but should focus on the needs of

lower echelons of these respective orders”. Participation then becomes crucial to involve these lower echelons; when discussing the characteristics of another development, Servaes (1999: 79) explicitly lists participatory democracy, which is (within another development) seen as “the true form of democracy. It is not merely government of the people and for the people but also, and more fundamentally, ‘by the people’ at all levels of society”.

These debates on alternative forms of development and participation were translated into models for development practice in the late 1980s and early 1990s, giving rise to what has become known as the field of participation in development. Here, the emphasis shifted from the broader levels of participation in developing societies to participation in the setting of development projects, where it is aimed at empowering people, capturing the indigenous knowledge and ensuring the sustainability and efficiency of the interventions (Hickey and Mohan, 2004: 7). One of the most influential models was (and is) Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), developed mainly by Chambers (1983, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 2002 – see also Mukherjee, 1993; Narayanasamy, 2009). Mukherjee (1993: 21) defines PRA as “a methodology for interacting with villagers, understanding them and learning from them”. In PRA, participation is preconditioned by the willingness of villagers to explain their perceptions and problems to development workers, but also by the capacity of development workers to evoke the villagers’ participation (Mukherjee, 1993: 35). As Chambers (1997b: 1747) summarized it, “The challenge is how to give voice to those who are left out and to make their reality count”. In order to facilitate the communication of local community knowledge, a wide variety of tools has been developed, such as “participatory mapping and modeling, transect walks, matrix scoring, well-being grouping and ranking, seasonal calendars, institutional diagramming, trend and chance analysis, and analytical diagramming, all undertaken by local people” (Chambers, 1994: 1253 – see also Mayoux and Chambers, 2005: 277, for a brief overview). These tools emphasize visual representation, in an attempt to construct what Robinson-Pant (1996) called a new literacy, which moves away from more traditional forms of literacy: “Participation (in PRA activities) does not depend on literacy but it does rely on representing ideas or quantities through symbols” (Wright and Nelson, 1995: 56). Although PRA makes strong claims about a reversal of power relations, evident in Chambers’ (1994: 1266) statement that “PRA has stressed abdication of power and passing much of the initiative and control to local people, using the metaphor (and sometimes reality) of ‘handing over the stick’ (or chalk, or pen)”, these claims are based on the equation of participation with (shared) learning, which leads to the black boxing of a series of other power processes. For instance, Pottier (1997: 223) points to the risk of de-contextualizing power: “The harder PRA practitioners try to reduce social distances between ‘them’ and ‘us,’ the more important it is not to assume that social distances would not exist locally”. Rahnema (1997: 167) goes a step further, and describes PRA as “the new participatory myth acting more like a Trojan horse which may end up by substituting a subtle kind of teleguided and masterly organized participation of the old types of intransitive or culturally defined

participation, proper to vernacular societies”. This explains Leurs’s (1996: 71) call, for instance, for more intensified forms of participation: “Further reversals of power (control over funding, decision making, analysis etc) are urgently required”.

Despite the problems, in the 1990s the notion of participation became more and more mainstreamed in development theory, although some authors (such as Woost, 1997: 231) trace the beginnings of this process back to the 1970s, for example, to McNamara’s farewell speech as President of the World Bank in 1973. Francis (2001: 72) quotes yet another World Bank presidential speech, this time on the occasion of Wolfensohn’s 1998 address to the Board of Governors, where he said, “Participation matters – not only as a means of improving development effectiveness, as we know from our recent studies – but as the key to long-term sustainability and leverage”. Not long before this speech was delivered, the World Bank (1996) had published *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook*, which contains the following definition of participation: “Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them” (World Bank, 1996: xi). In addition to an explicit emphasis on influence and control, in this document the World Bank introduces the distinction between participation on the one hand, and consultation and listening on the other. In an earlier publication (World Bank, 1995), the World Bank had outlined a four-level approach to participation: information sharing, consultation, collaboration and empowerment. In the 1996 *Sourcebook*, consultation is positioned differently, namely as a prerequisite for participation:

Instead, we recognize consultation and listening as essential *prerequisites* for participation, because, no matter how good the sponsors and designers are at consultation and listening, what is still missing is *learning* on the part of the people in the local system. A person who is being ‘listened to’ or ‘consulted with’ does not learn nearly as much as the person doing the listening and consulting. (World Bank, 1996: 4 – emphasis in original)

The *Sourcebook* articulates the participatory approach as a break with the past. This is partially achieved by distinguishing this approach from what is called the ‘external expert stance’, where “the project sponsors and designers place themselves outside the local system” (World Bank, 1996: 4). Although the *Sourcebook* does not discredit the ‘external expert stance’, it uses a confessional repertoire to discuss the problems related to this stance: “Admittedly, in the past, sponsors and designers may not have always listened to all the people or consulted poor and disadvantaged members of society [...]” (World Bank, 1996: 4). Also the participatory stance (with its focus on learning) is legitimized by problematizing the past in the World Bank’s (1996: 4) claim that listening to and learning from stakeholders will allow them to “gain insights into the reasons why the behaviour change dimensions of Bank-financed projects have run into so many problems”. The *Sourcebook* provides a series of examples of how this learning has improved the developmental process. One example is the following: “The

Chad Education Task Manager for example points out that he had never thought about parent education as an important means of improving child education until the parents themselves proposed it” (World Bank, 1996: 5 – emphasis removed). These case studies use a series of methods characterized by a strong focus on stakeholder participation. The methodology section of the *Sourcebook* groups them under the headings of Collaborative decision-making: Workshop-based methods (Appreciation-Influence-Control (AIC), Objectives-Oriented Project Planning (ZOPP) and TeamUp); Collaborative decision-making: Community-based methods (Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and SARAR); Methods for stakeholder consultation (Beneficiary Assessment (BA) and Systematic Client Consultation (SCC)); and Methods for social analysis (Social Assessment (SA) and Gender Analysis (GA)) (World Bank, 1996: 181 ff).²⁰

The mainstreaming of participation and the participation in development approach received harsh criticism. A collection of these critiques is provided in the reader *Participation: The new tyranny?*, edited by Cooke and Kothari (2001a). In the introduction to this book, the editors claim to want to move beyond the “identification of technocratic limitations of, and adjustments to, the methodology [of *participatory development*]” and aim their critiques at “the politics of the discourse” (Cooke and Kothari, 2001b: 7). On a first level, the authors critique what they see as the hegemonization of participatory approaches in development, where participation risks becoming a grand narrative (Kothari, 2001) and a means to its own end, at the expense of other techniques that might be more appropriate in specific circumstances. As the editors put it, “Have participatory methods driven out others which have advantages that participation cannot provide?” (Cooke and Kothari, 2001b: 7). However, on a second level, the authors of this edited collection raise a number of conceptual issues. They critique how in participation in development approaches the concept community is articulated as homogeneous, static and harmonious (see also Guijt and Shah, 1998; Mohan, 2001; Williams, 2004). Similarly, the role of the key concepts of learning and local knowledge is deconstructed since knowledge cannot be considered stable and original. To use Mosse’s (2001: 32) words, the “assumption that learning and ‘local knowledge’ defines, and redefines, the relation between local communities and development institutions needs to be reversed. It is often the case that the ‘local knowledge’ and ‘village plans’ produced through participatory planning are themselves shaped by pre-existing relationships”. Also the construction of a North–South dichotomy, where both components become homogenized and a Manichean world-view is used, is deemed problematic (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001).

The argument underlying many of these critiques is based on the complexity of power, and they exploit Foucault’s micro-analytics of power (see below) as their theoretical foundation. Kothari (2001), for instance, points to the close connection between the production and representation of knowledge and power. This allows her to problematize the isolation of local knowledge from the processes that generate it, in both the interaction between development workers and local people, and the interaction within the community itself. These power processes can work against the disempowered

who are to be empowered, in disciplining them through a series of participatory rituals, which simultaneously legitimize the rituals and their organizers (Ferguson, 1994). In Kothari's (2001: 143) words:

those people who have the greatest reason to challenge and confront power relations and structures are brought, or even bought, through the promise of development assistance, into the development process in ways that disempower them to challenge the prevailing hierarchies and inequalities in society.

Kothari (2001) then draws on a Goffmanian framework to argue that within communities a front-stage/back-stage logic might result in compliance with expectations. The celebration of community also results in the neglect of local power dynamics. As Cleaver (2001: 45) puts it, "More realistically, we may see the community as the site of both solidarity and conflict, shifting alliances, power and social structures". At the same time, care should be taken not to abort the component of resistance in the Foucauldian framework. Disempowered people who are confronted with participatory development initiatives (or rituals) can still turn these initiatives to their advantage. Kothari (2001: 150) writes that they "can also have enough power to carve out spaces of control with respect to the (re)presentation of their day-to-day lives [...]". Although the power dynamics in participation in development can lead to the de-politicization of development, these power processes also allow for its re-politicization (Williams, 2004: 94).

Despite the sometimes assertive tone of debates on participation in development and its implementation, for instance, by the World Bank, there is a common concern over participation. For example, Cooke and Kothari (2001b: 13) write in their introduction that they would not like to be labelled "anti-participation". Through critiques of the mainstreaming of participation, these authors confirm its importance, although its practical realization is sometimes deemed problematic. The main model for this problematization is grounded in a critique against the reductionism that is embedded within the mainstream articulation of participation, which reduces the maximalist nature of participation. Participation is seen as "domesticated away from its radical roots" (Cleaver, 1999: 608), because of its disconnection from a (radical) political process and because of its affirmation (instead of balancing out) of power imbalances.

In an attempt to redress this situation, a number of authors have pleaded for a stronger emphasis on the notion of citizenship in relation to development, scaling up the participatory processes from the level of the development project cycle and imputing them into the realm of politics. Ironically, their contributions are aimed at the weak connection between participation and institutionalized politics, which is crucial even in minimalist approaches to participation. The broadening of the span of participation has resulted in a disconnection with institutionalized politics, which has reduced the multidirectional character of participation (although in a slightly unusual way). In order to discuss this migration of participation from the social (back) into the political sphere,

Gaventa (2004) uses the term participatory citizenship. For Gaventa (2004: 29), this migration implies also that participation becomes articulated as a right: “the right to participate [...] is a prior right, necessary for making other rights real”. This argument is taken further in Hickey and Mitlin’s (2009) anthology, *Rights-based Approaches to Development*. A number of the contributors to this anthology retain intact the link between this rights-based approach and the concept of participation, exemplified by Gledhill’s (2009: 31) words, “The rights-based approach clearly resonates with the global discourses of ‘participation,’ ‘empowerment,’ and ‘social inclusion’ that pervaded the field of ‘development’ from the late 1990s onwards”.

2.3 The arts, museums and participation

In the world of the arts, participation has been thematized and practiced in many variations,²¹ although what is termed participatory art can hardly be considered a canonized art movement (any longer). Obviously, the artist has a strong power position in the creation of the artwork, but as Groys (2008: 20) remarks, this power position has been incomplete since art became secularized: “No modern artist would expect anyone to kneel before his work in prayer, expect practical assistance from it, or use it to avert danger”. Secularized art is dependent for its appreciation on the art worlds (including the art market in its many different guises), which generates financial value, and on what Groys calls ‘public taste’, which cannot be equated with financial value. As Duchamp (1959: 77) wrote, “In the last analysis, the artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius: he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that his declarations take a social value and that, finally, posterity includes him in the primers of Artist History”. Nevertheless, artists obviously remain crucial actors in the creative-artistic process, which unavoidably results in a more passive position for the audiences of artworks. These audiences stroll (quietly) through museums and galleries, and (even more quietly) attend performances and screenings. This distance allows them to pass their judgements from a position that is external to the artwork.

But in a number of cases art offers reflections on the always-problematic relationship between the artist, the artwork and its audience. In the case of participatory art, these reflections are translated into revisions of the traditional passive position of the audience in which the audience is implicated in the artwork. For instance, Popper (1975: 11) wrote that “The artist has taken it upon himself [*and herself*] new functions which are more like those of an intermediary than a creator [...]”. Later, Dezeuze (2010b: 222) described the objectives of what she called do-it-yourself art, as follows:

Do-it-yourself artists [...] tried to maintain a dialectic movement between reality and utopia by combining both within the space of the transitional space. In this sense, do-it-yourself artworks as transitional phenomena are conceived not only as material

enactments of a possible transition towards the disappearance of art and artists: they were also seen to embody a wider transition towards a new, freer, non-alienated, society.

Despite these radical objectives, the strong position of the artist as the creator of the artwork continued to impact on the degree of participation that is allowed for. In many cases, audience members are interacting with an already produced work of art, and are given guidelines on how to perform, to generate or complete the artwork, or how to act in ways that then are incorporated into the artwork. In addition, one should not be blind to how much the position of the artist is strengthened by audience participation, as Groys (2008: 21) points out:

When the viewer is involved in artistic practice, every piece of critique he utters is self-criticism. The decision on the part of the artist to relinquish his exclusive authorship would seem to primarily empower the viewer. This sacrifice ultimately benefits the artist, however, for it frees him from the power that the cold eye of the uninvolved viewer exerts over the resulting artwork.

An important starting point for these reflections on participatory art is Richard Wagner's essay *The Art-work of the Future*; in a plea for the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (or the total artwork) Wagner accuses the arts of egoism, partially because of their split into varieties of genres, and disconnection from the people who are seen as the source of all creativity: "The Art-work is the living presentation of Religion; – but religions spring not from the artist's brain; their only origin is from the Folk [*das Volk*]" (Wagner, 2004: 18). In this essay, Wagner calls on his fellow artists to return the arts to the people in producing the artworks of the future:

But to you I turn, – in the same sense as the Folk, albeit of necessity in your own mode of utterance, – to you, ye prudent men and intellectual, to offer you, with all the People's open-heartedness, the redemption from your egoistic incantations in the limpid spring of Nature, in the loving arm-caresses of the Folk – there where I found it; where it became for me my art-instructor; where, after many a battle between the hope within and the blank despair without, I won a dauntless faith in the assurance of the Future. (Wagner, 2004: 11)

Wagner's total artwork attempts to reconfigure the position of the arts for the people, supported by the argument that "The richest procreative force lies therefore in the utmost multiplicity" (Wagner, 2004: 9). However, as Groys (2008: 23-24) remarks, Wagner's attempt to establish an artistic fellowship with the people and to undermine the author's power is ambivalent since the author remains in control of the stage, and the codes of Wagnerian operas are almost impenetrable.

Twentieth-century art movements, such as Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism, used provocation and scandal to reduce audience passivity by transforming the audience member into a “hostile participant, provoked, attacked and beaten by authors and actors” (Melzer, 1976: 43). Lev-Aladgem and Jackson (2004) describe how Dada artists used strategies such as putting glue on seats, selling the same entrance ticket to several people and pinching (female) visitors. At the end of the 1930s, Antonin Artaud developed the *Theatre of Cruelty*, which used similar strategies to decrease the distance between actors and audience, by confronting them with extreme sounds, light and gestures.

In the 1960s, a series of arts movements focused strongly on the concept of participation and maximalist articulations. In addition to the community arts movement²² (see Binns, 1991), following Bishop (2006: 15), we can identify three other movements: Situationism in France, Happening in the United States and Neo-concretism in Brazil. In France, Situationist International, one of whose main protagonists was Guy Debord, emphasized the connection between art and (radical) politics, and critiqued the impact of capitalism on everyday life, leading, for instance, to pseudo-communication and a lack of participation.

REVOLUTION IS NOT ‘showing’ life to people, but bringing them to life. A revolutionary organization must always remember that its aim is not getting its adherents to listen to convincing talks by expert leaders, but getting them to speak for themselves, in order to achieve, or at least strive toward, an equal degree of participation. The cinematic spectacle is one of the forms of pseudo-communication (developed, in lieu of other possibilities, by the present *class* technology) in which this aim is radically unfeasible. (Debord, 2003: 216 – caps and emphasis in original)

In the so-called situations (or “collective environments, ensembles of impressions determining the quality of a moment” (Debord, 2006: 98)) from which Situationist International derived its name, more intense life experience became possible. A situation is “made to be lived by its constructors. The role of the ‘public’, if not passive at least a walk-on, must ever diminish, while the share of those who cannot be called actors but, in a new meaning of the term, ‘livers’ [*viveurs*], will increase” (Debord, 2006: 98).

Happening, which first developed in the United States, “aimed to manipulate creatively the relationship between the presented materials, performers and spectators. [...] Spectators became ‘participants’ who by carrying on simple ‘tasks’ and ‘activities’ aided in the creation of metaphors” (Lev-Aladgem and Jackson, 2004: 209). Allan Kaprow (1996), who is credited with having staged the first happening (Zimbardo, 2008a: 102), published a series of guidelines for happenings, which emphasized that the line between art and life should be kept fluid, the sources (of the happening) should originate from outside the arts, the happening should take place in widely spaced locales, time should be discontinuous and variable, the happening should be performed only once, and – most importantly in this context – “audiences should be eliminated entirely” (Kaprow,

1996: 713). Kaprow (1996: 713) explains that “A Happening [*that is*] only an emphatic response on the part of a seated audience is not a Happening but stage theatre”, but he also resists the idea of unprepared ‘participants’ being submitted to the abuse of the artists:

[...] on the human plane, to assemble people unprepared for an event and say that they are ‘participating’ if apples are thrown at them or they are herded about is to ask very little of the whole notion of participation. Most of the time the response of such an audience is half-hearted or even reluctant, and sometimes the reaction is vicious and therefore destructive to the work [...]. (Kaprow, 1996: 713)

Kaprow (1996: 714) prefers respectful events with participants who are willing and committed; at the same time professional talent is not a requirement of participants: “The best participants have been persons not normally engaged in art or performance, but who are moved to take part in an activity that is at once meaningful to them in its ideas yet natural in its methods”. Kaprow also nuances the idea that happenings necessarily have to have active audiences: Participants might not always know that they are part of the happening – Kaprow mentions the example of a butcher who sells meat to a customer-performer. Also, a happening can be staged just for (some of) the audience to watch it.

A number of artists have used the medium of the happening, for instance, those affiliated with Warhol’s Factory, or the Fluxus group, but these groups also used other formats to facilitate audience participation. For *Water Yam* and *Fluxkit*, George Brecht produced collaborative toolkits providing instructions on the actions of participants, but also the creation of objects (Frieling, 2008a: 41). Nam June Paik’s *Participation TV* allows the visitor to produce voice-generated television images, what Zimbardo (2008b) calls “unpredictable explosions of lines”, and Yoko Ono staged the *Cut Piece* performance, where audience members were invited onstage to cut off pieces of her clothes until she was nearly naked. Some audience members were extremely keen to get a piece, and as Pellico (2008a: 108) mentions, “[t]ensions arose during these performances, and there were moments of potential aggression”. In contrast to the Fluxus group’s work, Andy Warhol’s participatory art was aimed more at enlisting others “to work towards the mass production of Warhol images” (Frieling, 2008b: 90). For instance, the *Do It Yourself* series, produced around 1962, invited audience members to finish paintings based on the painting-by-numbers hobby kits.

Although Joseph Beuys collaborated with Fluxus, and is sometimes described as post-Fluxus (Zimbardo, 2008c: 130), his work is distinct, and is still very relevant to the debate on participatory art. Crucial to Beuys’s work is his concept of the social plastic (also translated as social sculpture), which allows him to address social issues through artistic strategies. Beuys resists the ‘traditional’ formalistic and aesthetic definitions of art, and aims to dismantle society in order to build “a social organism as a work of art” (Beuys, 2006: 125 – emphasis removed). During a lecture (telecast through satellite to

more than 25 countries) given at the *Documenta 6* exhibition, Beuys said, “such a notion of art would no longer refer exclusively to the specialists within the modern art world but extend to the whole work of humanity” (Beuys, quoted in Zimbaro, 2008c: 130). Beuys’s strategy is to try to convince each citizen to give form to life, at both the individual and the collective level. As Saper (2001: 23) remarks, this brings Beuys to combine an “extreme individualism” with a “collective internationalism” and provoked his most frequently quoted statement that “Every human being is an artist”:

This most modern art discipline – Social Sculpture/Social Architecture – will only reach fruition when every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor, or architect of the social organism. Only then would the insistence on participation of the action art of Fluxus and Happening be fulfilled; only then would democracy be fully realized. [...] EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST who – from his state of freedom – the freedom that he experiences at first hand – learns to determine the other positions in the TOTAL ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER. (Beuys, 2006: 125 – caps in original)

One example of this is the *7000 Oaks* project, which involved Beuys (and later his son) planting a total of 7000 trees in the German city of Kassel, which is home to the *Documenta* exhibitions. The project was initiated in 1982 at *Documenta 7*, and Beuys and many volunteers intervened in the urban space of Kassel by planting trees, each accompanied by a basalt stone. The project, with its biological, artistic, cultural, ecological and pedagogical components, was wound up in 1987, a year after Beuys’s death, at *Documenta 8* (see Beuys et al. 2006). Although Beuys’s charisma and his position as an artistic celebrity (Frieling, 2008a: 44) often complicated the participatory process in his own artworks, (some of) his work did allow for stronger forms of audience participation. One example is the 100-day installation at *Documenta 5* (in 1972) called the *Bureau for Direct Democracy*. Beuys installed an information office at *Documenta*, where he discussed the possibilities of direct democracy through the use of referenda (Beuys and Schwarze, 2006).

Finally, the neo-concretist movement, (co-)founded by the South Americans Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, emphasized the need for participants to manipulate the artwork as a way of understanding it (through their senses). The *Neo-concrete Manifesto* from 1959 calls for a focus on more intuitive approaches to art and on natural subject matters, rather than formulaic representational styles and reduction of art to objects (Congdon and Hallmark, 2002: 67). Clark’s *Bichos* series used geometric metal constructions, which visitors were invited to pick up, play with and/or stand on (Congdon and Hallmark, 2002: 67); her *Dialogues* series aimed at creating dialogues between audience members, for instance, by binding their hands together with a Möbius strip (Pellico, 2008b: 104). As Congdon and Hallmark (2002: 68) describe, the bodily senses played a key role in the participatory process: “She was concerned with activating participants’ bodily senses along with their

responses to those experiences”. Oiticica was evenly interested in the bodily senses; in his *Whitechapel experiment* he “asked people to take off their shoes before entering large boxes filled with sand and straw or cabinlike structures with mattresses and blankets” (Pellico, 2008c: 107). Not surprisingly, dance became one of Oiticica’s media: He organized disruptive events with participants from Samba schools dressed in capes called *Parangolés* (see Braga, 2003). For Oiticica (2006: 106), the *Parangolé* “demands participation through dance”, allowing for a “transformation of the ‘total act of the self’”. These transformations are seen as characteristic of what Oiticica (2006: 108) calls ‘environmental art’:

[...] being and indeed requiring the collaboration of various artists with differing ideas, solely concentrated on this general idea of a ‘total participatory creation’ – to which would be added works created through the anonymous participation of the spectators, who actually would be better described as ‘participants’.

Frieling (2008a: 43) comments in a rather positive fashion on the work of the neo-concretist movement, writing that the organization of “communal gatherings and discourses [...] pre-figured the idea of an open system that is constructed by participants-what we might call ‘true’ participation today”. He goes on to point to the adaptability of these open systems: “Such a system can incorporate pre-given rules and also establish new ones collaboratively”.

In addition to these three movements, an emphasis on audience participation was developing in the world of theatre. Again, this evolution was not new; in his 1924 essay *Theatre, Circus, Variety*, László Moholy-Nagy (2001: 25) had called for a new position for the audience: “It is time to produce a kind of stage activity which will no longer permit the masses to be silent spectators, which will not only excite them inwardly but will let them take hold and participate-actually allow them to fuse with the action on the stage at the peak of cathartic ecstasy”. Also, Bertholt Brecht (see Steinweg, 1995) had experimented with reducing the separation between audience and actor in his *Lehrstücke* project (which he abandoned, but which was revived by the Brazilian director Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, working with ‘spect-actors’ (Boal, 1979)). In the 1960s and 1970s in particular, more structural changes in theatre theory led to the re-articulation of theatre as a text-based art, to an open, playful and social event (Lev-Aladgem and Jackson, 2004: 207). In so-called alternative and third theatre, audience participation implied “taking part in the play: dancing, playing a scene with the performers, engaging fellow spectators in conversation as part of the play, removing or exchanging clothing, or any of the many other kinds of physical involvement possible” (Schechner, 1971: 73). An example here is the work of the Italian director Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret, where a barter system was introduced and the audience, instead of paying to see the performance, was invited to perform themselves in return: “A play is exchanged for songs and dances, a display of acrobatics for a demonstration of training exercises, a poem for a monologue, etc.” (Watson, 1993: 22).

After the heydays of participatory art in the 1960s and 1970s, it gradually became less popular, which led Frieling (2008a: 45) to describe the 1980s as “a decade that avoided exploration of participatory social concepts”. However, this does not imply that participatory art disappeared completely, as evidenced by Beuys’s work. Manovich (2001: 57) also points out that the first interactive computer installations appeared in the 1980s. Previous to this, the fascination of the arts with media technology had provided a major stimulus to audience participation, exemplified by Herbert Schumacher’s (Zimbaro, 2008d) *Documenta der Leute* (People’s Documenta) at the *Documenta 5* (1972). Schumacher’s group used portable video equipment to interview passers-by and to replay these interviews in a van parked outside the exhibition centre. A slightly later example was Jochen Gerz’ (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, 2004) 1980 video installation *Purple Cross for Absent Now*, where he is shown in close-up on two video monitors, with a rubber rope around his neck. Visitors could see only Gerz and the end of the rope, and were invited to test the ‘liveness’ of the situation by pulling the rope to tighten the noose.

The digital revolution revived the popularity of participation in the 1990s in what Deuze (2010a: 4) calls the “second wave of do-it-yourself practices”. In this period, interactive art became a more popular concept to describe these practices (see Dinkla, 1996). There were also several significant changes related to the articulation of audience participation in this period, based on changes to the structure of the societal context. As Bourriaud (2006: 163) remarked in 1998, the “social utopias and revolutionary hopes [have] given way to day-to-day micro-utopias and mimetic strategies”. In the 1990s, the emphasis was on interactive art that focused on “the experience of the user as an act of communication, on the social space of the interface, and on the dynamics of interaction” (Penny, 1995: 58). One of the key concepts of the era, Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics, emphasizes human relations and context as a starting point, where “[t]he status of the viewer alternates between that of a passive consumer, and that of a witness, an associate, a client, a guest, a co-producer and a protagonist” (Bourriaud, 2006: 168). Bourriaud (2006: 162) points explicitly to the responsibility of the artist (“for the symbolic models he is showing”) and shies away from the concept of participation: He refers instead to interaction and communication:

Their works bring into play modes of social exchange, interaction with the viewer inside the aesthetic experience he or she is offered, and processes of communication in their concrete dimensions as tools that can to be used to bring together individuals and human groups. (Bourriaud, 2006: 165)

Of course, participatory (or interactive) art in the 1990s and the twenty-first century is not exclusively new (or digital) media art. In 1997, the Interactive Arts Jury (1997/1998: 107) of the *Ars Electronica* festival (a leading annual media arts festival) wrote that the ‘usual’ terms used to evaluate interactive art were no longer adequate due to the inflation of the

concept of interactivity. Moving away from a definition that lined interaction to the digital – the ‘usual’ terms – they stated that in interactive artworks the interaction “takes place between people, between people and machines, and between machines themselves”. One of the many examples of the complexity of twenty-first-century interactive art is Markus Kison’s *Touched echo*²³ (which was ‘exhibited’ at the *Brühlsche Terrrasse* in Dresden from 2007 to 2009, and also at *Ars Electronica* in 2008). The artwork consists of a small display that invites the visitor to lean his or her elbows on the railing (of the *Brühlsche Terrrasse* or its substitute at *Ars Electronica*) and to cover his or her ears. This allows sound to be transferred via the metal of the railings into the person’s body and the visitor hears the sounds of heavy planes and explosions, reminiscent of the bombing raid of 13 February 1945 that destroyed the city of Dresden. Other interactive art is characterized by the absence of technology. For instance, in what Bhabha (1998) called conversational art, and Finkelppearl (2000) referred to as dialogue-based public art, artists organize human interaction. Kester (2004: 1–3; 2005: 77), for instance, refers to the work of the Austrian arts collective, *Wochenklausur*, which in 1994 brought together politicians, journalists, sex workers and activists from the city of Zurich to discuss drug policy. The discussions resulted in the establishment of a pension in Zurich, to provide a safe haven for drug-addicted sex workers.

The 1990s did not witness only a rediscovery of participatory/interactive art; institutions of display and conservation – the museums – became implicated in debates on participation, and a series of museum theorists began to advocate a new museology or new museum theory. One of the foundational texts was Vergo’s (1989a) reader, appropriately entitled *The New Museology*, in which he and a number of authors advocated a reconfiguration of the ways we look at the museum. In his introduction, Vergo (1989b: 3) refers to dissatisfaction with the ‘old’ museology, which was too much focused on museum methods, and was not reflexive enough about its purposes and identities. In the same introduction, Vergo distances himself from any claim to ultimate novelty and exclusivity,²⁴ or mono-perspectivism. Within this diverse collection of articles, a number of authors rethink (or plead for a rethink of) the museum’s relation to the visitor, and the power imbalances that characterize that relationship. For instance, Merriman (1989: 167–168) – drawing heavily on Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of distinction – concludes that “[...] the action of museums in contemporary culture is to divide society into those who have the ‘competence’ to perceive museum visiting as a worthwhile leisure opportunity, and those who do not”. Wright (1989: 148) takes a similar position: “The present fiction in museums – that every visitor is equally motivated, equipped, and enabled ‘to experience art directly’ – should be abandoned. It is patronising, humiliating in practice, and inaccurate”. Also, the political nature of the museum and its functioning as a discursive machinery is thematized. Greenhalgh’s (1989: 96) chapter on international exhibitions in particular describes how these exhibitions “recognized the socio-political climate of their time and they responded to it”.

In later publications on new museology/new museum theory, the emphasis on representation, politics and power is deepened, and combined with a more explicit

agenda for social and cultural change. Critiques of the elitism, exclusionary practices and mono-vocality of museums (Ross, 2004) form the basis of a museum reform project that aims at “the transformation of the museum from a site of worship and awe to one of discourse and critical reflection that is committed to examining unsettling histories with sensitivity to all parties” (Marstine, 2006: 5). In addition, the focus on the inclusion of the museums’ communities is continued in Marstine’s (2006: 5) plea for a museum that “is transparent in its decision-making and willing to share power”. Through this strong emphasis on inclusion and power, the notion of audience participation is reintroduced into the debate, for instance through a recognition that visitors and communities have cultural expertise, as Halpin (1997: 56) writes:

the new or critical museology about which I am speaking might be a useful museology in service to a community, instead of the state and the élite. A museology practised by named, committed and creative professionals who know that people other than themselves are also cultural experts.

Anthologies such as *Cultural Diversity. Developing Museum Audiences in Britain* (Hooper-Greenwill, 1997), *Museums, Society, Inequality* (Sandell, 2002), and *Changes in Museum Practice. New Media, Refugees and Participation* (Skartveit and Goodnow, 2010) focus on the importance of inclusionary practices combined with a series of examples. One such example is Hemming’s (1997) chapter in *Cultural Diversity*, which is (rather tellingly) entitled *Audience Participation: Working with Local People at the Geffrye Museum*. Hemming discusses the exhibition ‘Chinese Homes: Chinese traditions in English homes’, which ran for three months in the Geffrye museum in Hackney (London), combined with educational courses, organized by the museum, for different groups of people within the community. There was collaboration with a Chinese Community Centre: Members of the Chinese community were involved in the construction of the ‘Chinese Homes’ exhibition through group discussions on content (and access to preparatory meetings) combined with oral history approaches. In his non-celebratory process evaluation, Hemming’s (1997: 176) chapter points to the problems related to language, resources and time, but also emphasizes the importance of audience participation:

Involving the community in making decisions does take time, but also the will to make it happen. However, if the museum had tried to impose its own narrative on the exhibition without the consultation process, the results would have been disastrous. The chances are that the exhibition would have alienated the Chinese community and been a rather shallow attempt to portray their culture.

However, within sociology, audience participation in cultural institutions is also approached from a totally different perspective. Often²⁵ building on a quantitative sociological approach, and closely related to Bourdieu’s work on distinction, art or

cultural participation is defined and analysed as individual art (or cultural) exposure, attendance or access, in some cases complemented by individual art (or cultural) creation. As Vander Stichle and Laermans (2006: 48) describe it, "In principle, cultural participation behaviour encompasses both public and private receptive practices, as well as active and interactive forms of cultural participation". Through this emphasis on the individual's cultural participation, and his or her cultural capital (DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 1996) and potential omnivorous behaviour (Peterson and Kern, 1996; Vander Stichle and Laermans, 2006) embedded within taste democracy (van Eijck and Knulst, 2005), the focus of this type of research moves away from the institutional context of cultural participation, and the micro-politics of cultural institutions, but maintains its attention to the importance of inclusion.

3. Audience participation and communication (rights)

Participation has played a key role in a variety of approaches within the field of communication and media studies. The starting point in this debate is audience theory because the notion of audience activity can be used to open up debates on participation in and through the media. This choice implies that I do not subscribe to the idea that the signifier audience is outdated and should be abandoned – a point of view that McQuail seems to have adopted, at least in certain of his writings, for instance when he says that

there is no doubt that the audience concept is in many ways outdated and its traditional role in communication theory, models, and research has been called in to question. We can (and largely do) go on behaving as if the audience still exists 'out there' somewhere, but we may be largely deceiving ourselves. (McQuail, 1997: 142)

The discussion in this chapter on the basic dimensions of audience theory (including the interaction/participation dimension) will illustrate some of the complexities of the debate on the active audience and will allow me to migrate the maximalist and minimalist model of democratic participation into the media sphere. In a second part I revisit the more maximalist political-democratic models in order to show how (maximalist) participation has been translated into the media sphere and how this affects its meanings. The first cluster deals with Marxist, anarchist and Soviet theory; the second cluster focuses on deliberative democracy and public sphere theory. A third cluster revisits the discussions on development and participation, and how (through the UNESCO, New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) debates) they again have affected the media sphere. In the last part, I zoom in even closer, looking at three specific types of media praxis and the way participation has been articulated within the contexts of community and alternative media, television talk shows and reality TV, and new media.

3.1 *Audience articulations and participation*

There are many approaches to structuring how the concept of audience is theorized, and a “totalizing account [is] a logical impossibility” (Jenkins, 1999). The starting point of the analysis in this chapter is the identification of the two major dimensions that are labelled active/passive and micro/macro, based on Littlejohn’s (1996: 310) *Theories of Human Communication*, in which he writes that:

disputes on the nature of the audience seem to involve two related dialectics. The first is a tension between the idea that the audience is a mass public versus the idea that it is a small community. The second is the tension between the idea that the audience is passive versus the belief that it is active.

These two dialectics (or dimensions) are the starting point of the theoretical reflection that follows, which also will argue that each dimension needs to be transcended. In the first part of this discussion, the reduction of the active/passive dimension to processes of signification is transcended by combining this dimension with elements from the participation/interaction dimension. The micro/macro dimension is expanded by introducing the community/society dimension, and within the micro/macro dimension, a meso-level is (re-)introduced.

3.1.1 *The active/passive dimension in the articulation of audience*

The first dimension structuring the audience concept – the active/passive dimension – is strongly linked to the debates on structure and agency. Allor (1988: 217) refers to it as follows: “The field continues to oscillate [...] between the voluntarism of a conception of the full human subject as agent of meaning making and the determinism of a conception of the individual as the object of socialization processes”. This connection influences audience theory, since there is often a clear preference for one of the sides in the binary opposition (to refer to one of the core principles of Derrida’s deconstruction). In other words, we should avoid “the trap that being active is always best for the audience” (Höijer, 1999: 191).

The passive model of the actor has a long history, and is very present in one of the most persistent communication models in the history of communication studies: Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) sender-message-receiver model (see Nightingale, 1996: 6). Later versions and variants – such as DeFleur’s model (1966) – add a feedback loop, but these additions do not alter the fundamental position of the receiver as the ‘end point’ in the communication process. The research tradition that connects most closely with this approach is media effects research, which is inspired mainly by the concern for and/or fear of the disadvantageous effects that the media might have on the receiver(s) –

usually articulated as potential victims (Webster and Phalen, 1997: 128) – in a number of specific fields.²⁶ In contrast, the assumption of the human subject as an active carrier of meaning is echoed in the development of Eco's (1968) aberrant decoding theory on the one hand, and Hall's 1973 encoding/decoding model (published in 1980) and the concept of the active audience (Fiske, 1987) that emanated from this model, on the other. Fiske emphasizes the social and negotiated aspects of meaning, in which meaning is interpreted as unstable (and always susceptible to reinterpretation) and contested; witness Fiske's (1987: 14) definition of 'text': "a text is the site of struggles for meaning that reproduce the conflicts of interest between the producers and consumers of the cultural commodity". In addition, uses and gratifications theory of (among others) Katz et al. (1974) and deduced models, for example, Palmgreen and Rayburn's (1985) expectancy-value theory and Renckstorf et al.'s (1996) social action model, all rely to a large degree on the concept of the active audience (Livingstone, 1998: 238). The importance of the uses and gratifications theory lies not only in this emphasis on the active audience member, whose selectivity originates from utilitarian considerations (to "seek information that will support their beliefs and practices and avoid information that challenges them" (Katz, 1968: 795)); of at least equal importance – from an analytical point of view – is the complete reversal of the sender-message-receiver model (Nightingale, 1996: 8).

3.1.2 The participation/interaction dimension in the articulation of audience

The 'traditional' active/passive dimension discussed above often takes an idealist position by emphasizing the active role of the individual viewer in the processes of signification. This position risks reducing social activity to such processes of signification, excluding other – more materialist – forms of human practice. In other words, the active dimension hides another dimension, termed here the participation/interaction dimension (Figure 4).

The interaction component of audience activity refers to the processes of signification and interpretation triggered by media consumption. Obviously, polysemic readings of media texts are an integrative part of this component. But also work on identity, where audiences engage with the media texts offered to them, is included in the interaction component of audience activity. This is in the ritual, expressive or mediating quasi-interactive aspects of media (see respectively Carey, 1975; McQuail, 1994; Thompson, 1995), where the symbolic–significatory linkage between media and audience is emphasized. In his seminal article *A Cultural Approach to Communication*, Carey (1975: 6) distinguishes between the transmission and ritual view of communication, which in the latter communication is "linked to terms such as sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith". Building on Dewey's (1927) work, Carey articulates communication in relation to the maintenance of society, through the generation of a common culture. In discussing Carey's work, McQuail (1994: 51) calls this model expressive, since it is "celebratory, consummatory (an end

in itself) and decorative rather than utilitarian”. Although using more linear models to theorize the media–society relationship, media effects research studies the impact of the exposure of individuals to media content, or in other words, the effects of the interaction between audiences and media content. Finally, Thompson (1995: 82ff) discusses three types of interaction: face-to-face interaction, mediated interaction and mediated quasi-interaction. While mediated interaction (such as letter-writing or phone conversations) implies the use of a technical medium to transmit information to another individual located in a spatially and/or temporally distinct context, mediated quasi-interaction is produced for “an indefinite range of potential recipients” and is “predominantly one-way” (Thompson, 1995: 84). Despite its monological nature, mediated quasi-interaction is still seen as interaction, because it “creates a certain kind of social situation in which individuals are linked together in a process of communication and social exchange” (Thompson, 1995: 84).

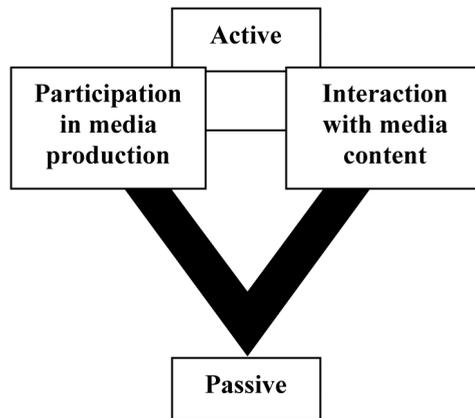


Figure 4: The two dimensions of audience activity

The participatory component of audience activity refers to two interrelated forms of participation, which can be termed participation *in* the media and *through* the media, similar to the way that Wasko and Mosco (1992: 7) distinguish between democratization in and through the media. Participation through the media deals with the opportunities for mediated participation in public debate and for self-representation in the variety of public spaces that characterize the social. The media sphere serves as a location where citizens can voice their opinions and experiences and interact with other voices. Obviously, the structures and cultures of the media sphere itself (and its many components), and the ideological-democratic environment, have a strong impact on the intensity of the participation. In more maximalist versions, the consensus-oriented models of democracy (and participation) emphasize the importance of dialogue and deliberation and focus on collective decision-making based on rational arguments à

la Habermas in a public sphere. Other authors (e.g. Fraser, 1990) stress more conflict-oriented approaches and point to the unavoidability of political differences and struggles, seeing the media as crucial sites for struggles over hegemony (Kellner, 1992: 57). What these maximalist versions have in common is first that they (implicitly or explicitly) use a broadly defined notion of the political, where the media sphere becomes incorporated into the political. Second, they articulate multiple sites of societal decision-making, where dialogue, deliberation, debate and struggle play a role within the media sphere itself, and affect the sphere of institutionalized politics, and many other societal spheres. This renders participation multidirectional, as the exercise of communication rights is seen not only to facilitate participation in institutionalized politics, but also as aiming to democratize a variety of other societal spheres, including the sphere of the media. More minimalist versions, captured, for example, in such concepts as informed citizenry (see Schudson (1998) for a critique) and the marketplace of ideas (see, e.g. the libertarian normative media theory (Siebert et al., 1956)), still accept the political nature of the media sphere, but simultaneously articulate it as a support system for institutionalized politics, which allows for opinion formation on matters related to this sphere and facilitates the functioning of representative democracies.

Participation in the media deals with participation in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media organizational decision-making (structural participation). These forms of media participation allow citizens to be active in one of the many (micro-)spheres relevant to daily life, and to put into practice their right to communicate. Although mainstream media have attempted to organize audience participation (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; McNair et al., 2003), community and alternative media in particular have proven more successful at organizing more intense forms of participation in the media (Girard, 1992; Downing et al., 2001; Rodriguez, 2001; Bailey et al., 2007). The theories and practices of community and alternative media will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but it is important to stress that these types of media organizations have strong links to the concept of participation, at the levels of both self-representation and self-management, which positions them close to the logics of direct, delegative and participatory democracy.

In many cases, especially in mainstream media, media production is restricted to a specific group of people, who here are termed media professionals, who are characterized by specific forms of expertise and skills, institutional embeddedness and autonomy, and the deployment of management and power strategies to achieve specific objectives. In some cases, we can add a commitment to public service and the possession of an ethical framework. In these mainstream media contexts, where the participation of media professionals in the process of media production is guaranteed,²⁷ the focus is shifted towards the participation of non-professionals in the professional system. This opening up of the media system can take more minimalist forms, but also more maximalist forms, since media professionals are often in positions to decide about the degree of power to be delegated and the intensity of participation that is allowed (for). To structure these

options, we return to the debate on political participation (see Figure 1), and rework the minimalist and maximalist participatory dimension into an archetypical model of minimalist and maximalist media participation (see Figure 5). In minimal forms, media professionals retain strong control over process and outcome, restricting participation to access and interaction, to the degree that one wonders whether the concept of participation is still appropriate (see below). Participation remains unidirectional, articulated as a contribution to *the* public sphere but often mainly serving the needs and interests of the mainstream media system itself, instrumentalizing and incorporating the activities of participating non-professionals. This media-centred logic leads to a homogenization of the audience and a disconnection of their participatory activities from other societal fields and from the broad definition of the political, resulting in the articulation of media participation as non-political. In the maximalist forms, (professional) control and (popular) participation become more balanced, and attempts are made to maximize participation. Here we see the acknowledgement of audience diversity and heterogeneity, and of the political nature of media participation. The maximalist articulation allows for a recognition of the potential of media participation for macro-participation and its multidirectional nature.

Figure 5: The minimalism versus maximalism dimension in the media sphere.

<i>Minimalist media participation</i>	<i>Maximalist media participation</i>
Focusing on control by media professionals	Balancing control and participation
Participation limited to access and interaction	Attempting to maximize participation
Focusing on macro-participation through (micro-participation in) media channels	Combining micro- and macro-participation
Media as non-political	Broad definition of the political as a dimension of the social
Unidirectional participation	Multidirectional participation
Focusing on a homogeneous audience	Focusing on heterogeneity

As already indicated, we need to be careful not use too broad a definition of participation that incorporates all types of social practices. Here, Pateman’s (1970: 70–71) definition of participation, which refers to influence or (even) equal power relations in decision-making processes, is useful to avoid the signifier participation being over-stretched. This implies that participation cannot be equated with ‘mere’ access to or interaction with media organizations (see below), as Jenkins and others do, for instance. One example of this conflation²⁸ can be found in *Convergence Culture* where Jenkins (2006: 305) defines participation as referring “to the social and cultural interactions that occur around media”. Access and interaction do matter for participatory processes in the media – they are actually its conditions of possibility – but they are also very distinct from participation because of their less explicit emphasis on power dynamics and decision-making.

If we combine the discussions on the two dimensions of audience activity (participation in media production and interaction with media content) with the distinction between participation through the media and participation in the media, we can define three major components, which are rendered visible in Figure 6.²⁹ These components are participation in media production, participation in society through the media, and interaction with media content. The first component, participation in media production, is supported by three elements: access to, interaction with and participation in media organizations (or communities) (see chapter 4).

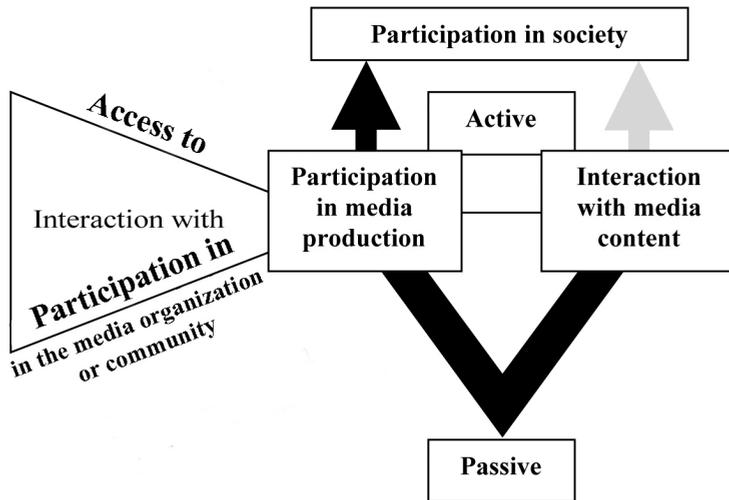


Figure 6: Participatory dimensions of audience activity.

3.1.3 The micro/macro dimension in the articulation of audience

The second core dimension selected as an analytical starting point is the micro/macro dimension. This dimension is widespread: In most definitions of audience, the audience is referred to as an aggregate of individuals (the micro-dimension) or as a collective (the macro-dimension). Littlejohn (1996: 311) summarizes the two positions as follows: “In contrast to mass society thinking is the position that the audience cannot be characterized as an amorphous mass, that it consists of numerous highly differentiated communities, each with its own values, ideas and interests”. Other examples of similar references to the micro/macro dimension exist. Radway (1988: 359) refers to the concept of audience as “a collective label for the consumers of electronically mediated messages” and Ang (1991: 33) defines an audience – following Harré (1981) – as a “taxonomic collective”: “an entity of serialized, in principle unrelated

individuals who form a group solely because each member has a characteristic – in our case, spectatorship – that is like that of each other member”. Moores (1996: 2) speaks of “several groups divided by their reception of different media and genres, or by social and cultural positioning” and Dayan (2005: 46) refers to “Audiences of this sort [*namely spectators*][*that*] are observational aggregates”.

As the definitions above indicate, audiences can be charted using a variety of approaches to ‘the many’ as basis. In the micro-approach, individuals are the building blocks of the audience, while the macro-approach stresses collective aspects: “on the one hand [*relating*] to complete groups or social categories (a class, a community, a political public, etc.) and on the other to overlapping subsets of individuals within the total media audience which express this or that requirement from mass communication” (McQuail, 1994: 288–289). Examples of audience articulations that are situated in the micro-dimension can be found in the uses and gratifications theory and in related models. As Dayan (2005: 46) remarks, spectatorship has similar aggregative dimension: “They are spectators added to other spectators – spectators in the plural”. Also Livingstone and Lunt’s typology (1996: 18–19 – see also Livingstone, 2005: 31) – the television audience as an aggregate of alienated viewers, consumer-viewers or citizen-viewers – can be located within this micro-view of audience. At the other (macro-)end of this scale, a series of articulations are significant: audience as mass, audience as market (segment) and audience as public³⁰. In all three cases, the emphasis on the collective risks the audience becoming articulated as a living entity, “a huge, living subject” (Ang, 1991: 61).

3.1.4 *Communities and organizations*

Both the micro- and macro-approaches conceal a multitude of audience articulations that all relate to the collective, but in very different ways. To extend this diversity of articulations, this text uses Tönnies’ old *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* dimension,³¹ in which ‘society’ is characterized, according to Martin-Barbero (1993: 29), by “an absence of identifying group relations”. Next to a number of audience articulations that construct the collective by the mere use of the media (which implies the absence of identifying group relations), a number of audience articulations are included that do imply (some type of) group identity. These articulations are discussed in the following part of this book, where a further distinction is made between articulations of the audience as community and the organized audience.

A number of the audience articulations discussed above already contain (sometimes weak) references to the audience as community. In the political and economic domains, audiences are constructed as political communities (or publics) and markets (or brand communities) at the macro-level, or as citizens and consumers at the micro-level. For instance, in Livingstone and Lunt’s (1996) typology (part of the) audience is defined as an aggregate of citizens, which results in the creation of a linkage between what they call the

citizen-viewer and the political community. In this part of the book the focus is placed on audience articulations that favour the community aspect. At the micro-level this relates to the articulation of audiences as social, virtual and interpretative communities. The so-called ethnographic turn (Livingstone, 1998: 239) has led especially to increased attention to the interaction in small-scale communities, such as the family, the peer group, the classroom, the work environment and the neighbourhood. Examples of this are present in the work of Morley (1986) and Walkerdine (1986) in connection with the social processes within the family related respectively to television and video. A similar emphasis on family (as a moral economy) can be found in the domestication approach (Silverstone, 1991; Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992). Analysis of the use of ICTs in everyday life shows that communities are formed not just in geographically defined spaces, but also in cyberspace – as virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993). Third, more culturist approaches emphasize the existence of communities of meaning (Cohen, 1989), meaning-making audiences (Dayan, 2005) and interpretative communities (Radway, 1988; Lindlof, 1988). Within these audience articulations the common frame of interpretation – sometimes combined with socio-demographic characteristics – is emphasized.

At the macro-level, articulations of community are more complex; they can be categorized into three groups: class, gender, age or ethnicity; ordinary people; and taste cultures/subcultures. In talking about television, Ang (1991) suggests the phrase “cultural positioning and identifications”, to describe the situation-transcending factors that people carry with them and actualize in concrete situations, such as “those along the lines of gender, class, ethnicity, generation, and so on, as well as cultural ideologies as to the meaning of television as a social and aesthetic phenomenon” (Ang, 1991: 184). The articulation of audiences as ordinary people (negatively articulated with the elite or the power bloc – see below) also partly links to this articulation referring to a common popular culture (Hall, 1981), or to “alliances of social interests formed strategically or tactically to advance the interests of those who form them” (Fiske, 1993: 10). Finally, the concept of taste culture can be used to articulate the audience as community. Through the incorporation of taste culture in his typology, McQuail refers not just to Gans’s (1967: 553) definition – in which a ‘taste culture’ is seen as a collective of individuals grouped on the basis of their preference for a certain content, which also comprises media content – but also to the work of Lewis (1992) on music and subculture identities. These analyses lead to the articulation of audience on the basis of subculture identities in relationship to a dominant culture.

3.1.5 The meso-level within the micro/macro dimension

The micro/macro dimension can be expanded not only by the community/society dimension. In defining this micro/macro dimension as a scale, space is also created for a meso-level. This rather rare, but for that reason important, articulation leads to the

definition of audience as organized. A first version of this articulation of audience is offered by McQuail (1994: 307), when he refers in his typology to the audience articulations of the already-existing social group and the fan club or group, and categorizes both as 'active social groups.' A more elaborate analysis of fan culture can be found in Jenkins's (1992, 2006) work, which connects fandom with the concept of the organized audience as represented by the existence of fan clubs, fanzines and congresses. More important in this context is the work of Reyes Matta, which has led to the development of an alternative model of communication based on active social participation (Reyes Matta, 1981, 1986). The point of departure here is the right to communicate, which is endowed explicitly on (1) the entire society, (2) individuals and (3) groups. These actors construct the social organization of the communication processes (on the international, national and the local levels), within which the media function. The messages that originate from these media will eventually reach the organized audience, defined by Reyes Matta as follows:

The entirety of the receivers should neither be perceived as individuals, nor as an amorphous, quantitative mass, but rather as social groups or institutions that are linked in an organizational or structural way with the society at large, such as labor unions, cultural groups, political parties, or new social movements. (Reyes Matta (1981) quoted by Servaes, 1989: 59)

3.2 Deploying democratic-political maximalist models

One of the previous sections of this chapter referred to a number of maximalist models that operate within the field of democratic theory. These frameworks have been significant in providing theoretical support for the media participation debate and, in turn, have generated specific approaches to media participation, ranging from Marxist critiques on audience (participation) commodification, to Habermasian reflections on the public sphere, to anarchism-inspired approaches to alternative media. In addition, debates on participation in other fields (than democratic theory) have spilled over into the media participation debate, as illustrated by the prime example of participatory communication and development (closely connected to the debates on a New World Information and Communication Order).

3.2.1 Marxist and anarchist media studies, and the media participation debate

Marxist theory (in its broad sense) directly or indirectly has contributed to media studies in a wide variety of ways. Wayne's (2003) *Marxism and Media Studies* is a good example of a direct application of the Marxist toolbox, but Marxist theory has also played a key role through its integration into the political economy of communication and cultural

media studies. Mosco (1996: 25) defines the political economy of communication as “the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources,” and analyses processes of commodification, spatialization and structuration. The basic argument here is that the communication industry follows the more general capitalist logics, as the following quote from Mattelart (1979: 36) exemplifies:

The manner in which the communication apparatus functions, which determines the elaboration and exchange of messages, corresponds to the general mechanisms of production and exchange conditioning all human activity in capitalist society.

More specifically, one of the main concerns is related to the colonization of public spaces, where the (growing) domination of corporate power in the communication industry is deemed problematic for media production, distribution, content and reception. Participation in the media becomes blocked by the communication industry’s market logics and focus on professional employment, but participation through the media is also hampered by the media’s circulation of dominant ideologies that continue to serve the interests of the dominant class (Wayne, 2003: 175), which reduces representational diversity. In cultural media studies, we find similar concerns, elaborated more through a mixture of (post)structuralist and (post)Marxist theory. Here, the focus is on the hegemonizing capacities of media, and the (potential) diversity of audience interpretations. An early example appears in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Hall et al., 1978), where Hall and his colleagues research the moral panics caused by the appearance of a ‘new’ form of criminality (mugging), and the way that it supported a dominant societal (repressive) order. Other authors in the field of cultural media studies, such as McRobbie (1991) and Gilroy (1987), focus more on problematic (stereotypical) representations of gender and ethnicity.

Apart from producing a series of harsh critiques on the functioning of the communication industries, both projects have attempted to counter the domination of capitalist media structures and cultures, and to increase the participation of ‘the’ people, albeit in different ways. Despite these differences, both projects aim to redress the structural imbalance between the (mainstream) media systems and the representations they generate on the one hand, and the communicative needs and opportunities for audiences and publics on the other. This implies also that the bourgeoisie vs. proletariat opposition is translated into a more fluid and post-Marxist (media) elite (or power bloc) versus the people opposition (Hall, 1981; Fiske, 1993).

In the case of the political economy approach, the emancipatory agenda was built on the need for structural reform (which could be evolutionary or revolutionary, in some cases resulting in a plea to seize the means of (media) production). In a softened-down version, through the mediation of western social-democratic ideologies,³² we can find traces of these logics in the public broadcasting services (PBS), which combine public

ownership with a cultural-pedagogic logic within a remit to strengthen civil society and democracy and create social cohesion (Brants and De Bens, 2000: 16–17). Picard describes the identity of the public within PBS as follows: “[*Public service*] media are viewed as instruments of the people, public utilities through which the people’s aspirations, ideas, praise and criticism of the state and society may be disseminated”. There is also attention to the possible cross-fertilization between PBS and alternative media organizations (see below), which would allow the latter structurally to bypass the mainstream media. In 1980, Mattelart and Piemme (1983: 413) wrote,

A new definition for the idea of public service must be found, one which integrates both old and new technologies, as well as the national and local context. The basis of this new definition should be the relation to active groups, whether or not they are institutional.

The resistance (of these active groups) to the professionalized media is seen as one of the reasons for the origin and existence of the community media movement in which an anti-elitist discourse is to be considered crucial (McQuail, 1994: 131; Girard, 1992).

Also from an anarchist theory perspective, there have been some substantial contributions to the media and participation debates owing to the fact that the focus of anarchist theory is not always on the state as such. Obviously, the state is often (one of) the main focal point(s) of anarchist theory, but as May (1994: 60) remarks, there is an ambivalence in anarchist theory about whether it is state and government that should be seen as the only sites of the exercise of power. As mentioned above, the economic realm is quite often involved since critiques of the equality-distorting role of capitalism are easily reconciled with criticisms of political decision-making structures. A number of authors have pleaded for the incorporation of more societal spheres, claiming that there is “no final struggle, only a series of partisan struggles on a variety of fronts” (Ward, 1973: 26). Post-structuralist anarchist theory, in particular, has enabled a more complex analytics of power in a variety of societal spheres. This allows us to focus on:

a politics that is more local and diffuse than the large-scale politics that is better suited to grand narratives. It struggles not only on the economic or state levels, but on the epistemological, psychological, linguistic, sexual, religious, psychoanalytic, ethical, informational (etc.) levels as well. It struggles on these levels not because multiple struggles will create a society without the centralization of power, but because power is not centralized, because across the surface of those levels are the sites at which power arises. (May, 1994: 94–95)

Through this broadening of the scope, combined with the very necessary de-essentialization of anarchist theory, the media sphere has become one of the many possible sites of analysis. Support for this repositioning of anarchist theory and the

development of post-anarchist theory can be found first in the importance generally attributed to the contemporary (mainstream) media sphere, its symbolic power and the perceived potential of the media as new governing bodies that (re)produce hegemonies, which renders them necessary targets for anarchist critiques. On a more positive note: The potential of these media spheres to stimulate a more participatory culture and to enhance a semiotic democracy legitimizes attention from an anarchist perspective.

The more Chomskian strands of anarchist theory have incorporated the vitriolic critiques of the mainstream media system, although even alternative media come in for some criticism, as Bradford's (1996: 263) analysis of pirate radio suggests. Apart from more traditional problems with the remnants of essentialism, these analyses of the media are often characterized by a rather fundamental distrust of technology, which is seen to reinforce "class and hierarchical rule by adding powerful instrumentalities of control and destruction to institutional forces of domination" (Bookchin, 1996: 26). Some authors manage to incorporate anarchist theory in a more balanced way, with participation and self-management featuring prominently. Downing et al. (2001: 67 ff), in their book entitled *Radical Media*, distinguish two models for the organization of radical media: the Leninist model and the self-management model. Downing et al. (2001: 69) explicitly relate the latter – where "neither party, nor labor union, nor church, nor state, nor owner is in charge, but where the newspaper or radio stations runs itself" – to what they call a "socialist anarchist angle of vision". Although Downing et al. mainly point to the problems that emanate from this 'angle of vision' (see below), their theoretical reflections and case study analyses clearly link self-managed media to the anarchist tradition. Another author that should be mentioned here is Hakim Bey – the pseudonym used by Peter Lamborn Wilson – who, in his essay *Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ)* (1985), reflects on the upsurge (and disappearance) of temporary anarchist freespaces. He distinguishes in this essay between the net and the web: He sees the net as the "totality of all information and communication transfer" (Bey, 1985: 106) whilst the web is considered a counter-net that is situated within the net. Media technology plays an important (although not all-determining) role in the web:

The present forms of the unofficial Web are, one must suppose, still rather primitive: the marginal zine network, the BBS networks, pirated software, hacking, phone-phreaking, some influence in print and radio, almost none in the other big media [...]. (Bey, 1985: 107)

It is interesting that both Downing et al. and Bey exploit the island metaphor, but in different ways. Downing et al. (2001: 72) critique anarchist theory for being satisfied with creating "little islands of prefigurative politics with no empirical attention to how these might ever be expanded into the rest of society". Bey, in contrast, celebrates (the temporality of) the islands in the net, replacing the permanent revolution by the temporal uprising, legitimized by the argument that "our own particular historical situation is not

propitious for such a vast undertaking” and that a “head-on collision with the terminal State, the megacorporate information State and the empire of Spectacle and Simulation” will only result in “futile martyrdom” (Bey, 1985: 98).

3.2.2 *The Soviet theory of the press, and the concept of narodnost*

Inspired by and simultaneously a structural reworking of Marxist theory, the Soviet theory of the press has been discredited by its translation into totalitarian practice within the USSR and the Central and Eastern European countries, and by the many critiques launched against it, including those from Western European and US ideologists, exemplified by the *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert et al., 1956). Of course, we should be careful not to align ourselves with totalitarian practices. One way to deal with this is to bracket the praxis, and to focus on the theoretical concepts, which can (at least potentially) be articulated within a democratic discourse.

This type of project is not new. In Žižek’s (2002: 11) re-reading of Lenin in *Revolution at the Gates*, he argues that the relevance of this project lies in Lenin’s “fundamental experience” of “being thrown into a catastrophic new constellation in which the old coordinates proved useless”. Žižek shies away from a nostalgic re-enactment of revolutionary glory and a pragmatic readjustment of the old Marxist-Leninist projects, but wants to repeat the “Leninist gesture of reinventing the revolutionary project in the conditions of imperialism and colonialism” (Žižek, 2002: 11). Žižek realizes the dangers of this move: His introduction starts with the following sentence: “The first public reaction to the idea of reactualising Lenin is, of course, an outburst of sarcastic laughter” (Žižek, 2002: 4).

Keeping in mind these risks, a similar (re-)analysis of the Soviet theory of the press can still be organized. Hopkins’s (1970) overview (which is similar to McNair’s (1991: 18) overview) of the Soviet press theory’s basic principles is a helpful starting point.

(1) Party orientation (*partiinnost*), which may be interpreted as conscious acceptance that the press is a politically partisan institution, and it therefore expresses party philosophy and goals; (2) high level of ideology (*vysokaya ideinnost*), which suggests that the mass media should be spiritually reinforced with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism; (3) truthfulness (*pravdinost*), an obligation to transmit information truthfully; (4) popular orientation (*narodnost*), which reminds the Soviet press of its responsibilities toward the masses, and simultaneously of the people’s access to the publicly owned press; (5) mass character (*massovost*), which not only maintains that the Soviet press serves the masses, but functions among them; and (6) criticism and self-criticism (*kritika* and *samokritika*), which calls upon the press to criticize failures and faults of the Communist Party, the government, and their agencies, as well as to criticize its own performance. (Hopkins, 1970: 34)

Although each of these principles merits in-depth debate, the vanguard idea of the party organization principle is one that (1) produces a strong presence and privileging of a specific ideological framework, (2) in turn mediates the principle of truthfulness and (3) makes these three principles difficult to use within a democratic framework. On the other hand, notions of criticism and self-criticism, and especially the concept of *narodnost* (and *massovost*) remain important in the debates on participatory communication. If we zoom in on *narodnost*, we can see that this concept – which Hopkins (1970) translates as popular orientation, and McNair (1991) translates as accessibility – serves a number of purposes. First, it articulates media organizations and their media professionals as representatives and also part of ‘the’ people. At least theoretically, *narodnost* disarticulates the elitist element from the media professionals’ identity and compensates by making them representative or part of ‘the’ people, working with them in partnership. Second, the concept structures the content, since *narodnost* also implies a strong focus on the lived experience of ‘the’ people. This brings Inkeles (1956: 140, quoted in McNair, 1991: 26) to the conclusion that in the 1940s “not events but social processes are treated as news and regarded as being newsworthy [...] Events are regarded as being news in so far that they can meaningfully be related to the process of socialist construction”. An example in Lenin (1972: 339) from the 1918 Pravda contains a similar argument:

We do very little to educate the people by living, concrete examples and models taken from all spheres of life, although that is the chief task of the press during the transition from capitalism to communism. We give little attention to that aspect of everyday life inside the factories, in the villages and in the regiments where, more than anywhere else, the new is being built, where attention, publicity, public criticism, condemnation of what is bad and appeals to learn from the good are needed most. Less political ballyhoo. Fewer highbrow discussions. Closer to life. More attention to the way in which the workers and peasants are actually building the new in their everyday work, and more verification so as to ascertain the extent to which the new is communistic.

This does not imply that the content should be populist or vulgarized, as Lenin (1972: 344) argues in his *Thesis on Production Propaganda*:

This newspaper, devoted to matters of production, should be a popular one, in the sense of being understood by millions of readers, without falling into vulgarisation. This paper should not descend to the level of the uncultivated reader, but should work steadily – and by vary gradual degrees – to promote his development. [...] Top priority should be given to a single economic plan, to the labour front, production propaganda, the training of workers and peasants in the work of administration, to seeing that Soviet laws and measures established by Soviet institutions are given due effect, and to an extensive and properly organised exchange of opinions with the rank-and-file reader.

This brings us to the third component of *narodnost*, which is the accessibility of the audiences to the press. The above-mentioned ‘exchange of opinions’ system involving readers’ letters has been used extensively: McNair (1991: 25) refers to Alfyorov, who claimed that the Soviet media received 60–70 million letters each year. This was combined with the worker-peasant correspondence system endorsed by the 8th party congress in March 1919, and structured through Rabselkor (the Movement of Worker and Peasant Correspondents). Although, again, in practice, worker-peasant correspondents were objects of surveillance and discipline (Gorham (1996) calls them “Tongue-tied writers” – see also Kenez, 1985: 233–234), the concept was aimed at providing media access to non-professional writers. By providing media access, *narodnost* also contributed to the media’s watchdog role, exposing the dysfunctions of the state and economic apparatuses (Štastná, 1985: 293), the fourth component of *narodnost*.

The extracts from Lenin (1972) also exemplify the difficulties involved in discussing the Soviet theory of the press from a democratic perspective. *Narodnost* served the Soviet’s ideological, educational, propagandist objectives by showing the achievements of communism in the realm of everyday life, evidenced by Lenin’s (1972: 339) call for “more verification so as to ascertain the extent to which the new is communistic”. Through its focus on the everyday and the economic context, the totalitarian political system was able to disappear from sight, and position itself beyond public scrutiny. This move is symbolized with Lenin’s (1972: 339) plea for “Less political ballyhoo”. Obviously, the mediation of *narodnost* through the concept of *pravdinost* also renders its meaning specific, since truth is a Marxist-Leninist truth, and this framework obviously impacted on what could be said in public.

When discussing participation we should not forget *narodnost*. Contemporary debate on media and participation (in the East and the West) can be deepened by its conceptual richness. First, *narodnost* opens up the concept of the watchdog to non-professionals (and can thus for instance be used to theoretically capture WikiLeaks’ activities). This concept is frequently (discursively) restricted to the professional identity in other frameworks. Second, and especially when *narodnost* is combined with *massovost*, the large-scale nature of participation is highlighted. Here, popular access to the mainstream media becomes less incidental and secondary (as is often the case in contemporary mainstream media), and is transformed to become a core principle of these media organizations. Third, *narodnost* provides different and important (from a participatory perspective) articulations of audience, since the audience is seen as embedded within everyday life. Even more importantly, we see an articulation of the audience (through the Rabselkor system) as organized. This rather rare perspective on audience – see Reyes Matta’s (1986) work discussed above – stresses that audience members are neither isolated individuals (an articulation found in the mainstream media model) nor organized within the media itself (as articulated in the alternative media model, for instance), but are part of civil society and enter into media worlds as rhizomatically connected individuals. The *narodnost* concept thus provides us with the

possibility to rework the more minimalist forms of participation often found within mainstream media. Moreover, through its emphasis on an audience that organizes itself outside the media organizations, an unusual perspective on media participation in democratic societies is opened up.

3.2.3 *Deliberation and the public sphere*

Communication plays a key role in the deliberative democratic model, and in Habermas's model of the public sphere, described in Habermas's (1996: 360) definition of the public sphere as "a network for communicating information and points of view". It is no surprise that these models³³ play a prominent role in theorizing the connection between participation and communication. First, participation in the public sphere is seen as an important component, since it relates to the basic assumptions that characterize the communicative action that takes place within the public sphere, and where "participants enter into interpersonal relationships by taking positions on mutual speech-act offers and assuming illocutionary obligations" (Habermas, 1996: 361). But, in Habermas's two-track model of deliberative politics, there is also a strong emphasis on the connection of the public sphere to realities external to it, and on participation through the public sphere. After all, as Habermas (1996: 359 – emphasis in original) put it, "The capacity of the public sphere to solve problems *on its own* is limited".

If we go back to an earlier (already mentioned) definition of the public sphere introduced in Habermas (1974: 49) ("By the 'public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body"), we see again the emphasis on conversation and communication. However, we should not forget that Habermas's (1991) older work on the public sphere – *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, first published in German in 1962 – is a historical-sociological account of the emergence, transformation and disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere. This much-critiqued component of Habermas's work (see e.g. Bottomore, 2002) tries to ground his theoretical and critical reflections in the historical realities of the eighteenth century,³⁴ where a sphere "between civil society and the state" came into being, in which "critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed" (McCarthy, 1991: xi). In its struggle with the absolutist state, the bourgeoisie "replaced a public sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented *before* the people", with a sphere "in which state authority was publically monitored through informed and critical discourse *by* the people" (McCarthy, 1991: xi – emphasis in original). In the late capitalism of the twentieth century, this bourgeois public sphere was to disintegrate through the manipulation of public opinion by the mass media, the articulation of social needs by large organizations, and the management of politics (Pusey, 1987: 90).

Pusey (1987: 90) comments on the irony involved in locating participation in rational debate and the creation of consensus, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an era characterized by the most brutish forms of industrial capitalism, which left many lower-class (and other) people voiceless. Fraser (1990: 60), in her article *Rethinking the Public Sphere*, makes a similar point: “Now, there is a remarkable irony here, one that Habermas’s account of the rise of the public sphere fails fully to appreciate. A discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction”. Fraser focuses on the unequal participation of women and members of the lower classes in the public sphere: “But this network of clubs and associations – philanthropic, civic, professional, and cultural – was anything but accessible to everyone. On the contrary, it was the arena, the training ground and eventually the power base of a stratum of bourgeois men who were coming to see themselves as a ‘universal class’ and preparing to assert their fitness to govern” (Fraser, 1990: 60). Also, Garnham (1992: 359–360) produces a list of critiques, according to which Habermas (1) ignores the existence of a “plebeian public sphere alongside and in opposition to the bourgeois public sphere”; (2) “idealizes the bourgeois public sphere”; (3) de-emphasizes gender relations and relations of production “by excluding the household and the economy from the public sphere”; (4) creates a rationalist model of public discourse that “leaves him unable to theorize a pluralist public sphere”; (5) relies too much on Adorno’s model of the cultural industry, which leads to an over-emphasizing of media power; (6) neglects “all [...] other forms of communicative action not directed towards consensus”; and (7) “neglects both the rhetorical and playful aspects of communicative action”. Hartley (1996: 181) condenses in one eloquent sentence his analysis of the postmodern public sphere and its processes of democratisation:

The critical pessimism of twentieth-century social theorists who lament the passing of an informed, rational public sphere and the rise of popular entertainment media has simultaneously overplayed the achievement and social extent of the Enlightenment public sphere, and also proved to be an impediment to understanding the role that the popular media do play in producing and distributing knowledge, visualizing and teaching public issues in the midst of private consumption, writing the truths of our time on the bodies of those image-saturated ‘celebrities’ whose cultural function is to embody, circulate, dramatize and teach certain public virtues within a suburban cultural context.

But these critiques, which in part were embraced by Habermas (1992, 1996), focus more on the nature of the public sphere than on its actual existence. Later, Habermas (1996: 360–362) more exclusively emphasizes the formal-procedural nature of the public sphere (instead of conflating it with its historical origins), while maintaining a focus on communicative rationality and consensus in which the public sphere is seen as a social space generated through communicative action. Even the (broad) diffusion

of information and points of view (for instance, via broadcasting media) is not the most important component, although “only the broad circulation of comprehensible, attention-grabbing messages arouse a sufficiently inclusive participation. But the rules of a *shared* practice of communication are of greater significance for structuring public opinion” (Habermas, 1996: 362 – emphasis in original). He goes on to say that the success of public communication is not intrinsically determined by the requirement of inclusion (which is seen as being more of an empirical matter), and defends a normative position that emphasizes the importance of the “formal criteria governing how a qualified public opinion comes about”. For instance, “[t]he structures of a power-ridden, oppressed public sphere exclude fruitful and clarifying discussions” (Habermas, 1996: 362). In sum, positioned as part of the two-track model of deliberative politics, the public sphere for Habermas remains a crucial site of participation and communication, which simultaneously “relieves the public of the burden of decision making; the postponed decisions are reserved for the institutionalized political process” (Habermas, 1996: 362 – emphasis removed).

A number of alternative public sphere models have been developed as a response to Habermas. Although they continue to keep the public sphere concept (more or less) intact, they are relevant here because they encompass key articulations of participation. One model is Hauser’s (1998) rhetorical public sphere, where the focus is more on specific issues, which aligns with Habermas’s (1996: 360 – emphasis removed) position that streams of communication become filtered and synthesized “into bundles of topically specialized public opinions”. In critiquing the homogeneity of Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere, Fraser (1990: 67) suggests the existence of “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses”. One example of these counterpublics is the

feminist subaltern counterpublic, with its variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places. In this public sphere, feminist women have invented new terms for describing social reality, including ‘sexism,’ ‘the double shift,’ ‘sexual harassment,’ and ‘marital, date, and acquaintance rape.’ Armed with such language, we have recast our needs and identities, thereby reducing, although not eliminating, the extent of our disadvantage in official public spheres. (Fraser, 1990: 67)

At the same time – and as Conway and Singh (2009: 63) remark – Fraser’s approach to the identity of the public sphere is closely related to Habermas’s, illustrated by her definition of the public sphere as “a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction” (Fraser, 1997: 70). More recently, Fraser (2007) focused on the transnational

character of public spheres, transgressing the boundaries of nations and states. In so doing, she is still aiming to protect the ideological-critical and normative nature of the public sphere concept, by emphasizing the principles of normative legitimacy and political efficacy. Normative legitimacy refers to the idea that all those affected are able to participate (Fraser, 2007: 20; see also Habermas, 1996: 365), which Fraser takes to mean the principles of inclusiveness and parity. Political efficacy refers to the connection of the public sphere with institutionalized politics, where the public sphere needs to act “as a political force to hold public power accountable, ensuring that the latter’s exercise reflects the considered will of civil society” (Fraser, 2007: 22).

In addition to Fraser’s work, several other alternative public sphere models have been developed. A more radical (and older) model is Negt and Kluge’s (1983: 92) concept of the proletarian public sphere, based on the idea that “only when they [*the workers*] organise themselves in a form of a public sphere, do they develop at all as interests and are no longer mere possibilities”. Negt and Kluge (1983: 94) plead for the self-organization of the working class, in which the proletarian public sphere acts as a “self-defence organ [*aimed at*] the protection of individuals from the direct influence of bourgeois interests and ideologies”. More recently, emanating from critiques of the unitary public sphere, Gitlin (1998) developed the concept of public sphericules. Gitlin (1998: 170) describes it as follows: “The unitary public sphere is weak, riddled with anxiety and self-doubt, but distinct communities of information and participation are multiplying, robust and brimming with self-confidence”.

Gitlin’s work brings us to the field of communication and media studies, where the concept of the public sphere is omnipresent in a diversity of approaches. A first dimension structuring this field is the normative versus the neutralized-descriptive approach. To immediately complicate things further, we can see – following Nieminen (2006) – that within the normative approach two sub-approaches can be distinguished: A normative-prescriptive sub-approach and a historical-sociological sub-approach (this latter is also referred to by Nieminen as the cultural-diagnostic (sub-)approach), which are in alignment with the two strands in Habermas’s work (see above). In the normative-prescriptive sub-approach, the public sphere is a regulative idea, “an ideal which may never be fully realized but which can act as a normative framework for critical evaluation” (Nieminen, 2006: 106). Equally normative, the historical-sociological sub-approach focuses on the “historical and sociological (pre)conditions of the phenomenon we call the [...] public sphere” (Nieminen, 2006: 107).

Characteristic of the normative approach (and its two sub-approaches) is that the public sphere is articulated with a concern for the democratic-participatory process, where participation, in the Habermasian version, is “governed by the norms of equality and symmetry; all have the same chances to initiate speech acts, to question, to interrogate, and open debate” (Benhabib, 1994: 31). Here we have Dahlgren’s (1995) example of *Television and the Public Sphere*, which is in close parallel to Habermas’s normative approach, for critical assessment of the democratic capacities of television

– “arguably the dominant media institution of the modern public sphere” (Dahlgren, 1995: 23). Although Dahlgren (1995: 148) points to the interpretative agency of viewers, he also concludes that “we would be foolish to exaggerate its [television’s] contribution to critical reason and progressive affect”. Another example is Livingstone and Lunt’s (1996) *Talk on Television: Audience Participation and Public Debate*, which looks at televised audience discussion programmes, using what is mainly an (adjusted) Habermasian framework. In the conclusion to their book, they mention first the Habermasian call for a public sphere that is able to generate critical consensus within the public, and then add a call of their own, for “communicative conventions linked to narrative and inquiry or negotiation which may support a potentially emancipatory public sphere” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1996: 180). As these examples show, this concern is often translated into an evaluatory position, which ranges from the positive-emancipatory to the negative-dominative. McKee (2005: 2) summarizes the latter position as critiquing the public sphere for being too trivialized, too commercialized, too spectacular, too fragmented and too apathetic. In contrast, the first position stresses the democratization of the public sphere, and the increased opportunities for opinion formation and the expression of a collective will.

Obviously, the Habermasian version is not the only possible normative approach to the public sphere, nor does it constitute the only grounds for evaluating its democratic nature; there is a very long tradition of normative media theories that are related structurally to the public sphere concept. Curran’s (1991) book chapter *Rethinking the Media as Public Sphere*, for instance, is an explicit attempt to connect these normative media theories to the concept of the public sphere. By discussing and comparing the different traditions in normative media theory, Curran shows that the public sphere can be seen as a public forum or marketplace of ideas³⁵ (in liberal media theories), as a site of class domination (in Marxist media theories) or as a public arena of contestation (in radical-democratic media theories). Curran’s article shows also that all these concepts incorporate or allow for a normative positioning. For instance, in the case of liberal media theories, the public forum (or the marketplace of ideas) is considered democratically relevant because it is “the space between government and society in which private individuals exercise formal and informal control over the state; formal control through the election of governments and informal control through the pressure of public opinion” (Curran, 1991: 29). Because the more liberal media theories still insist on a separation between institutionalized politics and the public sphere, where government is ultimately seen as ‘the’ seat of power (Curran, 1991: 29), these types of publics are articulated – in the words of Fraser (1992) – as ‘weak publics’, whose deliberations are void of decision-making authority, rendering participation minimalist. Other normative media theories use (or plead for) ‘strong publics’, whose deliberations do matter both for opinion formation and for producing decision-making authority (Fraser, 1992) (although without necessarily taking the place of the state). Also, some of the alternative models of the public sphere, such as the notion of counterpublics (see e.g., Asen and Brouwer, 2001 for a discussion

of counterpublics and ICTs), can be seen as part of the normative approach that focuses on 'strong publics', because these alternative models value the counter-hegemonic resistance that counterpublics can organize. In his book *Culture and Democracy. Media, Space and Representation*, Barnett (2003: 79) stresses this component when he writes, "It is also important to affirm the practical existence of counterpublics with different norms of access, conduct, participation and representation". Moreover, the workings of counterpublics show the permeability of the borders between public sphere and the political system, which, again, emphasizes civil society's participation.

The internal differences between these normative approaches are fed by the diversity of democratic theories, where the normative models that position publics as 'weak publics' (e.g. the liberal media theories) are related to the more minimalist versions of democratic participation, and where 'strong public' models define a public sphere that is more closely positioned to the maximalist democratic models. But we should not forget that there are also neutralized-descriptive approaches to the public sphere, which do not use an explicit normative framework. In these approaches the public sphere concept is still used to demarcate "a network for communicating information and points of view" (Habermas, 1996: 360), but they do not attribute specific democratic characteristics to the public sphere. Here, the public sphere becomes a 'mere' public space where communicational interchanges take place, in some cases almost a synonym for publicness. McKee (2005: vii) links this approach to the everyday use of the term public sphere, when he says that "It's a term in everyday use to describe information when it's made generally available to the public: we say it's in 'the public sphere'". One example McKee points us to is Furedi's (2004) book *Where Have All The Intellectuals Gone? Confronting 21st Century Philistinism*, which indeed equates the public sphere with publicness. Arguably, in these cases also, the use of the public sphere concept is not entirely neutral, and still contains ideological-democratic assumptions. 'Even' in the case of the Furedi example, the blurb for the book includes the following statement, which brings in a normative position: "Frank Furedi explains the essential contribution of intellectuals both to culture and to democracy – and why we need to recreate a public sphere in which intellectuals and the general public can talk to each other again".

A second dimension structuring the use of the public sphere concept within the field of media and communication studies is the media-centric/society-centric dimension. An example is Poster's (1997: 209) radical statement that: "The age of the public sphere as face to face talk is clearly over; the question of democracy must henceforth take into account new forms of electronically mediated discourse". In other cases, this dimension generates an uneasy tension, as communication and media studies analyses often affirm a difference between the public sphere and the media, but also argue that the (mass) media are the most prominent contemporary form of the public sphere. For instance, in Dahlgren's (1995: 148) conclusions about television, we find this duality (between television as public sphere and television in the public sphere) encompassed in one sentence: "While television is the dominant medium of the public sphere, 'public

sphering' is clearly not television's dominant purpose, and its institutional logic of course greatly conditions its role within the public sphere". McKee (2005: 5) explicitly formulates this tension as follows.

The relationship between these two terms [media and public sphere] is complicated. On the one hand it's true that the public sphere is a bigger thing than just 'the media'. [...] But on the other hand, the mass media obviously play a central role in the public sphere [...] It's only in the mass media that vast populations of people can come together to exchange ideas. You can't fit the entire population of America, or Britain, or Australia, into a town hall where they could all discuss issues that affect them.

Especially within the field that studies the democratic capacities of ICTs (and more specifically the internet), there is a tendency towards more media-centric approaches. An interesting example here is Barlow's (2007) book entitled *Blogging America: The New Public Sphere*, but there are also other examples (see e.g. Gerhards and Schäfer's (2010) comparative article with the – again – telling title *Is the internet a better public sphere?*, and Castells, 2008). Lister et al. (2003: 176) explain this focus as follows (talking about the pre-web internet): "The essentially participatory and interactive elements of the pre-web internet clearly suggest attractive homologies with Habermas's descriptions of the idealized public sphere", but Habermas's 'old' media critiques also feed into this preference. This apparently natural match further strengthens the tendency to look at the media as (the most important part of) the public sphere, focusing on the internet's capacity "to take part in debate and [offer] us the chance to 'talk back' to the media, creating dialogue instead of passivity," and to represent new subjectivities (Lister et al., 2003: 177). Dahlberg's work (2001a; 2001b) is an example of the avoidance of a conflation of (new) media and the public sphere through an examination of how online discourse is extending the public sphere. First he operationalizes the Habermasian normative approach into six conditions: autonomy from state and economic power; exchange and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims; reflexivity; ideal role-taking; sincerity; and discursive inclusion and equality. He then uses this matrix to evaluate the claim that the internet is enhancing and extending the public sphere of rational-critical deliberation. Although Dahlberg supports the claim, he qualifies it, based on the increasing commodification of cyberspace, the limited presence of reflexivity, the lack of respectful listening to others, the difficulty involved in verifying claims and information, the extensive exclusions, and the domination of discourse by specific groups and individuals (Dahlberg, 2001a). A similar analysis brings Witschge (2007: 127–128) – who focuses more on openness – to conclude that "openness to difference is limited in online debates and that voices are excluded from entering the dominant discourse in several ways". Also the more alternative counterpublics models are used to study how "online media offer a space for free speech and participation" (Woo-Young, 2005: 395). In his analysis of Korean polemicist websites, Woo-Young (2005) points to their capacity to

produce and distribute counter-discourses, but also mentions their strong gate-keeping, their elimination of diversity, and the exclusiveness of these discursive communities.

In a number of other cases, more society-centred approaches are exploited. An argument used to legitimize this broader approach is that most theoretical frameworks do not restrict the public sphere to a specific set of institutions like the media. Here it is relevant to repeat part of Habermas's (1974: 49) older definition of the public sphere: "A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body". Another argument supporting this approach is that authors in other research fields have labelled other spaces public spheres.³⁶ Shelton (2009), for instance, writes about the museum as a public sphere, Buschman (2005) refers to the library, and Giroux (2002) and Vega Encabo and Gil Martín (2007) discuss the university and science from this perspective. There are many other examples, such as public sphere analyses of the workplace (Roberts, 2009), the arts (Fernandes, 2006) and literature (Gustafson, 2008). As McGuigan (2005) reminds us in his article on the cultural public sphere, Habermas (1991) discussed not only the political public sphere, but also the literary public sphere, and McGuigan (2005: 435) expands the latter notion to "the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through affective (aesthetic and emotional) modes of communication". A number of authors have tried to develop this broader approach, contextualizing media and positioning them within the social and the political, where concepts such as network societies, transnational public spheres and counterpublics are shown to be useful (see e.g. Crack, 2007; Cammaerts, 2007b). Another (reasonably frequently used) instrument to support this broadening of the scope is the concept of popular culture, although this focus also has restrictions. A historical example is Brophy's (2007) *Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland, 1800–1850*, which groups chapters on public reading, singing, use of public space (festivals, planting liberty trees), and carnival. A more contemporary example is Hartley's (1996: 182) connection between the postmodern public sphere, suburbia and media, and his argument that "[...] the home and suburbia, together with their associated institutions (shopping centre, family, media) and practices (dressing and congregating; looking, listening and talking), constitute a place where and the means by which public, political knowledges are not only circulated and consumed, but recreated, generalized and personalized". In this context, McKee (2005: 202) uses the concept of cultural participation (in discussing Adbusters) to claim that (although again through media technological developments) "cultural participation [*is*] a real possibility for all citizens: and [...] such participation is, in itself, a political act".

The third dimension (which I discuss only briefly here) is situated at the level of the distinction between cultural(ist) and structural(ist) approaches. Support for this distinction can be found in Dahlgren's (2005; see also Dahlgren, 1995) discussion of the structural, representational and interactional analytic dimensions of the public sphere. Structural approaches to the public sphere refer to (analyses of) the infrastructure of the public sphere; Dahlgren (2005: 148–149) (again focusing on media) provides a short list

of these infrastructural components, which also structure the participatory process within the public sphere: media organizations, their political economy, ownership, control, regulation, their financial structures and the legal frameworks in which they (have to) function. Arguably, these structural approaches to the public sphere can also be seen as including the patterns of behaviour, rational-argumentative structures and value systems that all characterize social interaction. More culturalist approaches to the public sphere emphasize the processes of representation of the social and its actors, and the attribution of meaning to events and phenomena, objects and social processes. Not only does this approach allow for the recognition of contingency and fluidity (often without falling into the trap of cultural nihilism), it also leaves more space for diversity and cultural struggle and for the role of identities and affect. To use Fraser's (1990: 68–69) words:

[...] public spheres are not only arenas for the formation of discursive opinion; in addition, they are arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities. This means that participation is not simply a matter of being able to state propositional contents that are neutral with respect to form of expression. Rather [...] participation means being able to speak in one's own voice, thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing one's cultural identity through idiom and style.

Another example is Dahlgren's (2009: 118) civic cultures model, which attributes considerable attention to civic identities, or "people's subjective view of themselves as members or participants of democracy". Beyond the identity of formal citizenship, Dahlgren mentions the importance of the sense of being an empowered political agent, and the importance of membership of one or more political communities (Dahlgren, 2009: 120–121). In addition, the civic identity concept allows Dahlgren to emphasize the emotional component of civic identities. Although he recognizes that political passions have generated many horrors, he insists that affective involvement contributes to the vibrancy of a democracy (and a public sphere). Others, such as Gripsrud (1992) and McGuigan (2005), stress the importance of melodrama in the public sphere, and Mouffe (2005: 24) more broadly pleads for acceptance of the importance of affect within the political, in saying that 'passions' are to be seen as "one of the main moving forces in the field of politics". In other words, these culturalist approaches allow for more emphasis on the political and democratic culture, and the role played by identities, emotions and discourses when analysing participation in the public sphere.

3.2.4 UNESCO, communication rights and development communication

Another field in which participation is discussed intensively is located at the intersection of international and development communication. Earlier in this chapter, I described the close connection between participation and development, and this connection impacts

on the role ascribed to communication in the development process. As Servaes (1999: 83) argues, several Latin American scholars, such as Beltran, Bordenave and Martin-Barbero, in the 1970s discussed the role of participatory communication as a tool to create a more just world. Indicative of this is Bordenave's (1994) article *Participative Communication as a Part of Building the Participative Society*, in which he defines participatory communication as "that type of communication in which all the interlocutors are free and have equal access to the means to express their viewpoints, feelings and experiences" (Bordenave, 1994: 43). This re-articulates communication as "a two way process, in which the partners – individual and collective – carry on a democratic and balanced dialogue" (MacBride Commission, 1980: 172). Freire's theories, in particular, have had a considerable impact on this domain, as Thomas (1994: 51), for example, remarks:

Although he [Freire] never really linked his analysis to the use of particular media, it is implicit in his writings that communication, in order to be effective, has to be participatory, dialogic and reciprocal. In fact, the entire enterprise of participatory communication projects, from the organization and production of community radio in Latin America, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia, through the practices of popular theatre in countries like Brazil, Chile, Jamaica, South Africa, India, and the Philippines utilise Freire's perspective.

The debate on participation and development moved onto the global stage in the 1970s when the struggle over the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and NWICO began within UNESCO. The *Declaration of Guiding Principles on the Use of Satellite Broadcasting for the Free Flow of Information, the Spread of Education and Greater Cultural Exchange* (Res. 4.111 – UNESCO, 1973) was accepted at the October–November 1972 UNESCO General Conference in Paris. This emphasized the need for satellite broadcasting to "respect the sovereignty and equality of all States" (Art. 2). In article 6, the declaration again stresses national sovereignty: "Each country has the right to decide on the content of the educational programmes broadcast by satellite to its people [...]" Although the concept of the free flow of information is used explicitly, the declaration contains correctives that shift it towards the free and balanced flow discourse of the Non-aligned Movement. In article 5 of the declaration, this struggle becomes apparent in mentioning explicitly (news of) developing countries: "The objective of satellite broadcasting for the free flow of information is to ensure the widest possible dissemination, among the peoples of the world, of news of all countries, developed and developing alike". McPhail (2002: 179) describes the decision to hold regional meetings in order to discuss the national communication policies that were to be organized in the 'peripheral' regions. A series of meetings took place in Latin America, in Colombia (July 1974), Ecuador (June 1975) and Costa Rica (July 1976).

The struggle of the Non-aligned Movement resulted in participation becoming prominent on the political agenda. At the General Conference in Paris held in October–

November 1974, resolution 4.121 used the concept of participation more explicitly in the preamble: “Convinced that all individuals should have equal opportunities to participate actively in the means of communication and to benefit from such means while preserving the right to protection against their abuses [...]” (Hamelink, 1997: 294). This resolution also authorized the Director-General to

study ways and means by which active participation in the communication process may become possible and analyse the right to communicate in consultation with competent organs of the United Nations, Member States and professional organizations and to report to the nineteenth General Conference on further steps which should be taken [...]. (UNESCO, 1975)

The resolution resulted in a report entitled *Means of Enabling Active Participation in the Communication Process and Analysis of the Right to Communicate* (UNESCO, 1976), which was accepted at the October–November 1976 General Conference. The 1976 conference also approved the *Recommendation on Participation by the People at Large in Cultural Life and their Contribution to it* (UNESCO, 1977), which contained a section on audience participation that stated that

Member States or the appropriate authorities [*should*] promote the active participation of audiences by enabling them to have a voice in the selection and production of programmes, by fostering the creation of a permanent flow of ideas between the public, artists and producers and by encouraging the establishment of production centres for use by audiences at local and community levels [...].

As McPhail (2002: 182 – see also MacBride Commission, 1980: 295) explains, after difficult negotiations over a draft resolution (calling for state responsibility for media activities) the decision was taken at this General Conference to undertake a review of “the totality of problems of communication in modern society”. This led in December 1977 to the establishment of the sixteen-member International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, which was headed by Sean MacBride.

Before the MacBride Commission published its final report, the 20th General Conference accepted the *Declaration on Fundamental Principles Concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War* (UNESCO, 1979), which was less ambitious than previous documents. However, it did contain the statement in article 2 that “Similarly, it is important that the mass media be responsive to concerns of peoples and individuals, thus promoting the participation of the public in the elaboration of information”. The MacBride Commission report (1980), *Many Voices, One World. Towards a New More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order*, took a strong position on audience participation. The chapter

on the *Democratization of Communication* describes the following four approaches to breaking down the barriers to the democratization of communication:

(a) broader popular access to the media and the overall communication system, through assertion of the right to reply and criticize, various forms of feedback, and regular contact between communicators and the public [...]; (b) participation of non-professionals in producing and broadcasting programmes, which enables them to make active use of information sources, and is also an outlet for individual skill and sometimes for artistic creativity; (c) the development of 'alternative' channels of communication, usually but not always on a local scale; (d) participation of the community and media users in management and decision-making (this is usually limited to local media). Self-management is the most radical form of participation since it presupposes an active role for many individuals, not only in the programmes and news flow, but also in the decision-making process on general issues. (MacBride Commission, 1980: 169)

In one of the meeting reports – of the 1977 meeting in Belgrade – Berrigan (1979: 18–19) outlines a clear distinction between the three concepts that are used in the above-mentioned citation (access, participation and self-management):

By definition, access infers the ability of the public to come closer to communication systems, and in concrete terms it can be related to two levels: of choice and of feedback. [...] In summary, access refers to the use of media for public service. It may be defined in terms of the opportunities available to the public to choose varied and relevant programmes, and to have a means of feedback to transmit its reactions and demands to production organizations. Participation implies a higher level of public involvement in communication systems. It includes the involvement of the public in the production process and also in the management and planning of communication systems. [...] Participation may be no more than representation and consultation of the public in decision making. On the other hand, self-management is the most advanced form of participation. In this case, the public exercises the power of decision making within communication enterprises and is also fully involved in the formulation of communication policies and plans.

The maximalist definition of participation can also be found in the MacBride Commission (1980: 173–174) report, for instance, in the last summary paragraph, which emphasizes the need for audience participation in the decision-making and programming activities:

There is surely a necessity for more abundant information from a plurality of sources, but if the opportunity to reciprocate is not available, the communication process is not adequately democratic. Without a two-way flow between participants in the process, without the existence of multiple information sources permitting wider

selection, without more opportunity for each individual to reach decisions based on a broad awareness of divergent facts and viewpoints, without increased participation by readers, viewers and listeners in the decision-making and programming activities of the media – true democratization will not become a reality.

Crucial to the MacBride Commission report, and to the debates that took place before it was published, was the embedding of participation in the right to communicate, referred to by Jacobson (1998) as a third-generation human right (see also Fisher and Harms, 1982; Servaes, 1998; Dakroury, 2009). This right was originally proposed in 1969 – by the French civil servant Jean d'Arcy – and aimed to broaden the right to be informed, which is embedded in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the MacBride Commission report the right to communicate implies that “(a) the individual becomes an active partner and not a mere object of communication; (b) the variety of messages exchanged increases; and (c) the extent and quality of social representation or participation in communication are augmented” (MacBride Commission, 1980: 166). As Jacobson, slightly ironically, remarks, the MacBride Commission was correct in its assumption³⁷ that “[the] right to communicate [still has to] receive its final form and its full content” (MacBride Commission, 1980: 173). Harms’ definition, explicitly mentioned in the MacBride Commission report, nevertheless remains relevant:

Everyone has the right to communicate: the components of this comprehensive Human Right include but are not limited to the following specific communication rights: (1) a right to assemble, a right to discuss, a right to participate and related association rights; (2) a right to inquire, a right to be informed, a right to inform, and related information rights; (3) a right to culture, a right to choose, a right to privacy, and related human development rights. (Harms quoted in MacBride Commission, 1980: 173)

The debates on participation and the right to communicate continued in the 1980s, and featured in a number of General Conferences, but the concept of the right to communicate (almost) received its *coup de grace* when the USA and the UK pulled out of UNESCO (Jacobson, 1998: 398). During the 1990s, the right to communicate disappeared almost completely from UNESCO’s agenda (and from the agendas of other international organizations), with the exception of forums such as the MacBride Round Tables (Hamelink, 1997: 298).

Only in 2003, in the slipstream of the UN WSIS,³⁸ was the debate on communication rights reinvigorated,³⁹ in part, thanks to initiatives such as the Communication Rights in the Information Society Campaign (CRIS).⁴⁰ The WSIS took place in two phases, with a first phase in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and the second phase in Tunis, from 16 to 18 November 2005. After the first phase, *A Declaration of Principles* was published, in which the first sentence described “Our Common Vision of the Information Society”:

We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, assembled in Geneva from 10–12 December 2003 for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life. (WSIS, 2003)

In evaluating the role of participation at the WSIS, it is important to emphasize that the summit adopted a multi-stakeholder approach (see Rosenau, 1990; Hemmati, 2002), which allowed business and civil society actors to play significant roles. Although there were clear limits to the levels of participation (see Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2005; Padovani and Nordenstreng, 2005; Cammaerts, 2008), the presence of non-state actors at a world summit was significant, and allowed the opening up of “formerly closed decision-making forums at the international level” (Mansell and Nordenstreng, 2006: 31). In one of the final WSIS documents, the *Tunis Commitment* (WSIS, 2005a), the importance of multi-stakeholder participation was formally confirmed: “We acknowledge that multi-stakeholder participation is essential to the successful building of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society and that governments could play an important role in this process”.

However, in the final texts of the summit meetings (WSIS, 2003a; 2003b; 2005a; 2005b), participation played only a minor role; it receives minimalist significations and does not feature very often. For instance, in the discussion on internet governance, there is mention that this governance should be “based on the full participation of all stakeholders, from both developed and developing countries, within their respective roles and responsibilities” (WSIS, 2005a). More maximalist meanings of participation, linked to communication rights, are missing, which provokes rather skeptical evaluations: “A surge, at least in the short term, in the political will to incorporate such rights in a new international declaration is unlikely, regardless of the WSIS document’s recommendations about the need to respect human rights” (Mansell and Nordenstreng, 2007: 30–31). This does not mean that participation and communication rights were erased from the summit. The WSIS Civil Society Plenary (2003), which published an ‘alternative’ declaration, uses the concepts of full participation and empowerment, and elaborates on communication rights, providing shelter for the more maximalist articulations of participation:

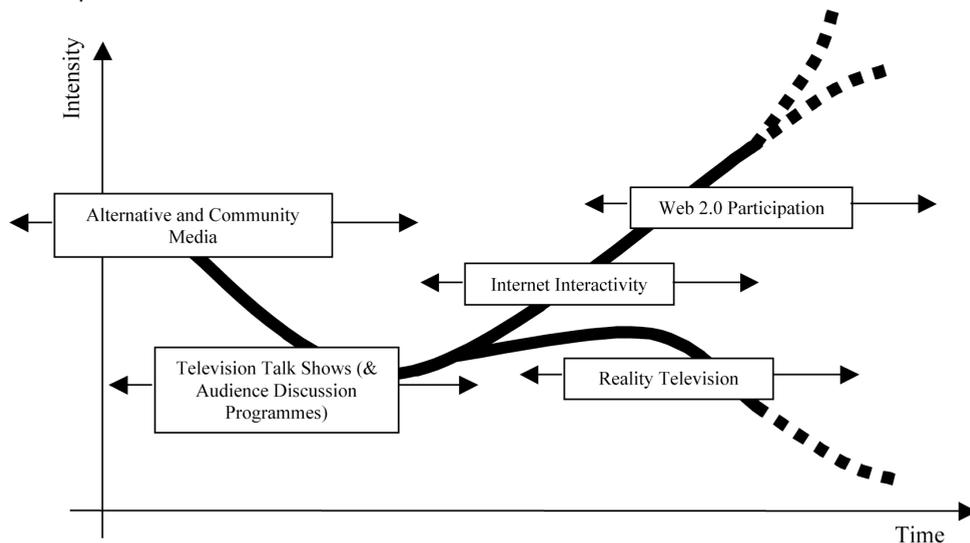
We are committed to building information and communication societies that are people-centred, inclusive and equitable. Societies in which everyone can freely create, access, utilise, share and disseminate information and knowledge, so that individuals, communities and peoples are empowered to improve their quality of life and to achieve their full potential. Societies founded on the principles of social, political, and economic justice, and peoples’ full participation and empowerment, and thus societies

that truly address the key development challenges facing the world today. [...] We reaffirm that communication is a fundamental social process, a basic human need and a foundation of all social organization. Everyone, everywhere, at any time should have the opportunity to participate in communication processes and no one should be excluded from their benefits. This implies that every person must have access to the means of communication and must be able to exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression, which includes the right to hold opinions and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Similarly, the right to privacy, the right to access public information and the public domain of knowledge, and many other universal human rights of specific relevance to information and communication processes, must also be upheld. Together with access, all these communication rights and freedoms must be actively guaranteed for all in clearly written national laws and enforced with adequate technical requirements.

3.3 Participation in specific media technologies, organizations and genres

In this last part of this chapter, I turn my attention to three (theoretical) debates on media praxis (and to the articulations of participation they contain) since these debates have generated a considerable literature on media participation. First, I discuss a series of

Figure 7: A selection of (debates on) participatory media praxis and their (potential) participatory intensity.



Source: Adapted from Carpentier and Hannot (2009: 612).

approaches to community and alternative media, showing the importance of (maximalist) participation for this media sphere. Second, I move to the world of mainstream audio-visual media, whose attempts to organize participatory practices, through talk shows and reality TV, are equally relevant here, despite the many constraints to these participatory practices. Third, the new media debate has generated huge numbers of reflections on participation, despite the concept of participation almost being replaced by the signifiers access and interaction, in the 1990s. All three cases of media praxis provide unique perspectives on the notion of (media) participation in different contexts, different periods and with different participatory intensities (as Figure 7 shows).

3.3.1 Community and alternative media

The discussion of the role of participation in the NWICO debates contained a considerable number of references to community and alternative media, and it is difficult to ignore their key role in participatory theory. At the same time, their diversity makes them difficult to capture: Even the labels of these media organizations vary widely. For example, in relation to radio, we find that in Latin America it is termed popular radio, educational radio, miners' radio or peasants' radio. In Africa, they refer to local rural radio, while in Europe the terms associative radio, free radio, neighbourhood radio and alternative radio or community radio are applied. Asians speak of radio for development, and of community radio; in Oceania the labels aboriginal radio, public radio and community radio are used (Servaes, 1999: 259). Although I am sensitive to the argument that complete conflation of these different labels should be avoided (Howley, 2005: 4), I want to focus on what this multiplicity of community and alternative media organizations⁴¹ have in common, seeing their diversity and hybridity as a characteristic, rather than as an analytical problem. Support for this position can be found in Atton's (2002: 209) argument that "This encourages us to approach these media from the perspective of 'mixed radicalism', once again paying attention to hybridity rather than meeting consistent adherence to a 'pure,' fixed set of criteria [...]". Moreover, most mono-theoretical approaches focus on certain characteristics and ignore others. In order to capture the entire field of community and alternative media, it is necessary to combine these different approaches. Four approaches can be distinguished: community media, alternative media, civil society media and rhizomatic media. The combination of these approaches provides us with a typology to theorize community and alternative media, and to analyse the role played by participation.

Traditional community and alternative media theory is built on media-centred models in trying to describe the functioning of community media (approach 1) and alternative media (approach 2). The first approach uses a more essentialist theoretical framework, stressing the importance of the community served by the media organization; alternative media models focus on the relationship between alternative and mainstream media, putting

more emphasis on the discursive relation of interdependency between two antagonistic sets of identities. These traditional models for theorizing the identity of community and alternative media are complemented here by two more society-centred approaches.⁴² The third approach defines community and alternative media as part of civil society. In order to incorporate the more relationist aspects of civil society theory – articulated, for instance, by Walzer (1998) – they are combined with Downing et al.’s (2001) and Rodriguez’s (2001) critiques of alternative media, and radicalized and unified in the fourth approach, which builds on the Deleuzian metaphor of community and alternative media as rhizome. This approach allows (even more) incorporating aspects of contingency, fluidity and elusiveness in the analysis of community and alternative media.

Figure 8: Positioning the four theoretical approaches.

	<i>Media-centred</i>	<i>Society-centred</i>
Autonomous identity of Community / Alternative Media (Essentialist)	<u>Approach I:</u> Serving the community	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <u>Approach III:</u> Part of civil society </div> <u>Approach IV:</u> Rhizome
Identity of Community / Alternative Media in relation to other identities (Relationalist)	<u>Approach II:</u> An alternative to mainstream	

Source: Based on Carpentier et al. (2003: 53).

These four approaches, of course, are theoretical (and ideological) discourses, which might materialize in practice (or not). But they do contain the core concepts that structure (in always-unique combinations⁴³) (Figure 8) the identities of community and alternative media. In the first approach, the role of these media organizations towards the community is emphasized. Community media are seen as serving a specific – often geographically defined⁴⁴ – community, and thus validating and strengthening that community. This is a component of the 2008 European Parliament’s (2008) *Resolution on Community Media in Europe*,⁴⁵ which states that “community media are non-profit organisations accountable to the community that they seek to serve”. Second, access by the community and participation of the community (and its constituent subgroups) should be considered key-defining factors. An illustration can be found in Howley’s (2005: 4) work, when he describes community media as “locally oriented, participatory media [that facilitate the] process of collective identity construction in geographically defined communities”. Another example is the ‘working definition’ of community radio adopted by AMARC-Europe, the European branch of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters⁴⁶, an organization that encompasses a wide range

of radio practice across the continents. Attempting to avoid a prescriptive definition, AMARC-Europe (1994: 4) labels a community radio station as “a ‘non-profit’ station, currently broadcasting, which offers a service to the community in which it is located, or to which it broadcasts, while promoting the participation of this community in the radio”.

This implies that the aim of community (and alternative) media organizations to serve the community is often translated as enabling and facilitating access and participation by members of the community. A diversity of ordinary people is given the opportunity to have their voices heard and valued. Societal groups who are misrepresented, disadvantaged, stigmatized or even repressed can benefit especially from using the channels of communication opened by community and alternative media, strengthening their internal identity, manifesting this identity to the outside world, and thus supporting social change and/or development. The participation of these groups and communities is facilitated through a more horizontal power structure, where core or staff members (often present in community and alternative media organizations) shy away from the ‘traditional’ media professional identities and practices. As Berrigan (1979: 8) eloquently summarizes it:

[*Community media*] are media to which members of the community have access, for information, education, entertainment, when they want access. They are media in which the community participates, as planners, producers, performers. They are the means of expression of the community, rather than for the community.

Also Tabing’s (2002: 9) definition of a community radio station – as “one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community” – makes clear that participation in media organization is not only situated at the level of content production, but is also related to management and ownership. Participation in these media organizations is also translated as participation through media in society, as Fairchild (2001: 103) puts it succinctly: “In short, participation in the station acts as a bridge to participation in society”. For instance, in its 2009 *Declaration on The role of Community Media in Promoting Social Cohesion and Intercultural Dialogue*, the Council of Europe (2009) emphasizes the role of community and alternative media to stimulate political (macro-) participation and enhance democratic learning: “Conscious that in today’s radically changed media landscape, community media can play an important role, notably by promoting social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and tolerance, as well as by fostering community engagement and democratic participation at local and regional level”. Fairchild (2001: 103) takes a broader-political perspective when discussing the role of community media in facilitating societal participation:

[...] Community radio stations act as issue-based organizations devoted to counteracting the existing distribution of power by facilitating coalitions between

other issue-based organizations and giving these groups a platform for airing their views.

The second approach to defining alternative and community media is based on the concept of alternative media, where it is emphasized that being a “third voice” (Servaes, 1999: 260) or the “third type” (Girard, 1992: 2) is still a viable option for media organizations. This concept is built on a distinction between mainstream (public and commercial) media on the one hand, and alternative media on the other, where alternative media are defined in a negative relationship to mainstream media. This relational perspective can be found in Waltz’s (2005: 2) definition of alternative media as “[...] those media that provide a different point of view from that usually expressed, that cater to communities not well served by the mass media, or that expressly advocate social change [...]”. Present-day mainstream media are usually considered to be large-scale and geared towards large, homogeneous (segments of) audiences; state-owned organizations or commercial companies; vertically structured organizations staffed by professionals; and carriers of dominant discourses and representations. Alternative media can take an (or several) opposite position(s) on these matters. Typically, they are small-scale and oriented towards specific communities, possibly disadvantaged groups, respecting their diversity; independent from state and market; horizontally structured, allowing for the facilitation of audience access and participation within the frame of democratization and multiplicity; and carriers of non-dominant (possibly counter-hegemonic) discourses and representations, stressing the importance of self-representation.

Participation plays a crucial role here, on several levels. First, organizational structures are seen as alternatives to the way mainstream broadcasters are organized. More horizontal hierarchies allow for structural participation of producers in the management of the media organizations. Prehn (1991: 259) describes this as follows: “participation implies a wider range of activities related to involving people directly in station programming, administration and policy activities”. Second, community and alternative media allow for the participation of non-professional producers in the production of media content, providing an alternative model of media production and facilitating the participation of various (older and newer) social movements, minorities, and sub/counter-cultures. Through their self-representation more alternative (or counter-hegemonic) content is generated, signifying the multiplicity and heterogeneity of societal voices. They provide “air space to local cultural manifestations, to ethnic minority groups, to the hot political issues in the neighbourhood or locality” (Jankowski, 1994: 3). At the same time, the critical stance towards the production values of the ‘professional’ working in mainstream media (Atton, 2008) leads to a diversity of formats and genres and creates room for experimentation with content and form.

In the third (society-centred) approach, community and alternative media organizations are seen as part of civil society,⁴⁷ a societal segment considered crucial for the viability of democracy. Community and alternative media can be seen as an ‘ordinary’ part of civil

society, as one of the many types of organizations active in the field of civil society that facilitate multidirectional, micro- and macro-participation. Although the nature of civil society varies markedly across nations and continents, it is argued here that, following Cohen and Arato (1992: vii–viii), this concept is relevant to most types of contemporary societies and can be seen as an important locus for the expansion or deepening of democracy, by increasing the level of participation. Keane (1998: xviii) points to a number of reasons why civil society matters, and includes civil society’s capacity to enable “groups and individuals freely within the law to define and express their various social identities”, but also its important potential to revive the democratic imagination. In this list of arguments in favour of civil society, Keane explicitly mentions “variously seized non-state communications media”,⁴⁸ providing support for the argument that alternative and community media are part of civil society. Howley (2010: 73) takes a similar approach, emphasizing the role played by (alternative and) community media as civil society:

Like other voluntary associations, community media consciously adopt participatory decision-making structures and practices that promote a sense of belonging to, and responsibility toward, the organization, its mission, and its relationship to the wider community. Equally important, community media encourage private individuals to work collaboratively in meaningful activities that not only promote sociability among individual participants but also serve a variety of local needs and interests. In doing so, community media cultivate a more deliberate approach to participation in public life, nurture social networks within and between communities, and, potentially at least, encourage innovative ways to think about the practice of democracy.

When the specificity of broadcasters, and their potential role as (one of the) major public spaces, is brought into focus, and community and alternative media are no longer defined as just ordinary parts of civil society, these media become important because they provide spaces that allow citizens to have their voices heard, and because they intervene in the mediascape. For these reasons, they are sometimes termed citizen media (Rodriguez, 2001; see also Pettit, et al., 2009) or civil society media⁴⁹ (Hintz, 2007). As Rodriguez (2001: 20 – emphasis in original) formulates it, citizen media allow citizens to become a “collectivity [*that*] is *enacting* its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape”. Hintz (2007: 244) refers to civil society media that encompass “media organizations, groups, and projects, which fit into the basic non-state non-commercial model and share the structural and thematic tendencies of civil society”. He continues, “Participation, emancipation, and empowerment represent crucial features” (Hintz, 2007: 244). From this perspective, community and alternative media are seen again as offering different societal groups and communities the opportunity for extensive participation in public debate and for self-representation in public spaces.

In discussing the notion of alternative media, Downing et al. (2001: ix) critique its ‘oxymoronic’ nature: “everything, at some point, is alternative to something else”,

legitimizing the decision to focus on ‘radical alternative media.’ At the same time they still emphasize the diversity that characterizes these radical alternative media that are to be found in a “colossal variety of formats” (Downing et al., 2001: xi). A similar argument is developed by Rodriguez (2001: 20), who suggests abandoning the notion of alternative media in favour of citizen media

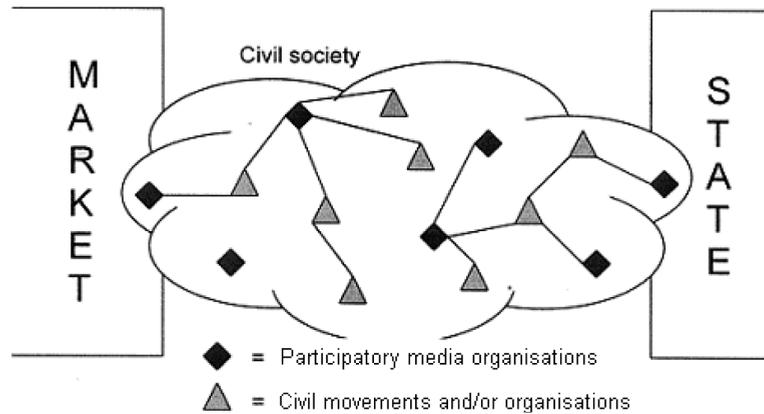
because ‘alternative media’ rests on the assumption that these media are alternative to something, this definition will easily entrap us in binary thinking: mainstream media and their alternative, that is, alternative media. Also, the label ‘alternative media’ predetermines the type of oppositional thinking that limits the potential of these media to their ability to resist the alienating power of mainstream media.

The rhizomatic approach to community and alternative media uses Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) metaphor to radicalize approaches 2 and 3 (Figure 9). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, both authors were heavily involved in the French alternative (‘free’) radio scene, which they saw as an opportunity to realize their “utopie ‘deleuzoguattarienne” (Dalle, 2006). Authors such as Sakolsky (1998), Chidgey et al. (2009), and Oi-Wan and Iam-Chong (2009) also use Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphor to label media organizations rhizomatic media. If we transpose the rhizomatic approach into community and alternative media theory, it allows us to focus on three aspects, without giving up on the concept of alterativity: rhizomatic media’s role as a crossroads of civil society, their elusiveness, and their interconnections and linkages with market and state (see Santana and Carpentier, 2010, for a more elaborate argument). Community and alternative media are often part of large civil society networks, and act as meeting points and catalysts for a variety of organizations and movements. Both their embeddedness in a fluid civil society (as part of a larger network) and their antagonistic relationship towards the state and the market (as alternatives to mainstream public and commercial media) make the identity of community and alternative media highly elusive and fluid. In this approach, it is argued that it is this elusiveness and contingency, which are ‘typical’ of a rhizome, that are their main defining elements. These translocal networks are characterized by the fluid articulation of a diversity of alternative media organizations, which reflects the strategy of what has been theorized by writers on contemporary resistance, such as Benasayag and Sztulwark (2002: 68 – my translation):

[...] the counter-power affirms on the contrary the development of the multiplicity as the only road to attempt to conquer the capitalist centrality. From this perspective, each experience has to be developed, not as something isolated, ‘provincial,’ but in a network in the myriad of the other alternative and revolutionary experiences.

But these networks do not stop at the edge of civil society; like rhizomes, community and alternative media tend to cut across borders and build linkages between pre-

Figure 9: Civil society and community and alternative media as rhizome.



Source: Carpentier et al. (2003: 62).

existing gaps. In the case of community and alternative media, these connections apply not only to the pivotal role community and alternative media (can) play in civil society, where they facilitate participatory networks. They apply also to the linkages alternative media (and other civil organizations) can establish with (segments of) the state and the market, without losing their proper identity and becoming incorporated and/or assimilated.

In discussing community and alternative media, I should avoid a too celebratory position since this field is characterized by a variety of problems. The four approaches described above can be used to structure a list of some of the more major problems. The community media approach highlights dependency on the community, which does not always have a strong interest in participating, which, in turn, reduces heterogeneity. When the power positions of core or staff members become too strong within these media organizations, the more maximalist forms of participation are especially threatened. Moreover, the concept of community – central to the identity of community media – is often reduced to a geographical articulation, which weakens the position of community media and introduces the danger of localism or isolationism (see Mattelart and Piemme, 1983: 416). The alternative media approach brings in the problems encountered by small-scale, independent and horizontally structured organizations that carry non-dominant discourses and representations. These characteristics hardly guarantee financial and organizational stability, and these types of problems become especially pertinent when the relationships with public and commercial media become antagonistic and attempts are made to hegemonize identities at the expense of community and alternative media. In such cases, community and alternative media are articulated as unprofessional, inefficient, limited in their capacity to reach large audiences, and as marginal as some

of the societal groups to whom they try to give a voice. One of the main consequences of marginalizing the alternative (or articulating it negatively as naïve, irrelevant or superfluous, for instance) is the low political priority given to what is considered to be 'marginal', causing a downward spiral. Considering community and alternative media as a rhizome introduces a related threat: These media may signify the fluidity and contingency of media organizations, in contrast to the rigidities and certainties of public and commercial media organizations, but their very elusiveness might be a barrier to a 'common ground' for policy-related actions. The civil society approach shows that 'making participatory democracy work', to paraphrase the title of one of Putnam's (1993) publications, is a very difficult task, requiring constant attention. Organizations that are horizontally structured, and oriented towards community participation, have to deal with certain degrees of inefficiency, which sometimes make their functioning and the realization of their objectives impossible, and in other instances perverting these objectives. Finally, the rhizomatic media approach shows another set of problems, where these media might be unable to realize their role as a crossroads because of diverging or conflicting objectives. Moreover, rhizomatic media are in permanent danger of losing their independence towards, or becoming incorporated by, market and state.

3.3.2 *Talk shows and reality TV*

Within mainstream media, a series of genres and formats have allowed for a certain degree of participation by ordinary people. It should be emphasized immediately that participation in this context is structurally limited, as mainstream media only rarely allow for structural participation (or participation within the media organization's decision-making structures themselves). Moreover, mainstream media have a variety of objectives, and the organization of societal participation and audience empowerment is not always part of their primary objectives (despite some authors protesting that it should – see Keane, 1998).

Nevertheless, mainstream media remain significant societal players that merit our attention, also because the achievements and failures of the participatory processes they organize can be very enriching to the debates on media participation. In this section I want to focus on two audio-visual genres – talk shows and reality TV – in the knowledge that other genres (in print and in audio-visual media) provide equally relevant (albeit slightly less well discussed) examples. In his analysis of ordinary television, Bonner (2003), for instance, discusses game shows⁵⁰ (and the many subgenres such as quizzes and dating shows (Teurlings, 2001)), lifestyle programmes and food programmes. Watts' (2009) historical overview – of what she calls 'postwar audience participation shows' – provides us with many other examples. In newspapers, the letters to the editor genre also plays a significant role (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006), but there are also more unusual participatory genres, like the obituary in Iceland, which "can be written by anyone and

about anyone; they are not solely written by journalists and about the elite as is the case elsewhere” (Hastrup, 1998: 165). Here, I will discuss the two genres whose participatory components have generated considerable academic debate: the talk show and reality TV.

The talk show genre does facilitate participation within the mainstream media again to a certain extent, but the existence of many subgenres complicates this discussion. As is often the case with media genres, this label clusters together a wide diversity of actual programme formats. They have the common core element of a host talking to people in a studio setting (Leurdijk, 1997: 149), and are aimed at a mixture of entertainment and information; as Hallin (1996: 253 – emphasis in original) puts it, “These new forms of media are often described as providing ‘unmediated’ communication. This is clearly not accurate: they are *shows*, often carefully scripted, each with its own logic of selection and emphasis”. At the same time, talk shows differ in terms of the actual conversational techniques used, the subjects discussed and the exact roles of hosts, guests, experts and (studio) audiences. To deal with this diversity, several authors have categorized the talk show into subgenres. Timberg and Erler (2002: 6–7) refer to the late-night entertainment show, the day-time audience participation talk show and the morning magazine-format show. Munson (1993: 8) lists as contemporary subgenres the ‘confrontalk’ show, the sports talk show, the news/talk magazine (which includes news interview programmes, investigative documentaries⁵¹ and audience participation talk shows), the celebrity talk show (‘chat shows’ or talk/variety shows) and the talk/service show.

News interview programmes are described by Leurdijk as “interview programmes that are related to the news”; they are based on “interviews or discussions with politicians or other experts, without an active contribution of the studio audience. [...] In general, they follow the political news in the selection of their topics and guests” (Leurdijk, 1999: 37). Other talk shows, such as talk/variety shows, feature fewer politicians, and focus more on celebrities, “show business chit chat” (Steenland, 1990) and sports personalities, while magazine-like talk/service shows deal with “fashion, cooking, gardening, health, relationships and sometimes also social issues” (Leurdijk, 1999: 37 – my translation) Arguably, confrontalk type shows are distinguishable by their moderation style and studio setting, and overlap with the other subgenres.

The audience participation talk show subgenre finds its origins (partially) in what Munson (1993: 36-37) calls the ‘interactive talk radio’ format, the call-in or the phone-in. Munson explains in detail how, in the US from the 1930s on, disk-jockeys invited listeners to phone in with comments, which were then paraphrased by the radio presenters and broadcast on air. Allowing callers to speak live on air started in the mid-1940s, and Munson (1993: 36) describes the early phone-in radio talk show as being characterized by “Its relationship to public controversy, its appearance of spontaneity, and its calculated blending of information and entertainment in a constant, productive defiance of notions of generic integrity [...]”. The phone-in developed into a format that is still used today (‘even’ on television – see Carpentier, 2005), where the topic is either set beforehand, or the format is ‘open-line phone-in’ where the “callers select their own issue to talk

about and are given the floor at the beginning of calls in order to introduce their issue and express an opinion on it” (Hutchby, 1996: 482). But the phone-in talk show was not the only (early) subgenre that (structurally) allowed for audience participation. Munson (1993: 30–31) also mentions educational talk shows, such as *The People’s Platform* (1938–1952), which used a panel of four (a ‘big name’, an expert and two ordinary people) to discuss current issues. Other, more comedy-oriented, early talk shows, such as *Vox Pop* (1932–1947), “dealt with spontaneous man-in-the-street interviews involving political, personal, trick, or ‘nonsense’ questions calculated to surprise the interviewee into an amusing response” (Munson, 1993: 31).

Audience participation talk shows (or audience discussion programmes) successfully transferred to television, and became a popular subgenre that differed considerably from set format programmes. In the US *The Jerry Springer Show* (Lunt and Stenner, 2005) relied on confrontation; *The Phil Donahue Show* (Carbaugh, 1988) and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (Peck, 2008) were more restrained discussions of still very emotive topics. In the UK, programmes such as *Kilroy* (Livingstone and Lunt, 1996) discussed issues that were part of the broader political field, while *Question Time* (McNair et al., 2003) focused on institutionalized politics. Despite these intra-genre differences, all these programmes were based on the principle that “an active role is accorded to the studio audience which participates in a discussion about social, personal or political problems under the supervision of a presenter” (Leurdijk, 1999: 37, my translation). A very detailed typology of televised audience discussion programmes is provided in Livingstone and Lunt (1996: 39), which details a series of defining components: First, the host, guests (often experts) and the studio audience (consisting of non-experts) are together in a studio, with the experts perhaps spatially separated, for example, ranged in front of the audience. Second, the host – often a television personality – is free to move through the studio; in other words, he or she has spatial authority (Carpignano et al., 1990: 48). The host (supported by an editorial staff) manages the conversation, but at the same time, the course of the conversation also determines the opportunities for specific participants to contribute. Third, each episode focuses on a specific (often controversial) subject that is political, social or personal in nature. Audience discussion programmes rely on lively conversation and argumentation, in which opposed and different points of view are expressed. The contributions of the participants are regarded as emotionally significant in themselves, and are grounded in personal experience rather than hearsay or scientifically ‘proven’ fact. Fourth, there is a specific production context: The production cost of these programmes is relatively low, their ‘production value’ is also considered to be low, and they are not (always) a part of prime-time programming. They are often broadcast live or recorded in ‘real time’ with little or no editing.

As this discussion of different subgenres shows, not all of them have (strong) participatory components, and the audience discussion programmes are a more privileged site of audience participation. The genre’s complexity makes this ‘division of labour’ less than straightforward, and the distinction made by Dahlgren (1995) is

helpful: He distinguishes between vox-pop talk shows and elite talk shows, which unlike the former remain embedded within journalism, and are based on interviews with members of political elites – “On such programmes, influential journalists would pose questions to important power holders” (Dahlgren, 1995: 62–63). This is not to imply that the show element disappears; on the contrary, this feature has led to fierce critiques of what Rosenstiel (1992) calls “talk show journalism” where the journalists become the ‘stars’⁵² of the programme. This evolution, it is said, has created a situation where “the journalists’ interpretation of events were almost becoming more significant than the news coverage of the events. [...] They are in a sense all ‘media stars,’ sitting and discussing together” (Dahlgren, 1995: 63). Nevertheless, the strong focus on journalism and personalities as guests is substantially different from vox-pop programmes that focus on “popular involvement” (Dahlgren, 1995: 63).

Some talk show subgenres are closer to vox-pop talk shows, as the earlier discussion on audience discussion programmes shows. But, again, their diversity has resulted in categorizations. For instance, McNair et al. (2003: 33) mention the following (British) talk show subgenres: the studio debate, the phone-in debate and the single-issue debate. Analysing the north Belgian (participatory) talk show landscape, Resmann (2009) mentions the audience discussion programme, the consumer or service magazine, the survey programme, and the elite talk show with vox-pop interviews as programmes with participatory components. Resmann’s analysis shows that the participation of ordinary people is not confined to the ‘typical’ talk show subgenre of the audience discussion programme, and that many subgenres have introduced participatory components. Another element that increases the complexity of these subgenres is that they themselves can be considered ‘intergenre’ because they combine different formats (inside and outside the talk show genre). Livingstone and Lunt (1996: 179) explain that audience discussion programmes have “elements of, for example, the game show and the current affairs programme”. Like most genres, the entire talk show genre is characterized by hybridity: “The talk show ‘genre’ – to the degree that it even *is* a single category – has to come to assume many ‘messy,’ hybridized variations in the thousands of talkshows that air locally and nationally – even internationally – in any given week” (Munson, 1993: 7 – emphasis in original).

Audience discussion programmes (and other talk show subgenres with participatory components) have provoked many and very different evaluations. In the academic literature on these talk shows, two main approaches can be distinguished: the emancipation and the manipulation approaches.⁵³ The emancipation approach, which often uses a conceptual repertoire that is closely related to alternative and community media theory, argues that these programmes contribute to the democratization of the mass media (Hamo, 2006: 428) since they provide access for ordinary people, to public spaces, and allow them to participate in the production of media content. Not surprisingly, the concept of the public sphere is often deployed here (e.g., Carpignano et al., 1990). Livingstone and Lunt (1996: 19) refer to the participants in audience

discussion programmes as citizen-viewers, who are “seen as participating, potentially at least, in democratic processes of the public sphere”. They generate a “collage” (Leurdijk, 1999: 134) of the wide difference in opinions and experiences but no final conclusion or solution, and are seen as articulating the heterogeneity and diversity of the participants (and people in general).

This topical diversity argument links up to the argument that marginalized, discriminated against and misrepresented groups in society can also achieve access to and participate in these programmes, while in other genres the opportunity to speak out rarely occurs. Leurdijk (1997: 148) explicitly lists women, black people and ordinary people as examples, but “white supremacists” have also been discussed in this context (Feder, 1993). And as Priest puts it, members of these marginalized groups are themselves conscious of the importance of such channels:

[*Marginalized groups*] are aware of its importance and are therefore willing to step forward to attempt to counteract its negative influence through self- and group representation that is carefully managed to put the best possible image forward. (Priest, 1995: 194)

The interaction between ordinary people, experts and politicians – the latter two articulated by Livingstone and Lunt (1996: 180) as representatives of the system – is also deemed important. By placing both groups together in similar situations, audience discussion programmes provide an upgrade to the so-called common sense and the ordinary experience of social and political realities. Leurdijk (1999: 134 – my translation), for example, emphasizes the importance of experience to public debate: “These experiences are, next to factual information and argued analyses, a valuable and even necessary component of the public debate”. Moreover, the confrontation between both groups makes it possible that “representatives of established power” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1996: 180) are held accountable, subjecting them to public scrutiny (McNair et al., 2003), which again incorporates a democratic argument.

To a more limited degree, we can find arguments that stress the opportunities for broader participation through the media. A more political version can be found in McNair et al. (2003), who point to the possibility of mobilization through the increase in public identification and engagement with institutionalized politics: “From such engagement, it is hoped [*by programme-makers*], stems knowledge, opinion, and possibly motivation to act politically.” Gamson (2001: 58), in relation to political talk shows, combines different levels of participation, but includes an outcomes-component: “Mediated public participation, then, is meaningful for the outcome of the political process, for the individual self-development as a citizen, and for increasing the collective capacity of citizens to act on their own behalf”. In the broader talk show literature, the (potential) empowerment of participants and viewers is discussed, and these programmes are seen to facilitate increased self-esteem and (psychological) self-determination,

echoing democratic developmental arguments (see above). Shattuc (1997: 136), for instance, suggests that (therapeutic) talk shows offer an alternative to the authority of psychological expertise by favouring the “active/activist individual who has the capacity to think and disagree”, which gives “a voice to normally voiceless women [*who*] speak for themselves and are valued for their experience”. Priest (1995) immediately qualifies this type of empowerment by pointing to its individualized nature, since it focuses more on individual well-being and less on structural-societal components.

In contrast to the emancipation approach, several authors highlight the manipulative or pseudo-participatory nature of these programmes. One line of argument focuses on the production context, which does not escape the processes of commodification. For instance, Tomasulo (1984: 10) formulates the following harsh critique of the US talk show *Donahue*: “The program, like any TV show, should not be expected to provide easy solutions to complex problems. The commercials should”. A slightly more subtle – but still critical – position occurs in White (1992: 80), who says that “[*there is*] little in contemporary American culture that escapes commodification”, but at the same time refuses an absolutist application of such criticism.

Another cluster of critiques focuses on the content of these programmes, which are seen as lacking societal relevance and value. Tomasulo (1984: 10), for instance, considers them to be machines that produce series of “pseudo-statements”. Moreover, the instability of the debate and its many contradictions, and the lack of closure, is considered problematic. Their discursive diversity is seized on by some authors as a point of criticism, in which the absence of a rational discussion that results in a critical consensus (*à la* Habermas) leads to a risk of trivialization of the performed utterances (Priest, 1995: 17). Tomasulo (1984: 8–9) speaks about “an unstable debate full of contradictions in an illusory atmosphere of free speech”, which preserves the illusion of participation. Peck (1995) and Steenland (1990) problematize the emphasis on the individual and the personal – over the structural and the social. Another content-related critique focuses on the inability of these programmes to criticize (or undo) the existing power imbalances in society (McLaughlin, 1993), an argument used by Livingstone and Lunt (1996: 175): “It remains problematic that giving voice may not affect real decision making and power relations in society, but only give the illusion of participation”.

In addition, the power imbalances within these programmes are approached critically. Within mainstream media, media professionals unavoidably play a significant role in organizing the participation in a context that is ‘theirs’ to control. Media professionals are placed in hierarchically structured entities and assigned specific responsibilities in the professional production of particular media products. This responsibility is complemented by the notion of psychological property (Wilpert, 1991): To realize professional goals in a world dominated by routine and time – a “stop-watch culture” (Schlesinger, 1987: 83) – media professionals can make use of the production facilities that are owned (in the strictly legal sense of the word) by the media organization. Wilpert’s (1991) theory of psychological appropriation provides support for the thesis

that control over these production facilities leads to a sense of property. It is precisely this combination of responsibility and (psychological) property that supports the articulation of the media professional as the manager of a diversity of resources, from technology, via content, to people (Livingstone and Lunt, 1996; Carpentier, 2001), which, in turn, legitimizes the management, surveillance and disciplining of ordinary participants. Ethical frameworks have the capacity to mediate between these different components, but do not always guarantee a strong power base for ordinary participants.

In the case of audience discussion programmes, critical analyses point precisely to the difficulties in (or the impossibility of) accomplishing a reasonable power balance between producers and participants. This applies to the initial access to the programmes, but also to the content of the debates. For instance, Leurdijk (1997), White (1992), Tomasulo (1984) and Gruber (2004) describe how participants lose control over the narration of personal stories because editorial teams try to orchestrate, canalize, structure or manage the debate. The role of host, who not only decides on the turn-taking, but also on the questions launched at the participants (and who only rarely discloses anything about him- or herself, as Priest (1995: 17) remarks), particularly affects the programmes' power structures.

The second genre, reality TV, became very popular in the 1990s and 2000s, but also has a long history going back to such programmes as *Candid Camera* (1948). As a genre, it is based on the construction of both people and situations as real. In other words, ordinary people feature prominently (although their presence in these programmes is sometimes unplanned), and are placed in situations related to everyday life. The claim to reality supporting the genre is translated into a series of visual strategies, through the use, for instance, of fly-on-the-wall camera techniques, which, in turn, are supported by technological evolutions such as the lightweight camera and the possibilities for audiences to create their own content. Nevertheless, the genre spans a very large group of structurally very different programmes, which has led some authors to call reality TV a trans-genre (see Van Bauwel and Carpentier, 2010). Kilborn's (1994: 423) definition gives us a good indication of the complexity of the genre:

Reality programming will involve (a) the recording, 'on the wing,' and frequently with the help of lightweight equipment, of events in the lives of individuals or groups, (b) the attempt to simulate such real-life events through various forms of dramatized reconstruction and (c) the incorporation of this material, in suitable edited form, into an attractively packaged television programme which can be promoted on the strength of its 'reality' credentials.

Also within the reality TV genre we can distinguish a number of subgenres, such as those mentioned by Ouellette and Hay (2008: 2): "dating shows, make-overs, job competitions, gamedocs, reality soaps, interventions, lifestyle demonstrations". Bonner's (2003: 24–27) list is different: clip shows, docu-soaps, and the "more tabloid kind of current affairs"

programmes, and adds the reality game show as a separate category while at the same time regretting its inclusion, because “these programmes do not assert that they are showing some kind of minimally mediated ‘real’” (Bonner, 2003: 26).

Despite the hybridity of the genre, reality TV programmes still share a (often strong) claim to reality, which makes the genre – according to Biressi and Nunn (2005: 3) – “loaded, since by definition, it should occupy a more privileged position in relation to the representation of the ‘real’ than overtly fictional forms”. This combination of reality TV’s reality claim, its focus on the ordinary and the everyday, and the management by media professionals who control many of reality TV’s production aspects also makes it a highly relevant genre in relation to the discussion on participation. Again, in this debate we can find approaches that focus on the concept of emancipation, while the more critical approaches point to intervention, manipulation and pseudo-participation.

First, reality TV provides ordinary people access to the TV sphere or to the machineries of mediation that render their existence, practices and utterances visible to an outside world, and (in some cases) allows them to acquire celebrity status (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 148). As Andrejevic (2004: 215) phrases it, “The promise of reality TV is not that of access to unmediated reality [...] so much as it is the promise of the access to the reality of mediation”. This access renders ordinary people and their everyday lives visible, and signifies their importance. It resonates with what Lazarsfeld and Merton (1948) called the status conferral function, and with Tuchman’s (1978) notion of (avoiding) symbolic annihilation, summarized by Gerbner and Gross (1976) as follows: “Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation”.

But within the emancipation approach, the democratic importance of reality TV is not reduced to mere access; this access is also seen to allow ordinary people to enter into interactions with a number of other participants, with media professionals and audiences, collaborating in the production of a televisual text. The presence of these participants assists in the production of a wide set of discourses, which have (sometimes strong) ideological and political significations. Moreover, their voting behaviour – allowing the audience to vote is not uncommon in reality TV programming – and their discussions on a multitude of online forums, allows the audience to become involved in the interaction. At the same time, reality TV also produces discourses on participation and power, allowing us to see something that might be termed a participatory process (and its failures and constraints). These screened interactions contain moments of joint decision-making, providing a stage facilitating our entry to the realm of participation (in Pateman’s (1970) strict definition; see also Andrejevic (2004)). As Ouellette and Hay (2008: 215 – emphasis removed) remark, “To say that reality TV offers demonstrations in group participation and governance is to point out TV’s little, everyday ways of instructing viewers about the techniques and rules of participation”. This returns us to Hartley’s (1999) argument about democratisation, indicating that TV can indeed offer a combination of civic education and entertainment.

Of course, all is not well with the participatory process of reality TV programmes, as pointed out in the manipulative approach. Even if some ordinary people are granted access to the TV sphere and the TV screen, the kinds of presences, practices and discourses they are allowed to generate are questionable. As Deligiaouri and Popovic (2010: 73) remark, the free-willed decision of participants does not protect them against the workings of the “Reality-Panopticon”. And access on its own does not protect against symbolic annihilation since omission is not its sole dimension. Tuchman (1978) added two more dimensions to symbolic annihilation: trivialization and condemnation. In the case of reality TV, and especially in the case of the humiliation TV subgenre, ordinary participants can end up performing in rather disadvantageous (self-) representations that produce a ‘spectacle of shame’ or a ‘freak show’ (Dovey, 2000). For instance, Palmer (2003) argues that the ‘spectacle of shame’ is intrinsically linked to a major part of the reality TV genre, while Hill’s (2007: 197) audience analysis maintains that humiliation plays an important role in reality TV:

Some of the most dominant types of reality TV have been the reality gameshow [...] and reality talentshow. These formats, and their celebrity cousins, have concentrated on putting people in difficult, often emotionally challenging situations. Audiences have come to categorize this specific type of reality TV as ‘humiliation TV’.

The levels of interaction and participation in reality TV are often considered problematic. One of the harshest critics is Andrejevic (2004: 215), who claims that reality TV might result not in the demystification of TV, but rather in the fetishization of TV. This line of reasoning is related to Couldry’s (2003) argument that a series of media rituals serves and strengthens (the myth of) the mediated centre. This implies that (mainstream) media organizations attempt not only to hegemonize their key position in social reality, but also to hegemonize their embeddedness in capitalist economies, their organizational and managerial cultures, their internal power structures, and their *modi operandi*. This media-centric perspective impacts strongly on the intensity of participation within the reality TV genre, to a degree that Andrejevic (2004: 218) refers to as the “democratization of access to publicity as public relations” in his ponderings on the need to distinguish between transactional and democratic participation, where transactional participation refers to the forms of participation that are promoted by the ‘interactive digital economy’.

A crucial factor limiting the participatory intensity of reality TV is the specific position of its media professionals, and the skewed power balance between them and the ordinary participants. This type of argument can be found in Turner’s (2010: 46) critique on the democratainment concept, which, Turner says, “over-estimates the power available even to these newly empowered [...] citizens”. Of course, the broad context of the commodified media sphere creates a context in which (some) ordinary people are transformed into what Rojek (2001) calls ‘celetoids’, or people whose public careers cater to the interests of the media industry itself. But the unequal power relations also affect

the relations between producers and participants, since media professionals (as argued earlier) exert strong levels of control over the participants and their actions. Participants are invited into these programme contexts, and then find themselves exposed to this heavy management, which is legitimized through the (psychological and legal) ownership of the programme by the production team. In the case of reality TV, this imbalance is aggravated by the programme's strong focus on entertainment and disarticulation with public service. As the protective ethical frameworks are often linked to this public service remit, we can see that these ethical frameworks are only minimally present in reality TV programmes, which led Hibberd (2010: 88) to refer to reality TV's media professionals as post-professional. Moreover, the combination of reality TV's focus on ordinary participants, and identification of the media professional as the manager of resources often leads to reduced visibility of media professionals. They remain visible, of course, to the participants, but they resort to on-site managerial strategies (such as rules and contracts) that render their operations at least partially invisible. In addition, they are often edited out of the programmes so that audiences do not witness them managing participants. At the same time, we must be careful not to attribute absolute power to these media professionals, since this would eliminate the possibility that participants might resist their management. Nevertheless, the strength of professional interventions renders access to and participation of ordinary people in the sphere of reality TV more minimalist and sometimes even highly problematic.

3.3.3 *New media/internet studies*

The arrival of another generation of so-called 'new' media drastically affected the nature of the discussion on participation and the media. From the 1990s onwards in particular – and in some cases earlier (for instance Bey's *TAZ* (1985)) – the focus of theoreticians of participation and audience activity shifted towards the so-called new media. The development of the internet, and especially the web – the focal point of this text⁵⁴ – was to render most information available to all and to create a whole new world of communication, the promise of a structural increase in the level of (media) participation, within its slipstream, extending to the more maximalist versions of participation. At the same time, these 'new' technologies in many cases have led to formulations of strong claims to novelty and uniqueness, in combination with processes of amnesia in relation to the societal roles of old media technologies.

One of the main specificity arguments is based on the structural nature of the shift from one-to-many to many-to-many communication, which provides support for the more multidirectional forms of participation and for the heterogeneity of the communicational content and practices. An example of this argument can be found in Rosen's (2008) essay *The People Formerly Known as the Audience*. Rosen argues that the (commercial) media system has lost control over its audiences, as it has been (re)transformed into "the public

made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable” (Rosen, 2008: 165). He describes this change as follows:

The people formerly known as the audience are those who were on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another – and who today are not in a situation like that at all. (Rosen, 2008: 163)

A second claim for specificity is based on privileging the ‘user’, and his or her transformation into the ‘prod-user’ (e.g., Bruns, 2007, 2008, or the ‘prosumer’ – Toffler (1980)). At the theoretical level, the participatory component of audience activity (or the material component) has gained especial strength in new media theory, which claims that we are witnessing a convergence between the producers and the receivers of discourses at the level of the production process (and not just at the level of interpretation). This convergence is reducing the power positions of media organizations and media professionals, and is seen to be increasing audience empowerment. A third claim is based on the convergence argument. In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins (2006) locates the specificity of present-day media cultures in the combination of top-down business with bottom-up consumption and production practices. For Jenkins (2006: 243) convergence:

represents a paradigm shift – a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture.

Jenkins’s argument is based on a multiple media approach that overcomes the old/new media divide, in combination with attention to the intertwining of active consumers and corporate media. Much in line with Fiske’s (1989) position, Jenkins sees popular culture as the meeting place of active audiences and mainstream media, as the intersection between participation and commodification. Here, lack of formal organizational structures and the fluidity of these online participatory practices are invoked to claim specificity. Shirky’s (2008) *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* is a good illustration of this line of argument, and emphasizes the processes of collective action and community building that support the digital participatory culture, bypassing traditional organizational structures. Mass amateurization – “a world where participating in the conversation is its own reward” (Shirky, 2002) – and mass collaboration are seen as the main societal driving forces that have displaced media professionalism, for instance.

There are problems with these specificity claims. We can see the homogenization of audience articulations and practices, where the active audience (or the ‘user’)

becomes the predominant model, and passive consumption is rendered either absent or regrettable.⁵⁵ The popularity of the 'user' concept can be explained, at least partially, by its capacity to emphasize online audience activity, where people 'use' media technologies and content more actively. The presupposition of a hyperactive and hyperproductive audience feeds strongly into these specificity claims, although this presupposition is not always substantiated by actual audience practices.

We see also the homogenization of the media, combined with a celebration of media power where the diversity of media consumption is ignored, and the social impact of media is overestimated. The convergence argument seems strongly invested into a set of commercialized media worlds, which, again, tends to homogenize 'the media' and hegemonize the media's tendency towards commodification. And even if we (momentarily) accept the focus on commercial media, we need to take into account Jenkins's argument that the price paid is high, since the risks of being incorporated are substantial. Media industries have not disappeared and "To be desired by the networks is to have your tastes commodified" (Jenkins, 2006: 62). This impacts on the production sphere since the audience's leisure time is often transformed into (free) labour (Terranova, 2000) and consumers are disciplined into work (Zwick et al., 2008).

Finally, we must not lose sight of the importance of formal organizational (participatory) structures (see chapter 4). Here, the conflation of community and organization into the convergence culture argument poses a serious problem because this conflation tends to lead to an underestimation of the importance of formal organizational structures in facilitating and protecting the more intense forms of participation, a rejection of (the differences in) power dynamics within organizations and communities, and a neglect of the sometimes problematic power positions of participating (or interacting) individuals in a context of networked individualism (Wellman, 2001). In this regard, audience activity cannot be detached from the long history of participatory practices within the media. As earlier parts of this chapter have shown, mainstream media and (especially) alternative and community media have a long history of organizing participatory processes at the level of content and management, and continue to play crucial roles.

Despite these problems,⁵⁶ the debates on new media and participation contain a wide variety of articulations of the key concepts of access, interaction and participation. Ordinary users are seen to be enabled (or empowered) to avoid the mediating role of the 'old' media organizations, and publish their material (almost) directly on the web. These novel practices have affected discussions over access and participation in a fundamental way. In a first (pre-web 2.0) phase, the two key signifiers of access and interaction gained dominance, although participation did not (completely) vanish from the theoretical scene. Later, the concept of participation made a remarkable comeback to reach a prominent position in the 2000s.

In the 1990s (and in some cases before then), the importance of access increased structurally, as techno-utopianism emphasized access for all, to all information, at all times (Negroponte, 1995). This argument had an explicit political component since the

increased potential of access to the public sphere was also emphasized. The potentially beneficial increase in information, which challenges the “existing political hierarchy’s monopoly on powerful communications media” (Rheingold, 1993: 14), the strengthening of social capital and civil society, and the opening up of a new public sphere, or a “global electronic agora” (Castells, 2001: 138) began to take primacy. In turn, increased access was seen as affecting subject positions. To use Poster’s (1997: 213) words, “the salient characteristic of Internet community is the diminution in prevailing hierarchies of race, class, age, status and especially gender”. The critical backlash to these and other rather bold statements focused on the lack of access of some, foregrounding the notion of a digital divide, but at the same time remaining within the realm of access. As I argue elsewhere (Carpentier, 2003), the core of the digital divide discourse is based on the articulation of three elements: (1) the importance of access to online computers, whose use (2) results in increased levels of information, knowledge, communication or other types of socially valued benefits, which (3) in turn, are so vital that the absence of access and the resulting ‘digibetism’ (or computer illiteracy) will eventually create or maintain a dichotomized society of haves and have-nots. Especially the element of unequal access to online computer technology plays a crucial role, and functions as a nodal point in the digital divide discourse. The centrality of the signifier access is well-illustrated by the huge body of research aimed at documenting socio-demographically based differences in ICT access.

This always-specific articulation of the digital divide discourse, with access as its nodal point, at the same time excludes a series of other meanings. A first line of the critiques of these discursively exclusionary practices is based on the argument of the multi-dimensional character of (internet) access. Steyaert (2002), for instance, argues that “physical access” (stressing the materiality of access) should be complemented by the different skills required for interaction with ICT (informacy). He distinguishes three levels of capabilities: instrumental, structural and strategic skills. His argument is complemented by the emphasis on user practices. As Silverstone (1999: 252) remarks, writing about the domestication of ICTs,

The more recent history of home computing indicates that individuals in the household construct and affirm their own identities through their appropriation of the machine via processes of acceptance, resistance, and negotiation. What individuals do, and how they do it, depends on both cultural and material resources.

More specific content-oriented approaches focus on ‘missing content’ from a user perspective. The Children’s Partnership’s (2000) analysis, for instance, points to the absence of content of interest to people (living in the US) with an underclass background, with low levels of literacy in English and with interests in local politics and in culture, in other words,

underserved Americans [*that*] are seeking the following content on the Internet: practical information focusing on local community; information at a basic literacy level; material in multiple languages; information on ethnic and cultural interests; interfaces and content accessible to people with disabilities; easier searching; and coaches to guide them.

Another series of critiques, aimed at a more political re-articulation of the divide, explicitly highlights the threat towards participation. An example of this position is Gandy's (2002) article entitled *The Real Digital Divide: Citizens versus Consumers*, in which he sees "the new media as widening the distinction between the citizen and the consumer" (Gandy, 2002: 448). The main concern here is that the 'new economy' will incorporate and thus foreclose on the democratic possibilities of the new media (Barber, 1998; Kellner, 1999). The basis of analysis is provided by a distinction between a 'consumer' and a 'civic model' of network activity. The balance between these models will eventually determine the role of the internet in post-industrial democracy, where a too dominant position of the 'new economy' is seen as detrimental towards participatory intensity.

These kinds of analyses show that the assumptions of the digital divide discourse and its focus on access are not accepted totally uncritically, and openings are created to (re-)establish the link between access and participation. But at the same time, in the pre-web 2.0 phase of the internet, the notion of interaction and the derived concept of interactivity played a significant role in discourses about new media, much more than participation did. For instance, in Rheingold's (1993) summary of new media consequences – supporting citizen activity in politics and power, increased interaction with diverse others, and a new vocabulary and form of communication – interaction features prominently.

Not dissimilarly to participation, the concepts of interaction and interactivity have highly fluid meanings, leaving them often undefined or under-defined (McMillan, 2002: 164; Rafaeli, 1988: 110). Manovich (2001: 55), for instance, problematizes the newness and broadness of the concept of interactivity. He argues first that it can be found at work in many older cultural forms and media technologies. Second, he refers to the "myth of interactivity", claiming that its meaning becomes tautological when it is used in relation to computer-based media: "Modern HCI [*Human Computer Interaction*] is by definition interactive. [...] Therefore, to call computer media 'interactive' is meaningless – it simply means stating the most basic facts about computers". He points to the danger of reducing interaction to physical interaction between a user and a media object, at the expense of psychological interaction: "the psychological processes of filling-in, hypothesis formation, recall, and identification, which are required for us to comprehend any text or image at all, are mistakenly identified with an objectively existing structure of interactive links" (Manovich, 2001: 57).

In order to deal with this fluidity and diversity, many authors reverted to categorizing systems, distinguishing between different forms of interaction (see Jensen, 1999). There is one group of scholars that have introduced a distinction between two broad types of interaction: person-to-person interaction and person-to-machine interaction (Carey, 1989; Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Lee, 2000); others identify three levels of interaction. Szuprowicz's (1995) distinction between user-to-user, user-to-documents and user-to-system is one of the more commonly used threefold systems of categorization. The person-to-person (or user-to-user interaction) and user-to-documents interactions are hardly new, and have been analysed in a diversity of academic fields such as communication studies, sociology, literary theory and cultural studies. User-to-system interaction, in particular, is rather central to new media, since it focuses on the human-computer relationship. Originally, in this tradition, interaction was used to describe the more user-friendly interfaces that transcended the perceived limitations of batch processing. Later HCI research focused "analogous to reception studies [...] on the user-technology interaction, rather than the technology per se. It deals with usage of technology, or, to speak in discourse lingua, the pragmatics of technology" (Persson et al., 2000). This focus allows me to return to the concept of interactivity, and Jensen's (1999: 17) definition of interactivity as "a measure of a media's potential ability to let a user exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication". In this definition, interactivity is seen as a characteristic of specific media technologies (or systems) that incorporate the possibility of user-content and user-user interaction through the interaction between user and technology.

Some authors have attempted to return some of the key characteristics of participation – namely power – to the discussion of interaction and interactivity. McMillan's (2002) important contribution to this debate is that she – very explicitly – links interactivity with questions of control (and power). An important argument here is that the relationship between the user and his 'extension' remains externally defined and can hardly be questioned. In order to theorize this reduction, Penny (1995) proposes the word *interpassivity*, echoing the above-discussed hierarchical systems that distinguish between 'real' and 'false' interaction. Rokeby (1995: 148) argues that interactivity is about "encounter rather than control". He goes on to say that

interactive media have the power to [...] expand the reach of our actions and decisions. We trade subjectivity [...] for the illusion of control; our control may appear absolute, but the domain of that control is externally defined. We are engaged, but exercise no power over the filtering language of interaction embedded in the interface. (Rokeby, 1995: 154)

However valuable these attempts, they were structurally unable to influence the mainstream pre-web 2.0 approach, which favoured interaction over participation, implicitly reducing the intensity of participation. But the concept of participation

managed to maintain a presence in a number of academic subfields. The theoretical reflections on electronic (direct) democracy and new media especially offered a safe haven for participation. These elaborations partially continued the work of earlier participatory-democracy theorists such as Barber. In *Strong Democracy* (1984) Barber (1984: 289) focuses mainly on “interactive video communications”;⁵⁷ but already is referring in a balanced way to the potential use of networked computers:

The wiring of homes for cable television across America [...], the availability of low-frequency and satellite transmissions in areas beyond regular transmission or cable, and the interactive possibilities of video, computers, and information retrieval systems open up a new mode of human communications that can be used either in civic and constructive or in manipulative and destructive ways. (Barber, 1984: 274)

In a later work (1998: 81), Barber refers more explicitly to the web: “the World Wide Web was, in its conception and compared to traditional broadcast media, a remarkably promising means for point-to-point lateral communication among citizens and for genuine interactivity (users not merely passively receiving information, but participating in retrieving and creating it)”.

Especially when this discussion is framed in the quest for more direct and/or deliberative democracy, the notions of power and decision-making maintained a strong presence. Budge (1996: 1), for instance, defends the move towards more direct democracy, where “public policy can be discussed and voted upon by everyone linked in an interactive communications net”. These principles made it to the realm of political practice; witness the rhetoric of US presidential candidate Ross Perot on “electronic town halls” in 1992 and 1996 (Browning, 2002: 133). However, here the safe haven turned out to be more treacherous than expected. When these attempts to deepen democracy are contrasted to representative democracy, the entire project becomes (rightfully) vulnerable to criticisms of “technopopulism” (Coleman and Gøtze, 2001: 5) and risk yet another form of discreditation. Some authors – such as Coleman and Gøtze – manage to steer clear of these more dubious interpretations, to seek a new balance between representation and participation. Coleman and Gøtze refer explicitly to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) (2001) three-stage model, which distinguishes information distribution and consultation from active participation. Participation is defined as

a relation based on partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in the decision- and policy-making process. It acknowledges a role for citizens in proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with government. (OECD, 2001: 16)

Moreover, however relevant this safe haven for participation, it came at a high price because participation was often articulated exclusively within institutionalized politics

in this pre-web 2.0 phase. Participation and institutionalized politics were frequently seen as unidirectional instruments for increasing civil participation in the latter, which positioned them more closely to the minimalist models than the above-mentioned authors desired.

At the end of the 1990s, the situation changed, as web 2.0⁵⁸ slowly came into existence, and the concepts of participation and democracy became more explicitly (re-)articulated within the realm of new media, allowing for more discursive space for the maximalist versions of participation. Parts of these debates were situated within the domain of participation through the media, some were focused on participation in institutionalized politics, while other debates used a broader articulation of the political. First, a series of e-concepts (such as e-governance, e-democracy, e-campaigning, e-canvassing, e-lobbying, e-consultation and e-voting – see Remenyi and Wilson, 2007; and see Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2007) for three Estonian examples) was used to point to the possibilities for increased participation in institutionalized politics, but also to discuss the increased possibilities for political actors to reach out to the political community (see e.g., Williamson et al. (2010) on the digital campaign). For instance, the Hansard Society's definition of e-democracy (quoted in Chadwick, 2006: 84) focuses explicitly on political participation and the relation to institutionalized politics: "The concept of e-democracy is associated with efforts to broaden political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their representatives via new information and communication technologies". In their discussion of e-democracy, Di Maria and Rizzo (2005: 76) take a similar position by emphasizing the change in the power balance between administration and citizenry: "The promotion of e-democracy means, above all, a reverse approach in the relationship between Administrations and citizens, with a shift of power towards the latter [...]". As Vedel (2003: 253 – my translation) argues, these e-democracy techniques may range quite substantially, from "a one-time consultation of citizens to their direct intervention into the decision-making process". Vedel goes on to list a number of these techniques (e.g. district committees, local referendums, participatory budgeting, local citizen juries) where ICTs can provide significant support. For instance, participatory budgeting, where citizens participate in the decision-making process of budget allocation (Souza, 2001; Shah, 2007; Sintomer et al., 2008), has been organized through the web (Rios et al., 2005; Peixoto, 2008). But at the same time, the maximalist versions of e-democracy remain rare, as "few democracies experiment [*with these kinds*] of online practices" (Breindl and Francq, 2008: 18).

A second cluster of debates within the domain of participation through the media uses the concept of deliberation, as the deliberative turn also affects new media studies. This concept allows for a more maximalist approach to participation through the media, sometimes described as a broader approach towards e-democracy. A first description can be found in Chadwick's (2006: 100) book *Internet Politics*, where the deliberative models "conceive of a more complex horizontal and multi-directional interactivity". In this perspective, new media are seen as potentially instrumental in providing a (series

of) sites where deliberation can be organized. To use Gimmler's (2001: 30) words, "Here it is clear that, since it generates knowledge and functions as a medium of interaction, the internet can play a significant role in the deliberative public sphere". Again, in these discussions on the internet as a public sphere (which always run the risk of entering a media-centric logic – see above), we can find first a set of positions related to the normative-prescriptive Habermasian perspective. Habermas (1998: 120 – quoted in Downey and Fenton, 2003: 189) in 1998 expressed his reservations about ICTs fulfilling the conditions of the public sphere:

Whereas the growth of systems and networks multiplies possible contacts and exchanges of information, it does not lead per se to the expansion of an intersubjectively shared world and to the discursive interweaving of conceptions of relevance, themes, and contradictions from which political public spheres arise.

Others use the Habermasian perspective to point to the internet's restrictions in facilitating deliberation, which is fed by the need for (a certain degree of) homogenization: The already-mentioned analysis by Dahlberg (2001b: 623) operationalizes Habermas's public sphere discourse into a set of requirements, in order to point to the problems related to reflexivity, listening to others and working with difference, identity verification, processes of domination and exclusion, and the expansion of economic interests (see also Graham and Witschge (2003); Janssen and Kies (2005)).

But the normative approaches to deliberative online democracy are not exclusively Habermasian in nature. One strand of work is concerned with fragmentation and narcissism, where the internet becomes (seen as) a series of echo chambers for the like-minded (Sunstein, 2001). There are more positive positions: Gimmler (2001: 31), for example, points to the positive contribution of the internet to deliberative democracy by providing access to information and opportunities for interaction, and by encouraging the exchange of services and information. She points on the one hand to the opportunities the internet creates for stronger forms of participation in institutionalized politics: "On the local, regional and national level, moderated discourses, public forums, and a round-table style of discussion can be established, all of which give citizens the opportunity to be active participants in the process of decision-making" (Gimmler, 2001: 32). In these kinds of logics, the need to link the public sphere to institutionalized politics is emphasized (but also problematized), in order to pull "citizens into spheres where their deliberations are likely to influence the development of policy" (Chadwick, 2006: 111). On the other hand, she (Gimmler, 2001: 33) opens up debate on online deliberation by shifting it towards the use that civil society makes of the internet to "discuss topics of particular interest to them".

This brings us to the alternative approaches to the public sphere as, for instance, captured by the concept of counterpublics, sometimes connected to models of radical democracy and autonomism (see Dahlberg and Siaper, 2007), rendering it

more sympathetic towards heterogeneity. Here, the link with the state is severed, and attention is directed to “how the Internet impacts [on] counterpublic formation and public sphere activism” (Palczewski, 2001: 161). Although “state-focused political activism” is not abandoned, the broadened approach of the political allows this focus to be combined with “culturally driven discursive politics” (Palczewski, 2001: 161). This opens up space to see online identity politics (and the politics of identity) (Hall, 1989; Fung, 2002), culture jamming⁵⁹ (Dery, 1993; Cammaerts, 2007a) and cyborg politics (Haraway, 1991; Gray, 2002) as forms of participation of counterpublics in the cultural realm, while retaining the broad political dimension. Through these logics, ICTs are seen as sites of struggle, where a diversity of actors, individuals, groups, communities and organizations intervene in the social and political. An example of this is hacktivism, which refers to politically motivated hacking, by redirecting web traffic away from a website, defacing a website (or changing its content) or flooding a server (Chadwick, 2006: 129–130; Jordan, 2007). A specific illustration is the Yes Men, who used impersonation as a tool to focus public attention on social injustices. On the eighteenth anniversary of the Union Carbide disaster at Bhopal (which occurred on 2–3 December, 1984), the Yes Men set up a fake Dow Chemical Company (the owner of Union Carbide) website (Dow-Chemical.com) to send out a press release explaining that Dow would not take responsibility for the disaster and was offering only limited compensation. The website was registered in the name of James Parker, the son of the Dow Chemical Company’s CEO, who later reclaimed it. Two years later, the Yes Men received a request for an interview from the BBC on another website they control (DowEthics.com) and decided to accept, and posed as a Dow representative. Andy Bichlbaum (aka Jacque Servin) appeared on the BBC, and made the statement that Dow would accept full responsibility for the Bhopal disaster and had a multi-billion dollar plan to compensate the victims and remediate the site.⁶⁰

Within this framework, ICTs become articulated as mobilization tools, assisting in political (in the broad sense) recruitment, organization and campaigning, again contributing to participation through the internet. In a discussion of Internetnetworked Social Movements (ISMs), Langman (2005: 60) argues that there are three ideal-typical kinds of ISMs that (partially) rely on the internet: alternative media, alternative politics and “online cyberactivism, mobilizations organized by and/or on the Internet”. She stresses that (cyber)activists are embodied agents, and that online mobilizations (and activism) are situated within online and offline worlds, or in other words, mobilizations take place, and result in actions in both *meatspaces* and virtual spaces. Langman (2005: 44) points explicitly to the fluidity, multidirectionality and participatory nature of these kinds of mobilizations:

Electronic communication media have unique capacities to create democratic, participatory realms in cyberspace devoted to information and debates. Electronically mediated participation has created conditions for the emergence of new kinds of highly

fluid ‘mobilizing structures’ that tend to be far less structured, with fluid networks that are more open and participatory, and are articulated across a wide variety of issues.

A well-known example of such a mobilization is the Zapatista movement and the transnational mobilization that supported it: Downey and Fenton (2003: 196) call this case of “offline protest and online counter-publicity” the “cause celebre of Internet political activism” (see also Cleaver, 1999; Kowal, 2002; Ramírez de la Piscina, 2006). The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* or EZLN) is based in Chiapas (Mexico), and revolted against social inequality and government corruption. While the first uprising in 1994 was violent, the Zapatista movement quickly changed its strategy and chose a more pacifist path, supported by strong communicational campaigns. Cleaver (1999: 3) describes the tools used by the Zapatista movement:

From the use of mailing lists and conferences for the dissemination of information, the sharing of experience and the facilitation of discussion and organizing through the elaboration of multimedia web sites for the amplification and archiving of the developing history of the struggle to the use of electronic voting technology to make possible global participation in plebiscites on their political positions [...]

I do not want to focus exclusively on leftist and progressive movements. Hill and Hughes (1998: 153) point to the use made of the web by more conservative actors, and claim that “conservative websites are larger, flashier, and more visible on the World Wide Web than are either liberal or left-wing sites”. Downey and Fenton (2003: 198) – and also Cammaerts (2009) – point to the communication and mobilization strategies used by extreme right wing groups, concluding that “the Internet permits radical groups from both Left and Right [...] to construct inexpensive virtual counter-public spheres to accompany their other forms of organization and protest”.

In contrast to participation through the internet (and ICTs), participation in the internet focuses on the opportunities provided to non-media professionals to (co-) produce media content themselves and to (co-)organize the structures that allow for this media production. In new media theory, the opportunities for bypassing mainstream media organizations and professionals is one of the key arguments in favour of the internet’s democratic-participatory potential, although its limits and problems are also often acknowledged. One entry into this debate, which also captures some of its complexities, is the concept of user-generated content (UGC), which is frequently used to describe internet content production. Despite the popularity of the concept, clear definitions of UGC that move beyond the obvious statement that UGC deals with online or “website content produced by users” (Schweiger and Quiring, 2006: 1) or with “services providing user-uploaded and user-generated audio and video content” (Principles for User Generated Content Services, 2007) are rare. In

its 2007 report *Participative Web: User-created Content*, the OECD (2007: 8) makes a similar statement: “Despite frequent references to this topic by media and experts, no commonly agreed definition of user-created content exists”. Even the concept itself has a number of variations,⁶¹ and as an umbrella term, it encompasses many different practices and platforms, which the OECD report attempts to categorize as follows: Blogs; Wikis and other text-based collaboration formats; Sites allowing feedback on written works; Group-based aggregation; Podcasting; Social network sites; Virtual worlds; Content or flesharing sites (OECD, 2007: 17). In order to deal with this diversity, the OECD report prefers to describe three distinguishing features of UGC. The report first highlights the “Publication requirement”, which implies that UGC requires some type of (semi-)public distribution. A second distinguishing feature is the “Creative effort”, which refers to the “certain amount of creative effort [*that*] was put into creating the work or adapting existing works to construct a new one” (OECD, 2007: 8). Third, according to this report, “Creation” takes place “outside of professional routines and practices”, which “in the extreme” can imply that UGC is “produced by non-professionals without the expectation of profit or remuneration” (OECD, 2007: 8). The third characteristic, especially, situates UGC as a form of participation in the media production process.

This definition raises questions about the specificity of UGC in relation to all ‘other’ participatory media practices and about the differences in participatory intensity within the (broad) category of UGC. Again, the differences between more minimalist and maximalist articulations in participation play a significant role. Mainstream media organizations that have organized participation through new media often revert to the concept of citizen journalism to label the involvement of ordinary people in the media production process, especially following the South Asian Tsunami in December 2004: “The remarkable range of first-person accounts, camcorder video footage, mobile and digital camera snapshots [...] being generated by ordinary citizens on the scene [...] was widely heralded for making a unique contribution to mainstream media’s coverage” (Allan, 2009: 18). Although citizen journalism can thrive in more commercial and commodified contexts,⁶² it then faces the threat of incorporation by a diversity of mainstream media organizations that reduce the intensity of the participatory process. Many mainstream media have tried to develop business models to incorporate citizen journalists, and to reduce their roles to providers of information, keeping intact the media professionals’ role as gatekeepers and maintaining the level of participation at a minimum.

However, the broad category of UGC also leaves room for a wide variety of non-mainstream practices and forms of online alternative journalism (see Atton and Hamilton (2008), for a broad approach to alternative journalism), which allow for more maximalist versions of participation. One example is the Indymedia network (Kidd, 2003), which uses the principle of open publishing to allow for these more intense forms of participation in the media. As Mamadouh (2004: 486) explains, “The main characteristics of open publishing is that volunteers maintain the software and the public act as publishers, while media producers might take care of editorial parts, the editing of the newswire

and the producing of other media products”. It is often the case that alternative media, such as Indymedia, combine participation with editorial control by the core group of producers: “It is fascinating to observe the active negotiation going on here between the ideals of open publishing and enabling participation for all, typical ‘journalistic’ ideals of maintaining some kind of quality standard of information, and wanting to have editorial control over a published story and storytelling in general” (Platon and Deuze, 2003: 350). But these power dynamics remain structurally different from mainstream media settings, for example; they are more closely related to community and alternative media, where the core groups (or staff members) that find themselves in the heart of the organization facilitate the democratic-participatory process respectfully.

Online alternative media are not the only organizations within civil society that deploy online publishing activities. First, Ostertag (2006) shows that social movements have always deployed a considerable amount of media activities in their attempts to present themselves to the outside world, to do “organizational identity work” (Pudrovska and Ferree, 2004: 123) and to gather support for their causes. Gamson’s (1995: 85) description is telling: “Movements activists are media junkies”. As actors, they allow for participation through the media (and more specifically the internet), and for participation in the production of media content. We should keep in mind, nevertheless, that there are often clear differences in (the objectives of) alternative and community media on the one hand, and (new) social movements on the other, which does not always guarantee the participatory intensity of the media production activities in new social movements. At the same time, it would be an exaggeration to claim that these worlds are completely separate: For instance, a small research project conducted in 2009 on the coverage of a Belgian peace movement action by Indymedia shows that the people involved combined (active) roles within Indymedia and the peace movement (Carpentier et al., 2009).

Also, business actors organize participation in the media, which returns us to Jenkins’s (2006) convergence argument, in which the top-down corporate forces are combined with a bottom-up participatory culture. The case of YouTube has become a classic example, allowing people to make their (or other’s) video material available. As Hartley (2008: 5) formulates it in a conference paper on YouTube:

[...] with digital online media, there’s almost infinite scope for DIY (do-it-yourself) and DIWO (do-it-with-others) creative content produced by and for consumers and users, without the need for institutional filtering or control bureaucracies. The so-called ‘long tail’ of self-made content is accessible to anyone near a computer terminal. Everyone is a potential publisher.

However, we should not lose sight of the impact of these media industries on the participatory process, where structural participation in the decision-making process of the involved companies, for instance, is excluded.⁶³ Also, participation in internet content production is not always unproblematic. Jenkins (2006: 175) describes how “the term

participation has emerged as a governing concept, albeit one surrounded by conflicting expectations”. He explains that the corporate interpretation of participation still leans towards the more minimalist forms, while consumers strive for more maximalist versions (which, especially at the level of structural media participation, are often out of reach):

Corporations imagine participation as something they can start and stop, channel and reroute, commodify and market. [...] Consumers, on the other side, are asserting a right to participate in the culture, on their own terms, when and where they wish. This empowered consumer faces a series of struggles to preserve and broaden this perceived right to participate. (Jenkins, 2006: 175)

The above discussion indicates that participation in the internet is not always structured through formal organizations, but takes many different, often rather fluid, forms, captured in some cases by the autonomist concept of the multitude (Dyer-Witheford, 2007). Examples such as the online encyclopedia Wikipedia show that collaborative cultural production can still be grounded into a maximalist participatory model, as evidenced by O’Sullivan’s (2009: 186) description of Wikipedia: “A culture of sharing and participation is the most radical feature of the entire project, and the most promising for the future of the Internet [...]”. In this sense, Bruns’s (2007, 2008) notion of *produsage* not only signifies the (alleged) mixture of production and consumption, but also refers to the more maximalist forms of participation within media content production. This, of course, is not to say that this model is without problems: In the case of Wikipedia, there is dominance of a small group of core authors,⁶⁴ and an “extraordinarily high [*author*] mortality rate in all languages” (Ortega Soto, 2009: 157). But as an example of collaborative cultural production (or participation in the media), Wikipedia shows the presence of more maximalist versions of participation, and symbolizes the hope that the participatory culture of the counterpublics can become hegemonized into dominant (media) culture.

3.4 By way of conclusion: Access, interaction and participation

This book’s search for articulations of participation has resulted in a considerable number of societal fields that use this concept as a nodal point. This chapter focuses on a selection of these fields; many more are touched upon only briefly (e.g. participation in education – see Taylor and Robinson, 2009) or are not mentioned (e.g. participation in the medical field – see Guadagnoli and Ward, 1998). In addition to the field of media and participation itself, four fields were selected because they (arguably) matter most to support the discussion on media and participation. Democratic theory still takes a privileged position in the theoretical discussion on participation, as it immediately shows its political nature. But the political-democratic does not stop at the edges of

institutionalized politics: The political-democratic, and the distribution of power in society that lies at its heart, is a dimension of the social that permeates every possible societal field. The three other fields discussed here show this pervasiveness of participation as a deep social construction: Spatial planning is still connected to institutionalized politics, but simultaneously touches upon one of the building blocks of everyday life – the materiality of the spaces we inhabit (and do not inhabit). In addition, this field is one of the areas where the more maximalist interventions in the decision-making process have been accepted and embedded in legal frameworks, and it also has a very solid theoretical history. The field of development has maintained its connection to policy, but in the attempts to eradicate poverty, injustice and many other societal evils on a global scale it touches upon every possible component of human life. This field is important for a media and participation discussion given its strong emphasis on the role of (participatory) communication in development and its key role in the elaboration of the right to communicate. The field of the arts and museums might seem an unlikely choice, but the investment of the arts in the generation of meanings shows that the discussions on participation in the realm of the symbolic-cultural are not restricted to what we traditionally define as media. The discussions on participation in the (at times still considered) sacral world of arts and museums, and the culturally privileged position of the artist, illustrate how crucial the concept of participation is for the social.

In combination with discussions within the (fifth) field of communication and media, these debates on participation have a lot in common in that they all focus on the distribution of power within society at both the macro- and micro-level. The balance between people's inclusion in the implicit and explicit decision-making processes within these fields, and their exclusion through the delegation of power (again, implicit or explicit), is central to discussions on participation in all fields. At the macro-level, they deal with the degree to which people could and should be empowered to (co)decide on political, spatial, developmental, symbolic-cultural and communicative matters. At the micro-level, they deal with the power relations between privileged and non-privileged actors, between politicians, architects and urban planners, development workers, artists and media professionals on the one hand, and (ordinary) people who do not hold these positions on the other. Although it would be too much of a simplification to define all privileged actors as part of one societal elite, these privileged actors do form (partially overlapping) elite clusters, that hold stronger power positions compared to individuals not part of these elite clusters. Within all fields, debates about participation focus exactly on the legitimization or the questioning and critiquing of the power (in-)equilibrium that structures these social relationships.

At the same time, these debates show first that the models that support stronger forms of participation (even the most maximalist versions) do not aim for the (symbolic) annihilation of elite roles, but try to transform these roles in order to allow for power-sharing between privileged and non-privileged (or elite and non-elite) actors. For instance, the positions that defend strong forms of media participation do not necessarily focus on

the elimination of the media professional (or the journalist), but attempt to diversify and open up this societal identity so that the processes and outcomes of media production do not remain the privileged territory of media professionals and media industries. Second, these more maximalist participatory models only rarely aim to impose participation. Their necessary embeddedness in a democratic culture protects against a post-political reduction of participation to a mere technique, but also against the enforcement of participation. Here, I concur with Foss and Griffin (1995: 3), who contrast invitation and persuasion (the latter being fed by the “desire for control and domination”), and Greiner and Singhal (2009: 34), who develop the concept of invitational social change, which “seek[s] to substitute interventions which inform with calls to imagine and efforts to inspire”. These kinds of reflections allow participation to be seen as invitational, which implies that the enforcement of participation is defined as contradictory to the logics of participation, and that the right not to participate should be respected.

What these debates also make clear is the contingency of the signifier participation. Within each of the fields discussed, we can find discourses that provide different articulatory contexts for the notion(s) of participation. This contingency also emerges when we highlight the temporal dimension, since in different decades, different articulations of participation gained dominance. Although a too linear-temporal analysis should be avoided at all costs (as this would not do justice to the exceptions and discontinuities), it is clear that in each of the fields discussed, the more maximalist versions of participation played a significant role in the 1960s and 1970s, while the 1980s were characterized by the dominance of the more minimalist versions. It seems that it took decades to recover from the legacy of participatory amnesia left by this period.

The complexity and contingency of participation requires theoretical coping mechanisms, and I would argue here that there are two main ways of dealing with this contingency. The first strategy is based on the expression of regret for the signifiatory chaos, combined with attempts to undo it by (almost archaeologically) unravelling the authentic meaning of participation. This led to the construction of dichotomized systems of meaning, in which specific forms of participation are described as ‘real’ and ‘authentic’, and other forms are described as ‘fake’ and ‘pseudo’. This strategy is relatively old and, for example, in the field of political participation, Verba (1961: 220–221) pointed to the existence of ‘pseudo-participation’, in which the emphasis is not on creating a *situation* in which participation is possible, but on creating the *feeling* that participation is possible. An alternative label, used by Strauss (1998: 18) among others, is ‘manipulative participation’. Other strategies arose out of the construction of hierarchically ordered and multi-layered systems, of which Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of participation is a prime example. There are also more recent versions. One of these is the three-stage model (information distribution, consultation and active participation) developed by the OECD (2001). Considerably less critical and less radical than Arnstein’s model – as the bottom and top steps of the ladder are eliminated – participation is defined as a relation based on partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in the decision- and

policy-making process. It acknowledges a role for citizens in proposing policy options and shaping policy dialogue – although responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with government (OECD, 2001: 16). Another classic definition of participation that uses this strategy is developed by Pateman in her 1970 book *Democratic Theory and Participation*. As already discussed, Pateman distinguishes between partial and full participation, where partial participation is defined as “a process in which two or more parties influence each other in the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only” (Pateman, 1970: 70). Full participation is seen as “a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions” (Pateman, 1970: 71). These definitions and approaches share an almost messianic concern for the concept of participation: They want to protect and rescue it. The tactics are relatively similar, because they all consist of differentiating between (‘authentic’ or ‘real’) participation and other practices that are only nominally participatory – and which can be unmasked as forms of pseudo-participation.

The second strategy to deal with this signifiatory diversity, which is also used in this text, distances itself (at least in a first phase) from the question of differentiating between authentic and pseudo-participation. This strategy focuses on the signifiatory process that lies beneath the articulation of participation and defines it as (part of) a political-ideological struggle. From this perspective, the definition of participation is one of the many societal fields where political struggle is waged between the minimalist and the maximalist variations of democracy. As has been argued extensively in this chapter (see Figure 1), in the minimalist model, democracy is confined mainly to processes of representation, and participation to elite selection through elections that form the expression of a homogeneous popular will. Moreover, participation here exclusively serves the field of institutionalized politics because the political is limited to this field. In the maximalist model, democracy is seen as a more balanced combination of representation and participation, where attempts are made to maximize participation. The political is considered a dimension of the social, which allows for a broad application of participation in many different social fields (including the media), at both micro- and macro-level, and with respect for societal diversity.

The signification of participation thus becomes part of a “politics of definition” (Fierlbeck, 1998: 177), since its specific articulation shifts depending on the ideological framework that makes use of it. This implies that debates on participation are not mere academic debates, but are part of a political-ideological struggle for how our political realities are to be defined and organized. It is also not a mere semantic struggle, but a struggle that is lived and practiced. In other words, our democratic practices are, at least partially, structured and enabled through how we think participation. The definition of participation allows us to think, to name and to communicate the participatory process (as minimalist or as maximalist) and is simultaneously constituted by our specific (minimalist or maximalist participatory) practices. As a consequence, the definition

of participation is not a mere outcome of this political-ideological struggle, but an integrated and constitutive part of this struggle.

However, it would still be wrong to disconnect this second strategy for dealing with the signifiatory diversity of the concept of participation from the first strategy (looking for authentic participation). Three components of the first strategy, which have to do with three different delineations, are worth salvaging. A first delineation is related to what is arguably the core issue in this debate on participation (and the political-ideological struggle that lies behind the debate): power. Power – and, more specifically, the way power is distributed in society – is omnipresent in all debates on participation, and is also a constituting element of the first strategy. Some prudence is called for here, as power is often reduced to the possession of a specific societal group. Authors such as Foucault (1978) have argued against this position (see below), claiming that power is an always-present characteristic of social relations. In contemporary societies, the narrations of power are complex narrations of power strategies, counter-powers and resistance. These power struggles are never limited to one specific societal field (e.g., ‘the’ economy) but can be present in all societal fields and at all levels. Despite (or because of) this nuance, the debates on participation can be seen as a struggle for political power (in the broadest sense possible) – or, rather, as a power struggle about who can take on which roles in society. In the minimalist models, power is centralized as much as possible, while in the maximalist models the decentralization of power is preferred. Revisiting the first strategy (based on the authenticity of participation) allows us to see the participation debate as a latent conflict (which is sometimes rendered manifest) about who can become involved in societal decision-making processes, in the definition and resolution of societal problems, in deciding which procedures should be followed, and in the societal debates about these definitions, procedures and resolutions. Divergent positions on who should be empowered and granted the opportunity (and ‘the’ power) to speak thus become an integrated part of the debates on participation and the underlying political-ideological struggle.

The second delineation that can be derived from the first strategy is related to the difference between participation and its conditions of possibility. Although it remains crucial not to ignore the contingency and structural openness of the signifier participation, some form of discursive fixity is required in order to allow for this concept to be analysed. This analytical problem can be remedied also by returning to the first approach and to the three different concepts used in this approach: participation, interaction and access. Arguably, these notions are still very different – in their theoretical origins and in their respective meanings. But they are often integrated (or conflated) into definitions of participation. One example here is Melucci’s (1989: 174) definition, when he says that participation has a double meaning: “It means both taking part, that is, acting so as to promote the interests and the needs of an actor as well as belonging to a system, identifying with the ‘general interests’ of the community”. However valuable these approaches are, I would like to argue that participation is structurally different from access and interaction, and that a negative-relationist strategy – distinguishing between

these three concepts – helps to clarify the meaning(s) of participation and to prevent the link with the main defining component of participation, namely power, being obscured. Moreover, conflating these concepts often causes the more maximalist meanings of participation to remain hidden, which I also want to avoid. From this perspective, the conflation of access, interaction and participation is actually part of the struggle between the minimalist and maximalist articulations of participation.

If we revisit the theoretical discussions on participation, we can find numerous layers of meanings that can be attributed to the three concepts. This diversity of meanings can be used to relate the three concepts to each other; this strategy allows some fleshing out of the distinctions between them. All three concepts can then be situated in a model, which is termed the AIP-model (see Figure 10⁶⁵). First, through this negative-relationist strategy, access becomes articulated as presence, in a variety of ways that are related to four areas: technology, content, people and organizations. For instance, in the case of digital divide discourse, the focus is placed on the access to media technologies (and more specifically ICTs), which in turn allows people to access media content. In both cases, access implies achieving presence (to technology or media content). Access also features in the more traditional media feedback discussions, where it has yet another meaning. Here, access implies gaining a presence within media organizations, which generates the opportunity for people to have their voices heard (in providing feedback). If we focus more on media production, access still plays a key role in describing the presence of media (production) technology, and of media organizations and other people to (co-)produce and distribute the content.

The second concept, interaction, has a long history in sociological theory, where it often refers to the establishment of socio-communicative relationships. Subjectivist sociologies, such as symbolic interactionism and phenomenological sociology, highlight the importance of social interaction in the construction of meaning through lived and intersubjective experiences embodied in language. In these sociologies the social is shaped by actors interacting on the basis of shared interests, purposes and values, or common knowledge.⁶⁶ Although interaction is often equated with participation, I here want to distinguish between these two concepts, as this distinction allows an increase in the focus on power and (formal or informal) decision-making in the definition of participation, and – as mentioned before – protecting the more maximalist approaches to participation.

If interaction is seen as the establishment of socio-communicative relationships within the media sphere, there are again a variety of ways that these relationships can be established. First, in the categorizations that some authors (Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Lee, 2000) have developed in order to deal with the different components of HCI, different types of interaction have been distinguished. Through these categorizations the audience-to-audience interaction component (strengthened later by analyses of co-creation) has been developed, in combination with the audience-to-(media) technology component. At the production level this refers to the interaction with media technology and people to (co-)

produce content, possibly within organizational contexts. A set of other components can be found within the ‘old’ media studies approaches. The traditional active audience models have contributed to this debate through their focus on the interaction between audience and content, which relates to the selection and interpretation of content. As these processes are not always individualized, but sometimes collective, also forms of media consumption like family or public viewing (Hartmann, 2008) can be included, not to forget the role that interpretative communities can play (Radway, 1988; Lindlof, 1988).

Figure 10: Access, interaction and participation – The AIP model.

<i>Access (presence)</i>				
	<i>Technology</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>People</i>	<i>Organizations</i>
<i>Production</i>	Presence of (proto-)machines to produce and distribute content	Presence of previously produced content (e.g., archives)	Presence of people to co-create	Presence of organizational structures and facilities to produce and distribute content
<i>Reception</i>	Presence of (proto-)machines to receive relevant content	Presence of (relevant) content	Presence (of sites) of joint media consumption	Presence of organizational structures to provide feedback to
<i>Interaction (socio-communicative relationships)</i>				
	<i>Technology</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>People</i>	<i>Organizations</i>
<i>Production</i>	Using (proto-)machines to produce content	Producing content	Co-producing content as group or community	Co-producing content in an organizational context
<i>Reception</i>	Using (proto-)machines to receive content	Selecting and interpreting content	Consuming media together as group or community	Discussing content in an organizational context (feedback)
<i>Participation (co-deciding)</i>				
	<i>Technology</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>People</i>	<i>Organizations</i>
<i>Production (and reception)</i>	Co-deciding on/ with technology	Co-deciding on/ with content	Co-deciding on/ with people	Co-deciding on/ with organizational policy

This then brings me to the concept of participation. As repeatedly argued, this difference between participation on the one hand, and access and interaction on the other is located within the key role that is attributed to power, and to equal(ized) power relations in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the distinction between content-related participation and structural participation can then be used to point to different spheres of decision-making. First, there are decision-making processes related to content production, which might also involve other people and (proto-) machines (see chapter 5), and which might take place within the context of media organizations. Second, there is the structural participation in the management and policies of media organizations; also technology-producing organizations can be added in this model, allowing for the inclusion of practices that can be found in, for instance, the free software and open source movement(s). At the level of reception, many of the processes are categorized as interaction, but as there are still (implicit) decision-making processes and power dynamics involved, the reception sphere should still be mentioned here as well, although the main emphasis is placed on the production sphere.

Before moving to the keywords and the case studies, there is a third delineation that needs to be highlighted and, in this case, avoided. It concerns the unavoidability of the positioning of any author who intervenes in these debates. Ideology does not stop at the edges of analyses; it is an integrated part of any analysis. This, of course, does not ignore the fact that mere debate on the 'correct' definition of participation is too simple; for this reason, we need the second strategy. But mere description of the dynamics of power in participatory processes – with no normative evaluation of these processes – is also too simple. This is yet another area where the first strategy of looking for 'real' participation proves helpful. More specifically, this means that I subscribe to the call of many of the authors mentioned in this chapter (Giddens (2002) being one) to continue to deepen democracy and to include all societal fields (including the media) in this democratization process. It implies also that I consider the maximalist versions of participation socially beneficial attempts to improve the democratic quality of the social, without remaining blind to their problems and challenges. I realize that this plea for an increase in societal power balances has a clear utopian dimension. Situations of full participation, as described by Pateman, are utopian non-places (or better, 'never-to-be-places'), which will always be unattainable and empty, but which simultaneously remain to play a key role as ultimate anchoring points and horizons for my work (and the work of many others). Despite the impossibility of fully realizing these situations in social praxis, their fantasmatic realization serves as breeding ground for democratic renewal. As the French writer of Irish descent Samuel Beckett eloquently put it,⁶⁷ "Ever tried. Ever failed. Never mind. Try again. Fail better".

Notes

1. See Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Carpentier and De Cleen (2007).
2. In this interview, Spivak refers to the etymology of *Vertretung* (“to thread into someone’s shoes”), but also emphasizes the differences and interconnections between the notions of *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*, which she also refers to in her 1988 essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*.
3. The concept of ordinary citizens (and ordinary people) is a highly complicated signifier, which is discussed later. It suffices to mention here that the ordinary people signifier receives its meaning through juxtaposition with societal elites. For aesthetic reasons, the term ordinary is not inside quotation marks in this text, although here they would be appropriate.
4. Habermas uses a particular definition of discourse (which is why I quote the German version here): “*Unter dem Stichwort ‘Diskurs’ führe ich die durch Argumentation gekennzeichnete Form der Kommunikation ein, in der problematisch gewordene Geltungsansprüche zum Thema gemacht und auf ihre Berechtigung hin untersucht werden*” (Habermas, 1973: 214).
5. Obviously, there are many other examples that could be cited, including the Shoah. Also, the Stalinist regime provides us with horrifying examples.
6. The reason for excluding this model is that it can be seen as a hybrid combination of deliberative and radical democracy, both of which are discussed in this chapter.
7. The dictatorship of the proletariat should not be confused with the Leninist notion of the dictatorship of the vanguard of the proletariat.
8. Some authors, like Gramsci, related the council to the soviet (Bottomore, 1991: 114).
9. Giddens (1992) went on to develop these ideas on the democratization of the family.
10. Of course, Habermas is not the only author in this debate. See Cohen (1989), Fishkin (1991) and Dryzek (2000). The deliberative democratic model was also supported by Rawls (1999: 139), who in 1999 declared that he was “concerned with a well-ordered constitutional democracy [...] understood also as a deliberative democracy”.
11. Habermas (1998: 360) sees the lifeworld as the site of communicative action, and the public sphere as part of the lifeworld: “Like the lifeworld as a whole, so, too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action, in which mastery of a natural language suffices”.
12. For critiques on Habermas’s reductionism and romanticization of the bourgeois public sphere, see Fraser (1990) and Negt and Kluge (1983).
13. For instance, Mouffe (2005) continues to criticize Habermas for his focus on consensual outcomes.
14. See Carpentier and Spinoy (2008). This part is mainly based on the introductory chapter of this book.
15. For a more historical analysis of autonomist Marxist theory, see Wright (2008).
16. Lane’s (2005) article on public participation in planning was very instrumental for this part. Spatial planning is a very broad concept, which can range from the construction of housing (see Misra’s (2002) and Pacione’s (2001: 394) discussions on user-generated design), to neighbourhoods, cities and regions.
17. The Model Cities Programme in the US was a federal urban aid programme that ran from 1966 to the mid-1970s.
18. Pacione (2001: 125) also links advocacy planning to equity planning and pragmatic radicalism.
19. He later adds the third approach: multiplicity.

20. See also Smith (1991), Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (1988), Narayan and Srinivasan (1994), Srinivasan (1990), Salmen (1992), the World Bank (1994) and Cernea (1991) for elaborate descriptions and discussions of these methods.
21. One example is the exhibition 'The Art of Participation. 1950 to Now', which was organized by Rudolf Frieling for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and which was on view from 8 November 2008 to 8 February 2009. The exhibition catalogue (Frieling et al., 2008) was very helpful in providing both reflective articles and examples.
22. However important it is, to avoid the section on arts becoming too elaborate, the community arts movement is not discussed here.
23. See http://www.markuskison.de/touched_echo/.
24. See Halpin (1997) for a brief historical analysis of earlier museum (theory) reform projects.
25. See Rigney and Fokkema (1993) for a different approach.
26. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998: 4) sum up the fields within which the research of effects is/has been active into six clusters: sexual activity, violence, children, elections/politics, gender and race.
27. Although one could also argue that this is not always the case, and that formal and informal power imbalances occur amongst media professionals too (e.g. through professional hierarchies). Moreover, media professionals' continued participation in a capitalist media environment is not always guaranteed, as the possibility of a termination of employment can never be excluded.
28. It should be added that Jenkins does distinguish between interactivity and participation (Jenkins, 2006: 305), and that (in some rare cases) he uses the concepts of participation and interaction alongside each other, leaving some room for the idea that they are different concepts (Jenkins, 2006: 110, 137).
29. The social importance of the fourth component, the participation in society through the interaction with media content, should not be underestimated, but it remains a more minimalist form of participation (or interaction). For this reason, a grey arrow is used to indicate this component in the Figure 6 model.
30. See for instance Coleman and Ross (2010) for a discussion on the audience as public.
31. In this text the term 'community/society dimension' is preferred.
32. Picard (1985: 69) defines the social-democrat project as "modern Marxist thought combined with writings of classical liberal philosophers".
33. The public sphere has not been exclusively theorized by Habermas. Other key authors are Dewey (1927) and Arendt (1958), but in this text I focus on Habermas, as his work has gained most prominence in communication and media studies.
34. In his chapter on the genesis of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas (1991: 14ff) also looks at earlier stages.
35. Both concepts, in turn, are also related to the argument of consumer sovereignty (see Pauwels and Bauwens, 2007).
36. These approaches are also often not society-centred.
37. Even within the report the right to communicate was contested; witness the following remark from the Soviet Commission member Sergei Losev: "The right to communicate is not an internationally accepted right on either national or international level. Therefore it should not be discussed at such length and such a way in our report" (MacBride Commission, 1980: 172).
38. <http://www.itu.int/wsis>.

39. Still, the exact signification, formulation and span of the concept of communication rights have not stabilized. A more contemporary version can be found in Hamelink and Hoffman (2004: 3): “those rights – codified in international and regional human rights instruments – that pertain to standards of performance with regard to the provision of information and the functioning of communication processes in society”. For more recent publications on communication rights, see Alegre and O’Siochru (2005), Cammaerts and Carpentier (2007), Mueller et al. (2007), Movius (2008) and Dakroury et al. (2009).
40. <http://www.crisinfo.org/>.
41. Selecting an overarching label for participatory/community/alternative/civil society/rhizomatic media organizations poses an insoluble semantic problem. But, since in this approach of combining the four different models all become structurally incorporated, the question of the appropriate label seems relatively irrelevant. In this section, community and alternative media is chosen as the overarching label.
42. The object of this analysis – alternative and community media – of course complicates an unequivocal society-centred approach. Instead this type of approach should be interpreted as the societal contextualization of alternative and community media.
43. The argument that these four approaches and concepts provide the elements that construct the identities of the vast diversity of alternative and community media organizations, in always-different ways, has generated some confusion (see Hadl and Dongwon, 2008: 97). This theoretical strategy has no ambition to discredit the labels that specific organizations prefer to use; it aims to offer a framework to understand the discursive and material complexities of this field.
44. In AMARC-Europe’s (1994) definition of community radio, for instance, the geographical aspect is explicitly highlighted: “a ‘non-profit’ station, currently broadcasting, which offers a service to the community in which it is located, or to which it broadcasts, while promoting the participation of this community in the radio”. Nevertheless, other types of relationships between medium and community are implied in AMARC-Europe’s phrase “to which it broadcasts”. See Van Vuuren (2008: 16–17) for a discussion of alternative representations of community.
45. For a discussion of these policy initiatives at European level, see Jiménez and Scifo (2009).
46. The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters is usually referred to by its French acronym AMARC, or the *Association Mondiale des Radio diffuseurs Communautaires*. The AMARC website is at: <http://www.amarc.org>.
47. In defining civil society, Cohen and Arrato (1992: ix) explicitly include what they call the intimate sphere. The exact nature of civil society, and the question of which spheres to include, is beyond the objectives of this text.
48. The full argument Keane (1998: xviii) uses in favour of civil society is “the impossibility, especially in the era of computerised networks of communication media, of nurturing ‘freedom of communication’ without a plurality of variously seized non-state communications media”.
49. For a brief genealogy of the concept, see Hintz (2009).
50. Reality TV, of course, overlaps with the game show genre.
51. The presence of this component on Munson’s list is debatable and is not discussed here.
52. Dahlgren (1995: 63) calls these journalists “opinion celebrities”.
53. This distinction is related to the Lefebvrian distinction between the ordinary and ordinariness (see chapter 3).

54. This part of the book focuses on so-called internet studies or web studies (Gauntlett, 2004; Silver, 2004), in the full realization that the 'new media' label captures more technologies than the internet.
55. In the case of new media participation, this is in part compensated for by the attention to the 'lurker' in online communities, but the pejorative sound of this concept might be more an indication of a problem than a solution.
56. In new media theory, the emancipatory and manipulative approaches are not frequently used. Especially the related distinction between utopian and dystopian approaches has come to replace it. This utopian/dystopian distinction is not used extensively in this book because the articulation of the dystopia concept in new media theory has led to the conflation of the technology-as-regression-and-threat discourse with more critical approaches towards the societal role of technology.
57. See London (1995) for a later analysis of teledemocracy.
58. Using web 2.0 as a time-delineating concept has a problematic side. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 2000s, web 2.0 became a nodal point of new media discourses on democracy, which legitimizes its use. However, the label 'web 2.0 period' is used in a broad sense, referring to new media discourses on democracy that were articulated from the 1990s onwards.
59. For a fascinating example of government use of performance activism, see Singhal and Greiner (2008).
60. See <http://theyesmen.org/hijinks?page=1>.
61. Such as User Created Content (UCC) and Consumer Generated Media (CGM – see, e.g., the Japanese 2006 *White Paper* (2006: 18) from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications).
62. A grey-zone example is YouTube.
63. An art project that parodies this structural imbalance is 'Google will eat itself' (GWEI) (<http://gwei.org/index.php>). The idea is to serve Google text advertisements through a network of hidden websites, and to use the money generated to buy Google shares. After an estimated 200 million years, GWEI will owe Google, and promises to hand over the share to GTTP Ltd. (Google To The People Ltd.), which will then return the shares to the users.
64. This is also not uncommon with community and alternative media organizations.
65. See Carpentier (2007b) for an earlier version of the AIP model.
66. I do not want to claim that power plays no role in interactionist theory, but power and especially decision-making processes do not feature as prominently as they do in the democratic-participatory theories that provide the basis for this book.
67. In order not to do too much injustice to history: Samuel Beckett wrote these often-quoted sentences in relation to art and not democracy unrealized.



Chapter 2

Keyword - Power



1. A conceptual introduction

1.1 *Participation, power and control*

The complex dynamics of power have generated a long history of theoretical elaborations, which it is impossible to summarize within the scope of this book. Despite this disclaimer, however, the importance attributed to power in the debates on participation makes it necessary to briefly sketch some key elements of these theoretical elaborations. The starting point is two basic models of power, namely the causal and the strategic model. The causal model goes back to Weber's (1947: 152) definition of power (and before), which he saw as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests". The (traditional) Marxist model uses a similar definition of power that focuses on the dominance of the bourgeoisie as the owners of the means of production. Also, Dahl (1969: 80) refers to a linear-causal model of power in defining power as a situation where "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do". Subsequent additions to the causal model of power distinguish different levels, claiming that power intervenes not only in decisions, but also in non-decisions and the logic of no decision. Barach and Baratz (1970: 7) added the second layer to the discussion when they said that "power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are relatively innocuous to A". The third layer was added by Lukes (1974), in pointing to more latent conflicts and emphasizing the role of power in them.

The strategic model of power, which plays a substantial role in this chapter, was developed by post-structuralists such as Foucault who pointed out that in the traditional interpretation, power is often approached negatively. In his two major works of the 1970s – *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and the first part of *History of Sexuality*¹ (1978) – Foucault rejects this exclusively restrictive meaning of power, and defines power as productive, as "a general matrix of force relations at a given time, in a given society" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 186). It is this approach to power as productive that brought Foucault to a strategic model of power, since he saw power relations as mobile and multidirectional: Power

is practiced and not possessed (Kendall and Wickham, 1999: 50). This multiplicity of power relations also detaches the outcome of the power play from the actors' intentions. As Foucault (1978: 95) put it in his *History of Sexuality*, power relations are "intentional and non-subjective", which he later explains as follows: "people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does" (Foucault quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 187).

Foucault (1978: 94) also stresses explicitly that power relations are non-egalitarian, although domination should not be considered to be the essence of power. Simultaneously, resistance to power is considered to be part of the exercise of power (Kendall and Wickham, 1999: 50). As Hunt and Wickham (1994: 83) argue, "Power and resistance are together the governance machine of society, but only in the sense that together they contribute to the truism that 'things never quite work,' not in the conspiratorial sense that resistance serves to make power work perfectly". As no actor, however privileged, can exercise full and total control over the social, and more dominant positions will often generate resistance, the Foucauldian model presents us with a multitude of strategies that form a complex power-game. The analysis of the workings of power in this approach is enriched by adding Giddens's (1979: 91) dialectics of control, in which he distinguishes between the transformative capacity of power – treating power in terms of the conduct of agents, exercising their free will – on the one hand, and domination – treating power as a structural quality – on the other. The restrictive component aligns itself quite nicely with Foucault's recognition that power relations can be unbalanced, while the generative component refers to the objectives and achievements of the strategies on which Foucault builds his analytics of power. Resistance intervenes in both the generative and the restrictive component, and thus can be considered the third component of this power model. Figure 1 depicts the interaction between the generative, restrictive and resistant

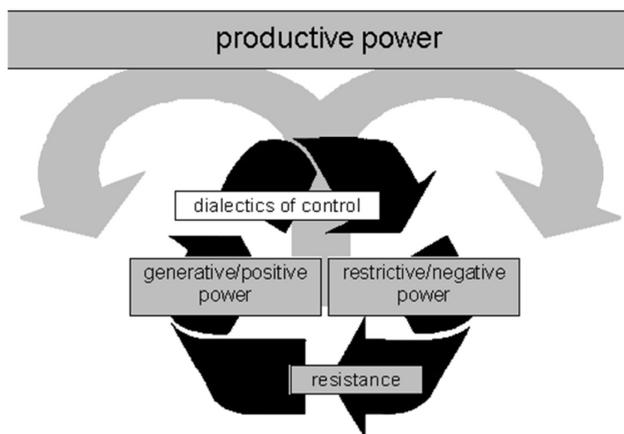


Figure 1: The dialectics of power.

power aspects as the building blocks of the productivity of power.² Through the dialectics of control, the different strategies of different actors produce specific (temporally) stable outcomes, which can be seen as the end result or overall effect of the interaction(s) between those strategies and actors. The emphasis on the overall effect that supersedes individual strategies (and agencies) allows Foucault to foreground the productive aspects of power and to claim that power is inherently neither positive nor negative (Hollway, 1984: 237).

1.2 Power, materiality and ideology

The difference between strategic and causal models of power is mainly based at the theoretical (power) level, and clearly is not the only way to categorize the omnipresent workings of power. One other (but crucial) way to theorize power is to incorporate its object(s), because power can (be intended to) affect many different realms of the social. Here, it is helpful to use the concepts of idealism and materialism as the main structuring categories to look at power's objects, because these two concepts allow me to distinguish discursive from material power.

Discursive power (obviously) functions within the world of ideas and has a close connection to the notions of representation, ideology and hegemony. Although language is an important carrier of discourse, the concept discourse is situated here at the more abstract and macro-level, following authors such as Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe. If we turn to an early Foucauldian model (such as is developed in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*³) we find a strong emphasis on the role (and power) of discursive formations in constructing and producing their objects. For instance, when Foucault talks about madness in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, he claims that

mental illness was constituted by all that was said in all the statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its various correlations, judged it, and possibly gave it speech by articulating, in its name, discourses that were to be taken as its own (Foucault, 2002: 35).

Althusser makes a similar argument, although he prefers the concept of ideology to theorize the importance of the ideal for the social. Here, ideology has discursive power as a “representation of the world” that “relates men and women to their conditions of existence, and to each other, in the division of their tasks and the equality and inequality of their lot” (Althusser, 1990: 25). Through the logics of interpellation, ideology offers over-determined frameworks of knowledge that allow subjects (actively) to make sense of the social while, at the same time, pre-structuring the social and excluding other frameworks.

Later, authors such as Hall (1997b) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) (re)used the concepts of representation and discourse to emphasize the importance of meaning

in accessing the social. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) stress the importance (and power) of discourse to generate meaning, where discourse is defined as “a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed” (Laclau, 1988: 254). Hall, (1997b), when emphasizing representational practices grounded in language, stresses the necessity of representations to interpret the world meaningfully, but he (more than Laclau and Mouffe do (1985)) also explicitly links the concept of representation to the subject, and how individuals (and mainly their egos – to use a Freudian concept) negotiate their individuality and subjectivity by using these discursive structures (or subject positions), provided to them by the cultures that surround them, without losing their freedom and independence. These approaches (in contrast to the Foucault of the 1960s, but in accordance with his later work) move away from structuralism and allow for the introduction of more human agency. They provide the space for more contingency. Through these re-articulations, discursive power becomes less anonymous as different actors are seen to actively develop strategies in their attempts to fix reality, which, in turn, generates counter-strategies and counter-ideologies. Societal contingency, then, becomes both the consequence and the condition of possibility of this discursive struggle to represent the social. The never-ending struggle to fix reality structurally unsettles any attempt to provide reality’s ultimate and universal fixation. And, at the same time, the struggle itself is conditioned by the impossibility of fixating reality.

In including especially Gramsci’s work (hegemony being the most obvious concept), these re-articulations provide a political-ideological support structure for the concept of discursive power. Gramsci (1999: 261) originally defined this notion to refer to the formation of consent rather than to the (exclusive) domination of the other, without however excluding a certain form of pressure and repression. Howarth (1998: 279) describes Laclau and Mouffe’s interpretation of the concept as follows: “Hegemonic practices are an exemplary form of political articulation which involves linking together different identities into a common project”. This is not to imply that counter-hegemonic articulations are impossible and that hegemony is total (Sayyid and Zac, 1998: 262). As Mouffe (2005: 18) formulated it, “Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, i.e. practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install other forms of hegemony”.

The ambition of these hegemonic projects is to become a social imaginary, defined by Laclau (1990: 64) as “a horizon: it is not one among other objects but an absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility and is thus the condition of possibility of the emergence of any object”. The strength of these social imaginaries is based on what Stavrakakis (1999: 96) calls “an ethics of harmony,” a desire for reality to be coherent and harmonious that is always frustrated and unattainable because of the contingency of the social. Using the psycho-analytical vocabulary, we can say that social imaginaries are fantasies that enable an overcoming of the lack generated by the contingency of the social and the structural impossibility of attaining reality (or the Real, as Lacan would have it). In Lacanian psycho-analytic theory, fantasy is conceptualized as having (among other

functions) a protective role (Lacan, 1979: 41). In providing the subject with (imaginary) frames that attempt to conceal and finally to overcome the lack (Lacan, 1994: 119–120), fantasy functions as “the support that gives consistency to what we call ‘reality’” (Žižek, 1989: 44). Subjects “push away reality in fantasy” (Lacan, 1999: 107); in order to make the reality (imaginary) consistent, social imaginaries are produced, accepted and then taken for granted.

Although these more recent theorizations of discursive power do not ignore the importance of the material, they remain (to different degrees) embedded within an idealist framework. A more materialist framework yields a different perspective, focusing on the exercise of power over and through material objects and bodies, which I call here material power. In his work in the 1970s,⁴ and especially in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault strongly advocates looking at how (disciplinary) power works upon bodies. He distinguishes four components to the way that bodies are turned into “docile [*bodies*]” that “may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (Foucault, 1977: 136). First, the body is stripped of its signifying dimensions, turning the subject into an object. The body is further divided into units, each subjected to detailed training, while the spaces in which the bodies are located are carefully managed. Finally, the application of control over bodies is consistent and continuous, not sporadic. Obviously, although power can (quite easily) become domination, for Foucault, there is still space for reciprocity in power relations and for resistance to unequal power relations.

Without claiming that all bodies are permanently subjected to ‘total institutions’ (*à la* Goffman (1961)), we can still bear witness to the presence of ideological and repressive state apparatuses (in the Althusserian sense), which exercise power in relation to individuals and organizations. Through the monopoly of violence, states, at all times, can surveil, control and discipline the bodies of their citizens, for instance, through penal systems. But as the governmentality school argues (Burchell et al., 1991; Barry et al., 1996; Rose, 1999), the subjection of bodies to power is organized not only by the state, but by a wide variety of aligned organizations. Because the mechanism of governmentality is based on management through freedom, individual freedom plays a key role in its functioning. In his essay *Subject and Power*, written in the early 1980s, Foucault states that power is “exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments might be realized” (Foucault, 1983: 221). A significant example of this can be found in the field of employment where large numbers of people happily surrender part of their freedom in order to function within hierarchically structured organizations, to allow their bodies to perform specified tasks that serve aims not necessarily aligned to their own. Again, it is crucial to remark that these types of the exercise of power are always characterized by a unique and specific combination of structural constraints and agency-related opportunities, and that these strategies always allow for tactics (de Certeau, 1984) to resist the strategies. Like discursive power, body-related material power remains incorporated

in struggle and conflict, and bodies maintain a degree of autonomy to enter into power practices themselves.

Next to body-related material power, we can distinguish object-related material power. Although this distinction runs the risk of anthropocentrism (see below), humans can still exert control over a wide variety of objects (or resources) that incorporate varying degrees of technicity, complexity and human intervention. This category ranges from basic material objects and (proto-)machines to complex configurations of objects (such as the assets of a company). A crucial concept to negotiate the relationships between humans and objects is ownership. This concept creates the framework for generating individuated and privileged connections between (groups of) individuals and (clusters of) objects. Renner (1949: 73) argues:

Whatever the social system, disposal of all goods that have been seized and assimilated must be regulated by the social order as the rights of persons over material objects. [...] The legal institutions which effect this regulation, subject the world of matter bit by bit to the will of singled-out individuals since the community exists only through its individual members. These legal institutions endow the individuals with detention so that they may dispose of the objects and possess them.

But the concept of property has more levels of complexity. As Pels (1998: 20) says, there are differences, for instance, between physical possession and enforceable claims, and between borders that are easily passable or relatively obstructed. Moreover, he points to the diversity encapsulated within the concept of the owner, which may be “individuals, kinship groups, cliques, corporations, states, or supranational bodies” (Pels, 1998: 20). As Wilpert (1991) argues, a legal basis is important to support the concept of ownership, but in the absence of a legal framework, even perceived property – what Wilpert calls psychological property (see above) – can generate this type of connection between individuals and objects. The same diversity applies to the object, which may be “tangible or intangible, separable or non-separable from the person. Property can embrace the object in its entirety, or can be divided into a scatter of partial rights” (Pels, 1998: 20).

There is a long tradition of critique that rejects the productive capacity of property and points to its exploitative characteristics. Not only Marxism, but also classic anarchist theory, for instance, is “critical of private property to the extent that it was a source of hierarchy and privilege” (Jennings, 1999: 136). Although some caution is needed: Even Proudhon’s (2008) already-mentioned dictum – ‘property is theft’ – was used for a specific context. Still, together with Marx and Proudhon, numerous authors, for instance in the field of political economy, have criticized the impact of object-related material power on (equality in) society.

These – sometimes critical, sometimes neo-liberal – reflections do confirm the power relationship between humanity and the world of material objects, where in some cases the impact of that relationship on the social is scrutinized. At the same time, I want to be

careful not to presume too strong an anthropomorphic bias in the power relationships between humans and objects. For instance, actor network theory (ANT) makes a strong claim as to the agency of objects. As Latour (2005: 73) puts it, “objects are nowhere to be said and everywhere to be felt”. ANT’s claim is that objects should be integrated into the study of (power relations in) the social, first of all because materiality is an integrated and crucial component of the social: “When power is exerted for good, it is because it is not made of social ties; when it has to relate only on social ties, it is not exerted for long” (Latour, 2005: 66). But more importantly in this context, objects enter into co-determining relationships with humans; after all “*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor” (Latour, 2005: 71 – emphasis in original). Through the connections with humans, objects can become mediators and/or intermediaries and become implicated in the exercise of power.

The model in Figure 2 shows the relationships between the four basic components (disregarding the many synergies between the different spheres, and more complicated societal structures). But we should keep in mind that the distinctions between discursive power, body-related material power and object-related material power are, at the same time, analytical, since they are found in the social only in an integrated and intertwined form. Here, we can return to Foucault (1980: 30) and his argument that power “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (Foucault, 1980: 30). Power is all-pervasive and continuously manifests itself at the micro-levels of society through interlocking processes of discursive power, body-related material power and object-related material power.

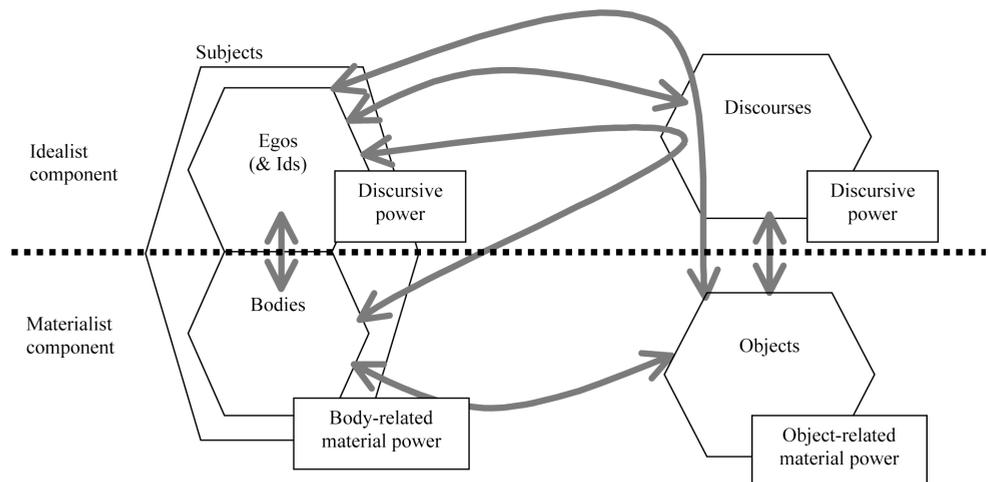


Figure 2: An object-based model of power.

1.3 Participation and power in the media sphere

Like the general debates on power, the debates on media power are similarly vast, and this chapter has no ambition to provide a complete overview of the literature on this matter. Moreover, these debates on media power are characterized by strong, paradigmatically driven disagreements, but so far the search for media effects – the ‘holy grail’ of communication and media studies (Watson, 2003: 61) – has yet to provide us with satisfactory answers. As Gauntlett (1998) argues in his essay *Ten Things Wrong with the ‘Effects Model’*, the absence of straightforward answers might be related more to the questions being asked than to our capacity to answer them. The theoretical reflections on (strategic) power illustrate the complexity of the dynamics of power, where power relations are mobile and multidirectional, and where resistance remains always a possibility, even against hegemonic articulations. This argument is strengthened further by theoretical reflections on the active audience, as the interactions with media content show that the discursive powers of the content should not necessarily be privileged over the audience’s capacity to interpret it. Also, the media sphere itself is characterized by a considerable diversity of media organizations, often producing contradictory discourses on a wide variety of issues. Finally, we should keep in mind especially that the media sphere and its audiences cannot be seen in isolation from (the rest of) the social. The media sphere cannot be considered the magical fountain of discursive origins, which produces the original discourses that then are distributed throughout the social. On the contrary, the media sphere is an inseparable part of the social, interacts with many already-existing discourses, and competes with many other discursive machineries (see below).

This plea for acknowledgement of the complexity of ‘the’ media sphere does not underestimate its discursive power. But the discursive power of the media sphere always needs to be qualified since it is very much dependent on a discursive alignment, in which a mediated statement becomes recognized and accepted (for instance, as truthful) by audience members through its alignment with the context provided by a multiplicity of other discourses, often originating from multiple discursive machineries. One illustration of the importance of this type of alignment can be found in Bourdieu’s (1991: 170) work on the symbolic, when he writes, “What creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them. And words alone cannot create this belief”. These logics of discursive alignment imply that mediated representations are embedded in the social context and are part of an incessant generation of statements at all possible levels of social life.

This implies also that the capacity of the media sphere to act as a legitimate discursive machinery needs to be constructed and reproduced. Couldry (2003) formulates this as follows: “Media power is reproduced through the details of what social actors (including audience members) do and say”. Couldry’s work on media power points to the role that

media organizations play in constructing their own centrality, through processes of framing, ordering, naming, spacing and imagining (see Couldry (2003: 178) for a brief summary). At the same time, this is not merely a media strategy, as the myth of media centrality feeds on the societal tendency (or fantasy) to attribute large ‘quantities’ of power to specific organizational systems. The clear attribution of one location of power – in an era where power has become utterly multidirectional, where there is no privileged seat of power left, and where multiple elites sometimes interlock and sometimes compete – remains a powerful fantasy that sometimes takes on the character of a fetish, further rendering the actual workings of power invisible.

When focusing more on media participation, the link between participation through the media and the media power discussion (as sketched above) is reasonably obvious. The media sphere is one that allows citizens to participate in public debates and to deploy their discursive powers by voicing their views. Through the media sphere, citizens can use their generative powers to become part of the societal decision-making processes, or to resist them. At the same time, societal decision-making processes have many inbuilt restrictions. At the material level, this includes the unbalanced control over a variety of objects (in the broad sense, as discussed above): Societal resources are not evenly distributed, and the control over the diverse discursive machineries is equally unbalanced, as instanced by the differences generated by media ownership. At the discursive level, restrictions can be generated by the privileged access of some voices (e.g., members of the political elites to mainstream news), which implies lack of access for others. But, again, resistance always remains a possibility, and many different voices can be heard through the channels of alternative media and new media. Even within the mainstream media, non-elite and non-hegemonic voices do manage to sneak in, and generate interventions in public debate.

However, the participation-in-the-media component opens up a different approach to media power. Here, we are entering more into the realm of the micro-analytics of power, and how power relations are played out in the specific locations of the broadcasting studio, the newsroom, but also management boardrooms. The notion of co-decision-making here becomes (even) more clearly articulated, because participation refers to the sharing of power to mobilize the objects and bodies that are involved in the media production process, to generate media discourses, and to decide on the management of the actual media organization. But as object-related power, and more specifically, control over the media organizations, is highly unbalanced at the macro- and the micro-levels of, especially, the mainstream media, participants face severe forms of restrictive power. As Street (2001: 235) formulates it, “The routines and cultures of media, their commercial and structural interests, all operate to determine the opportunities for access to [*and participation in*] the airwaves and newspaper columns”. In many cases, participants’ opportunities to express themselves are limited by a wide variety of thresholds, created, for instance, by the specific managerial interventions of media professionals. Moreover, non-media elites are faced with their limited ability to intervene in the management of

(mainstream) media organizations. But, here too, resistance can be exercised to cope with these restrictions, especially at the level of self-expression. Within the dialectics of control, one other angle deserves brief mention: That also participants can restrict others' participatory attempts.

In this context, the maximalist and minimalist dimension plays a crucial role, whether this participatory process takes place in the sphere of participation through the media or in the sphere of participation in the media. The maximalist forms of media participation, where control and participation become balanced, where participation is multidirectional and incorporated within a broad definition of the political, imply also a balance between the ability to deploy generative and resistant powers, and the confrontation with the restrictive powers deployed by others, at the levels of discursive power, body-related material power and object-related material power. In minimalist forms of media participation, on the other hand, we can find a strong focus on media professional control, a reduction of participation to access and interaction, and the utilization of participation to serve the interests of the media organization that organizes the participatory process. Obviously, these maximalist and minimalist forms are part of a dimension, and as the two case studies exemplify, many in-between positions remain a possibility.

2. Case 1: Management in the north Belgian audience discussion programme *Jan Publiek*

2.1 Introduction

*Jan Publiek*⁵ is a north Belgian (or Flemish)⁶ talk show that was put out by the public broadcaster BRTN/VRT⁷ at the end of the 1990s, and comprised a panel of twenty ordinary people who played a leading role. In each of a fixed number of sixteen episodes,⁸ the same participants, ten ordinary women and ten ordinary men, were granted access to a prime-time, live⁹ television programme, to discuss one specific issue. This feature positions *Jan Publiek* among the subformat of the audience discussion programmes (discussed in chapter 1). From a different angle, and despite the fame of the host, *Jan Publiek* can be described as an issue-type talk show, based on group discussion (Carbaugh, 1988), and not a personality-type talk show, focusing on 'show business chitchat' (Steenland, 1990). Although the programme is now quite old, it was (and still is) considered the flagship of audience participation on north Belgian television and incorporates all the power dynamics characteristic of mainstream television audience discussion programmes, making it a relevant case study for this book. The major questions here become how the different power relations function, and how within the dialectics of control, voices¹⁰ are managed, power is shared and unequal power relations are resisted. The overarching question is what kind of maximalist or minimalist discourse on mediated participation this combination of power and resistance eventually produces.

2.2 A brief note on method

The data¹¹ discussed here focus on the second series of *Jan Publiek*, broadcast between September and December 1997 on the north Belgian public television channel BRTN. A specific software package (ISI's Profile Timer[®], or PRT) was used to facilitate content analysis of the sixteen programmes in the series and to visualize the findings (for the researchers). The content analysis was conducted in two phases: First, the broadcasts were semi-automatically timed and the Dutch text was transcribed.¹² Data correction was implemented using a PRT-algorithm (called 'matching') that linked and compared actual timings with the estimated speaking times for the transcription. In a second phase the transcription was used for further quantitative content analysis, based on seven different coding systems.¹³ The results of the content analysis were subsequently fed back into the PRT software, and exported to statistical software for further analysis. Quantitative content analysis of the sixteen episodes was complemented by parallel, qualitative content analysis (based on Maso's (1989) and Wester's (1987, 1995) methodological approach, which supports the entire book) to provide more detailed results, which were further supplemented by the results of qualitative analysis of interviews with nine members of the production team¹⁴ and the twenty panel members.¹⁵

2.3 Power relations in Jan Publiek

In *Jan Publiek*, a selected group of ordinary people is allowed to gain access, exercise their discursive powers and be seen and heard to do so by members of the audience at home. The selected participants are seen as agents, and generate statements on the topics being discussed in the programme. They, the programme's host, the production team, the technical crew and other guests generate a broadcast, where a specific issue is being discussed and different opinions are being aired/screened. The participation of these ordinary people in the television programme, and their presence in the media sphere, is managed by the production team, who have specific objectives, define themselves as owners of the means of production and are familiar with the rules of practice within the media sphere. While the participants are empowered by the same production team that is granting them access to perform in a television programme, these ordinary people are simultaneously confronted with different forms of domination, authority, control, management of voices, and confessional and disciplinary technologies. They will resist this domination, thereby continuing and deepening the dialectics of control, which will result in a negotiated level of participation, a certain distribution of decision-making powers and a certain access to the available resources.

This negotiation will eventually result in a (local) overall effect: the production of discourses, both on (and related to) the issue being discussed, and on the participation of ordinary people. In *Jan Publiek*, ordinary people are seen on television to take part

in a process that is usually restricted to members of different elites, including media professionals. They are seen and heard discussing their views with other ordinary people and with members of certain elites, often inverting the lay–expert relation, “repudiating criticisms of the ordinary person as incompetent or ignorant and asserting the worth of the ‘common [wo]man’” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1996: 102). For this reason, Livingstone and Lunt (1996: 101) poetically call audience discussion programmes “a celebration of ordinary experience”. But the participants are also seen being subjected to management, confessional and disciplinary technologies, and resisting those negative/restrictive aspects of power. The analysis of *Jan Publiek* focuses on the different forms of management and the presence of confessional and disciplinary technologies, combined with the resistance provoked by these aspects of power. To analyse these different forms of management and resistance, a distinction is introduced between the pre- and post-broadcasting phases on the one hand and the broadcasting phase on the other. Although this case study may not seem to do justice to the generative aspects of power, it should be remembered that the different agents gain access to a broadcast and are able to enter into a generational process of “co-creation in which the producers, panelists and audience partake” (Dixon and Spee, 2003: 420; see also Dixon, 2009). The large number of statements from panel members in the sixteen broadcasts (see Figure 3) is clear evidence of the presence of generative power.

2.4 Management of and futile resistance by panel members in the pre- and post-broadcasting phases of Jan Publiek

In the pre-broadcasting phase, the production team is firmly in control. Before the series is broadcast, they have decided about the concept (in agreement with the network management and without any involvement of the yet to be selected panel members). In the preparatory phase, the panel of twenty ordinary people who will feature in the sixteen consecutive programmes is selected by the production team based on criteria they established themselves. The production team’s control over the media environment and its objects is accompanied by control over which bodies will be allowed to enter the television studio. As they want the panel to be representative of north Belgian society and to respect its diversity, they focus mainly on traditional socio-demographic criteria (with specific attention to the presence of two people with allochthonous origins and equal numbers of men and women), and (to a lesser degree) on the participants’ political orientations and personalities. The production team also requires that each panel member is eloquent and quick thinking, speaks clearly, has clear-cut opinions and is not fixated on particular topics. Following selection, the panel members receive some training (on media and debating techniques and in the use of the audio-visual technology) and are provided with some information. Before the first of the sixteen broadcasts, they are asked to participate in a test broadcast, which consists of a technical briefing – explaining to

the new panel the functioning of microphones and cameras – and a résumé of the house-rules, which links the briefing to the production team's managerial strategy. The house-rules are reiterated in various correspondences to panel members from the programme's executive editor and its host:

It is impossible for Jan [*the host*] to give the floor to everyone at the same time. The possibility exists that you didn't get the opportunity to say something about a particular subtopic. Avoid coming back to something that has been said before. [...] If you react, react to the topic that is being discussed at that moment. (Letter from Jean Philip De Tender, Executive Editor, to the panel members, 18 September 1997)

Prior to each broadcast, and without consulting the panel members, the chosen topic is divided by the production team into subtopics that allow a specific approach to the general topic, thus pre-structuring (or 'framing' as Leurdijk (1997) describes it) the entire debate. In addition to the panel of twenty ordinary people, the production team invites four (more or less) famous Flemish people (in Dutch abbreviated to 'BVs') to participate. Several other guests (experts and 'experience experts'¹⁶) are included. The topic of each broadcast is revealed to the panel members in a short telephone call or via fax from the production assistant one or two days before the day of the broadcast. No information about the structure of the broadcast, the subtopics or the guests is given to panel members. They are encouraged not to read or reflect on the topic, and are asked not to discuss it with other panel members, and especially not in the hours immediately before the broadcast, when they are in the VIP bar, having dinner, or waiting to have their make-up done. On the evening of the broadcast the production assistant is charged with receiving panel members in line with the production team's policy not to speak with them before the broadcast.

The production team legitimizes the lack of training and information given to panel members by stressing the importance of spontaneity, which, in their view, increases the level of reality and authenticity. They also argue that training and information might influence the panel members' abilities or opinions:

They are 20 people chosen from the audience, and that is their strongest point. And you should keep that strongest point, you shouldn't start to mould them, you shouldn't model them, as you do with a host, or counsel them, as you would counsel an expert because he [*or she*] has a specific function. Their function was to be themselves. It was important to have [...] them play the same role. (Jean Philip De Tender, Executive Editor, 4 December 1998 interview)

The lack of communication before the broadcast severely limits the possibilities for panel members to resist the production team's management; they have two options – to come unprepared or to decline the invitation to participate. Some panel members did study on

some of the topics, ignoring one of the elementary house-rules, but were discouraged by fellow panel members and by members of the production team from repeating this. Two panel members considered their contribution too limited and had considered quitting the programme, but in fact did not. One panel member left the television studio before the final (live) broadcast started, but the other members of the panel contacted him on his mobile phone and persuaded him to return to the studio: He arrived just in time for the start of the broadcast.

After the broadcast, panel members have greater opportunity to (try to) counter the production team's management when they met with the team in the green room. In these conversations they expressed some dissatisfaction and frustration with certain aspects of the programme, especially the lack of feedback (or evaluation) and the time constraints imposed upon their contributions. Some panel members tried (unsuccessfully) to suggest topics for future programmes. These conversations were usually described by the production team as 'complaining' or 'nagging', showing that even these subtle attempts to co-decide are seen as interference and not taken seriously. Moreover, the situation of panel members was described by the production team as deplorable, but unavoidable. The reluctance of the production team to contemplate what they saw as 'interference' is illustrated by comments made by the executive editor and the production assistant:

[*The panel members*] are an important instrument in the programme, but you should be able to continue using them as instruments, which means that you cannot afford to show your cards. They have strongly requested to be evaluated, to see whether they performed well or not. We did, but you shouldn't change them. (Jean Philip De Tender, Executive Editor, 4 December 1998 interview)

If you involve the panel, they'll soon take over the entire building. (Eva Vansteene, Production Assistant, 27 October 1998 interview)

2.5 Management in the broadcasting phase of Jan Publiek

During the broadcasting phase, the processes of control are more complex. The production team exercises its discursive control and its control over the bodies (voices) of the participants on two main planes. First, the host controls the process of turn-taking: He has the authority to grant or deny panel members permission to speak. In this he is supported by the director and the technical crew, who control key objects in the power play: the microphones and the cameras. This form of control is combined with a pre-prepared structure, which is not known to the panel members. Second, the host has the authority also to interview people.

The production team's control, of course, does not exclude the possibility that panel members will generate statements during the broadcast. Quantitative content analysis

of the sixteen *Jan Publiek* broadcasts shows that the panel members (as a group, and compared to the other groups of participants) occupied the largest part of the total speaking time: about 35 per cent (see Figure 3). Although the number of interventions by the host was noticeably higher (50 per cent of the total number of interventions), panel members were responsible for 27 per cent of the total interventions and their average speaking time per turn was considerably higher than the speaking time of the host: 10.1 compared to 3.5 seconds.

Figure 3: Interventions according to types of participant in the sixteen *Jan Publiek* episodes.

	<i>Number of interventions</i>		<i>Total speaking time</i>		<i>Average speaking time/turn</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std</i>
Host	4521	50	15889	22.5	3.5	6.5
Panel members	2446	27	24679	35	10.1	10.4
BVs	446	5	5454	8	12.2	11.7
Guests	1471	16	14470	20.5	9.8	11.6
Reportage	206	2	10079	14	48.9	65.6
Total	9090	100	70571	100	7.8	15.0

The presence of generative power does not eliminate the attempts of the production team to manage the participants. First, a programme is highly structured: The 70 minutes air time is allocated to subtopics, initiated by a pre-made reportage, a general question by the host to the panel or an interview with one of the guests. Panel members are asked not to make reference to earlier parts of the discussion, which means that they also contribute to this segmentation. This segmentation into a certain number of subtopics serves to eliminate other possible subtopics or angles. In his introduction the host proposes the topic and interviews a few of the panel members on their relationship to it. The core of the broadcast is formed by a series of subtopics, often with specific reportages and/or guests. In the final phase of the broadcast the host briefly thanks the participants and introduces the following week's topic.

The host – and the production team – knows the structure of the broadcast, and tries to keep the discussion within the bounds of the subtopics. In the fragment below, a panel member raises a new subtopic during the discussion of the private life of a north Belgian politician (Bert Anciaux). The panel member's comment is quickly cut off by the host, and another panel member (Fatiha) is given the floor.

Panel member Simone Goossens: [...] There's one thing I would like to ask for these women: don't look [...]

Host Jan Van Rompaey: Don't look down on them.

Panel member Simone Goossens: Don't look down on women who do the house-keeping and have children.

Host Jan Van Rompaey: Yes, but we are talking now about Bert [Anciaux] and later we will discuss all those other women. Fatiha?

(Broadcast 36¹⁷ – 11 December 1997 – Start: 11:13 – Stop 12:36)

Within the subtopics, the authority of the host is the second aspect of control: At a procedural level, panel members have to ask for permission to speak by raising their hand. Based on advice from the director of the programme (via an audio connection), the host decides who is allowed to speak, and who is not. This leads to a specific pattern of turn-taking (see Figure 4): Most panel members (and the BVs) explicitly solicit a first turn (79.3% of panel members' first interventions) and if permission is granted the panel member can make an intervention. The host can decide to respond to the panel member – asking for elaboration – or give someone else the floor. These second and third turns

Figure 4: Interventions of participants (host excluded) – Turn-taking and type of participant.

	<i>Panel</i>		<i>BVs</i>		<i>Experts¹⁸</i>		<i>Experience experts</i>	
<i>Gets a turn from the host and has solicited</i>								
Total	908	37%	167	37%	42	13%	89	8%
First intervention	900	99%	166	99%	41	98%	87	98%
Later interventions	8	1%	1	1%	1	2%	2	2%
<i>Gets a turn from the host and has not solicited</i>								
Total	1184	48%	228	51%	222	69%	797	73%
First intervention	114*	10%	38	17%	52	23%	156	20%
Later interventions	1070	90%	190	83%	170	77%	641	80%
<i>Gets a turn from a participant and has not solicited</i>								
Total	172	7%	23	5%	40	12%	118	11%
First intervention	15	9%	2	9%	7	18%	28	24%
Later interventions	157	91%	21	91%	33	82%	90	76%
<i>Takes a turn</i>								
Total	178	7%	28	6%	18	6%	83	8%
First intervention	106	60%	12	43%	14	78%	53	64%
Later interventions	72	40%	16	57%	4	22%	30	36%
<i>Type unknown</i>								
Total	4	0.5%	0	0%	2	1%	4	0.5%

* Mainly in the introductory phase of the broadcast.

are not solicited by the panel members, and the decision to ask for some elaboration is entirely the host's to make. It is only during the first introductory phase of the broadcast that the pattern is different, when the host selects a few panel members (without their soliciting a first turn) to question about their personal experience in relation to the topic of the broadcast.

The turn-taking pattern for guests (both experts and experience experts) is completely different. They rarely solicit for a turn (13% of expert interventions, 8% of experience experts' interventions). In their case, turns are initiated by the host without being solicited (respectively, 69% and 73% of interventions). Again, the decision is the host's to make. The host also decides when the next speaker gets a turn, which often means that the previous speaker is interrupted. The host legitimates any cutting off of comments by pointing to the time constraints and his desire to allow every guest and panel member to contribute at least once during a broadcast. Arguments therefore need to be "encapsulated into catch phrases" (Tomasulo, 1984: 10) – or according to the host of *Jan Publiek*:

We cannot give someone the floor for an entire minute. If you count the number of people who are present in the studio, and the minutes we have, the total speaking time, this leaves little time for the individuals. So, uh. What we do – what I do – is giving the floor to as many people as possible. This means that long statements are out of the question. (Jan Van Rompaey, Host, 30 November 1998 interview)

The favouring of clear-cut opinions – and the exclusion of knowledge acquisition through learning in its diverse forms, including discussion – leads to competition among panel members for opportunities to intervene. Panel members try to attract the host's attention using various non-verbal strategies, such as waving or clearly showing their (dis)agreement and emotional involvement. Although the production team stresses the importance of continuing where the previous speaker(s) has left off, these non-verbal strategies for attracting attention are difficult to reconcile with the notion of listening to the other participants. Thus, debate is often reduced to a succession of isolated statements, expressing approval or disapproval of a certain phenomenon. As panel members often focus on achieving at least one 'good intervention' per broadcast, opinions remain fragmented and can rarely be articulated. Without necessarily wanting to plead for the Habermasian ideal of a "rational discussion leading to a critical consensus" (Livingstone and Lunt, 1996: 160) in a talk show, it could be argued that a swift succession of isolated statements barely resembles any discussion at all.

The degree of fragmentation in the broadcasts can be analysed in two ways. First, the mere reference to (any of the) previous interventions of other speakers is taken into account: About half of the interventions of panel members (47%) are detached from the previous remark. The interventions of the guests are even more detached from previous interventions (56% of the expert interventions and 66% of the experience expert interventions).

Second, we can consider the immediate interaction among participants, which puts more emphasis on the continuation of a discussion between two or more participants. Figure 5 shows (again) that the majority of the inventions made by participants are not directly related to those of previous speakers, but that when participants do react to a previous comment, an unmediated reply to this reaction often does not materialize: 330 out of 593 multilevel reactions of all participants are level 1 reactions.

Figure 5: Interactions between the *Jan Publiek* participants.

	Participants		Panel members		BVs		Experts		Experience experts	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
No interaction	3370	86.41	2140	87.60	399	89.46	279	86.11	900	82.49
Level 1	330	7.56	163	6.67	30	6.73	26	8.02	106	9.72
Level 2	127	2.91	72	2.95	9	2.02	10	3.09	36	3.30
Level 3	51	1.17	22	0.90	2	0.45	5	1.54	21	1.92
Level 4	32	0.73	17	0.70	3	0.67	3	0.93	9	0.82
Level 5	18	0.41	7	0.29	1	0.22	1	0.31	8	0.73
Level 6	10	0.23	7	0.29	1	0.22	0	0.00	2	0.18
Level 7	7	0.16	3	0.12	1	0.22	0	0.00	3	0.27
Level 8	6	0.14	6	0.25	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Level 9	5	0.11	2	0.08	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	0.27
Level 10	3	0.07	2	0.08	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.09
Level 11	3	0.07	2	0.08	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.09
Level 12	1	0.02	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.09
Total	4363	100.00	2443	100.00	446	100.00	324	100.00	1091	100.00

The authority of the host is not limited to his procedural-level function as moderator, deciding on who gets a turn to speak or not. Figure 6 shows that the host of an audience debating programme can take on different roles, depending on the degree to which they intervene at content and at procedural level.

Figure 6: Possible roles of the host in an audience discussion programme.

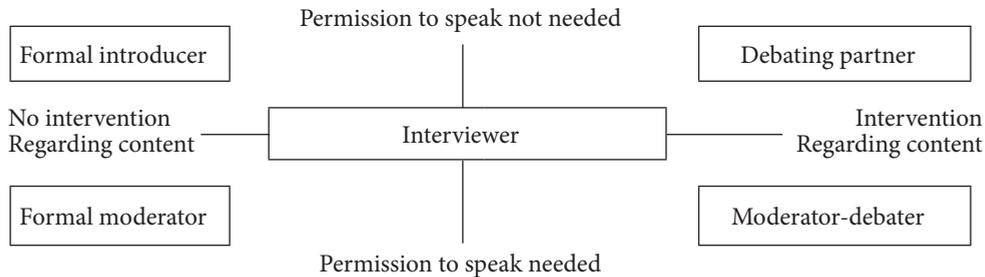


Figure 7¹⁹ shows that the host's role as formal moderator is far less important than his interviewer role, which involves his questioning both the invited guests and the panel members either in response to their expressed desire to intervene or as a result of his decision to solicit for more information. For example, the host can decide to change the format and start a small-scale interview, often related to an interviewee's personal experience or personal situation.

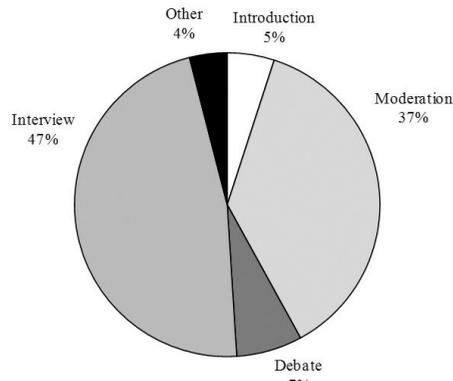


Figure 7: Host's interventions.

If the host's interventions (especially his moderation and interviewing interventions) are related to the person they are addressed to,²⁰ then it is clear that he is preferring interviewing to moderating. When the host addresses a panel member, the moderating/interviewing-type intervention is more balanced, but his interviewing role remains evident (see Figure 8).

As the rules of practice of interviews seem quite clear – a question followed by a response – interviewees tend to be very open in their responses to the interviewer's questions. This openness is supported by the (abstract) assurance of the production

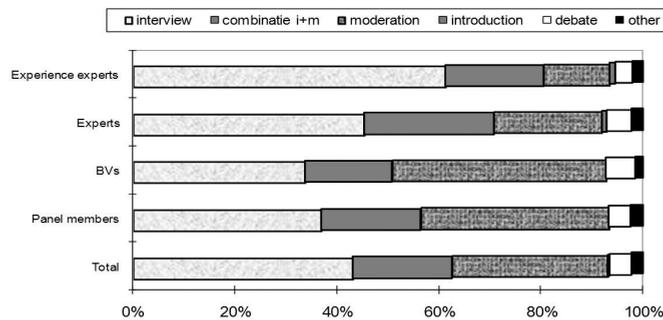


Figure 8: Types of intervention by the host in relation to type of participant.

team that the interviewee's privacy will not be violated. In practice, this means first that the production team will ensure that the questions posed are not too intrusive or sensitive. Second, interviewees can choose whether or not to respond to a question. The situation in which the host interrogates a participant and clarifies a statement resembles a situation of pastoral authority, in particular, because it is assumed that participants are being truthful in their answers about themselves, their experiences, their emotions and their personalities. In the first part of *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that one of the strategies of power is self-examination (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 175). The need, in particular, for experts to interpret and/or to clarify the statements resulting from such self-examination enmeshes us in relations of power with those who claim to be able (or to be helping) to extract the truth from these statements. The role of the host then could be seen (partially) as one of a guide (Karskens, 1986: 154) searching for the 'real' opinions and lives of the participants. In his role of guide, the host is able to use confessional strategies.

2.6 Resistance to management in the broadcasting phase of Jan Publiek

The discursive and material power of the host in his roles of moderator and interviewer is resisted repeatedly. At the procedural level, the host finds it difficult to impose his pre-prepared structure, especially in terms of deciding when a new subtopic has – in his opinion – to be launched. There is also resistance when the authority of the host concerning the turn-taking is contested: On several occasions, people started speaking without asking for or being granted permission. The host also faces resistance when he interrupts panel members in order to give others a turn: In some cases they simply continued to speak, or protested at being interrupted, as the example below shows.

Panel member Gorik Pinkhof: [...] But another problem that occurs as well, is what happens when one of them earns a lot of money. The choice they are confronted with is: who's going to stay at home?

Host Jan Van Rompaey: Bruno [*a househusband*], were you the one that [...]

Panel member Gorik Pinkhof: Wait, let me finish

Host Jan Van Rompaey: Yes, but I'm going to ask Bruno first. Which one of the two earned more? I mean, if you still have to [...]

Guest Bruno: Now you mean?

Host Jan Van Rompaey: No no, now it's your wife, but at the time?

Guest Bruno: At the time I think it was my wife, yes.

Host Jan Van Rompaey: Your wife, ok, yes. Gorik, you can continue.

(Broadcast 36 – 11 December 1997 – Start: 30:11 – Stop 31:21)

The role of the host as interviewer is also contested. Some panel members became expert at ignoring questions from the host and not losing their turn. There were instances of panel members trying to question the guests, which meant that the panel member (not the host) was giving someone else (usually a guest or a BV) a turn, taking on part of the host's moderator role. By directly addressing another participant they, and not the host, decide that the guest or BV should make a statement. Panel members sometimes succeeded in asking direct questions, thus completely undermining the role of the interviewer; however, more often such behaviour was resisted by the host, who was not willing to yield authority. Some situations were resolved through the panel member asking permission to put a question, or the host echoing the panel member's question, as illustrated in this fragment.

Panel member Misjel Vossen: [...] I would like to ask Bert [*Anciaux*], do you still find some time for yourself?

Host Jan Van Rompaey: Bert, do you still find some time for yourself?

Panel member Misjel Vossen: I think that's important as well.

Host Jan Van Rompaey: That's important as well, says Misjel. Tough question.

Bert Anciaux: [...]

(Broadcast 36 – 11 December 1997 – Start: 12:36 – Stop: 13:10)

Figure 9 provides an overview of the most frequently used forms of resistance. It shows that interrupting the host, taking turns and giving other participants a turn are frequent devices, as is not being deterred by an attempt to interrupt. The stronger forms of resistance (such as protesting) are less frequent.

Figure 9: Most frequently used resistance strategies.

<i>Type (selection)</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Giving other participants a turn	356	8.20
Interrupting the host	352	8.10
Taking a turn	311	7.10
Continuing despite an attempted interruption	155	3.60
Posing a question	54	1.20
Protesting against the host's interruption	32	0.70
Other types of explicit criticism	22	0.50
Ignoring other instructions from the host	21	0.50
Protesting against the questions of the host	17	0.40
Explicit criticism of the subtopics/reportages	15	0.30
Refusing to answer a new question (but continuing)	14	0.30
Total number of interventions	4363	100.00

2.7 Conclusion

The discourse on participation produced as a result of the dialectics of control strongly foregrounds the importance of the presence of ordinary people in the media sphere. During the 70-minute live *Jan Publiek* programmes broadcast on primetime television, ordinary people were enabled to generate statements on specific topics and air their opinions to a large audience. Panel members often talked about personal experiences, connoting that lay knowledge based on personal experience is worth talking about on television. Also, their prolonged media presence prevented such statements from being reduced to mere narrations of very specific authentic experience, and showed that ordinary people have opinions on a diversity of issues.

In *Jan Publiek*, panel members are placed in a relative egalitarian position towards members of different elites, and are seen discussing the topics with politicians and experts, sometimes even interviewing them and questioning their opinions. From this point of view, *Jan Publiek* does produce a participatory discourse involving ordinary people because these people are positioned in power relations towards the programme guests, which are at least egalitarian, but sometimes even unequal – to the advantage of the panel members (and thus the opposite of ‘real’ life). This reversal, of course, is only temporary, and could be interpreted as hiding traditional ‘real’-life power relations. To put it simply: Questioning a politician does not automatically change her or his policies, although showing a politician being questioned by ordinary people does support a more egalitarian, participatory discourse.

Analysis of the power relations between the production team – especially the host – and the panel members shows that in the discourse on participation, management of the voices and confessional and disciplinary technologies play an important role. Their subjection to this management unites the ordinary people with the members from different non-media elites. The professional identity of the production team legitimates a clear, unequal division of power: Panel members are limited in their ability to co-decide in the pre- and post-broadcasting phases, and their capacity to articulate is hampered by the authority of the host, resulting in fragmentation, segregation and lack of dialogue.

The unequal power distribution in *Jan Publiek* and the subjection of these ordinary people to different forms of restrictive power (through the production team’s management) did not prevent panel members from engaging in acts of resistance. They too took an active role in the dialectics of control, where power is always (but only to a certain degree) shared and resisted. In particular, their continued participation offered room for negotiation in order to resist the various types of management – connoting that ordinary people can resist unequal power relations – by making unsolicited interventions, protesting at losing their turns, contesting the role of the host or simply ignoring him, but such resistance was still relatively limited. In most cases, panel members accepted the rigid structure imposed on them.

Comparing the generative powers of panel members, the restrictive powers they were subjected to and their ability to resist those restrictive powers supports the conclusion that the discourse on participation in *Jan Publiek* hardly approximates the maximalist model of participation. *Jan Publiek* involves participation of ordinary people, who are allowed to generate statements under the strong guidance of professional authority and management. Participation is shown to be impossible without the management of a host (and his production team), and to be highly constrained by the professional standards of the broadcasters, whose main objective is still to make a ‘good’ programme, reducing participation to a secondary objective. At the same time, *Jan Publiek* does more than offer a purely minimalist form of participation, since participants are allowed to speak their minds, their diversity is recognized, and the professional management is organized in way that respects participants’ autonomy. Moreover, the programme does recognize the political nature of the social, and acknowledges the importance of organizing the participation of ordinary people (even if only as a secondary objective). However, *Jan Publiek* fails to overcome the restrictions generated by traditional articulations of the identities of the media professionals and the mainstream media production cultures.

3. Case 2: *Barometer* and the post-political

3.1 *The post-political and post-democratic condition*

The second case study looks at the hegemonic identity of media professionals and how its discursive power legitimizes strong power imbalance in the context of a north Belgian TV programme called *Barometer*. Although a wide variety of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses on participation and participatory practices can be generated in the context of mainstream television, in this specific case there is a strong power imbalance, and a dominant position of the media professionals that proves difficult to contest.

Although the Foucauldian analytics of power structures this analysis of the dominant position of the media professional (combined with a flavour of the Aristotelian (myth of) the first mover), additional support can be found in the theories of the post-political and the post-democratic. The argument offered here is that these two concepts, which refer to the construction of an ultimate consensus that transcends (and disallows) political dissent and thus legitimizes a specific regime, can be used also to analyse the media sphere, and the management culture of its media professionals.

We first turn to political theory, and more specifically the work of Mouffe (and others such as Žižek and Rancière) on the post-political. The starting point is Mouffe’s recent work focusing on (amongst other issues) the conditions for the possibility of agonism. Mouffe’s agonistic model of democracy is built on the distinction between

antagonism (between enemies) and agonism (between adversaries). While the presence of an adversary is considered legitimate, and his/her right to defend his/her ideas is not questioned, an enemy is (to be) excluded from the political community (Mouffe, 1997: 4). The aim of democratic politics then becomes to ‘tame’ or ‘sublimate’ antagonisms (Mouffe, 2005: 20–21), without eliminating from the political realm conflict or passion or relegating them to the outskirts of the private, and without denying the structural existence of antagonisms in society. Although agonistic struggle has been criticized by Žižek (Žižek and Daly, 2004) for its inability to challenge the present-day, neo-liberal status quo, Mouffe (2005: 33) believes that it can and should “bring about new meanings and fields of application for the idea of democracy to be radicalized”.

But, at the same time, and as argued at the beginning of this chapter, Mouffe recognizes the tendencies of political actors to strive for hegemony. To briefly reiterate this argument, as it will be developed further in chapter 3: Already in 1985, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, co-authored with Ernesto Laclau, Mouffe makes extensive use of the Gramscian (version of the) concept of hegemony. The ultimate objective of these hegemonic projects is to construct and stabilize the nodal points that can constitute the basis of a social order, the aim being to transform myths into a social imaginary, i.e. a horizon that “is not one among other objects but an absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility and is thus the condition of possibility of the emergence of any object” (Laclau, 1990: 64). At the same time, these hegemonies can never be total, all-encompassing or unchangeable, as they can always be challenged by counter-hegemonic practices (Mouffe, 2005: 18).

In her 2005 book *On the Political*, Mouffe critiques the neo-liberal hegemony and its capacity to ignore the pluralist and antagonistic characteristics of the political, replacing it with an ethics of harmony and consensus. For Mouffe (2005: 9), the “context of conflictuality” remains crucial to our understanding of the political, and more specifically, conflict and antagonisms are seen as the driving forces of contemporary political realities. This position is hardly surprising, given Mouffe’s post-structuralist emphasis on contingency and difference, starting from the idea that re-articulations and reconfigurations of the social are always possible. At the same time she recognizes that stability and fixity exist, but that at the same time the social is always structurally unstable and unfixed because any kind of stability and fixity can always be destabilized and dislocated. From this perspective, harmony and consensus are seen as temporarily and spatially contingent, and cannot be seen as structural characteristics of the political. Although Mouffe agrees that consensus is necessary, dissent continues to be an equally necessary *compagnion de route*. Mouffe’s radical pluralism (whose development originated in earlier work with Laclau²¹) articulates the existence of diversity and conflict as structuring forces of the political, which she contrasts with (a “dominant tendency within” (Mouffe, 2005: 31)) liberalism, and the way it understands pluralism:

The typical liberal understanding of pluralism is that we live in a world in which there are indeed many perspectives and values and that, owing to empirical limitations, we will never be able to adopt them all, but that, when put together, they constitute an harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble. (Mouffe, 2005: 10)

The discourse of consensus thus becomes another strategy to hegemonize (or universalize, or essentialize) political projects that are intrinsically particular, a strategy that aims to mute the voices that find themselves outside the dominant social imaginary. Mouffe's (2005: 30) work suggests that this hegemonic strategy uses "essentialist forms of identification or non-negotiable moral values" to establish a consensus and disregard the possibility of dissensus. In this post-political configuration even the possibility of contesting these forms of identification and moral values is non-existent. In other words, the post-political is a political project that negates what structurally defines the political (namely the existence of antagonism, difference and dissensus), and that posits a particular perspective on social reality as a universal and non-negotiable truth.

Mouffe's perspective on the post-political is similar to Rancière's concept of the post-democratic, although Rancière focuses more on the (hegemonizing) role of government.²² However, a more general formulation develops (in discussing "the communitarian miscalculations"), in which Rancière (2007: 88) sees post-democracy as "the rule of the principle of unification of the multitude under the common law of the One". His more specific formulation (relating post-democracy to government) resonates with earlier critiques on the technocratization of the political and on competitive-elitist democratic theory, where democratic government becomes detached from participation (in whatever form), as illustrated by the following:

Postdemocracy is the government practice and conceptual legitimation of a democracy *after the demos*, a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount, and dispute of the people and is thereby reducible to the sole interplay of state mechanisms and combinations [...] It is the practice and theory of what is appropriate with no gap left between the forms of the State and the state of social relations. (Rancière, 1991: 102; quoted in Mouffe, 2005: 29, translation modified and emphasis in original)

Just as in the political, the role of power in the post-political and post-democratic condition is crucial. Foucault's analytics of power, where power is seen as mobile and multidirectional, recognizes explicitly that power relations are not necessarily balanced. Of course, the possibility of resistance and contra-strategies remains, and no actor will be able ever to fully realize her or his strategies and intentions; but, at the same time, hegemonic discourses and practices will continue to play crucial roles in structuring the social. In some cases, hegemonic forces will manage to establish a social horizon that "is not one among other objects but an absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility and is thus the condition of possibility of the emergence of any object" (Laclau, 1990: 64).

Another metaphor that can be applied to analyse this condition of hegemony is Aristotle's first mover concept. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle claims that the divine is defined by its capacity to generate movement without moving itself. As what is being moved is intermediate, the first mover is "something which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality".²³ Of course, the first mover metaphor is hardly capable of providing a convincing case for a divine existence. Nevertheless, it is a good metaphor for the intensity and rigidity of hegemony, where the first mover is perceived as the source and origin of the emergence and movement of any object (to paraphrase Laclau, 1990: 64), signifying its normality, taken-for-grantedness and indisputability. As is the case with hegemony, the first mover can be dethroned, denaturalized and de-essentialized, but usually the first mover does not yield lightly. From a Foucauldian position, the first mover also cannot escape being implicated, being moved, pushing the first mover to the level of the mythical.

Such is perhaps the most diabolical aspect of the idea and of all the applications it brought about. In this form of management, power is not totally entrusted to someone who would exercise it alone, over others, in an absolute fashion; rather this machine is one in which everyone is caught, those who exercise this power as well as those who are subjected to it. (Foucault, 1996)

In the context of this case study, special attention is paid to the notions of visibility and invisibility in the exercise of power. Obviously, Foucault's (use of the) metaphor of the Panopticon shows the importance of visibility and invisibility in the exercise of power, as the objects of the disciplining power are rendered visible to the disciplining gaze of the guards that wield the power, while the guards remain invisible. In her discussion of performance, Phelan (1993: 6) formulates this as follows: "The binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying. There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal". Referring to Lacan, she continues, "Visibility is a trap [...] it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession". To put this within a Foucauldian perspective: The objects of power have become more visible, while the exercise of power has become less visible. And to use the Aristotelian metaphor, the first mover becomes hidden, its operations cloaked, whilst what is being moved becomes visible.

3.2 Media participation and the post-political

We can now return to the mainstream media, where (in some cases) the hegemony of media-centrality, strengthened by, and translated into, the dominant position of the media professional, allows the use of such concepts as the post-political and post-democracy. At the

same time, it would be too simple to claim an all-encompassing application of these concepts in the media sphere. Arguably, the post-political is not everywhere. One stage that it does not necessarily enter is produced discourse, which remains diverse and often contradictory (avoiding hegemonic closure), and where the political can still play a major part.

But the post-political becomes very present at the level of the production process and its skewed power relations. In many cases, mainstream media organizations remain political because of the structural openness of the wide range of specific discourses they produce, but often simultaneously are post-political because the hegemonic and consensual positions of the media professional (and the capitalist media system in which the media professional is embedded) are normalized and almost impossible to contest. We see many examples of resistant practices, but these practices are often characterized by their temporality and are incorporated quickly and easily within television narratives, and absorbed within the power structures of programmes.

The alliance between media organizations and media professionals generates a power bloc that has managed acceptance of its self-proclaimed centrality, and has consolidated legitimacy of its high levels of control as a societal horizon. Mainstream media, and even their participatory programming, become an illustration of post-(media)democracy, with the alteration that, in these cases, media organizations, and not the state, exercise extraordinary powers. This process is first of all an example of the workings of discursive powers, as this media-centrality and its interconnected legitimacy to control is a cultural construct. At the same time, once media-centrality and legitimacy to control have been hegemonized, they in their turn legitimize a wide variety of other discursive and material power strategies. In this sense, mainstream media production teams become the first movers: They are not seen themselves to be movable, but they manage to generate the movements on which the media product is constructed. And, especially in comparison to the powers they wield, their on-screen visibility is limited (sometimes virtually non-existent); often we can detect their presence only through the effects of their actions.

3.3 A post-political case study: Barometer

An illustration of this emerges from analysis of the 2002 TV programme *Barometer*, which was broadcast in north Belgium and was directly inspired by BBC's *Video Nation* (see chapter 4). There have been two series of *Barometer* with, respectively, five and eight episodes. The programme is produced by Kanakna, and broadcast on the TV1 channel of the public broadcaster VRT. All the episodes, and eight interviews with the producers,²⁴ were analysed using qualitative content analysis (see Maso, 1989; Wester, 1987, 1995).

Each 20-minute episode of *Barometer* was based on six two-and-a-half- to three-and-a-half-minute 'video letters', produced by ordinary viewers. The topics of these video letters varied widely, as illustrated by the episode shown on 30 April 2002, which

dealt with (1) practicing firemen; (2) a 16-year-old, happy, mother; (3) a practical joke involving a traffic light; (4) a mucoviscidosis patient receiving a new pair of lungs; (5) a complaint against rack renters; and (6) some elderly skydivers.

The programme and the video letters are introduced by Michiel Hendryckx, a (press) photographer, who only later achieved some renown for presenting a motorcycle/travel show (called *The Gang of Wim*). What is unusual is that Michiel Hendryckx is filmed in his own living room making the *Barometer* introductions, a device that is used to increase the authenticity and appearance of ordinariness. At the start of the first episode, the presenter explains this:

Good evening, and welcome to Barometer, the new TV1 programme. But also welcome to my home, and this is rather unusual – TV programmes are only rarely produced or broadcast from somebody’s home. But Barometer isn’t an ordinary programme, it is a programme that is made by you, the viewers. (Michiel Hendryckx, Presenter *Barometer*, episode 30 April 2002)

The programme’s production process is seemingly straightforward. Viewers are invited to send in video letters to the programme’s presenter, Michiel Hendryckx. As his introduction in the second episode suggests, he makes the selection of which material will be broadcast.

Good evening, and welcome to the second episode of Barometer. It has been a busy week, I’ve received many video letters, letters that were made by you. I have watched them with pleasure and, as usual, I have selected six. The first letter is from Keerbergen [*a small Belgian city*], and was made by Linda. Linda is a happy woman, the daughter of a farming family, who is afraid that the environment and scenery of her youth is about to disappear. (Michiel Hendryckx, Presenter *Barometer*, episode 6 May 2002)

On other occasions, the presenter’s intros and outros suggest a slightly more complicated production process, in which the production team supplies the camera and provides technical support. Nevertheless, the idea is that ordinary people can produce these video letters themselves, as explained by VRT’s producer Wendel Goossens: “The idea was to give a half hour of our broadcasting time to our viewers. We want to be a forum for viewers, that they can go to, and where we as programme makers do not interfere” (Wendel Goossens, VRT Producer *Barometer*, November 2002 interview). If we compare the (public version of the) production process of *Barometer* with *Video Nation* (see chapter 4), two important differences emerge. First, in the case of (the televised version of) *Video Nation*, the participant support structure is extensive; participants had possession of the camera for a longer period, and a member of the production team was on hand to provide assistance. Second, because *Video Nation* was embedded in the ideology of the BBC’s Community Programme Unit, attempts were made to maximize the participant

power base within the BBC's institutional context. In the case of *Barometer*, the support and the intensity of the participatory process were less developed.

3.4 *Barometer and the hidden production team*

If we examine the management techniques used by the *Barometer* production team, we can see that power relations in its production process were not very well balanced. The media professionals intervened at a number of levels to facilitate the production process and to increase the professional quality of the video letters. First, they contacted participants in advance, which allowed the production team to plan and structure the actual filming. Although the participants had a voice in this negotiation, the media professional culture had a strong impact on the negotiation and its outcomes. One of the producers explains this as follows:

What happens beforehand is a discussion over the phone; then we say: Yes, and how will we be able to do that? We'll start with you in the playground, and then we should go into the classroom to film, so all the girlfriends need to be there. And what class are we going to take? So we do create a structure beforehand, and then we explain how they need to operate the camera. Some of them can do it themselves, others can't and then we do it for them. (Wendel Goossens, VRT Producer *Barometer*, November 2002 interview)

Second, when filming had been completed, the raw material was collected and processed by the media professionals. After an initial screening, the material was passed to a (professional) editor, to reduce it to a well-structured, short video letter, and add music. Although VRT's managers criticized Kanakna for "aesthetizing the [*video letters*] too much, modifying them and adding sound to them" (Frank Symoens, Production Manager VRT, November 2002 interview), and the presenter expressed dissatisfaction with the addition of music, Kanakna refused to implement the 'rough' editing style, which audience research indicated would have been disliked. Kanakna's producer of *Barometer* articulated Kanakna's role as follows, again emphasizing the role of the media professional and the imposition of professional standards at the levels of both content and form:

It is something that these people have been working on for two hours; you can't broadcast the full version. It [*the unedited version*] is of no value to the viewer, so of course we have to edit it. It is our job, to reduce the length, and to make the story – how it is told by the person – as clear and specific as possible in the three minutes available. And that's the hardest thing of all, because these people are clearly having

trouble saying clearly and concretely what it boils down to. (Isabel Dierckx, Kanakna Producer *Barometer*, November 2002 interview)

But the production team's most important intervention arguably was at the level of selection. On this point, interviews were contradictory. Most people involved in the production process described the formal procedure as outlined above. In one case, the VRT producer of *Barometer* referred to the small number of contributions, but then changed the conversation ("It wasn't the case that we got a gigantic number of [*pause*] but let's look at the procedure [...]") (Wendel Goossens, VRT's *Barometer* Producer, November 2002 interview). But in an interview, the presenter – a press photographer and not a Kanakna employee – described a different procedure, later (in 2008) confirmed by three other interviews.²⁵ The presenter explained that Kanakna had not received enough contributions and decided to add some researchers to the production team to scan the newspapers for potential stories and participants.

I was led to believe that these people [*the participants*] contacted Kanakna themselves [...] but after the summer, during the second series, it turned out that almost nobody [...] They had to go and look for people. They searched the newspaper for articles, then they contacted the people, and asked them: Would you like to make a video letter? (Michiel Hendryckx, Presenter *Barometer*, November 2002 interview)

This extract is not only an indication of the post-political and post-democratic condition within the media system, it shows also the invisibility of the power exercised by the production team. Again, with the exception of the presenter, who was not a formal member of the production team, the media professionals were not visible on the screen. The presenter symbolically represents the *Barometer* production team (making the media professional seem visible in the programme), but, at the same time, he is an outsider with little control (rendering the 'real' media professionals invisible). For instance, with one exception and despite the formulation of his introduction to the programmes, which suggests otherwise, he has no say in the selection of the video letters. The presenter claims to have received the video letters on the day before his introductions are filmed. When asked who is responsible for the selection, he replies (rhetorically excluding himself from the production team), "The people from the production team do that. You'll have to ask them [...] I didn't [...] I only vetoed a letter once, but I didn't have a say" (Michiel Hendryckx, Presenter *Barometer*, November 2002 interview). VRT's producer of *Barometer* confirmed that the presenter was not involved in the selection process, and legitimized this decision as follows:

It was certainly the impression that he [*the presenter*] had something to do with it, and that he chose and selected the topics. It really didn't happen like that – but that is

often the case with television programmes: Not everything is what it seems. (Wendel Goossens, VRT's Producer *Barometer*, November 2002 interview)

Of course, the invisibility in *Barometer* does not apply only to the personages of the media professionals; it applied also to their interventions in the programme. The most interesting case is the presenter's claim that he was – at least initially – unaware that people were invited to contribute by the researchers on the production team. The possibility that invited contributions were used was never mentioned during the programme. Showing clear irritation during the interview, the presenter referred to a conversation he had with Wim Van Severen, the VRT channel manager of TV1, in which he (Michiel Hendryckx) expressed his dissatisfaction with these management techniques. He not only problematized that these techniques were hidden, he also made it clear that he did not appreciate the fact that they contradicted what he said in his televised introductions:

I say [*on TV*]: 'Good evening, welcome to *Barometer*, I've had a tremendous number of contributions.' But I hadn't had any! You had to go and look for them, like idiots, for all kinds of people that might have something to say!' (Michiel Hendryckx, Presenter *Barometer*, November 2002 interview – referring to a conversation with Wim Van Severen, Channel manager VRT TV1)

3.5 The post-political and its ethical-democratic questions

In this case study, my major claim is that one of the democratic problems of mainstream television (in a broad sense) is the post-political and post-democratic nature of the power position of its media professionals. Although a diversity of discourses can be generated through mainstream television, its participatory practices and its produced discourses on participation and democracy remain problematic, due to the management of the media professionals involved, and the apparent impossibility of contesting the unequal power relations that legitimize this management. Many identities, discourses and practices in mainstream television can be contested, but the position of the media professionals, exerting their psychological property, is often situated beyond (structural) contestation and becomes a social imaginary, making the media professional a first mover. This first mover power position allows the media professionals to exercise the generative and restrictive powers required to overcome resistance and to make things move.

We see clearly the opportunities for empowerment (mainly related to the specificity of programme discourses and practices), but combined here with a high likelihood of disempowerment related to the production process and its televisional representation. Whatever the limitations in terms of the technical and narrative skills of ordinary people in *Barometer*, and whatever the need for efficiency and production speed, the deontological question is how to legitimize the programme's unfounded claims of

participatory intensity, and the reconciliation of claims to maximalist participation combined with heavy management.

Both case studies, *Barometer* and (to a lesser degree) *Jan Publiek*, illustrate the strong presence (and impact) of management techniques, and how the television sphere manages, very effectively, to hide its power and render the production team's management role largely invisible. Because the production team's direct interventions are meant to be invisible, control is translated into a system of rules, or a set of procedures. In the case of *Barometer*, the presenter becomes the visual representation of the production team, deflecting attention from the 'real' production team's power, rendering it invisible. Moreover, the team's restricted definition of participation, and lack of participatory attitude, leads to a specific operationalization of the participatory process in a set of procedures, which affects the entire programme and the roles allowed for participants.

To defend the programme, participants in *Barometer* are, to some extent, still valued, although their lack of skills is sometimes held against them. The intense management is legitimized by the need for quality, efficiency and speed within a capitalist media economy. This makes *Barometer* an illustration of the normalization of media (professional) power as an impassive mover, the *primum movens immobile*, that manages to hegemonize its own basic assumptions, cultures, practices, principles and procedures.

Notes

1. The first part of *History of Sexuality* in French has the subtitle *La Volonté du Savoir* (*The Will to Know*), which, in the English translation, is replaced by the unimaginative *An Introduction*. In using the title *History of Sexuality* in this chapter, I refer only to the first part of Foucault's trilogy: *La Volonté du Savoir*.
2. Not all authors agree upon the distinction between the Foucauldian concept of productive power and Giddens's concept of generative power. Tucker (1998: 114), for instance, treats both concepts as more or less equal: "Giddens sees the primary importance of power in somewhat Foucauldian terms, for power is productive as well as repressive".
3. Foucault (2002).
4. Already in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, he was discussing what he then called the non-discursive, which is "an institutional field, a set of events, practices and political decisions, a sequence of economic processes that also involve demographic fluctuations, techniques of public assistance, manpower needs, different levels of unemployment, etc" (Foucault, 2002: 174). The role of the body as an object of (bio)power was thematized only later.
5. The name of the programme originates from a Dutch expression that could be translated as 'Joe Public', referring to the so-called 'man in the street'.
6. In order not to resonate with the strong Flemish identity construction process, the description 'north Belgium' is preferred.
7. The name of the public broadcaster, BRTN (Belgische Radio- en Televisieomroep Nederlandstalige Uitzendingen – Belgian Radio and Television Broadcaster – Dutch-spoken Broadcasts), was changed in 1998 to VRT (Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroep – Flemish Radio

- and Television Broadcaster, and in 2009 to Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie – Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting Organization).
8. The first series of *Jan Publiek* (the only series without a panel of ordinary people) had 21 episodes, the second series sixteen and the three subsequent series thirteen episodes.
 9. Not all episodes were broadcast live. For instance, three episodes of the second series of *Jan Publiek* were not broadcast live because the main studio was not available. In these cases, the programme was broadcast ‘as live’, with only minimal intervention.
 10. Because *Jan Publiek* is mainly (but not exclusively) based on group discussion, the management of bodies is reduced to the management of voices. Spatial elements will thus (largely) be ignored.
 11. Data were collected during an elaborate project on three Dutch-spoken audience discussion programmes, in collaboration with Sonja Spee, who was then based at the Centre for Women’s Studies, Antwerp, Belgium. I also want to thank her.
 12. In the original transcription Button and Lee’s (1987) transcription system was used, but the transcription symbols were not included in the English translation of the selected fragments.
 13. The coding of one broadcast (broadcast 37) was subjected to Scott’s intercoder reliability test (Krippendorff, 1980), resulting in values larger than 0.80 for all coding systems.
 14. The nine media professionals were Stefan De Bouver, Jean Philip De Tender, Ann Geeraert, Veerle Heyvaert, Murielle Sterckendries, Steven Van Campenhout, Jan Van Rompaey, Eva Vansteene and Luc Vermaut. These interviews took place in October and November 1998. In all cases, the full names will be mentioned.
 15. The twenty panel members were Damien Besard, Suzanne De Bruyn, Rudi De Kerpel, Albert Dumortier, Simone Goossens, Astrid Houthuys, Marga Jorissen, Simonne Laget, Betty Lathouwers, Fatiha Mataiche, Carmen Morales Ortiz, Gorik Pinkhof, Pierre Raemdonck, Roeland Rummens, Geert Van Beek, Annie Van Mulders, Frans Vanhelfmont, Eric Verhoye, Misjel Vossen and Sandrina Walschap. Also these interviews took place in October and November 1998. The 2007 interviews with 13 of these panel members were not used in this chapter, but only in chapter 3.
 16. ‘Experience expert’ is a category that refers to an ordinary person who has lived a specific experience, which legitimizes her or his participation.
 17. All fragments used as illustrations originate from one randomly selected episode.
 18. Fifty-six interventions could not be attributed to the (experience) expert categories, and were not included.
 19. This analysis is based on the 4521 interventions made by the host. Because codes overlap, the total number is 5883.
 20. In this analysis only a proportion (3256) of the available coded fragments could be used. For example, in some cases the host’s intervention clearly applied to the previous and not the next speaker. In other cases, no speaker contributed after the host’s intervention.
 21. See Laclau and Mouffe (1985).
 22. Rancière’s version of the post-democratic does not lament the demise of (representative) democracy, but theorizes hegemonic processes within (representative) democracies.
 23. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Book XII, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.12.xii.html>.
 24. I want to thank Ann Braeckman for her help with the analysis; David De Wachter, Geert Dexters, Faiza Djait, Adil Fares, Paul Lashmana, Sabine Lemache, Tine Peeters and Yolanda Van Dorsselaer for conducting the interviews in November 2002 with Michiel Hendryckx (Presenter *Barometer*), Isabel Dierckx (Kanakna *Barometer* Producer), Wendel Goossens (VRT Producer *Barometer*), Noel Swinnen (Manager Kanakna), Frank Symoens (Production Manager TV1 VRT), and Jean-Philip De Tender (Channel Adviser TV1 VRT). I also want

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to thank Maaika Santana for her interviews with *Barometer* researchers Eva Willems (24 September 2008) and Joke Blommaerts (26 September 2008). All interview and programme citations are translations by the author from Dutch.

25. On 30 August 2008, in a Facebook exchange, Isabel Dierckx (former *Barometer* Kanakna Producer) confirmed that there were four researchers involved: Joke Blommaert, Eva Willems, Caroline Meerschaert and Koen De Blende (the last two were also involved in the filming). In subsequent interviews, Joke Blommaert and Eva Willems confirmed that they had scouted for potential participants.

Chapter 3

Keyword - Identity



1. A conceptual introduction

1.1 Identity theory

As the notion of identity carries many different meanings, I need to explain how I use the concept here. Two major theoretical strands define identity, the more psychological (personal identity) strand and the more sociocultural (social or cultural identity) strand: The present text is aligned to the latter. More specifically, identity is seen as a discursive structure that endows meaning to objects and individual and collective agents. From this perspective, the social is characterized by a multitude of circulating identities, contested and contestable, that offer subjects opportunities for identification (which in turn creates the link with the more psychological approaches) and provide them with the building blocks of their subjectivities. Support for this position can be found in Sayyid and Zac's (1998: 263) approach, when they write that identity is to be defined in two related ways. First, identity is "the unity of any object or subject". This definition is in line with Fuss's (1989: ix) definition of identity as "the 'whatness' of a given entity". A second component of the definition of identity comes into play when the concept is applied to the way in which social agents are identified and/or identify themselves within a certain discourse. Sayyid and Zac's (1998: 263) examples in this context are "workers, women, atheists, British".

As mentioned in chapter 2, Laclau and Mouffe call this last component of identity a subject position (i.e., the result of the positioning of subjects within a discursive structure), which is used to describe the discursive positionings of actors. An important characteristic of the subject position concept is that it emphasizes the role of discursive structures to provide people with positions within the social, but simultaneously allows space for the contingent articulation of these positionings:

Whenever we use the category of 'subject' in this text, we will do so in the sense of 'subject positions' within a discursive structure. Subjects cannot, therefore, be the origin of social relations – not even in the limited sense of being endowed with powers that render an experience possible – as all 'experience' depends on precise discursive conditions of possibility (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 115).

In other words, Laclau and Mouffe's definition implies neither a structuralist nor a voluntarist position. Although they endorse Althusser's critique of the autonomous and self-transparent subject (a voluntarist position), they vehemently reject Althusser's economic determinism (a structuralist position), because in their view this aspect of Althusser's theory leads to a "new variant of essentialism" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 98). However, Laclau and Mouffe's rejection of this aspect of Althusser's work does not deter their borrowing from him the originally Freudian concept of overdetermination, although they alter its meaning:

Society and social agents lack any essence, and their regularities merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain order. This [*Althusser's*] analysis seemed to open up the possibility of elaborating a new concept of articulation, which would start from the overdetermined character of social relations. But this did not occur. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 98)

The notion of overdetermination is one of the strategies that Laclau and Mouffe use to emphasize the contingency of the social and of identities. This contingency can already be found at the heart of their discourse theory, when they discuss the nature of discursive structures (including identities and subject positions), the importance of articulation, the floating of signifiers and the infinitude of the field of discursivity. A discourse is seen as a structured entity that articulates different elements, whose meaning is altered by the process of articulation itself. Inspired by early semiology, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 106) claim that "all identity is relational", which implies the establishment of relationships of inclusion and exclusion, but also a process of modification. This becomes clear in their definition of articulation, which is seen as a "practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 105). Contingency originates from the specificity of the articulated elements (where some elements become articulated in a discourse, and others are not – they remain available in the field of discursivity), from the process of articulation and the specificity of the combination of elements, and from the possibility of re-articulation (where new elements become articulated or old elements become disarticulated, which affects the entire discourse).

But contingency also features prominently in Laclau and Mouffe's political identity theory (which builds upon their discourse theory in the strict sense – see Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008), where the political is seen as a site of conflict, antagonism and struggle for hegemony (see also Mouffe (2005) for an elaborate argumentation). Although their political identity theory focuses more on attempted stabilizations of the social through hegemonizing processes, they still base their theory on an ontology of contingency where hegemony can never be total. Also the actual process of establishing a hegemonic social imaginary presupposes societal contingency. This struggle for hegemony takes place in "a field criss-crossed by antagonisms" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 135), where

different sets of identities are aligned into a hegemonic project¹ and opposed to another negative identity, a constitutive outside. Through the interplay between antagonistic identities, these identities become constructed and can (in some cases) gain dominance. But Laclau and Mouffe's negative-relationalist approach to identity also allows them to show the limits of the formative capacity of antagonism (in constructing identities), since the presence of the 'other' identity remains a necessary component in the identity construction process. This means that identity can never be fully developed and foreclosed: "The presence of the Other prevents me from being totally myself" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 125). Antagonistic identities try to (discursively) eliminate each other but simultaneously need each other as each other's outsides.

Despite Laclau and Mouffe's careful positioning of the subject between structuralism and voluntarism, Žižek critiques their reduction of the subject to its subject positions. In an essay published in Laclau's *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, Žižek (1990: 250) explains this reduction as "an effect of the fact that Laclau and Mouffe had progressed too quickly" and did not manage to combine the "radical breakthrough" at the level of the concept of antagonism with an equally well-elaborated theory of the subject. This criticism has led Laclau, in particular, to acknowledge "the importance of an understanding of subjectivity in terms of the subject-as-lack" (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2004: 202). Although in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) subjectivities are already seen as a fusion of a multiplicity of identities, where the overdetermined presence of some identities in others prevents their closure, Laclau's later work more clearly distinguishes between subject and subjectivation, identity, and identification. The impossibility of the multiplicity of identities filling the constitutive lack of the subject prevents their full and complete constitution because of the inevitable distance between the obtained identity and the subject, and because of the (always possible) subversion of that identity by other identities. In Laclau's (1990: 60) own words, "the identification never reaches the point of full identity". Or as Sayyid and Zac (1998: 263) put it, "the subject is always something more than its identity". As Torfing (1999: 150) illustrates, there are many possible points of identification:

A student who is expelled from the university might seek to restore the full identity she never had by becoming either a militant who rebels against the 'system,' the perfect mother for her two children, or an independent artist who cares nothing for formal education.

Precisely the contingency of identities and the failure to reach a fully constituted identity creates the space for subjectivity, agency, freedom and the particularity of human behaviour:

The freedom thus won in relation to the structure is therefore a traumatic fact initially: I am condemned to be free, not because I have no structural identity as the existentialists

assert, but because I have a failed structural identity. This means that the subject is partially self-determined. However, as this self-determination is not the expression of what the subject already is but the result of the lack of its being instead, self-determination can only proceed through processes of identification. (Laclau, 1990: 44)

The self-determination that Laclau mentions generates space for subjects to become actively involved in the identity construction process, working with the building blocks that are available within the social, (re-)articulating and performing them, struggling against them and adopting them. Identity politics (or the politics of identity – see Hall, 1989), for instance, is very much based on the political agency of those engaged in the deconstruction of dominant identities. Another concept that refers to the active role of subjects in dealing with their identities is identity work. This concept – originally used at a more individual level (see Snow and Anderson, 1987) but later applied to collective identities and subject positions (see e.g., Reger et al., 2008) – captures the discursive efforts that people undertake in order to (re)construct and maintain their identities. But identity work and identity politics also have a material component, as is theorized by Butler (1990) in relation to gender identities. She stresses the performativity of identity, where identities become constructed through the repetition of acts. This does not mean that Butler (1993: 12) disconnects performativity from its discursive environment: “Performativity is thus not a singular ‘act,’ for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms [...]”. Nevertheless, Butler’s work allows the addition of an important material component to identity theory.

Human self-determination, of course, is not unlimited. As Laclau (1990: 44) argues, “self-determination can only proceed through processes of identification”, which generate the connection with discursive structures (or subject positions) that are outside the subject itself. At the same time, there is a strong desire for the wholeness of identities and the harmonious resolution of social antagonisms, although this wholeness and harmony is structurally lacking. If we turn to a Lacanian perspective, we can see that desire is conceptualized exactly through a relation to a lack (and not as a relation to an object). What causes the desire is exactly the lack, the incompleteness, of identity, which lies at the core of all subjectivity (Lacan, 1991: 139; Kirshner, 2005: 83). Subjects crave fully constituted identities, but they can never be realized. The lack can never be filled; the desire can never be satisfied. Desire is the “lack of being whereby the being exists” (Lacan, 1988: 223), which turns it into an endless unconscious driving force. The mechanism that allows us to cope with this structural inability and the frustration it generates is fantasy, because fantasy provides us with hope and protection (Lacan, 1979: 41). Fantasy provides the subject with (imaginary) frames to conceal the lack, and the promise to overcome it (Lacan 1994: 119–120). Nevertheless, this ultimate victory remains out of reach, and eventually all fantasies are again frustrated and their limits become visible, showing the contingency of identity and the social.

1.2 The subject position of ordinary people

In participatory processes, subject positions play a significant role, as they (co-) structure discursive positionings and material practices. Subject positions such as ‘audience member’ or ‘media professional’ circulate widely in society, and carry specific – sometimes dominant – meanings that affect the position and power relations of actors in participatory processes. The discursive affordances of these signifiers, for instance, normalize specific types of behaviour, and disallow other kinds of behaviour. As mentioned in the previous part of this chapter, subject positions are not necessarily stable, and they can be contested, resisted and re-articulated. In this sense, signifiers such as ‘audience member’ or ‘media professional’ are always implicated in the struggle between more minimalist and more maximalist approaches to participation.

When analysing participation, the concept of ordinary people merits special attention. As will be argued below, this subject position – and its discursive relationship towards societal elites – encapsulates basic societal differences, which might become (and often are) translated into a societal hierarchy that incorporates structural power imbalances. These discursive power imbalances, of course, are also generative and constitutive, and not exclusively restrictive and problematic, and they will also be resisted in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, the articulation of the concept of ordinary people – for instance, as an active, relevant social group with valuable opinions and knowledges, or as a passive mass – contributes to (pre)structuring the positions people (can) take in society, and may enable or limit their role in participatory processes.

This applies also to participation in and through the media. The subject position of ordinary people – which is closely related to, but still distinct from, the subject position of the audience – gains its meanings by becoming juxtaposed to a series of more elitist subject positions that also circulate in the media sphere, such as media professionals, celebrities, experts and politicians.² The specific articulations of ordinary people, through their juxtaposition to elitist positions (and the differences this entails) impact on the intensity of ordinary people’s participation in media productions and in media organizations because these articulations (co-)define the levels of participation that are socially desirable and possible. Moreover, media organizations are one of the many discursive machines that produce and reproduce a diversity of these subject positions, turning the (inter)actions of ordinary people, media professionals, experts and many other actors embedded in a wide range of social categories into mediated discourses. These discourses in some cases are highly fluid, multi-layered and sometimes contradictory, but in other cases they are more singular and rigid since they are embedded within specific hegemonies. In other words, media discourses not only relate to the topics being explicitly addressed; but media organizations also (re) produce discourses on participation, on ordinary people and other social categories, on the power relations that lie behind the participatory process, and on the conditions of possibility and limits of the participatory process. Finally, reception will also be

impacted by these subject positions, as audience members will use them to make sense of that they see, read and hear.

Before we can address the subject position of ordinary people more thoroughly, we need to look at the theoretical reflections on a related concept – everyday life. First, the concept of everyday life has received much more theoretical attention than that of ordinary people, and generated much richer theoretical frameworks. Following Gregg's and Sandywell's arguments, care should nevertheless be taken not to "erase" (Gregg, 2007: 99) the ordinary through an unnecessary focus on the everyday, or not to "denigrate" the ordinary through "the very act of being theorised as 'everyday life'" (Sandywell, 2004: 174). Second, especially Lefebvre's work on the everyday increases the weight of the political in the ordinary and is relevant for discussion here. A third argument is that one of the main significations of the ordinary is grounded in the everyday, when the ordinary is defined through its articulation with everyday (authentic) experiences.

1.2.1 The everyday

When analysing the everyday (and the ordinary) we can distinguish between more essentialist and relationist perspectives. The more essentialist approaches tend to see identities as stable, independent and possessing a 'true' essence. The more relationist approaches incorporate notions of fluidity and contingency, see identities as mutually dependent and ignore the existence of 'true' essences. Despite the incorporation of these essentialist approaches in this chapter, identities are still – as mentioned above – seen basically as relational, contingent and the result of articulatory practices within a discursive framework, which eventually will allow us to rework these essentialist approaches and to show their relationist nature.

The more essentialist frameworks that theorize the everyday stress the repetitive, the unpurposeful, the unnoticed and the routine-based as the main characteristics of the everyday. One illustration is Felski's (1999/2000: 18) seminal definition of the everyday as "grounded in three key facets: time, space and modality. The temporality of the everyday [...] is that of repetition, the spatial ordering of the everyday is anchored in a sense of home and the characteristic mode of experiencing the everyday is that of habit".

The difficulty in capturing the everyday has led many authors to define the everyday in a relationist way, or at least to generate some openings towards a relationist definition. In these relationist approaches, everyday life is seen as different from the exceptional, or the sublime and its enchantment. For instance, de Certeau (1984: xx) refers to everyday "practices that produce without capitalizing", and Bennett and Watson (2002: x) mention that everyday life is depicted "as ordinary in the sense that it is not imbued with any special religious, ritual or magical significance". Even Lefebvre (1958: 97), whose Marxist orientation leads him to a more essentialist approach to the everyday, proposes

a definition of everyday life in relation to “exceptional” or “superior” activities such as dreams, art, philosophy, politics, etc.

The advantage of these relationist approaches is that they allow the fluid construction of the everyday life to be emphasized, and highlight the impossibility of (permanently) capturing this floating signifier (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112–113). On the downside, the risk of the relationist approaches is twofold. First, the old romantic dichotomy between the everyday ‘inauthentic’ and the tragic ‘authentic’, which characterized the work of the early Lukács (1974) for instance, still threatens to contaminate any type of relationist approach towards the everyday. Second, hyper-relationist approaches bring along the risks of cultural relativism, and the disarticulation of everyday life from its potentially empowering signification. For these reasons it is crucial not to disregard the essentialist approaches of the everyday, but to incorporate them in a more constructivist/relationist position that allows articulation of the fluid nature of everyday life. For instance, in the case of Felski’s definition, where the everyday is based on repetition, home and habit, a more relationist re-articulation would emphasize the need for singularity, non-homely spaces and uniqueness as constitutive outsides for the definition of the everyday. Moreover, this relationist re-articulation would also stress the contamination of repetition with singularity, home with non-home and habit with uniqueness.

The distinction that Lefebvre (1988) makes between the everyday (*le quotidien*) and everydayness (*la quotidiennité*) is especially worth salvaging. Lefebvre strongly emphasizes the critical, political and emancipatory potential of the everyday, as the site where social change resides. Roberts (2006: 13) summarizes Lefebvre’s position as follows: “the everyday is that social or experimental space in which the relations between technology and cognition, art and labour are configured and brought to critical consciousness”. It is not “simply the expression of dominant social relations, but the very place where critical thinking and action begins” (Roberts, 2006: 38). In order to theorize the difference between capital’s administration of atomization and repetition, and the modality of social transformation and class resistance against this atomization and repetition, Lefebvre uses the distinction between the everyday and everydayness. This safeguards the critical-political potential of the everyday, which is seen as “lived experience (*le vécu*) elevated to the status of a concept and to language. And this is not done to accept it but, on the contrary, to change it” (Lefebvre, 1988: 86).

1.2.2 *The ordinary (people)*

Similar to the above discussion on the everyday, the ordinary and, more specifically, ordinary people can also be approached by using more essentialist perspectives. While the concept of ordinary people is sometimes seen as a synonym for ‘the people’, in many other cases, a class-based definition is used in which ordinary people are defined as “members of the working and middle classes” (Bennett and Watson, 2002: x). Hartley

(1994: 173) explicitly refers to the moments when the concept of ordinary people is used as “convenient ‘erasures’ or euphemisms for class”.

But, again, the fluidity of the signifier ordinary people (and of class), and the difficulty of capturing the signifier (see Thumim, 2006) need to be emphasized. De Certeau (1984: 2) pointed out that ordinary people are “Everyman & Nobody, Chacun & Personne, Jedermann & Niemand”. In his preface to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1984) stresses this fluidity as follows: “To a common hero, an ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets. In invoking here at the outset of my narratives the absent figure who provides both their beginning and their necessity, I inquire into the desire whose impossible object he represents”. As was the case with everyday life, this fluidity has resulted in the development of a number of relationist approaches, assisted by the de-essentialization of the notion of class itself. Through this process, class not only lost its privileged position as *explanans*, but also became articulated as more contingent and part of a struggle to signify. While the class concept is not completely abandoned, some authors translated class differences into an elite versus the people relationship. For instance, Hall (1981: 238) positions (ordinary) people versus this power bloc, consisting of members of societal elites, i.e. “the side with the cultural power to decide what belongs and what does not, an alliance of social forces which constitute what is not the people”. Also Williams (1981: 226) uses a people–elite approach when he refers to ordinary people as “a generalised body of Others [...] from the point of view of a conscious governing or administrative minority”.

A number of authors writing from a communication and media studies perspective also use these relationist approaches. Ytreberg (2004: 679) describes ordinary people as non-professional and non-specialized performers. Syvertsen (2001: 319) defines ordinary people as people who are not media professionals, experts, celebrities or newsworthy for any other reason. And Turner (2010), in his book on the demotic turn, contrasts ordinary people with celebrities, experts and media professionals. These subject positions act as constitutive outsides for the subject position of ordinary people. This means also that the qualities that are articulated with these ‘other’ subject positions are out of the reach of the ordinary people subject position: They actually contribute to the construction of the difference between them. For example, the level of renown is a quality that ‘belongs’ to celebrities, and is (thus) disarticulated from ordinary people (Hamo, 2006: 430). Other examples are the elements of knowledge (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 101–102) and authenticity (Thornborrow, 2001: 478), which construct the difference between experts and ordinary people.

Finally, Laclau (1977: 166), who also uses this relational approach, emphasizes the conflictual and dominating nature of the relationship between ordinary people and the power bloc. He writes, “the people/power bloc contradiction is an antagonism whose intelligibility depends not on the relations of production but the complex of political and ideological relations of domination constituting a determinate social formation”. The issue of domination that Laclau raises unavoidably foregrounds the resistance debate

(see also de Certeau, 1984). Another way to capture this resistance and to emphasize the political nature of the signifier ordinary people is by using Lefebvre's distinction between the everyday and everydayness. This distinction allows us to see the ordinary as a site of resistance against the workings of power elites, and ordinariness can then be used to refer to the administration, disciplining and management of ordinary people by these power blocs. Through this distinction, the ordinary is invested with a clear emancipatory signification, which consists of resisting the strategies of the societal elites and power blocs. As this semantic strategy again risks introducing a number of too essentialist positions, it remains a necessary condition to embed these concepts within a more constructivist/relationist model, where both the ordinary and ordinariness are seen as fluid and contingent (also see Sandywell, 2004).

1.2.3 Hybrid ordinary people–elite relationships

The (ordinary) people/power bloc approach has a number of structural problems, which necessitate a more thoughtful and careful application of this concept that avoids a too rigid definition of the concepts of ordinary people and power bloc. As the introduction to this chapter highlighted, subject positions are explicitly seen as not completely rigid and fixed, and not defined as forces that determine subjects. Subject positions are characterized by contingency and overdetermination but, at the same time, are seen as the objects of hegemonic projects that aim for specific stabilizations and fixations. This implies that the subject positions related to the (ordinary) people power bloc approach, also in the media sphere, are not necessarily stable, and that they can take different stances towards each other, which can change over time and space.

This is not to say that the oppositional and antagonistic articulation of the ordinary people subject position and the media professional elite subject position does not exist. Or that its translation into the discourse that uses this oppositional and antagonistic articulation to privilege elitist positions and ordinariness, based on the fantasy of full control and management and post-political strategies, has disappeared. These articulations exist, but they have simultaneously become highly contested and problematized in contemporary societies, a process that creates a structural tension. Nevertheless, many mainstream media organizations gratefully provide a shelter for the articulation of the media professional as privileged, in its stronger or in its weaker versions. In some cases this tension leads to nostalgia, where the complexities of fluidity and hybridity are mourned, and the return to a more straightforward past with 'clear' subject positions is longed for. In other cases antagonistic identity strategies are applied, whereas ordinary people are defined as 'others'. Through these dichotomizing articulatory processes, ordinary people are constructed as a homogeneous mass, and detached from social structures (e.g., civil society or communities). Their everyday life knowledge is discarded as irrelevant and illegitimate. They are deemed to lack any expertise, and to be in dire

need of education. In other cases, more benevolent (but not necessarily less problematic) discourses are used to construct a difference between the media professional and the societal groups they aim to serve. Here we can mention, for instance, the strategy of respectful detachment, where otherness is acknowledged and the other is respected, but no attempt at communication or interaction (let alone participation) is initiated.

A major contestation of the articulation of the media professional as privileged is the democratic-populist discourse, which is based on the radicalization of a cultural-democratic discourse that articulates the media professional as superfluous and about-to-disappear. In contrast to the othering processes, which privilege the media professional, this democratic-populist discourse is based on the replacement of a hierarchical difference with total equality. It is considered to be a populist discourse, because (following Laclau's approach) it is based on an antagonist resistance of the people against an elite. As Laclau (1977: 143) puts it, "Populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc". This democratic-populist discourse has two main variations. The celebrative-utopian variation defines the equalization of society and the disappearance of its elites, as the ultimate objective for the realization of a 'truly' democratic society. Media professionals in this perspective become problematized, and the symbolic power that is attributed to them is seen to be obstructing the process of democratization. But there is also an anxietatic-dystopian variation, based on the fear that the democratic-populist discourse might actually be realized. One recent example is Keen's (2007) *The Cult of the Amateur*, where the 'amateurs' who produce user-generated content come to be seen as a threat to (expert) tastes, knowledges and truths.

To resolve this apparent deadlock, I want to return to the debate on maximalist participation, which obviously wants to break with articulations of the media professional as privileged, but also needs to shy away from the democratic-populist articulation. Maximalist participation (as I define it here – see chapter 1) emphasizes more balanced power relations in society and in the media sphere, but seeks also to reconcile the different subject positions without collapsing them into one category or without privileging one over the other. Maximalist participation does not imply that the position of (one of) the involved parties (in this case media professionals or ordinary people) should be erased. On the contrary, maximalist participation entails a decision-making process that is respectful of all the parties involved, on the basis of power sharing. This plea for an increase in societal power balances still has a clear utopian, fantasmatic dimension. Despite the impossibility of fully realizing these situations in the social praxis, their fantasmatic realization serves as breeding ground for democratic renewal in the media sphere.

Simultaneously, it is necessary to avoid ignoring difference and the conflicts that difference brings about, while framing differences as necessarily antagonistic also needs to be avoided. Here, we can turn to Mouffe's work, which suggests the concept of agonism to describe a "we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging

that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents” (Mouffe, 2005: 20). An agonist relationship does not hide the differences in position and interest between the involved parties; they are “in conflict” but “share a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes places” (Mouffe, 2005: 20). This implies that the structural differences between media professionals and ordinary people (and other social categories) are acknowledged, but that all parties accept that they share a common cultural space and accept each other’s perspectives, however different they may be.

2. Case 1: The construction of ordinary people in *Jan Publiek*

2.1 Introduction

The first case study in this chapter revisits the north Belgian audience discussion programme (ADP) *Jan Publiek*. In collaboration with Wim Hannot (Carpentier and Hannot, 2009), I looked at the experiences of the participants in and at the reception of *Jan Publiek* by focus group members, in relation to the construction of the subject position of ordinary people in the programme. Through its format, *Jan Publiek* made use of, and (re)produced, a series of specific subject positions. Apart from ordinary people, who were invited on the basis of their authentic experiences or who were part of the panel of ordinary people, the programme included four more subject positions: the media professional (*in casu* the host), the celebrity, the expert and the politician. The production team of *Jan Publiek* carefully selected a number of individuals to fill these social categories, and built the entire programme structure on the interventions that these individuals were expected to make. During the actual broadcast, the moderator/host assiduously selected the participants and combined traditional interview strategies with more open moderation strategies (all of which were based on a pre-prepared script – see chapter 2). The interactions of individual participants (structured through their participant-categories and subject positions), the host (and his subject position(s) and scripts), the pre-prepared footage and the tele-voting interventions of the viewers at home, combined with the ideologies of participation and those of television production, all contributed to the construction of a weekly broadcast television text.

2.2 A brief note on method

The methodology of this case study rests on two main approaches, which incorporate the two types of audiences of ADPs. First, there is the regular or home audience, whose audience constructions are researched through a reception analysis based on focus groups. Second, there is the studio audience that participates in the actual debates. The

panel members, representing the audience in the actual ADP, were interviewed twice – in 1999 and 2007.

Reception analysis of the first edition of *Jan Publiek* was organized already in 1999.³ Based on an initial intention to focus on both participation and gender issues,⁴ four specific broadcasts from the first edition of *Jan Publiek* were selected for eight focus group discussions (and qualitative and quantitative content analysis⁵). Participants watched a whole episode of *Jan Publiek* before engaging in actual discussion. A total of 45 people participated⁶ in the eight focus groups, two of which included only men, and two of which included only women. Most of the participants knew about the programme *Jan Publiek* and had seen one or more broadcasts, but there were not many regular viewers. Each programme was discussed in two focus groups. The four programmes had the following topics (see Figure 1):

Figure 1: The four *Jan Publiek* broadcasts (first edition).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>
13-Feb-97	A brief love affair should be acceptable
10-Apr-97	Women make better bosses
17-Apr-97	Children are always the victims in a divorce
22-May-97	Porn should be banned

The second methodological component is based on a series of interviews with the panel members in *Jan Publiek*'s second edition. All twenty panel members that participated in *Jan Publiek* in 1997 were interviewed in 1999, using a semi-open questionnaire. In 2007, ten years after their participation in *Jan Publiek*, panel members were traced and contacted again: thirteen of them were eventually interviewed.⁷ Three of the original panel members had died, two of them were not traceable and two refused to be interviewed. All thirteen former participants interviewed had very vivid and consistent memories of their participation, and had little trouble answering the questions, despite this participation in *Jan Publiek* having taken place ten years earlier.

For my analysis of the reception focus groups and the interviews, I again used qualitative content analysis (Maso, 1989; Wester, 1987, 1995). The main sensitizing concept (see Blumer, 1969) was the notion of the subject position (and more specifically the interrelated, fluid and sometimes antagonistic subject positions of the ordinary people, the celebrity, the expert, the politician and the media professional). One potential problem was the time lag between the different research phases, but the outcomes of the reception focus groups and the interviews were actually very similar. For this reason they are discussed together, and only where there were structural differences do I differentiate between focus groups and interviews.

2.3 *Communication rights and pluralism*

In the course of the focus group discussions and interviews, the ordinary and its presence in the television system in *Jan Publiek* are validated explicitly. Two interrelated discourses are used to legitimize the presence of ordinary people, based on a democratic quality argument (see chapter 6). The first discourse is grounded in the concept of communication rights and simply claims access to the television system for ordinary people, as a basic (human) right. This is exemplified by the following quote from the focus groups:

Interviewer: What do you think about people giving their opinions on tv?
Noëlla (F, 58y, L, FG4⁸): It's their fullest right that they want to be on television.

Similarly, the interviewed participants claimed that *Jan Publiek* is specific because they are given the opportunity to “speak their minds” (Geert Van Beek, M, 34y, 1997) or offer their “vision” (Frans Vanheltmont, M, 72y, 1997), “have their say” (Eric Verhoye, M, 54y, 1997) or “say what they think” (Frans Vanheltmont, M, 72y, 1997). As these interview quotes illustrate, the participants felt validated through this process of self-expression:

Roeland Rummens (M, 21y, 1997): Just my opinion counts, and that's how it really was. Coming home and hearing reactions of people who had really watched and listened. People came up to me on the street with: sorry, I totally disagree with you, for this and that reason. Just talking. That moved me, it gave me some self-confidence, that's what I got out of it.

The second (interrelated) discourse is based on pluralism. It is deemed important that the different views expressed by (among others) the ordinary participants can gain publicness through *Jan Publiek*. This is illustrated by the following quote from one of the participants.

Rudi De Kerpel (M, 48y, 2007): That was the programme's strength, to avoid repeating the same positions, but to get different and opposing positions, which resulted in more fascinating television.

Although the two discourses of communication rights and pluralism legitimize the presence of ordinary people in *Jan Publiek*, the ordinary people's on-screen presence is not accepted unconditionally: It requires the condition of relevance.⁹ For the focus group participants, relevance is generated first by the representativeness of the ordinary participants in *Jan Publiek*. For that reason the ordinary participants need to be in a group, so that they can speak on behalf of the population and generate the pluralism of ideas, which is much valued. This articulation renders the ordinary people concept as always plural, articulating them as *the* public opinion.

Not surprisingly, the talk show participants inevitably take a different position here, since they are (and can hardly avoid) emphasizing their own individuality. As one of the participants put it, “Every person in itself was unique” (Betty Lathouwers, F, 58y, 2007). Nevertheless, they stress the need for relevance. As another participant expressed it, “What’s the use of having people talk about a topic with which they have nothing to do, and that want to give their opinion because they want to be on television” (Fatiha Mataiche, F, 34y, 2007). The tension between the participants’ emphasis on individuality and the need for relevance is resolved only by reverting to another legitimizing concept: authenticity.

For both focus group respondents and interviewees, authenticity is the main argument supporting the relevance of the ordinary people’s presence, which is referred to in other research (see Montgomery, 2001; Scannell, 2001; Thornborrow, 2001). Montgomery (2001: 399) remarked that authenticity can be situated at the level of spontaneity, at the level of truthfulness of the lived experience and at the level of the truthfulness of the performed self. In the case of *Jan Publiek*, the importance of the authentic lived experience is especially emphasized. When this authentic experience is deemed to be absent, the legitimacy of the presence of ordinary people in *Jan Publiek* is questioned by its audiences. In a number of cases, both focus group participants and interviewees expressed how difficult it was to talk about issues they had not experienced; yet in other cases they revoke the access rights of ordinary talk show participants when there is no authentic experience to support their presence.

Also, if these authentic experiences become too intense, the same process of delegitimation takes place. Ordinary people need to have authentic everyday life experiences, but when these are considered (too) extraordinary, too abundantly detailed or even vulgar, their narrations become disarticulated from the subject positions of ordinary people and they are marginalized. Similarly, when ordinary people are seen to appear on-screen only to become ‘famous’, they are no longer seen as authentic, and are considered to be disarticulated from the subject position of ordinary people (to have become pseudo-celebrities). Although the interviewed participants took the same position with regard to publicness and authenticity, all still emphasized the difficulties of reconciling these two, and a small number of the talk show participants referred explicitly to the harm the talk show had caused them, for instance, loss of a job, and ending of a relationship in one case and economic problems in relation to a small business in another.

2.4 The oppositional/antagonistic position of ordinary people towards the other subject positions

The subject position of ordinary people is not articulated only through the simple presence of this social category in the studio and the way that the format defines them as owners of authentic experiences.¹⁰ Their subject position is also defined within an

oppositional/antagonistic relationship involving a set of other subject positions that also feature prominently in *Jan Publiek*: those of celebrity, expert, politician and media professional. It is through the oppositional/antagonistic relationships with these more elitist social categories that the subject position of ordinary people becomes intertwined with ordinariness.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a too rigid interpretation of these subject positions should be avoided, as these oppositional/antagonistic relationships can be fluid and mobile in some cases, allowing people to shift, for instance, from one position to another. Thornborrow (2001: 478) rightly observes that the dichotomy of broadly oppositional criteria “in practice often breaks down when the discursive roles and interactions of participants in these shows is examined more closely”, something that we can observe in the case of *Jan Publiek*. But at the same time the rigid structure of *Jan Publiek*, with its media professionals protecting the pre-defined subject positions and the sometimes evenly rigid discursive frameworks used by the audiences, causes these subject positions to remain very present in articulating the identities of the other and the self.

2.4.1 Celebrities

In constructing a three-level typology (famous, semi-famous, anonymous), Hamo (2006: 430) points out that the degree of renown is one of the main structuring elements of the subject position of celebrity. Fame based on celebrity status is (at least partially) generated through frequent presence in popular public spaces, which allows the celebrity to develop a wide range of communicative skills (Ytreberg, 2004: 679).

As the subject position of the celebrity finds itself in an oppositional/antagonistic relationship with that of ordinary people, ordinary people become articulated as unknown (or anonymous), with no access to or experience of these popular public spaces. The following citation illustrates how a focus group participant constructs the difference between celebrity and ordinary people in their access to popular public spaces, and the need to adjust this imbalance.

Johanna (F, 83y, L, FG5): If we would get to hear only the opinions of famous Flemings^[11], that would be too narrow ... I think that people that usually don't get the opportunity [*to have their voices heard*] should be allowed for once to express their opinion. I think that's good.

The element of authenticity that characterizes ordinary people also affects the identity of celebrities. First, the lack of authentic experience among the celebrities who participated in *Jan Publiek* was critiqued. Second, authenticity is seen as restricted by the processes of commodification and image construction. Celebrities, in contrast to ordinary people,

are part of a specific cultural-industrial system, which is seen structurally to limit their capacity to participate openly and to act spontaneously (and to be authentic). As one of the participants in *Jan Publiek* remarked, “they wear masks” (Suzanne De Bruyn, F, 57y, 2007). Moreover, the *Jan Publiek* participants pointed to the arrogance of (some of) the celebrities, which serves only to contribute to the construction of celebrities as not ordinary and as inauthentic. These critiques again strengthen the importance of authenticity since its absence delegitimizes the participation of celebrities, and also positions ordinary people as non-commodified, which can be added to their articulations as unknown and non-experienced.

There are moments, nevertheless, when these subject positions start to shift. First, celebrities are still allowed access to lived experience, as the following citation illustrates. Because of this fluidity, their identities can be described as semi-authentic.

Evelien (F, 23y, H, FG4): I think that celebrities who talk about their divorce ... that they come across much better.

Ordinary people can gain access to celebrity status through their contribution to participatory programming. Although the focus groups discussed only the first episode of *Jan Publiek*, some participants were familiar with the later episodes. After the first episode, the format changed such that ordinary participants returned to subsequent episodes as members of a permanent panel (see also chapter 2). During the focus group discussions, some focus group participants spontaneously started comparing episodes (which also had been broadcast at the time the focus groups took place), claiming that the ordinary panel members became celebrities themselves.

In the interviews with these panel members, stories emerged of their being recognized and approached by strangers. For instance, Astrid Houthuys (F, 27y, 2007) describes how she was recognized by an anesthetist, who asked her (when she was about to have her appendix removed), “Hey, you’re from *Jan Publiek*. How are you doing now? And what are you doing on a day like today?” Even after ten years, some participants were still being recognized as familiar, and asked by people where they knew them from. In a small number of cases, *Jan Publiek* participants had appeared on other television programmes, which had increased their celebrity status.

2.4.2 Experts

In the case of the expert subject position, legitimacy is provided by expertise (Van Leeuwen, 2007: 94). Traditional genres, such as documentaries or current affairs programmes, valorize the expert for his objective, rational and factual knowledge, but in ADPs this position is often inversed and they are articulated as inauthentic, alienated, cold and artificial (Livingstone and Lunt, 1996: 101–102). Despite the critical position of

ADPs towards expert knowledge (and its reception), the expert subject position remains very present in ADPs, and is articulated in a specific way. Most importantly, experts are seen as knowledgeable (even if this knowledgeability is valued negatively). They are not seen as expressing personal opinions, but their interventions are grounded in (academic) research and knowledge. This articulation has consequences for the identity of ordinary people, who are linked to authentic experiences, through the oppositional/antagonistic relationship with the expert identity, as is illustrated in the citation below.

Jan B (M, 22y, L, FG3): Yes, their experience is just their own experience and not the experience of other people. That's why they are not experts.

Apart from being knowledgeable, experts are also individuated, embedded in professional systems and considered to be experienced. The process of individuation is in part strengthened by the way experts are treated by the media professionals who attribute names, ranks, institutional affiliation and status to them (Thornborrow, 2001: 459). Through their affiliation, their institutional and organizational membership is highlighted: In the reception focus groups, the experts were often referred to by name or according to their affiliations. Moreover, they are considered to be more experienced (similar to the celebrities) about speaking in public, another contrast with ordinary people.

As already indicated, the expert position (however present in the programme) is not always valued positively. In some cases, respondents use a flexible definition of expert, attributing the label to a science journalist (writing for *Knack*¹²), or to a psychologist writing for *Libelle*, a north Belgian women's magazine. However, this attribution is not wholehearted, since, in other cases, there is a perceived absence of 'real' experts, which is fed by the need to ground knowledge in academia. For yet another group, even the presence of these 'real' experts – described as "superprofessors" by one participant (Jan B, M, L, 22y, FG3) – is considered problematic. Again, these articulations of the expert identity have consequences for the subject position of ordinary people, which again articulates them with ordinariness. Through this antagonism, ordinary people are considered unknowledgeable but still authentic, unorganized but still part of a collective, and inexperienced.

In contrast to the celebrities, there is little overlap between the subject positions of experts and ordinary people. They are still deemed very different categories, and the difference between knowledge and opinion remains very rigid. There is one exception, which is when ordinary panel members turn out to be experts. The most important case was the panel member Fatiha, who worked in the so-called integration agency of the city of Leuven, and initially was approached by the editorial team of *Jan Publiek* to help locate potential panel members with a migrant background. Since there was a shortage of candidates, she herself agreed to participate as a panel member. However, her professional expert background was hardly mentioned during the broadcasts, which renders her a hidden expert.

2.4.3 Politicians

The focus group discussions rarely touched on this third subject position, despite the fact that several politicians feature in the *Jan Publiek* broadcasts. The legitimacy of their presence is based on the notion of accountability to ‘the people’. Politicians are articulated in ADPs as representing the people and, through the ADPs, the people – the ordinary participants and the audience at home – can decide on the quality of this representation. Similar to the experts, politicians do not escape some negative and sometimes cynical connotations, articulating them as alienated and even corrupt. The citation below contains both the representational and the cynical element.

Patrick (M, 47y, H, FG7): It’s a serious problem and a difficult one to find a ready-made solution for. Politicians who are supposed to lead the people, who are selected by the people, they fail too. Because, uh, their moral standards are blurred too.

The nature of this representation, however, is different from the case of ordinary people: While politicians are known to us, ordinary participants represent the people anonymously, symbolically and collectively. Traditional (political) representation becomes individuated and linked to power through the mechanism of delegation, establishing a “two-tier playing field, one of the represented and one of those who act for them as representatives” (Arditi, 2007: 63). Politicians are also defined as grounded in (political) organizations and as (political) experts, as they know how the political system works. This again is contrasted to ordinary people who – according to the focus group respondents – do not possess this kind of knowledge and expertise. Similar to the expert subject position, the antagonism between politicians and ordinary people articulates ordinary people as authentic, but at the same time unknowledgeable, unorganized and inexperienced.

Again, the border between the subject position of the politician and the ordinary people turns out to be more fluid than expected. This in some part was because one panel member was a member of a city council before her participation in *Jan Publiek*, but mainly was because of the approaches from various political parties that panel members received after their appearance on *Jan Publiek*. At least one panel member had become a candidate in one of the local elections, one panel member had been asked to stand (but had refused), and a third was the north Belgian liberal party’s VLD nominee for the Management Board of the public broadcaster VRT, a position Rudi De Kerpel has occupied for five years. The latter later became party secretary and treasurer of the right wing populist party Lijst Dedecker, and was a candidate for the Belgian federal elections of 2010.¹³

2.4.4 *Media professionals*

The central role of the media professional in an ADP is based on that of moderator combined with an interviewing role (see chapter 2). An important part of the critiques levelled against ADPs is focused on the role of the host, as she or he is seen to play a key role in the management of the debate and of the participants (see e.g. White, 1992). Whatever the connotations attached to the role of host in *Jan Publiek*, it is a role that articulates him as professional, and as part of a professional media system. This meaning emerged in the focus group discussions also, where both his identity and his actions were linked to professionalism, as illustrated by the two citations below.

Gabriël (M, 49y, H, FG7): He surely is, how shall I put it, he's a pro.

Patrick (M, 47y, H, FG7): Yes, but what I want to say is that, concerning Jan Van Rompaey, whatever he does, he does it in a professional way.

Being professional, in some cases, also implies embeddedness in the professional media system and culture. The host's on-screen presence first of all generates renown, which is not dissimilar to the fame of 'other' celebrities. His on-screen moderating and interviewing role articulates his subject position with power. The host (supported by the invisible production team) controls the setting and nature of the debate, and for instance decides who takes the floor, who gets which question, how long an intervention will be and who will be the next speaker. In the antagonistic position of the media professional towards the ordinary people, ordinary people thus become positioned as unknown, powerless, unprofessional and not part of a professional system or organization, again articulating them with ordinariness.

Again, this does not imply that the position of the media professional escapes critique. In particular, the combination of professionalism and being perceived as powerful generates heavy criticisms that the host (and his production team) are not professional enough, interrupt too much, keep debate superficial, are not sufficiently neutral and are even manipulative. Most of the panel members (having experienced the professional management of the producers themselves) indicated that they had become more critical television viewers than before their participation. As Fatiha Mataiche (F, 34y, 2007) put it, "What I learned from it is that media cannot contain reality. It's always a representation, an image, and not reality".

Finally, the border between media professionals and ordinary people becomes unstable, but this happens only after the broadcasts. A number of panel members used the fame generated by their appearance in *Jan Publiek* to become media professionals themselves. One of them had presented a programme about gardening on public radio, another had taken part, for two years, in a show about dogs on Liberty TV, and a third panel member had begun freelancing for the magazine *Knack*.

2.4.5 Jan Publiek – a model

As a preliminary conclusion, the model rendered below (Figure 2) provides us with an overview of the oppositional/antagonistic relations between ordinary people and the alliance of power blocs, at the discursive level of the different subject positions, as they were articulated by the viewers in the reception analysis focus groups. Through these oppositions/antagonisms, all subject positions become articulated with a wide range of elements that co-construct the identities of all the individuals involved.

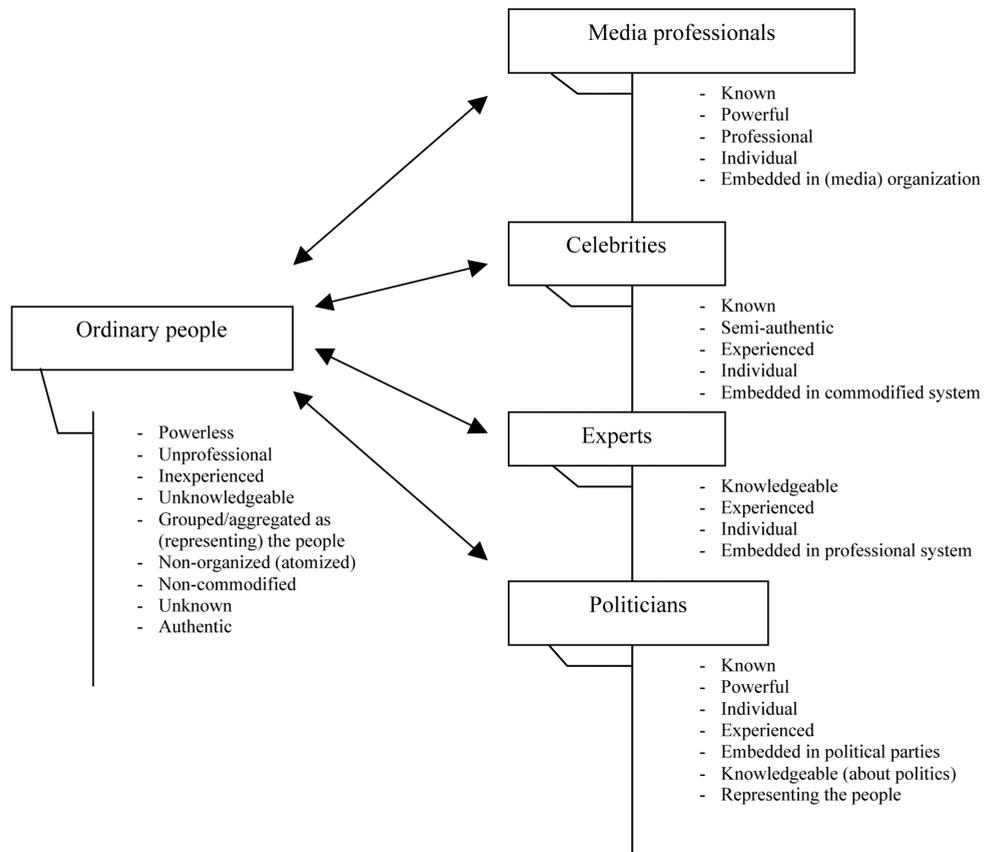


Figure 2: The articulations of the subject positions in Jan Publiek.

2.5 Conclusion

When looking at (the reception of) the participatory nature of *Jan Publiek*, or the perceived balance between the being ordinary and the ordinariness in these ADPs, the outcome – not surprisingly – is nuanced. The focus group respondents and talk show participants clearly emphasize the importance of the public participation of ordinary people, by invoking a communication rights discourse and a pluralism discourse. Their narrations of authentic experiences are highly valued and their interventions are connotated in a positive way, especially when compared with some of the other participant groups.

The relationist argument of the ordinary people versus the alliance of power blocs is not a mere theoretical construct, but was (spontaneously) raised in the focus groups and interviews. The participants articulate ordinary people in an oppositional/antagonistic position towards the more elitist groups, such as celebrities, politicians, experts and media professionals, and use that antagonism to expand their appreciation of the authenticity of ordinary people. In this sense, the ordinary – with its Lefebvrian emancipatory load – seems to be strongly present in *Jan Publiek*, and there seems to be little ordinariness (and related administration, disciplining and management of ordinary people).

But this antagonism comes at a high price because it entraps the recipients and participants into linking other characteristics to both the ordinary people subject position and the other elitist subject positions. The antagonism between media professionals and ordinary people, for instance, produces a powerful–powerless dimension; the antagonism between experts and politicians, and ordinary people supports the knowledgeable–unknowledgeable dimension; and the antagonism between celebrities and ordinary people constructs the latter as unknown compared to the fame of the celebrities. At a more generalized level, the antagonism between the power blocs and ordinary people constructs ordinary people as inexperienced, detached and atomized, restricts them to the private, and traps them in their authenticity. Through this mechanism ordinary people are again reintroduced to their ordinariness, and cut off from the emancipatory potential of the ordinary, which works against the maximalist participatory model.

3. Case 2: *Temptation Island* – reality TV and minimalist participation¹⁴

3.1 Introduction

The reality TV show *Temptation Island* was televised for the first time in 2001 on the FOX network in the USA. Many television networks bought the rights to this format, resulting in local variations of the original in several countries including the UK, France, Australia, Brazil and Italy. In Belgium and the Netherlands the local version was produced by Kanakna Productions for two SBS network broadcasters, VT4 in north Belgium and

Veronica in the Netherlands. The first Dutch-spoken *Temptation Island* was televised in 2002, and since then there has been a new series almost every year up to 2009.¹⁵ The fifth series, which is analysed here, was televised in April 2006, on VT4 and Veronica, with Hans Otten (VT4) and Tanja Jess (Veronica) as presenters.

The format of *Temptation Island* is relatively simple, and is based on a clear and quasi-impenetrable categorizing of the participants that makes use of two subject positions. Eight people, four men and four women, who are constructed as ‘partners’ in ‘couples’, are housed separately in so-called resorts on two tropical islands,¹⁶ where they meet a number of people who are defined through the subject position of ‘bachelor’ (or ‘tempter’ and ‘temptress’). The programme format revolves around a relationship test in which each partner in each couple receives the attention of the tempters or temptresses, for a period of two weeks. As the Veronica *Temptation Island* website says, “During their stay they are seduced by attractive men and women who give rise to their ultimate fantasies”.¹⁷ The eight partners (and their tempters/temptresses) spend most of their time having fun, in smaller or larger groups, while (almost) every action is filmed and recorded by the (sometimes hidden) cameras and sound recording equipment of *Temptation Island*’s production team. The various episodes consist of montages of these components, with commentaries, and interviews with the participants.

The (group) interactions are alternated with two subformats. On the so-called ‘dates’, which culminate in a ‘dream date’, the partners choose one of the tempters/temptresses for a private date during which they embark on a romantic activity or an adventure, through which the *Temptation Island* production team attempts to heighten the pressure on the partners (and their relationships). In the second scenario the participants are shown short film clips of their partners’ escapades at so-called ‘bonfires’, while being interviewed by one of the presenters. The final meeting between the couples is also during a bonfire. Both the film clips and interview questions are aimed at increasing the pressure on the partners. The final episode shows a visit to the couples some months after their *Temptation Island* stay, when an inventory is made of the damage caused to their relationships.

In some programmes the basic format was changed. For example, in *Temptation Island* 2005 the bar attendants (a man and a woman) – who played important roles in the festivities – took on the roles of tempter and temptress. In *Temptation Island* 2006, an extra temptress (Rebecca Loos) was invited onto the show, and a new group of tempters/temptresses, including some previous participants (Tim De Pril, Gaby Visser and Rowena Guldenaar¹⁸) was brought to the island. The participants then had to choose which of the tempters/temptresses could stay. Also in one episode, the mother of one of the participants came to visit her, and the respective dream dates of the couple were replaced by a ‘reconciliation date’, which allowed the couple to spend time alone to try and mend their relationship and “to make something special of their second last day on *Temptation Island*” (Veronica *Temptation Island* website).

3.2 Key discourses in *Temptation Island*

It was mainly the interactions between participants, encouraged by the production team's management thereof, that were the basis of the television text. As is the case of any text, the *Temptation Island* text contains a series of discourses that transcend individual statements and interactions cast in pictures and sounds. Although *Temptation Island* is not explicitly framed by its producers as a participatory programme, it still produces a discourse on participation. Of course, this discourse is not the only one being produced. Moreover, to fully understand *Temptation Island's* discourse on participation, we first need to look at another set of key discourses.

One of the most important discourses generated in (and through) *Temptation Island* was the discourse about sexual fidelity, which is linked to the subject position of the partner (in the couple). In principle, human relationships can be organized in many different ways, but in *Temptation Island* – through the emphasis on the couple/bachelor dichotomy – a specific form of heterosexual relational organization is privileged, thereby ruthlessly excluding many other societal forms. At the same time, the status of the bachelor is acknowledged, but without differentiating between the tempter and temptress. Their identity stands in an antagonistic relationship with the partners: The bachelors represent hedonistic pleasure, which at the same time is articulated as threatening. It is the forbidden fruit, which itself is a specific and reduced representation of this social category.

It is noticeable that there are limits to the relationships that are subjected to the *Temptation Island* test. The following sentence from Kanakna productions' call¹⁹ for participants indicates that married couples would not be considered: "Participants must be older than 20, unmarried, and must be free for two weeks". A second limitation – not mentioned in the call – is children. The impact (and evidence) of this limitation became clear during *Temptation Island 2* in 2003, when one of the couples (Cindy Stoop and James Serbeniuk) had to leave the island because Cindy Stoop was pregnant. In the *Temptation Island* discourse, marriage and children are seen as too important to be drawn into the game or even considered.

Moreover, the idea of the relationship test is reduced to one of resisting (physical) seduction, and maintaining sexual fidelity. On the Veronica *Temptation Island* website, the end result of the fifth series (broadcast in episode fifteen) is summarized as follows: "Bianca was not the only one to stray; Liesbeth and Cheyenne also could not resist temptation, even though they denied this in the strongest terms. The pictures tell a different story". A specific and homogenous representation is offered of what is regarded as primordial in a relationship, what the subject position of the partner entails, and what criteria should be used to test a relationship. The problematic character of (sexual) infidelity and the intrinsic link between love and sexuality is strengthened by the recurrent references in the broadcasts to earlier crises between the partners as a result of infidelity. It is precisely this testing of mutual trust that is seen in the *Temptation Island*

text as an important motivating factor for participation. This element is also emphasized on the VT4 website, where the couple Bianca Mommen and Björn²⁰ were introduced as follows: “Bianca and Björn are from Willebroek. She has previously been unfaithful, and he often confronts her with this. She now wants to prove to him that one mistake means nothing, and win back his total trust”.

Once this trust is backed up by practical evidence during the *Temptation Island* encounter, and the partners have proven their fidelity to each other, the way is open to an everlasting and harmonic relationship. Sexual fidelity becomes the proof of a love that – once the ‘right one’ has been found – is forever. This is well illustrated by the following sentence from the description of the couple Lisette van Veenendaal and Len Konings, on the VT4 website: “They take part in *Temptation Island* to prove that they were born for each other”. In this sense *Temptation Island* is articulated as a rite of passage, allowing people to enter the world of ‘genuine’ relationships. Thus, the programme forms part of the hegemonic discourse of heterosexual monogamy, where the subject position of the partner is articulated with exclusive and lifelong relationships.

When the partners fail the relationship test, another element takes precedence to articulate the (failed) partner: honesty. The entire configuration (and power dynamics) of *Temptation Island* is in any case based on truth speaking. Participants who are interviewed (alone or during the bonfires) are trusted to be revealing their innermost feelings to others (the presenters, their partners, the viewers). If they are not honest, they run the risk of having their actions interpreted negatively by the production team, or being pressured to be ‘honest’, with the constant threat of being ‘unmasked’ by the clips. However, it is particularly when it comes to sexual infidelity that the pressure to be ‘honest’ becomes extreme. Of course this emphasis on honesty forms part of the production team’s management strategies, because the ‘struggle’ followed by the ‘confession’ creates ‘good’ television, and it can also be used to further undermine the position of the other partner. But these management strategies only strengthen the emphasis on the cultural importance of honesty, presenting it in the television text as an important regulatory mechanism in human relationships.

Apart from the emphasis on honesty, other cultural demands are made on human actions. The strong emphasis on the narration of the self, within the basic framework of the relationship test, presupposes consistent and rational (or rationalizable) action. Emotional fluctuations and (seemingly) inconsequent behaviour are frowned upon in the commentary and in the interactions with other participants. For example, when Bianca Mommen, at first, holds herself very aloof from the single males and reacts very emotionally to clips of her partner, Björn, holding hands with a temptress. A few episodes later she was seen to have sex a couple of times with one of the bachelors. After these events, the other partners and singles, and the commentator’s voice-over, express their disbelief and lack of understanding.

The immediacy of the television system plays a role here because there is a time limit on filming, and participants do not have the opportunity to withdraw and to reassess

their positions and/or to rationalize their actions. Withdrawing from the group in any event is regarded as problematic since the sociability of the participants is taken for granted. Some participants do isolate themselves, but this is articulated as a problem in the broadcasts, for example, through reference to the particular participant being upset. Such emotion is the only explanation accepted as legitimate for voluntary social isolation. At the same time the participants' individual responsibility is strongly emphasized. They are framed as taking their decisions as mature and independent individuals, so that the entire structurizing context (and in particular the production team's management) moves to the background, very much according to the post-political logic described in the *Barometer* case study in chapter 2.

A second key discourse in *Temptation Island* is based on the ideal of physical beauty as the source of and catalyst for attraction and seduction. On the Kanakna website the invitation to participate is expressly directed at “good-looking people (singles/couples)”. According to the Veronica *Temptation Island* website the partners are exposed to seduction by “handsome single men and women”, and it is not by chance that a tropical island is chosen as set for the series, resulting in an endless parade of scanty swimwear, bikinis and shorts. Here, the production team does revert to gendered stereotypes (although the male bachelors do not escape these processes of objectification). An illustration of this is the scene where the female singles are introduced to the male partners. In an unsubtle reference to Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, the masked singles parade in long hooded gowns with, clearly, only lingerie beneath. These images were reproduced on the front page of the VT4 website and in a poster campaign. After this ‘revelation’ the singles wrap themselves around the partners. This elicited the following remark from one of the partners, Andries de Jong: “They were touching us all over, and I thought: I hope they stay away from my business”.

A significant number of the *Temptation Island* scenes support the idea of physical seduction, including the apparently inevitable wet T-shirt competition, the slapping of (female) buttocks, the selection rituals for the ‘dates’ (reminiscent of beauty contests), and short-skirted or bare-chested dancing. In particular, the relationship test involves exposing the partners to the physical component of sexuality, and to female and male beauty. It is thus also no accident that magazines such as *Maxim* and *P-Magazine*, which rely very strongly on the ‘babe’ concept, as well as nude publications, such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, published photo reports on the female singles. Examples of these are the photographs of Liesbeth van Muylem in *P-Magazine* (April 2006) and of Mieke and Rowena Guldenaar in *Playboy* (July 2006). The male participants received little such publicity. With this emphasis on physicality, *Temptation Island's* discourse also reinforces the classic ideals of (female) beauty, with symmetry and slimness as key components.

This somewhat exclusive focus on physicality and beauty is toned down by the notion of the ‘connection’. Already attracted by the bodies of the singles, the partners quickly develop a preference for one or two of them. These individual preferences are legitimized by the concept of the ‘connection’, which suggests that there is compatibility between the

relevant personalities. This ‘connection’ refers more to an attraction based on character than one based on the physical, and partly softens the exclusive focus on participants’ bodies. The repertoire of ‘connection’, however, mostly comes to the fore later, and thus does not really diminish the emphasis on the physical.

A third and last key discourse involves the ‘holy’ rules of the game. As the direct interventions of the production team are supposed to remain hidden, their control is translated into a system of rules. The power of the media professionals is never directly seen in operation in *Temptation Island*; we see only the results of this power imbalance. Despite a number of modest manifestations of resistance, the entire programme radiates obedience. The participants are docile bodies, disciplined by the production team, which takes a post-political position. They are key examples of ordinariness in a Lefebvrian meaning. One example of this is the escape scene, where some of the partners decided to swim to the women’s resort. When they discovered that their boat was within swimming distance of the women’s resort, they jumped into the water to swim the rest of the way. However, they were persuaded to return to the boat, and the escape ended in failure. Here the concept of the relationship test also plays an important role, as departing from the rules equates to undermining the test. Therefore, disobedience (or a critical attitude) is re-articulated as cheating, creating a catch-22 situation for the participants.

3.3 Power in *Temptation Island*’s production sphere

When the power relations between the participants and the production team are examined more closely, it is difficult to ignore the inequality of these relations, which renders this programme an example of minimalist participation. The production team uses a number of sophisticated management techniques to place the partners under pressure, the most important being the unlimited trial.

Basing the entire programme concept on a relationship test to which the participants voluntarily subject themselves legitimizes the extreme interventions of the production team. On the *Temptation Island* websites of VT4 and Veronica, the concept of the relationship test is explicitly mentioned. The first sentence of the introductory text on the VT4 website²¹ is “Four couples travel to Thailand, where they are separated for sixteen days, during which their relationships are subjected to extreme tests”. On the Veronica *Temptation Island* website the first sentence reads “*Temptation Island*: the ultimate fantasy is a reality programme where four unmarried couples travel to an exotic location the test their relationships”.

Based on the concept of the relationship test and supported by the subject positions of the partner and the tempter/temptress, *Temptation Island* becomes an unlimited trial, where it is not only the people who are articulated as tempters/temptresses who “do everything in their power to place as much pressure as possible on the women [*and men*]” (VT4 website), but where the production team also tries to influence the context in such

a way that the relationships of the carefully selected couples are put under even greater pressure, often resulting in a break-up between the partners during the programme or after it ends. By taking part in a programme of this format, the participants relinquish their power over the nature and intensity of the tests to which they are subjected. At the same time this willingness to relinquish power legitimizes the production team's interventions and their intensity. In the final episode of the programme several participants said that they had underestimated the pressure that would be put on their relationship, but without referring to those persons who – under the pretext of an unlimited trial – had knowingly placed their relationship under duress. In their discussions, the participants emphasized the 'seduction' to which they had been subjected by the tempters/temptresses. As often happens in the television sphere, the interventions of the media professionals were not mentioned; they remained concealed.

The basic mechanism of the unlimited trial as a management technique is strengthened by the artificial setting, which is strongly reminiscent of a panopticon. The participants are cleverly isolated by their location on a distant tropical island, which offers a wide range of tourist (and sexual) attractions, but at the same time strongly resembles a prison (demonstrated by including the occasional 'escape' attempt). Within the imaginary walls of the so-called resorts, participants are subjected to numerous surveillance techniques by means of which (almost) all their activities are captured – day and night. These images are edited by the production team, and shown to the viewers and also to partners. Finally, *Temptation Island* is 'safeguarded' by numerous rules, contractually enforced, which direct and discipline the participants' behaviour.

A third management technique is based on what Foucault terms confessional power. *Inter alia*, through interviews, the participants are continually urged to describe their activities and emotional states, and to confess even the slightest 'infringements' to the specific articulation of the subject position of the partner. The interview questions are (partly) enabled by the production team's Olympian perspective (through the ubiquitous cameras). The result was not only a seemingly endless series of (self-)revelations on the part of the participants, of course unreciprocated by the presenters, but also the presenters being the first witnesses (and judges) of the, often inevitable, 'lapses' of the partners. The culmination of confessional power lies in the subformat of the bonfires, where partners are questioned about their reactions to suggestive or explicit clips of their partners' activities, and where they confess their own 'bad behaviour'. It is at the last bonfire, in particular – where the partners are reunited and have to confess their 'sins' to one another (and to the presenter and viewers) – that the most intimate details are revealed, leading often to emotional outbursts. One example is the bonfire during *Temptation Island 5* where the couple Björn and Bianca Mommen were reunited, earlier than usual. After clips had been shown to the viewers, and to Björn, Bianca confessed to having had sex with one of the bachelors, Stephen. Björn then stormed off in a rage: "Ten days, even that you could not do for me", and ran weeping to the beach, where he began shouting "Why?" – so loudly that it affected the sound quality of the recording.

Two remarks have to be made regarding this analysis of the production team's management techniques. First, the interaction between the participants is important, and not only because the programme is based on the seduction of the partners by tempters/temptresses. The power dynamics are more complex because the partners try to support and protect each other, but also discuss and judge each other's behaviour during the interviews. Second, and more important, is that resistance to the production team's management, from all the participants, still occurs, although only rarely. How it was practiced offers different articulations of the subject positions of (obedient) participant, (faithful) partner and (seducing) tempter/temptress. Participants did manage to escape the cameras and microphones: Although opportunities were few, some participants swam far out to sea, thereby becoming invisible and also inaudible, or simply removed the portable microphones. In some instances, refusing to participate in the interaction by locking themselves in a room, or 'going to bed early', can be seen as resistance, as can rather unenthusiastic performances by the tempters/temptresses. For example, in episode 12 of *Temptation Island* 5, the temptress Mieke initially accepted partner Len Konings' invitation to go on his dream date, but later returned the chain – symbolizing the 'chosen one' – to him, saying that he was too arrogant, and that she no longer wanted to be his dream date.

3.4 Viewer (dis)identification and pleasure

The popularity of the programme is evidenced not only by the many hundreds of thousands of viewers, but also by the numerous responses and discussions on online discussion forums, blogs and feedback forms.²² Analysis of these forum postings shows how viewers engaged with the text of *Temptation Island*. More specifically, it investigates how viewing pleasure is generated by viewers watching the disintegration of relationships, and the hardships and pain this causes to the people involved. The main argument explaining this tension recalls the identity theories discussed earlier in this chapter. In particular, this part of the analysis focuses on the process of viewer disidentification, which is constructed through the discreditation and dehumanization of the participants.

Analysing online forums has certain limitations since these are specific communicative systems with specific characteristics. For example, a number of these forums were moderated, so some postings were removed or not shown in full. Sometimes the moderation policy was explained, such as in the case of the VT4 forum on *Temptation Island*; in other cases it was not:

Our aim is to talk about the programme, not let participants hang their dirty washing on the line! We will be very strict in this regard [...] such postings are removed because of their aggressive and offensive nature. (Amourath, Forum Moderator, 1 April 2006, vt4.be)

Despite these methodological problems, qualitative analysis of these forums allowed me to incorporate the voices of audience members, who often responded immediately after the programme, or sometimes even while the programme was being screened. The quasi-anonymity of the forums adds another layer to the viewer responses: The postings are written in very raw and direct language, and (more often than might be expected) are shockingly insulting. I have decided to quote these postings here, regardless of the crude language, not out of sensationalism, but because the language use is crucial to my analysis. I would emphasize that I have not selected exceptional pieces, and that these citations are illustrative of a pervasive phenomenon.

As might be expected, these online responses are extremely diverse. A large part of the postings is purely informative, asking for or offering information on how the programme is developing, and on the private lives of the participants. This category of postings includes so-called ‘caps’ (or programme stills), which appear quite often in the forums, and quotes from the broadcasts. For instance, partner Björn’s cry – “TEN DAYS!!!” (SEMTEX, 24 April 2006, fok.nl) – was a popular quote, along with references to quotes from earlier programmes that had become part of *Temptation Island*’s standard repertoire, such as “No kissing, no fucking” and “Drink is the devil”, statements made by partner James Serbeniuk in *Temptation Island 2*. The more informative postings are supplemented by a small number of predictions about future developments and analyses of cultural²³ and gender differences (or expressions of cultural and gendered (lack of) understandings). However, the main tone of the messages in the postings on the forums analysed was judgemental. Posters gave their opinions, on many different levels, of the participants, their behaviour, their physical appearance, their personalities and their moral fibre. It is mainly these types of statements that are analysed in relation to the processes of disidentification, discreditation and dehumanization.

The starting point of this analysis, though, is the viewing pleasure generated by this programme. Although there are some (old) postings from non-viewers (“[I] never watch this kind of nonsense”. (jootje02, 4 July 2005, sbs.nl)), the majority of posters are viewers and, in most cases, fans, who also express their appreciation of the programme. One example is the following statement from Lady_Y: “We love this programme” (Lady_Y, 5 April 2006, veronica.nl). However, many viewers combined expressions of their appreciation with distancing statements, implying partial disidentification with the entire programme, similar to what Ang (1985) observed when analysing another popular culture programme, *Dallas*.

Of course it’s trash, but I keep on saying that it’s fun at certain moments. Life is serious enough as it is. (Angel45, 2 July 2005, sbs.nl)

Sad? Sure. Pathetic? Definitely. Entertaining? Enormously!’ (sugababe, 14 April 2006, vt4.be)

The process of disidentification is related mainly to the identificatory relationship between viewers and participants. In the online forums, we can distinguish four strategies of disidentification with the participants. First, disidentification takes place through the articulation of *Temptation Island* as a game and the attribution of individual responsibility to participants for participating in it, and risking their relationships in the process. It is particularly the idea of the (unlimited) trial that emphasizes the element of play. In a number of instances the actual words 'play' or 'game' are used. *Temptation Island* is a game in which the stakes that participants will fail are high, and some viewers watch eagerly for participants to 'transgress'. Some strongly support certain participants as opposed to others, such that the programme becomes a race into decline, rather than a series of smaller and larger human dramas.

I find it an amazing programme; just cannot understand that there are still couples who want to participate, because by now everyone knows the game so well!! I would never participate, but I like to watch it. (praia, 12 May 2006, verionica.nl)

It is very clear that this year they are doing their best to brew mischief and to make the couples uneasy about their partners (but OK, that is part of the game) (Megara, 13 April 2006, vt4.be).

Discreditation and disidentification take place through the emphasis on the individual responsibility of participants. The participants are seen as responsible for the decision to participate, and consequently are discredited through their descriptions of 'mad', 'silly' or 'stupid'. This mechanism reduces some of the partners to jokers, providing the broadcasts with legitimate entertainment value, and leaving participants open to be judged. In exceptional cases, posters (such as Bobette) were more self-reflexive in their attitude to this aspect, and in some cases participants were defended against this type of criticism (although it is not always easy to distinguish between supporters and critics).

What fool goes to an island with her boyfriend where she leaves him alone with single girls?? You're begging for it! And the single girls? I would die of shame (Maartjj*, 30 May 2006, sbs.nl).

A more stupid person is difficult to imagine [...] if she were to stand amongst a flock of sheep, I wouldn't notice hahahaha what a stupid woman!!! (Zuse], 8 May 2006, belg.be).

Let's be honest: *Temptation Island* is an immoral programme. And that's why we watch it: to be able to say 'I'll never do that,' and meanwhile we enjoy being a voyeur, hoping that, for example Len, will try and make amends in a following programme, understandable in front of the camera (Bobette, 7 April 2006, femistyle.be).

Second, the process of disidentification is organized through the rigid articulation of the subject position of partner, which is based on validation of sexual fidelity, honesty and monogamy. The television text of *Temptation Island* is based on a complex tension between upholding conservative sexual values and showing practices that do not live up to these expectations. Viewers often react to this tension by disapproving and condemning the practices of the participants, and it is no coincidence that one of the most frequently used words to describe (at least some of) the participants is ‘slut’, mostly oriented towards female participants.

This extends to one of the posters referring to the entire programme as “Slut Camp”: “Ah, is that one of the ten girlies who are part of the Slut Camp? Is there not enough going on in your lives? Is it so boring? I find it only a 6/10” (Zagato, 11 April 2006, zattevrienden.be). One section of the posters sees the female singles as ‘sluts’, since their assumed promiscuity is in conflict with traditional monogamous moral values, including the gendered double standard. While the television text portrays the hedonism of the singles in a mostly positive manner, the attitude of (some of) the posters is more negative. And the partners, who (presumably) succumb, are not spared censure. One of the most striking postings (by Jaytonism) identifies the partners through a specific characteristic. Two are described as ‘whores’: “Kevin is smart. Matthieu is gross. Len is smart. Lisette has a sweet smile. Bianca is a whore. So is Cheyenne. Björn is naive” (Jaytonism, 22 May 2006, fok.nl). On the same day there was another posting that defended only one of the women, but even so reiterated the importance of honesty for judging Cheyenne: “Ok, Cheyenne had sex with the Smoothy [...] but come on, this does not suddenly make her a whore? Though it is sad that she was not honest about this [...] Kevin is far too good, and perhaps he would even have forgiven her” (hardsilence, 22 May 2006, fok.nl).

It is no surprise that the second woman, Bianca Mommen, was not defended. Very soon after the first broadcast, the news that Bianca Mommen (aka Alana) was an erotic masseuse and prostitute circulated on some websites, and appeared in an article in a major north Belgian popular newspaper, *Het Laatste Nieuws*. In this article, Bianca Mommen defends herself with the Clintonesque reasoning, “I only give massages with my breasts. That is not sex. I have never been paid to have sex with a client”. The articles generated an avid online investigation into Bianca Mommen’s private life, resulting in a series of texts that ran in parallel to *Temptation Island*’s television text. Photos and a masturbation video were posted, and a series of testimonies by clients appeared that contradicted her defence.

Even more important than this privacy-infringing variation of what has to be called citizen journalism was the abusive tirade that broke over Bianca Mommen’s head. A very large number of posters insulted her, and her initial reticence and emotionality were held against her. At a more structural level, her subjectivity was seen to completely violate the conservative subject position of the partner, and triggered severe social sanctions.

An ugly whore who gives a stupid and prudish performance on TV. One should throw such a person in the Willebroek canal. (danzig, 11 April 2006, zattevrienden.be)

I don't understand this female. On TV she does not even want to talk to a guest, there she is such a prude [...] what is the world coming to. (nXr, 11 April 2006, zattevrienden.be)

So, at last Bianca had a good fuck; perhaps she will now keep her stupid wits together. What an impossibly irritating person. Those who talk the most first get the chop. But of course, an escort girl cannot do without. Sorry, Veronica, that the programme is now totally without credibility. It has always been fun to watch. (Angeliekje, 25 April 2006, veronica.nl)

Whenever she was filmed making out with one of the singles, this was seen as final confirmation of her promiscuity. For most of the posters it was unthinkable that her professional work and her relational sphere could be separated. The fact that she was seen as a prostitute brought the traditional repertoires about prostitution to the fore in the discussions, resulting in her being dehumanized, objectified, defined as abnormal and deviant, and stigmatized. A small number of posters came out in defence of Bianca Mommen, for example, by trying to make a distinction between a 'slut' and a prostitute, but these postings were ignored or countered.

I find the whole business rather crude and mean, with all the comments. Bianca's occupation is her business, and it does not mean that the child is a slut. (sugababe, 11 May 2006, vt4.be)

Yes? Then what is your definition of a slut? If a prostitute is not slut, then I don't what is. (Kuifer, 16 May 2006, vt4.be)

Bianca's denials of her professional activities and her sexual escapades with bachelor Stephen also elicited negative responses, since they violated the principle of honesty. However, she was not the only participant to be subjected to such condemnatory responses. Others who were suspected of lying were condemned, and their deceived partners received expressions of sympathy. The lying participants were expected to confess and apologize. If they did not, the postings became even more condemnatory. This emphasizes again the cultural importance – or even the hegemony – of the traditional monogamous relationship, of sexual fidelity and of honesty.

I ask myself [...] if Bianca sees the clips again ... how does she feel? Not because of the sex scenes, you know, but because she lied so shamelessly. (Amourath, Forum Moderator, 28 April 2006, vt4.be)

hihi, I'm also watching TV :D Really sad for Andries :(Stupid woman that she is! All this lying, I so hate that! Good luck, Andries! (Direct_gek, 24 May 2006, veronica.nl)

Third, and in addition to the debate on fidelity, the debate on physicality and beauty is paramount in the postings. In some instances the clips of specific body parts (especially female) were applauded, for example, in the posting by eronmiller: “To quote HUMO [24]: TITS, TITS and again TITS! Whether it is Rebecca or Bianca, they are wiggling there for our visual pleasure [...]” (eronmiller, 12 April 2006, vt4.be). The objectification of (female) bodies for the pleasure of the male gaze is very much in line with Mulvey's (1975) analysis, and again leads to the viewers distancing themselves from the participants' subjectivities. Often, certain participants were singled out, and the attractiveness (or lack thereof) of their bodies exhaustively discussed and evaluated. An example is the debate on whether the 'super-temptress' (Rebecca Loos) is 'fat' or 'well-rounded'. Those singles (and sometimes also the partners) who fit the beauty ideal are judged in a positive light, and called 'pretty', 'nice' or 'sweet'. In some cases this resulted in renewed attacks on participants, with Bianca Mommen again being the target.

She walked face first into a wall, fell down, and afterwards a bus rode slowly over her face [...] (Kenneth89, 12 April 2006, zattevrienden.be)

I would rather go to a toothless crack whore than to stick my prick into Bianca with the cow spots on her legs and her crooked eye! (mark25utr, 21 April 2006, whitelinefirm.nl)

The fourth strategy of disidentification is related to the lack of participatory intensity. The participants are portrayed as docile bodies that submit themselves to the management of the production team, which does not leave much space for their representation as active and empowered individuals. Although postings on the production team's management are rare – after all, the management often remains hidden – there are some that show that viewers were aware of the production team's interventions. Some posters referred to the suggestive clips during the bonfire evenings, the creation of a particular mood by means of music, the importance of the montage and the 'mean' interview questions.

However, as *Temptation Island* is defined as a game where participation is voluntary, the (sometimes) problematic character of these techniques is often secondary. This important aspect in some cases provoked some posters to criticize the imperfect character of the management techniques, which reduced participants to pawns in a game:

The presenters' questions were much meaner this year, but they missed the opportunity to make good use of the footage of the partners having sex, in order to position the partners against each other, as they did the year before. Of course, we do not get a Kenny and a Sven every year. (_Boo_, 24 May 2006, fok.nl)

However, the situation becomes more complex: In some rare instances the posters critiqued the (legitimacy of) *Temptation Island's* management via the concept of the game and the trial. The programme (or a facet thereof) was defined as 'ridiculous' or 'miserable', and some posters vented their annoyance. Sometimes this irritation was limited to para-social interactions with the television screen (as in the case of Mikkel), with the poster engaging in a dialogue with the 'personages' (participants). In a small number of instances their irritation led to deep-seated criticisms of the production team's (and in particular the presenter's) behaviour. The posting by 'believer' is one of the few that actually questions the deontology of the programme-makers.

I always get irritated when they manipulate the clips during the bonfires. Then I sit and shout at the TV: 'No, that's not at all true!!!' (Mikkel, 16 March 2006, femistyle.be)

And I actually find that the whole thing can no longer be justified by the producers. OK, the participants ask for this, but surely as a human being, this must kill you? (believer, 28 April 2006, femistyle.be)

The criterion that is applied here is based on the seriousness of the emotional and relational impact on the participants, but at the same time they are reminded of their individual responsibility, and relatively little is said about the structural limitations. Most of these 'critical' readings of the television text (with some exceptions, such as Bobette's postings on femistyle.be, cited below) in fact refer to specific aspects, and ignore the all-encompassing character of the production management, which in any case is unseen by most of the posters.

You know, in this series I am over-conscious of the way in which everything is directed: Mieke's letter with the key would really not have come without a tip (+ key) from the producers; trying to make the partners jealous was staged. The whole programme is only insinuation, and if everything goes too well, the producers will intervene. (Bobette, 24 April 2006, femistyle.be)

There is a second (and more significant) example of the professional management being questioned, and the television text critically evaluated. This criticism goes to the heart of the programme concept, and questions the authenticity and real-life quality of *Temptation Island* as a reality show. The contradictions in Bianca Mommen's behaviour, the sensational news that she is a prostitute, and the inclusion of participants who have appeared in other television programmes and, therefore, cannot be defined as ordinary people were enough for one group of posters to call the entire programme a 'put-up job'.

A total put-up job, that Temptation. And an ex-participant of Big Brother is also there! They are all actors! (Tim, 1 April 2006, whiteLineFirm.nl).

Not true [...] a friend of mine, temptress Mavis, is NO actress! She works in an accounting office. So, keep your prejudices for yourself!!! (Sinneke, 4 April 2006, whiteLineFirm.nl).

Despite a number of reflexive postings coming out against this criticism (as, for instance, Sinneke's), combined with testimonies and behavioural analyses, many posters expressed their disapproval. In this roundabout way the production management comes under fire (and heavy fire, at that) because the credibility of the programme is prejudiced by the interventions of the production team – negating the idea of fair play, and the idea of ordinary people. Such resistance is not aimed at the production team's deontological code, but at the fact that they transcended the programme format. Simultaneously, it works against the participants, who are discredited, this time by being articulated as actors posing as ordinary people who are dishonest about their identities.

3.5 Conclusion

Both the programme and the viewers who responded online demonstrate a rigid moral perspective on sexual fidelity and monogamy. While the television text offers scope for hedonism (through the central, and legitimately defined, role of the singles), the online discussions are dominated by a conservative perspective, which in some instances escalates to moralizing, intolerance, sexism and stigmatization, aimed mostly at the female participants.

Through the logic of photo-negativism, where visions of order are photo-negativized into stories of disorder (see Hartley, 1992), *Temptation Island* confirms the hegemonic interpretation of the ideal relationship. The partners who, one after the other, succumb to the pressure present negative points of identification against which viewers can measure themselves, enabling them to confirm their own moral value system as presented on the (television) plate. The viewers receive malicious satisfaction as well as pleasure when they see the failure of people whom they articulate as inferior. When the partners succumb, anticipating the catharsis of the final confession that has to restore social order is another source of pleasure for the viewers.

In order to legitimize their viewing pleasure, the viewers enter into a social contract with the programme. The programme and the viewers together construct a distance between the latter and the participants, discouraging identifications. Several strategies of disidentification are used to create this distance. There is the articulation of the participants as being individually responsible for participating in an irresponsible game, which results in their representation as 'stupid' (for entering into a situation that will inevitably lead to their downfall). Through the rigid articulation of the subject position of the partner, based on the validation of sexual fidelity, honesty and monogamy, they become represented as immoral and promiscuous. The voyeuristic focus on the (female) bodies and the strong, virtually uncontested, professional management further

contribute to the processes of disidentification. *Temptation Island* in this respect is not only an illustration of the dangers of (minimalist) participation and a prime example of how participants are reduced to Lefebvrian ordinariness, it is also an anti-empathetic programme, in both its production and reception.

Of course, there are exceptions at both the textual and the reception level. For instance, the bachelors are portrayed positively in the television text, and gender differences in the representation of the concept of the bachelor are rare. Moreover, I would not want to claim that there is only one reading of the programme: In the online discussions a number of posters use alternative readings, for instance, posters defending Bianca Mommen, or offering structural critiques of the professional management. But the dominant reading in the diversity of online forums remains highly judgemental and problematic.

All this raises the ethical question of how the members of the production team can justify treating other people in such a destructive manner. The question is not whether the participants should be protected 'against themselves,' which would place me in a paternalistic position. The question is how media professionals can justify – to themselves and to the entire media sector – spending two weeks (and more) trying to destroy people's relationships. The argument that it is 'only a game' and that participants take part voluntarily in my opinion is not a satisfactory answer to this ethical question. Even in the case of informed consent²⁵ one might wonder whether such subtle management techniques could be communicated sufficiently well to generate informed consent, or whether consent should ever be granted, given these kinds of techniques. In this respect, *Temptation Island* shows the need for reality TV to be embedded into the production values of human-interest journalism, or entertainment-oriented journalism (see Meijer, 2001; Campbell, 2004), so that reality TV and human-interest programming can be firmly anchored in a more ethical system.

Notes

1. This happens through the so-called logic of equivalence, but without totally eliminating their differences: A chain of equivalence "can weaken, but not domesticate differences" (Laclau, 2005: 79).
2. The subject position of ordinary people plays a key role in a variety of media organizations and communities, including mainstream media, alternative and community media, and (non-mainstream) online media. Arguably, the exact articulations of the ordinary people subject position and its juxtapositions with elitist subject positions will be very different in these media (sub)spheres, but this does not nullify the role of these subject positions and the antagonistic/oppositional structure in which they are placed.
3. The focus groups took place in January 1999. The reception project was organized in collaboration with Sonja Spee, who was then affiliated with the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of Antwerp, and Mieke De Clercq, then a teaching assistant at the University of Ghent, Communication Studies Department. My thanks also to the Ghent students for their work: Jo Bambust, Sylvie De Bock, Frederik De Pesseroey, Wendy De Schrijver, Elke Devroye,

Sofie Eyckerman, Elke Feys, An Goedgezelschap, Karla Liebrecht, Charlotte Nyssen, Jelle Osselaer, Pedro Pisonier, Liesbeth Ponsaerts, Evelyne Six, Lode Spincemaille, Peter Stoffels, Thomas Swannet, Frederik Taevernier, Kim Van den Eeckhout, Eddy Van Geyte, Wim Van Peteghem, Thijs Vandeplassche, Guy Verbruggen and Kirsten Victor.

4. Whilst the original analysis focused more on power relations between media professionals and participants, and on gender issues, the material was sufficiently rich to enable analysis related to the topic discussed in this case study.
5. Although a detailed qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the four programmes was used as a basis for the reception analysis, it is not discussed in this article.
6. When age is a consideration, the range is 18–83 years. The category 20–29 years was over-represented and 30–39 years was under-represented. Although some geographical spread was achieved, most people came from the Ghent area where the focus groups were conducted. The categories of students and retired people were also over-represented.
7. These thirteen panel members were traced and interviewed by Lies Vandenberghe. I am very grateful to her and appreciative of her help also in the data gathering phase for this chapter (see also Vandenberghe, 2008). The table below gives an overview of the panel of twenty ordinary people.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>2007 contact information</i>	<i>Age when interviewed in 2007</i>
Besard Damien	M	Deceased	
De Bruyn Suzanne	F	Interviewed	57
De Kerpel Rudi	M	Interviewed	48
Dumortier Albert	M	Deceased	
Goossens Simone	F	Interviewed	81
Houthuys Astrid	F	Interviewed	27
Jorissen Marga	F	Interviewed	32
Laget Simonne	F	Refused	
Lathouwers Betty	F	Interviewed	58
Mataiche Fatiha	F	Interviewed	34
Morales Ortiz Carmen	F	Moved abroad	
Pinkhof Gorik	M	Refused	
Raemdonck Pierre	M	Interviewed	38
Rummers Roeland	M	Interviewed	30
Van Beek Geert	M	Untraceable	
Van Mulders Annie	F	Interviewed	52
Vanhelmont Frans	M	Deceased	
Verhoye Eric	M	Interviewed	64
Vossen Misjel	M	Interviewed	59
Walschap Sandrina	F	Interviewed	36

8. In all cases, focus group participants' genders, ages and educational status (High/Low) are mentioned as well as the number of the focus group in which they participated. The sex, age and year of interview are mentioned for the *Jan Publiek* participants.
9. In chapter 6, this will be theorized as social quality.
10. One could speculate about the reception of the authenticity of ordinary people in cases when the participants were positioned (slightly) differently (which happened to an extent in the

other episodes of *Jan Publiek*); in the case of the first episode of *Jan Publiek* both the format and the reception emphasize the articulation of authenticity of ordinary people.

11. As mentioned in chapter 2, north Belgian celebrities are often referred to in Dutch as BVs, or 'Bekende Vlamingen', which translates as FFs, or Famous Flemings.
12. *Knack* is a north Belgian newsmagazine.
13. <http://www.dekerpel.com/>.
14. An earlier, Dutch, version of this case study was translated into English by Fernanda Snyman; I would like to thank her for her work.
15. In 2008 there was no *Temptation Island* edition broadcast, and the 2009 edition was produced by VT4 only.
16. The television text makes hardly any reference to the locality of these resorts, disconnecting them from their (post)colonial realities.
17. <http://www.temptation-island.nl/>.
18. Tim De Pril was a partner in *Temptation Island 2*. Gaby Visser and Rowena Guldenaar were temptresses in, respectively, *Temptation Island 3* and 4.
19. The Dutch text was originally available online at: <http://www.rotationz.be/new/news.php?newsid=1949>, but the page no longer exists. It can now be accessed at <http://forum.losflippers.be/thread.php?threadid=2775&boardid=12&sid=bd91818b93114b65f2a5e208af75e923&goto=nextnewst>.
20. Not all participants' surnames were available. If they are not known, only first names are used.
21. At the time of writing, this website was no longer online.
22. The following forums, blogs and feedback pages were analysed. The selection was based on a number of criteria to generate diversity (Dutch/North Belgian, broadcaster/non-broadcaster, large/small, male/female focus, formalized debate/comments).
[belg.be](http://www.belg.be/leesmeer.php?x=3457): <http://www.belg.be/leesmeer.php?x=3457> (no longer accessible)
[femistyle.be](http://www.femistyle.be/ubbthreads/showflat.php?Cat=0&Number=311289&page=0&fpart=1&vc=1): <http://www.femistyle.be/ubbthreads/showflat.php?Cat=0&Number=311289&page=0&fpart=1&vc=1> (no longer accessible)
[fok.nl](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/840554,844298,848519,849903,851659,852485,854457,854746,856631,858232,860619): <http://forum.fok.nl/topic/840554,844298,848519,849903,851659,852485,854457,854746,856631,858232,860619> en [863794](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/840554,844298,848519,849903,851659,852485,854457,854746,856631,858232,860619)
[goedZO?!.com](http://www.goedzo.com/index.php/2006/04/26/filmpje_temptation_island_deelneemster_b): http://www.goedzo.com/index.php/2006/04/26/filmpje_temptation_island_deelneemster_b
[sbs.nl](http://www.sbs.nl/modules.php?name=special&site=televisienieuws&sid=1326): <http://www.sbs.nl/modules.php?name=special&site=televisienieuws&sid=1326> (no longer accessible)
[veronica.nl](http://veronica.sbs.nl/modules.php?name=special&site=televisienieuws&sid=4835&rubrieknaam): <http://veronica.sbs.nl/modules.php?name=special&site=televisienieuws&sid=4835&rubrieknaam> (no longer accessible)
[vt4.be](http://www.forum.vt4.be/display_topic_threads.asp?ForumID=11&TopicID=17887&ReturnPage=&PagePosition=1&ThreadPage=1): http://www.forum.vt4.be/display_topic_threads.asp?ForumID=11&TopicID=17887&ReturnPage=&PagePosition=1&ThreadPage=1 (no longer accessible)
[whitelinefirm.nl](http://www.whitelinefirm.nl/node/202): <http://www.whitelinefirm.nl/node/202>
[zattevrienden.be](http://www.zattevrienden.be/Alana_aka_Bianca_uit_Temptation_Island_de_verboden_fotos): http://www.zattevrienden.be/Alana_aka_Bianca_uit_Temptation_Island_de_verboden_fotos
All citations in this chapter have been translated into English by the author.
23. The focus of the analysis was not on the cultural differences between the north Belgian and the Dutch broadcasts; nor was it on the differences in online culture between north Belgium and the Netherlands, or on the difference in status between the posters ('ordinary viewers' and participants).
24. *Humo* is a popular north Belgian magazine.
25. See Hibberd et al. (2000).

Chapter 4

Keyword - Organization



1. A conceptual introduction

1.1 *The organization concept*

The concept of organization still plays a significant role in capturing the social structures through which media activities are deployed. It is considered to be stating the obvious to say that small- and large-sized media organizations are ubiquitous within the media sphere. Media organizations are interconnections of the material and the discursive, and arrange and regulate specific people and objects within the organization, creating a border between them and their outsides, while at the same time establishing material links with their political, economic, technological and cultural environments. Moreover, organizational cultures attribute roles and identities to these people and objects, discursively structuring their practices. Media organizations work also as discursive machineries that generate media output (in combination with a variety of other texts, such as annual reports) and produce discourses on all possible societal fields (including the media sphere itself). At the same time, the articulation of the concept of the (media) organization with the mainstream (media) has provoked substantial critiques. First, within the field of alternative (and community) media, the concept of the alternative media organization implies a re-articulation of the mainstream media organization. Second, the success of internet communication has supported the development of the (virtual) community as a different model to structure media production.

The debate on the role of the organizational structure affects the problematics of participation, since these social structures impact on the intensity of the participatory process by impeding and channelling participation, as well as facilitating and allowing for it. Media organizations – through their presence, objectives and practices – can support more maximalist forms of participation, but at the same time, they can limit participants' participation and steer them towards more minimalist forms. In order to see what role the organizational structure can play in supporting participation, it is necessary to briefly discuss the nature of this social structure and its ways of operating within the media sphere. Through discussion of the above-mentioned contestations, I show the potential role of organizational structure in directing participation towards more maximalist (or minimalist) forms.

There is a wide variety of definitions of the concept of organization, but as Lammers (1987: 22) remarks, there is consensus on a number of key characteristics. Lammers (1987: 29) describes the organization as a social structure that has been consciously constructed and is (more or less) regularly reconstructed. Organizations have a formally defined design which is intended to be rational and is characterized by functionalization, coordination and finalization. Within the organization, tasks are defined and grouped together (functionalization); these tasks are then combined (coordination) with the aim of achieving the general objective(s) (finalization), which can range from utilitarian to normative (Etzioni, 1961). A short definition that emphasizes this aspect can be found in Etzioni (1964: 3): “Organizations are social units (or human groupings) deliberately constructed and reconstructed to seek specific goals”. Through these logics, hierarchies and power imbalances become embedded within the organization, as described in Stinchcombe’s (1967: 155) definition: “Any social arrangement in which the activities of some people are systematically planned by other people (who, therefore, have authority over them) in order to achieve some special purpose is called a formal organization”.

These definitions are not meant to create the impression that all organizations are similar. As in many fields of the social, there is a wide variety of organizational structures, practices and cultures. Attempts to deal with this complexity have resulted in a series of categorizing systems, among which the distinction between the mechanistic, organic and bureaucratic organization is one of the most prominent. Hatch (1997) uses three characteristics, complexity, formalization and centralization, to support this typology. Whereas organic organizations have low levels of complexity, formalization and centralization, mechanistic and bureaucratic organizations have high levels of complexity and formalization. The distinction between mechanistic and bureaucratic organizations is that the former is characterized by high levels of centralization, while bureaucracies – though highly formalized – function in a decentralized way.¹ Also related to this typology is the debate on the role of institutionalization, or the way that organizations become “infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (Selznick, 1957: 17). As Scott (1992) argues, institutionalization implies that the organization is embedded in an environment with specific expectations of the organization, and imposes rules in order to ensure the organization’s social legitimacy.

Despite the diversity that characterizes the world of organizations, these social structures have a common focus on the realization of a specific set of objectives. In order to achieve this aim, the people and objects that are constructed as internal to the organization are arranged in a specific (hierarchical-formalized) order. Through these logics, but in a variety of ways, people become members, and objects become owned. Keeping in mind Rafaeli’s (1997) argument, we should not lose sight of the complexities of membership because membership might be based on physical or temporal relationships, production relationships or cultural relationships. And, as Pels (1998) argues, also the notions of ownership and owner are not always straightforward.

These internal-material characteristics (see Figure 1) are first of all complemented by external-material characteristics, which position the organization within a network of other organizations and within the context of the organizational environment. This network can be extended to include the circulating objects that leave or enter the organization. Although the internal logics of organizations should not necessarily be articulated as stable, especially the relations of organizations with their environments and the constant flux of people and objects that move across their boundaries show the structural instability and contingency of organizations.

Figure 1: Organizational characteristics.

	<i>Material</i>	<i>Discursive</i>
<i>Internal</i>	Hierarchical-formalized and objective-oriented arrangement of people and objects	Organizational culture <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px auto; width: fit-content;">Discursive machinery</div>
<i>External</i>	Interorganizational network, organizational environment and circulating objects	

From this perspective, organizations can be seen as attempts to delineate a unity and to protect its stability, through the logics of functionalization, coordination, finalization, formalization and centralization, while simultaneously being exposed to centrifugal and centripetal forces. Also, at this level, organizations cannot be seen as homogenous; they react differently when confronted with the complexity of environmental relationships. Just as the differences between mechanistic and organic organizations (from an internal-material approach) have been theorized, we can argue also that there are mechanic and organic networks in which organizations are situated. Here, differences arise from the more rigid or more fluid articulations of the different actors that constitute these networks.

One way to capture the (differences in) organizational, interorganizational and environmental fluidity is through Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) metaphor of the rhizome (as was already discussed in chapter 1). This metaphor is based on the juxtaposition of rhizomatic and arbolescent thinking. The structures of mechanistic and bureaucratic organizations, and the networks in which they are situated, can be seen as arbolescent. The arbolescent is a structure that is linear, hierarchic and sedentary, and can be represented as “the tree-like structure of genealogy, branches that continue to subdivide into smaller and lesser categories” (Wray, 1998: 3). According to Deleuze and Guattari, it is the philosophy of the State.

The rhizomatic, on the other hand, links to organic organizations and their networks. The rhizomatic is closely related to the alternative in being non-linear, anarchic and nomadic: “Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other

point” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 19). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) enumerate a series of characteristics of the rhizome – the principles of connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography, and decalcomania. Connection and heterogeneity imply that any point of the network can be connected to any other point, despite the different characteristics of the components. The concept of multiplicity constructs the rhizome, not on the basis of elements that are each operating within fixed sets of rules, but as an entity whose rules are constantly in motion because new elements are always included. The principle of the asignifying rupture means that “a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 9). Finally, the principle of the map is juxtaposed with the idea of the copy. In contrast to the copy, the map is:

open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12)

Apart from the more material characteristics of organizations, their discursive characteristics can be emphasized also, without aiming to disconnect the discursive from the material. At the internal-discursive level, organizations are sites where organizational culture develops, circulates and is preserved. Siehl and Martin (1984: 227) describe organizational culture as follows: “organizational culture can be thought of as the glue that holds an organization together through a sharing of patterns of meaning. The culture focuses on the values, beliefs, and expectations that members come to share”. As Martin (2002: 3) remarks, the field of organizational culture is broad, and, for instance, includes “the stories people tell to newcomers to explain ‘how things are done around here,’ the ways in which offices are arranged and personal items are or are not displayed, jokes people tell, the working atmosphere [...], the relations among people [...], and so on”. Organizational culture, or “the way of life in an organization” (Hatch, 1997: 204), produces discourses on (amongst many other areas) the general objectives and specific tasks of the organization, the means and decision-making procedures that need to be used to achieve them, the language and conceptual framework, the membership boundaries and criteria for inclusion (and exclusion), and the criteria for allocation of status, power and authority, and rewards and punishments (based on Schein (1985), see also the summary by Hatch (1997: 213)). At the same time, organizational culture is not homogeneous, and the above-mentioned areas provide ample opportunity for conflict, contestation and power struggles within the organization.

Again, organizational culture does not stop at the borders of the organization (however permeable these borders might be). Organizational identities and discourses interact

with the networks, environments and cultures in which the organizations are embedded. These outsides offer to organizations fields of discursivities that provide the discursive elements to construct the organizational cultures. Obviously, discourses on ‘good’ decision-making, leadership and membership, and on the legitimacy of the organizational objectives, are not continuously reinvented by each individual organization, but are part of a broader cultural configuration that seeps into these organizations. Organizations, at the same time, are not without agency, and can – within the limits of a set of hegemonies – articulate existing elements into particular discourses. Through their practices and discourses, organizations also support, normalize, and sometimes undermine and contradict existing cultural configurations. Their voices contribute to society’s discursive production, sometimes entailing the promise of social change, but often contributing to the continued fixation of society’s rigidities.

One way to theorize (and name) these discursive productive capacities is to return to Deleuze and Guattari’s work, and more specifically their notion of the machine. In their *Anti-Oedipus*, they define the machine as “a system of interruptions or breaks”, whereas the breaks “should in no way be considered as a separation from reality; rather, they operate along lines that vary according to whatever aspect of them we are considering. Every machine, in the first place, is related to a continual material flow [...] that it cuts into” (1984: 36 – emphasis removed). Deleuze and Guattari (1984: 36) also point to the interconnectedness of machines when they say that “every machine is the machine of a machine”. It is seen as the law of the production of production: “[...] every machine functions as a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but at the same time is also a flow itself, or the production of a flow, in relation to the machine connected to it”. Although Deleuze and Guattari often apply their machine concept to the human body (e.g., the mouth-machine), they also use the machine concept in a much broader way, for instance in talking about abstract machines such as capitalism. As Raunig (2007: 147) points out, in Guattari’s (1972) first machine text (*Machine and Structure*, originally written in 1969) he uses the machine to discuss the revolutionary organization as an institutional machine that does not become a state or party structure. Without being completely faithful to Guattari’s framework, which sees the machine as unstructuralizable (see Genosko, 2002: 197), his theoretical reflections on the revolutionary machine allow me to articulate the organization as a discursive machine, which is contingent on, but also embedded in, fields of discursivity and continuous productivity.

1.2 Media organizations and their critiques

Mainstream media organizations are firmly embedded within a capitalist context, which structures and fixates many of the organizational characteristics. As Cottle (2003: 3) formulates it, “[...] media industries are businesses, sites of investment and sources of employment”. At the level of the internal-material, mainstream media organizations group a wide variety of people and objects, but simultaneously they structure these actors in specific ways. McQuail (1994: 191), for instance, mentions three basic categories, media professionals, management and technical staff, which all perform specific roles and conform to specific identities, and contribute to organizational objectives in different (and sometimes contradictory) ways. Within (but also beyond) these basic categories, the actors find themselves situated in complex power structures that are nevertheless often still characterized by strong vertical hierarchies and arbolic structures. Apart from human actors, there is a wide range of objects, among which so-called media technologies play a crucial role. Together, these people and objects are set to achieve a number of mixed goals, which, according to Tunstall (1971: 51), combine revenue goals (audience revenue goals and advertiser revenue goals) and non-revenue goals (gaining prestige, exercising influence but also serving a nation). The balance between these different objectives is not necessarily stable, as Tunstall (1971: 50) notes in remarking that “A continual process of bargaining takes place as to which goals should be pursued”.

Also the (mainstream) media organization’s interorganizational network and organizational environment are specific, because they obviously have strong communicative objectives. The process of media production requires the establishment and maintenance of connections with large-sized audience groups that consume these media products, which in turn result in the media organizations’ ambition to maximize the circulation of these (symbolic or physical) objects. Moreover, mainstream media organizations are dependent for their revenues on advertisers, sponsors and governments, and for their functioning on a wide range of suppliers and service providers. And – through processes of economic convergence, and vertical and horizontal integration – they are often connected to other (media) organizations. As the domain of media production is considered to be of high societal relevance, a wide range of other actors has taken a keen interest in the media sphere, a situation – articulated by Gerbner (1969) as institutional pressures – that has led to the development of media regulation and media activism.

At the discursive level, media organizations accommodate a series of identities that play a key role in the (media) organizational culture. Especially the journalistic identity, and its articulation with professionalism, is worth mentioning here because it combines notions of public service, ethics, management of resources, autonomy, membership of a professional elite, the need for immediacy, and objectivity (see Deuze, 2005; Carpentier, 2005). But the journalistic identity is only one of the many subject positions that circulate within media organizations. It has nevertheless received ample attention,

especially in its discursive struggle with other subject positions, such as manager and marketer, as evidenced by such books as *Market-driven Journalism* (McManus, 1994) or *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom* (Underwood, 1995). Despite the specificity of the journalist identity, a number of the above-mentioned elements, including the claim on provision of a societal service, the right to manage resources (including people), the right to autonomy, elitist positioning, the claim to reality and an acclaimed central role in society (see Couldry, 2003), are shared at a much broader level, and characterize the entire sphere of mainstream media organizations.

This specific position of (mainstream) media organizations within society strengthens their role as discursive machines. Obviously, media products have achieved a pervasive and spectacular presence in everyday life, to the degree that they have become difficult to (desire to) escape from. These media products are carriers of a multitude of discourses, which in many cases are contradictory, but they do not always evade the workings of hegemony. Especially the discourses about the media sphere offer contained legitimizations for the media organization's hegemonic practices and cultures. Media products, for instance, are carriers of normalizing discourses about the media organization's claims to direct access to reality, its centrality and its elitist position in society. But they include also normalizations of mainstream media production cultures, where media professionals still hold strong – sometimes post-political – positions of power to internally manage the resources deemed necessary and to provide publicness and visibility to, and framings for, other societal actors. In this sense (mainstream) media organizations are machines that interrupt, channel, fixate and produce flows. Their position also brings contestation, struggle, resistance and instability because the ways that they interrupt, channel, fixate and produce flows are not always accepted.

However dominant the mainstream media organizational logics, there are two structural contestations of (some of) its basic premises. The first contestation is grounded in the sphere of alternative and community media organizations, which introduced a different model of media organization. This alternative model was a critical response to the internal logics of mainstream media organizations, and their construction as large-scale, vertically structured, arbolic, sometimes bureaucratic organizations, staffed by professionals and geared towards large, homogeneous (segments of) audiences. The alternative model critiques the nature of the external-material articulation of mainstream media as closely connected or part of the arbolic networks of state and market. On an external-discursive level, mainstream media are critiqued for being carriers of dominant discourses and representations.

The alternative organizational model consists of organizations that are horizontally structured, and that facilitate audience access and participation within the frame of democratization and multiplicity. The critical stance towards the production values of the media professional working in mainstream media has led to a diversity of formats and genres and creates room for experimentation with content and form. This alternative organizational model articulates media organizations as small-scale, and independent of

state and market, but part of the rhizomatic network of civil society and oriented towards specific communities, possibly disadvantaged groups, and respecting of their diversity. At the level of the discursive, alternative and community media are articulated as carriers of non-dominant (possibly counter-hegemonic) discourses and representations, which also value the principle of self-representation (see chapter 1). One of the clearest examples of these articulations can be found in the introduction to Girard's *A Passion for Radio*, where he formulates the following answer to the question:

a passion for [community] radio?: The answer to that question can be found in a third type of radio – an alternative to commercial and state radio. Often referred to as community radio, its most distinguishing characteristic is its commitment to community participation at all levels. While listeners of commercial radio are able to participate in the programming in limited ways – via open line telephone shows or by requesting a favourite song, for example – community radio listeners are the producers, managers, directors and even owners of the stations. (Girard, 1992: 2)

The second structural contestation of the mainstream media organizational model shifts attention to another concept, that of community. Here, the argument is that (mainstream media) organizations are bypassed by communities of users. One component of this argument is the virtual community's capacity to bring people together. For instance, Rheingold's (2002: 2 – emphasis removed) definition of virtual community includes the verb 'to organize', but it is the community that is the location of the process, not the organization.

- Organized around affinities, shared interests, bringing together people who did not necessarily know each other before meeting online.
- Many to many media [...]
- Text-based, evolving into text plus graphics-based communications [...]
- Relatively uncoupled from face-to-face social life in geographic communities [...]

Castells (1996: 352) employs a similar definition in his *The Rise of the Network Society*, which also uses the verb 'to organize' in relation to the virtual community. Moreover, he emphasizes the *possible* and *relative* formalization of communities, which again are (implicitly) contrasted with organizations. He defines the virtual community as:

a self-defined electronic network of interactive communication organized around a shared interest or purpose, although sometimes communication becomes the goal in itself. Such communities may be relatively formalized, as in the case of hosted conferences or bulletin board systems, or be spontaneously formed by social networks, which keep logging into the network to send and retrieve messages in a chosen time pattern (either delayed or in real time).

The emphasis on community increases with the success of web 2.0, which became seen as juxtaposed to mainstream media organizations. Shirky's (2008: 29) already-mentioned book *Here Comes Everybody. The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, for instance, contains the following statement about organizations: "The typical organization is hierarchical, with workers answering to a manager, and that manager answering to a still-higher manager, and so on". Although it is not always made explicit, the focus of these kinds of analyses is often on the commercial media organization, which functions as a constitutive outside for new "non-hierarchical and collaborative forms of organization" (O'Sullivan, 2009: 87). Groups and communities (and not organizations) are the structuring components of these forms of collaboration and co-creation. Shirky (2008: 47) uses the concept of the post-managerial organization, but in practice he refers to "loosely coordinated groups [*that*] can now achieve things that were previously out of reach for any other organizational structure [...]". Similarly, Jenkins (2006: 243) constructs a juxtaposition between commercial media organizations and bottom-up consumption and production practices, in *Convergence Culture*, which he defines as a move towards "ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture". On the one hand consumers, as groups or communities, are "asserting their right to participate in the culture, on their own terms, when and where they wish" (Jenkins, 2006: 175). Corporate organizations, on the other hand, fall into two groups, prohibitionists and collaborationists. According to Jenkins (2006: 175):

Corporations imagine participation as something they can start and stop, channel and reroute, commodify and market. The prohibitionists are trying to shut down unauthorized participation; the collaborationists are trying to win grassroots creators over to their side.

In contrast to these corporate organizations, Jenkins (2006: 260) stresses the importance of what he calls consumption communities, for instance when he writes, "A politics of participation starts from the assumption that we may have greater collective bargaining power if we form consumption communities". Jenkins does not entirely shy away from the notion of the organization since as he uses the concept of adhocracy. Jenkins links this organizational concept to the work of the science fiction writer Cory Doctorow (2003), but it features also in earlier writings such as Toffler (1970) and Waterman (1990). Here, the bureaucratic organization becomes the constitutive outside, as the adhocratic organization is "characterized by a lack of hierarchy. In it, each person contributes to confronting a particular problem as needed based on his or her knowledge and abilities, and leadership roles shift as tasks change" (Jenkins, 2006: 262).

Another concept frequently used in this context is community of practice, originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991 – see also Wenger, 1998). As Wenger et al. (2002: 4) put it, communities of practice are "groups of people who share a concern, a set

of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis". Shirky, and also O'Sullivan (2009) in his analysis of Wikipedia, translates this concept to the context of social media. Again, the notion of the community is lauded as an alternative *form* of organization, which does not incorporate the problems related to the organization as *structure*:

Communities of practice are inherently cooperative, and are beautifully supported by social tools, because that is exactly the kind of community whose members can recruit one another or allow themselves to be found by interested searchers. They can thrive and even grow to enormous size without advertising their existence in public. (Shirky, 2008: 101)

1.3 The (maximalist-)participatory organization

The next question that emerges is related to the importance of the organization for maximalist participatory processes. This does not imply that the notion of community should necessarily be discredited, nor does it mean that the connections between community and organization should be ignored. For instance, Jenkins's (2006) work – and especially his reference to adhocracies – shows how closely related are communities and organization. Moreover, as Williams (1981: 76) puts it in his *Keywords*, communities can materialize in organizations:

The complexity of community thus relates to the difficult interaction between the tendencies originally distinguished in the historical development: on the one hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may or may not adequately express this.

But arguably, the organization remains an important social structure, different from the community (and the group) because of its logics of functionalization, coordination, finalization, formalization and centralization. Reducing the concept of the organization to the antipode of the multiplicity, to a position of minimalist participation or non-participation, would be too simple. The alternative media organizational models, in particular, show that it is possible to attribute a significant role to the organization as a tool for and location of the more maximalist forms of participation.

1.3.1 Variations of participatory media organizations

As argued earlier (see chapter 1), participation cannot be equated with 'mere' access to or interaction with media organizations. Access and interaction are the conditions

of possibility of participation, but do not capture the power dynamics and decision-making enshrined in the meaning(s) of the signifier participation. And even in the case of participatory media organizations, which do focus on participation, we can see many differences.

These differences are usually not situated so much at the level of participation through the media, since participatory media organizations often play a key role in providing a voice to the social actors. But the degree to which participants can (co-)decide on the content production of the media organization (content-related participation) and its management (structural participation) varies strongly. In order to position the participatory organization, which uses (more) maximalist approaches to participation, the intensity of participation in the media is used as a first dimension. Also the locus of the production process varies widely, since production in some cases takes place within the organization and in others outside of it. In the latter cases, the media organization becomes more exclusively a channel for distributing content (produced elsewhere) and for providing access to the media sphere. The consequence is often that the production process (and its potentially participatory nature) becomes disconnected from the media organization itself, which places the participatory nature of the production process beyond the remit of the organization.

The combination of these two dimensions results in four ideal-typical models, which all have a place, without being neatly positioned at the four corners of the matrix cells, in the matrix generated by the combination of these dimensions (see Figure 2). The first model deals with organizations that have maximalist forms of participation within the organization, and where the (often participatory) production process is an intrinsic part of the organization. In other words, these participatory processes involve people that organize their own participation. Classic examples are (community and) alternative radio stations and the so-called Independent Media Centers (IMCs), Indymedia² being the most famous example. Although in both these cases there are different types of membership (with varying degrees of involvement), this model presupposes an explicit link between the participants and the organization.

The second model includes organizations that aim to have others (often non-members of the organization) participate in the media production, which still takes place within the organization. Because of the different (power) positions of the organization (and its members) and the actual producers, the level of participation within the organization of the latter is reduced. In some cases, this level of participation is still considerable, as examples from the sector of (the less radical) community media illustrate. These media organizations are often oriented towards facilitating the participation of members of a specific community, where these members remain relatively detached from the actual organization. The digital storytelling sector presents a number of examples, for instance, when organizations, such as the Center for Digital Storytelling,³ support 'their' participants' creation of digital narrations (see Lambert 2002). In some other cases

the opportunities for participation within the organization are more restricted, as the example of the British *Video Nation* project (see below) shows.

In the third and fourth models the locus of production becomes detached from the organization, and renders the organization mostly a provider of access. In a relatively small number of organizations this still allows for (some level of) participation within the organization itself (Model 3). Examples can be found in the field of community Wi-Fi, where the organization's aim is to provide access to the internet for its members. Organizations that focus almost exclusively on providing access to the media sphere, with only minimal participation within the organization itself (Model 4), are frequent, and exist in many different forms. Examples are organizations that provide blog or vlog facilities, such as Ourmedia and YouTube,⁴ and websites aimed at social networking, such as Facebook and MySpace.⁵ Instances of what is often called citizen journalism, where non-professionals provide raw materials to mainstream media newsrooms, can be included in this fourth model.

The four models described above assume only limited internal organizational interaction. This often matches the actual situation of these organizations, in which

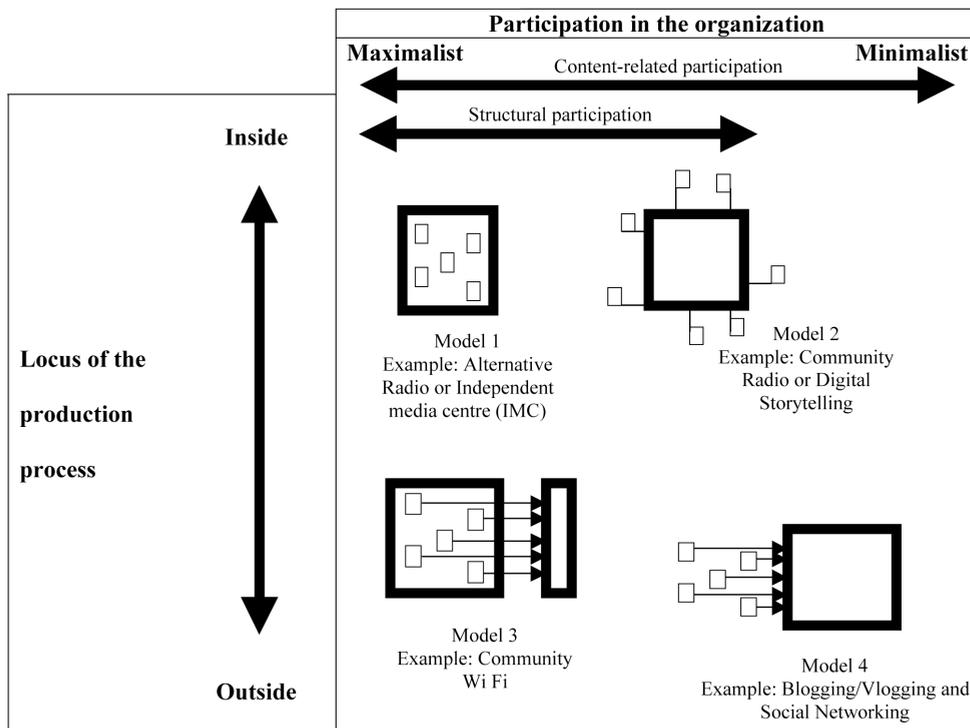


Figure 2: Models of participatory organizations.

participants are frequently individualized. In other cases participants have direct and exclusive relationships with the nuclear group that (in practice) is managing the organization. Nevertheless, it is possible that participants collaborate (i.e. interact with each other and co-decide). Thus, Figure 3 offers an alternative version of these four models, visualizing practices of cooperation and co-creation within the organizational structures.

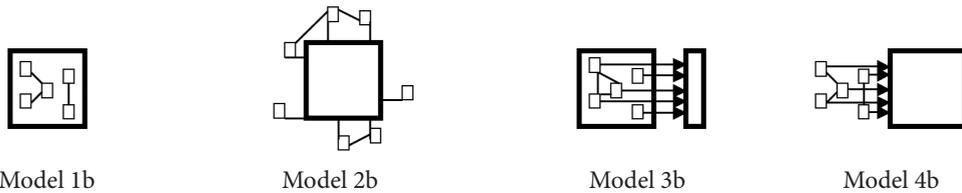


Figure 3: Models of (semi-)participatory organizations with networked participants.

1.3.2 Importance of organizational structures for facilitating participation

Categorizing (maximalist-)participatory media organizations might provide us with an overview of the diversity that characterizes this media (sub)sphere. But their mere existence and diversity does not show the importance of organizational structures for the facilitation of participatory processes. To make that argument I need to return to the original discussion of the definitions and characteristics of organizations (see Figure 4). At the material level, organizations articulate people and objects within an entity, with the ambition to realize specific objectives (through the processes of functionalization, coordination, finalization, formalization and centralization). The existence of a formal organizational structure allows an explicit definition of participation as (one of) the objective(s) of the organization, which commits the people involved, and embeds the notion of participation in the material practices of the organization, at the levels of decision-making procedures and production practices. The formalization of participation as an objective, and the explicit commitment and responsibility of its members to protect it, offers an organizational shelter (and often a material space) for these (maximalist) participatory practices, in a societal context that is not always appreciative of the more maximalist forms of participation.

Moreover, (maximalist-)participatory media organizations are nodal points in rhizomes of participatory and civil society organizations. Their presence in these rhizomes often plays a strengthening role, as they are instrumental in the articulation of these networks. The rhizomes also have a protective role in making the incorporation by market and state actors more difficult. In some cases, these rhizomes are strong enough to deterritorialize market and state actors. An analysis of two Brussels-based alternative radio stations (Santana and Carpentier, 2010) shows how their many radio

programmes (each with its own producer(s)) were almost all connected to one or more civil society organizations and to other alternative media organizations. Together they formed a substantial network of organizations that included human rights, feminist and pacifist organizations, art house cinemas, and alternative record labels. The participation in this network of state and market organizations was limited. Networks in which participatory media organizations feature vary in scale, but are often highly localized. In some cases, participatory media organizations move beyond the local but continue to protect their local embeddedness, a process I describe (Carpentier, 2008 – see also below) as translocalism, based on Appadurai’s (1995) conceptual work. In even fewer cases, participatory media organizations become part of what Keane (2003) calls global civil society.

Figure 4: The significance of participatory media organizations.

	<i>Material</i>	<i>Discursive</i>
<i>Internal</i>	Participation as objective; Space for participation; Horizontal organizational structures	Participatory culture and democratic decision-making; Egalitarian subject positions and participatory attitudes; Cultural archive
<i>External</i>	Nodal points in participatory networks/ rhizomes; Often local; sometimes translocal, rarely global	Discursive machinery producing discourses of participation in media output, in discursified material practices and in external communication

The importance of participatory media organizations can also be argued for at the discursive level because their organizational cultures can be seen as cherishing a participatory culture at the levels of both production and management. Their formal decision-making structures, combined with their objective to facilitate participation, create an ongoing need to democratize their own structures and to create and protect internal power balances. As the maintenance of egalitarian and horizontal structures requires almost continuous effort, and as challenges to this power balance constantly lurk around the corner, the discourse of participation and democracy plays a key role in the organizational culture. This, in turn, renders these (maximalist-)participatory media organizations centres of expertise based on the considerable amount of knowledge on the practical organization of participatory processes and how to overcome the many problems these processes encompass. The longer that these participatory media organizations have

been in existence, the larger are their archives of participatory knowledge. (Maximalist-) participatory media organizations are also sites of more egalitarian subject positions. The concepts of professional, producer, audience and the manager all receive different – non-mainstream – articulations, in which elitist positionings are avoided and where the audience becomes radically activated.

Their activities as media organizations often render their participatory backstage visible and offer a discursification of their material participatory practices. Combined with their more explicit communicative activities, which demonstrate the workings of access, interaction and participation in the field of media production, these (maximalist-) participatory media organizations are discursive machines that allow for the *mettre en discours* of participation. Care should be taken not to romanticize them; frequently they fail because of their tendencies towards lethargy, isolationism and even self-destruction. But these crisis moments are often constitutive, and offer purifying rituals that enhance their participatory natures.

This text should not be seen as a plea to ignore the importance of mainstream media organizations in organizing participation (despite their limitations), nor should it be interpreted as a naïve celebration of alternative forms of media organizations that aim to discredit the multitude of communities and social groups that, in many cases, uphold maximalist articulations of participation and material participatory practices. In the processes of social change, in which the media sphere is characterized by an increased diversity of actors, discourses and practices, all types of social structures can take on key roles. We should avoid privileging one specific type of structure, whether it be the traditional vertically structured media organization, the social group, the community or the alternative, more horizontally structured, media organization. Nevertheless, we must avoid stepping into the trap of using the (neo-)liberal dichotomy between a problematicized macro-structure (whether the state or mainstream media) and a celebrated micro-structure of non-organized citizens.

In this text I want to explicitly stress the importance of creating organizational nodal points in the multitude that will allow maximalist participation to be identified as an explicit objective; that channel and fixate the commitment of people towards participatory media production; that generate physical and virtual spaces for participation; that allow for the intentional creation of participatory rhizomes at the local, translocal, glocal and global level; that provide safe havens for participatory cultures and egalitarian subject positions; that allow the storage and reuse of participatory experiences in cultural archives and centres of expertise; and that support the production of participation through their discursive machineries.

2. Case 1: BBC's *Video Nation*

2.1 Introduction

Despite the attempts of mainstream media organizations to organize participatory programming and projects (see chapter 2), on the whole it is difficult to articulate them as (maximalist-)participatory organizations because their hierarchical structures, close connections to market and state, professional organizational cultures, and affinity with hegemonic discursive environments do not enable strong commitment to maximalist participatory positions. Simultaneously, a homogenization (and demonization) of mainstream media organizations must be avoided. One obvious and major structural difference is the distinction between commercial and public broadcasting organizations. Also within mainstream media organizations, differences occur, supported, for instance, by the relative autonomy of production units. These phenomena of compartmentalization facilitate the existence of organizational subcultures (see Hatch, 1997: 225ff), which van Maanen and Barley (1985: 38) define as follows:

A subset of an organization's members who interact regularly with one another, identify themselves as a distinct group within the organization, share a set of problems commonly defined to be the problems of all, and routinely take action on the basis of collective understandings unique to the group.

If organizational subcultures bend or translate the more general objectives of mainstream media towards a more maximalist participatory direction, they can benefit from the internal-material capacities of these large-scale organizations, which allow for the mobilization of a more considerable amount of resources in order to create participatory substructures that cherish a more maximalist participatory culture and a reworking of traditional mainstream professional identities. The force of the mainstream discursive machine can be utilized to communicate a maximalist participatory discourse, which (at least indirectly) questions the 'regular' hegemonic professional discourses of that particular organization (and other mainstream media organizations). These subcultural islands are vulnerable because they do not function outside the hierarchical structure of the mainstream media organization, and there is always the threat of corrective action to bring the organizational subcultures back into line with the mainstream organizational culture.

Although commercial media organizations cannot be excluded as a location for these kinds of dynamics, the public service remit makes public media organizations the more likely hosts of these participatory subcultures.⁶ Arguably, in the case of the BBC, its Community Programme Unit (CPU) offered such a structural shelter for a participatory subculture. The CPU was launched in 1973, headed by Rowan Ayers, and was established

with the support of then Director of Programming David Attenborough.⁷ Its establishment was fed by a number of critical media professionals who were (partially) connected to pressure groups such as the Free Communications Group, the Standing Conference on Broadcasting and the 76 Group. Since the late 1960s these groups had been advocating media democratization (Crisell, 2002: 202; Briggs, 1995: 787–788).

The BBC's evening discussion programme *Late Night Line-Up* played an especially significant role in the establishment of the CPU. This programme had already broadcast (parts of) Canadian and US participatory programmes,⁸ but the making and screening of the *Guinness Workers Film* by *Late Night Line-Up* in 1971 is considered formative for the establishment of the CPU. An interview with workers in a Guinness factory about the BBC's autumn schedule turned into a critique of television in general, and of how poorly television represented (working-class) people more particularly (Aldridge and Hewitt, 1994: 21; Downmunt, 1997: 202; Harvey, 2000: 164). *Late Night Line-Up* producer Rowan Ayers and some of his colleagues translated this event as a need for “a platform on national television for voices and viewpoints normally unheard or misrepresented in the mainstream” (Downmunt, 1997: 202). An official version of the CPU's remit is contained in the BBC's 1986 annual report: “This Unit is responsible for programmes made by and with the general public, usually as a direct response to public request” (BBC, 1986: 236). The CPU produced a variety of programmes (and projects), such as *Open Door*, *Open Space*, *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation*.

The relationship of the CPU with the BBC management was not conflict-free. Harvey (2000: 163) writes that the programme out of which the CPU grew, *Late Night Line-Up*, enjoyed “a sort of fifth column status within the BBC, criticising some of the Corporation's most prestigious output [...]”. Also the work of the CPU itself was at times considered controversial, and the unit received only limited funding (Aldridge and Hewitt, 1994: 22; Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 17). Johnson (1991: 30) describes the CPU as “committed, seasoned, and struggling”. In his article he also describes the critiques launched against the CPU, and how the CPU was seen as “a guerrilla unit”:

The unit has been under attack in some way or another since it first emerged from the nether world of late 1960s and early 1970s late night programming. [...] The BBC Board of Governors besieged Attenborough, claiming the producers were a guerrilla unit using the BCC to promote their own left-wing ideology. Critics from the left denounced the project as a plot to make the BBC more legitimate, attacking even those groups who were given access. (Johnson, 1991: 31)

Earlier, Lewis (1984: 101) had written that the CPU's work had “little effect on the practice of the news and current affairs teams [...]”. Lewis (1984: 101) also points out that the CPU's programmes suffered from “ghetto scheduling”, an argument reiterated by Hibberd et al. (2000: 13): “Such programming has, however, frequently been consigned to late-evening slots and has, therefore, tended to remain at the periphery

of mainstream television”. The CPU was discontinued in the 2000s, allegedly because of budget cuts.

These analyses provide support for the idea that the CPU functioned as an organizational subculture within the BBC, facilitating more maximalist versions of participation, and in doing so, going against the grain of the BBC’s professional culture and mainstream media ideology. The CPU’s resistant position came at a price: Its weakened position left it with limited resources, undesirable broadcasting timings and reduced impact on the BBC’s professional culture, and finally resulted in its demise. The CPU nevertheless shows that these pockets of more maximalist participation – one could say even temporary autonomous zones (see Bey, 1985) – can exist within mainstream media organizations, while they can still use (some of) the quite substantial resources of mainstream media organizations to organize these participatory processes.

2.2 A brief history of Video Nation

One of the CPU’s projects that illustrates how these more maximalist participatory processes were enabled (and what the limitations were) is *Video Nation*. The BBC’s press service (1994) summarized the concept of *Video Nation* as follows – demonstrating with some immediacy the participatory claim of the project: “people [*can use cameras*] to directly portray their own lives in their own terms”. Evolving from a televised to a web-based⁹ project (and later becoming multi-platform), *Video Nation* is a platform where participants (‘members of the audience’) can provide a wide range of representations of their daily lives. Taken as a whole, the aim of these images is to signify the multi-layered culture of ordinary people and the cultural diversity within the British nation.

The *Video Nation* project was born in 1992, when Alan Yentob, BBC2’s then controller, gave his approval for the project. What is crucial and was unusual is that this approval was not related to a proposal for a programme, but was the approval for a project aimed at providing material for a diversity of yet to be developed programmes. The basic idea was to provide camcorders to a semi-representative selection of ‘the audience’, to train these (about) 50 people and ask them to film fragments of their daily lives. One of the co-producers summarized its ambition as follows: “the aim was an anthropology of Britain in the Nineties seen through the eyes of the people themselves” (Rose, 2000: 174). To introduce the first documentary that resulted from the *Video Nation* project (*Money, Money, Money* – 13 March 1994) a series of ten trailers was commissioned and broadcast. A programme slot for these very short broadcasts, immediately before the current affairs programme *Newsnight*, already existed on BBC2 and had been filled by programmes such as *A picture of Rembrandt* and *Sarajevo: a street under siege*. The first of the so-called *Video Nation Shorts* – *Mirror*, made by retired Colonel Gordon Hensher¹⁰ – was broadcast on 7 March 1994.

After 1994, the weekly output (for 40 weeks a year) of the *Video Nation* project consisted of five Shorts, which in most cases were broadcast in the slot before *Newsnight* on BBC2. During the six years of their existence on television, about 1300 of these “mini-portraits” or “windows on the people’s worlds” (Chris Mohr, 12 August 2002 interview¹¹) were produced. A year’s production also included three hours worth of longer documentaries (Rose, 2000: 176). By 1999, the project had occupied more than 60 hours of broadcast time and produced more than 10,000 hours of raw material, made by more than 300 participants (BBC, 1999).

Ironically, the first phase of the *Video Nation* project ended in June 2000 because of the scheduling of the Shorts: Their place in the programme schedule was claimed by new BBC2 Controller Jane Root, who wanted tighter scheduling in order “to hold viewers” (McCann, 1999). Some time later, the BBC CPU, where *Video Nation* was located, disappeared.

The web-based existence of the Shorts started relatively inconspicuously, through a number of collaborations with other projects, such as the BBC’s language education programme *Learning English*¹² and the anti-tobacco campaign *Kick the Habit*,¹³ but did not result in a real revival of the project. It was not until mid-2001 that BBC Online discovered the potential of the Shorts:

The Shorts library provided a unique source of (relatively) cheap and copyright-free video content ideal for broadband to demonstrate its potential. It was already cut into hundreds of segments whose duration and personal nature were perfect for the web. (Feedback Chris Mohr, 6 November 2002)

This discovery led to the launch in November 2001 of the BBC *Video Nation* website as an “on-line community and archive”. Thus, the *Video Nation* website preceded the well-known video-sharing website YouTube (created in 2005), by some four years, although YouTube’s existence and success later influenced the decision to restructure the *Video Nation* website. The *Video Nation* website, however, is very different from YouTube, based mainly on *Video Nation*’s production practices and ambitions, which continue to be in line with those of the television phase:

It’s about handing over the agenda to members of the public, encouraging them to record what they think is important. The aim is to reflect everyday life across the UK in all its rich diversity. (BBC *Video Nation*, 2002)

In the first phase the national website (see Figure 5) contained an archive of 250 already-televised Shorts – made by 91 different participants¹⁴ – and a small number of new Shorts.¹⁵ The national website was linked to four local BBC websites (Humber, Leicester, Liverpool and London) that were part of the *Where I live* project. On these local websites (and only there) new participants could “[put their] views and experiences on camera and share them with the whole community” (BBC *Video Nation* Liverpool, 2002).

Figure 5: The first *Video Nation* website (2001–2002).

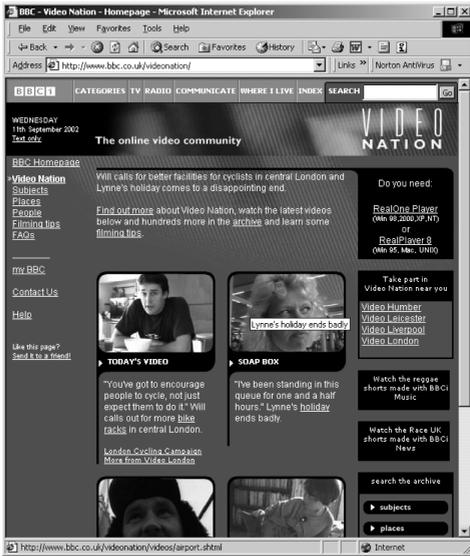


Figure 6: The second *Video Nation* website (2003–2009).

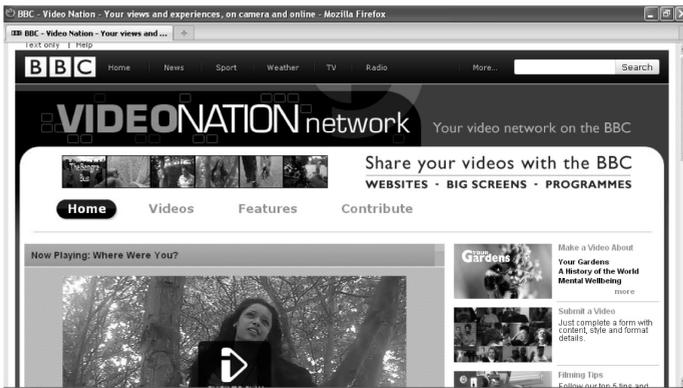
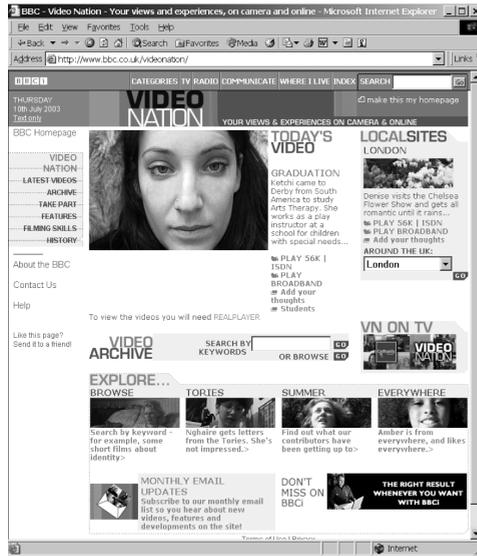


Figure 7: The third *Video Nation* website (2009–2011).

In 2003 a series of changes was implemented: A new look was created for the national website (see Figure 6), and the Shorts became available in a broadband version. Also, fourteen local sites were added to the original group of four local sites, and the total number of Shorts available on the national website was dramatically increased. By the middle of 2003, 750 Shorts – made by 365 participants¹⁶ – were online. In April 2005, the number of local BBC websites had increased to 27, with just under 600 local Shorts

available on the national website.¹⁷ A year later, the local Isle of Man site was added, and the number of local Shorts on the national website had increased to 869.¹⁸ The local centres also produced several Shorts that were not made available on the national website (their content being considered of local interest only (Rosemary Richards – 3 August 2010 interview)). The BBC (2006: 17) *Corporate Responsibility & Partnerships 2006 Review* refers to an annual production of 800 Shorts: “We make around 800 films a year with the help of more than 3,000 contributors”. Although this annual production decreased – a 2009 BBC (2009: 20) report mentions a total production of 500 – the number of Shorts available on the national website had increased in number and in September 2009 was 1274, with the total of national Shorts exceeding 800.¹⁹

In autumn 2009 *Video Nation* was re-launched as an “online video submission website” (BBC, 2010: 29) called *Video Nation Network* (VNN) (see Figure 7). The restructuring was part of a longer evolution in which, through a system of internal commissioning, *Video Nation* increased its collaboration with other BBC production teams (including television) and other (cultural) institutions. In the words of one member of the production team, *Video Nation* became “more plugged into different parts of the BBC” (Tariq Aziz, 29 July 2010 interview). This resulted in the *Video Nation* content being structured into so-called Features, and in a more multi-platform distribution of this content. By the first half of 2002, *Reggae Music Memories* had been established, based on a collaboration between *Video Nation* and BBCi Music. Another example of collaboration was the 2003 partnering between *Video Nation* and BBC4 to produce a series of Shorts about Lomography, which were published online to coincide with the *Happy Snappy Days* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Also in 2003, *Video Nation* produced a series of Shorts on the Iraq War for BBC4. A more recent example (2009–2010) is the feature on the 1984–85 miners’ strike.

After the restructuring of *Video Nation* in 2009, it became impossible to submit just any kind of content. The *Video Nation* core team proactively researched to identify potential producers, often within community groups (in connection to features), and also used a system of online feature calls, where *Video Nation* invited “members of the public to submit content that contributes to BBC series and features” (BBC, 2010: 29). As a BBC local website, BBC Stoke and Staffordshire (2010), formulated it, “Once upon a time we could submit anything we liked; but now submissions should be themed”. The *Video Nation* production team became more centralized (similar to the television phase), and the regional library-loan system and support from regional *Video Nation* producers was abandoned.

In the past, the BBC in Staffordshire used to loan out cameras to anyone who thought they had a story to tell in moving images. There was even a ‘Video Nation’ producer. [...] Nowadays, with so many people having access to camcorders, and even mobile-phone video recorders – and with new video machines being so easy to use – there’s no longer so much need for a loan-library system. (BBC Stoke and Staffordshire, 2010)

Despite these changes, the *Video Nation* team is carefully protecting the “original values” of *Video Nation*, “not letting it drift towards vox pop [...] but reaching out to people and letting them tell stories in their own way” (Tariq Aziz, 29 July 2010 interview). Also, according to Rosemary Richards (3 August 2010 interview), *Video Nation* is still very much about “what people want to say and not about what [*the media*] demand”. The enthusiasm of the production team and the importance of *Video Nation* have not dissuaded the BBC from announcing its closure (BBC Press Office, 2011). The *Video Nation* production team tweeted on 28 January 2011: “As part of the 50% online service reduction in BBC websites the closure of VNN has been announced for the end of March 2011” (Video Nation Network, 2011).

2.3 *From television to the web*

Compared to the original television-based existence of the *Video Nation* Shorts, there are several differences. These differences in part can be attributed to the nature of the medium and the way it was being used. The televised shorts were normally broadcast only once, were aimed at a wide audience²⁰ and offered very limited amounts of contextual information. These Shorts were an interruption to or transformation of ordinary or ‘normal’ programming, which maximized the surprise effect: “You never knew what and who to expect. And then someone would pop up and for two minutes you would be in their world” (Chris Mohr – 12 August 2002 interview).

Access to the archived online Shorts changed the viewing experience, because the web is more of a lean-forward than a lean-backward medium. Furthermore, the website offered access to a multitude of images, not just one interruption of the television flow, in combination with a (still concise) summary, and the name and place of residence of the authors. The structure of the website allowed the Shorts to be ordered according to topic, authors and region, which implied more contextual information. It also allowed for the potential construction of connections between the Shorts, and in some cases, an overview of the lives of some participants who were involved over extended periods of time.

Alongside these medium-related changes, a number of other changes were implemented in the production process. In the first, television, phase a more or less stable group of 50 people was selected and trained. They could use the cameras for one year, on the condition that they would send in 90 minutes on tape every fortnight. This procedure allowed participants time to develop their own filmic language. In the web phase the number of people who could get access to the project was increased, and ironically to the detriment of the level of their participation. The online Shorts were filmed by participants who, in many cases, had cameras at their disposal for only limited periods of time. In some cases, in order to save time and resources, training sessions were followed immediately by filming of the first Shorts (Carole Gilligan, 22 April 2003 interview). After the 2009 restructuring, the regional loan system and the one-

on-one training model involving regional *Video Nation* producers were abandoned, although the core team still make available production toolkits and provide support for groups of potential producers (Freelance collaborator Ameneh Enayat, 29 July 2010 interview).



Figure 8: *Video Nation* website link to the filming tips.

The changes from television to web were accompanied by filming tips (see Figure 8) based on training-Shorts made by some of the more experienced participants. These Shorts are intended to give new and potential participants a modest overview of the *Video Nation* filming style,²¹ both making the training method public and illustrating its simplicity. In the example below (from the first *Video Nation* website), one of the participants shows how easy it is to film an improvised travel-shot (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: A training-Short: *Hollywood* by C. Gorner.

2.4 *Video Nation's basic principles*

The television and the web phase(s) of the *Video Nation* project are characterized by three basic principles that, to a very high degree, determined the outcome of the project.

1. An emphasis on the everyday lived culture of ordinary people
2. A project that aspires to signify the diversity of contemporary British society

3. Material that originates from a partnership between the production team and participants, where the participants are granted more control over the production process and outcome than is common practice in the mainstream media sphere

2.4.1 *Everyday culture of ordinary people*

The emphasis on the everyday culture of ordinary people – the first basic principle – was already present in *Video Nation*'s first press communiqué, where it was pointed out that

[...] all 55 [...] will be asked to focus on subjects of personal relevance such as family relationships and cultural identity, as well as those of public concern such as unemployment, racism and law and order. By asking them to film everyday events, like eating breakfast, shopping, or having a night out, the project will explore a wide range of contemporary issues in a personal, highly immediate way. (BBC Press Service, 1994: 2)

Building on de Certeau's work, *Video Nation* is not only a validation of the everyday, the repetitive, the unpurposeful and the heterogeneous, but also contains elements that signify sublime and aesthetic aspects of everyday life. As Parret formulates it, "the everyday shows fissures: Privileged moments of intense aesthetic experience" (1996: 74 – my translation).

Through this process surfaces the constructed and complex nature of the distinction between the everyday centre and the privileged margin, and between ordinary people and the power bloc(s). The members of the *Video Nation* production team do not escape from the hybridity of the everyday, as they themselves aim to contribute to its 'aestheticization' by applying a series of criteria in order to make 'good' and 'watchable' television (which refers to the notions of professional and technical quality discussed in chapter 6). This type of analysis circulates internally within the production team, and can be summarized by the statement made on the basis of their ongoing self-evaluation, that there are not enough 'bad people' in *Video Nation*. It is also sharply expressed by Morrison:

The point I am making here is that VNS is part of a larger political project and this does have repercussions in terms of the construction of 'ordinary' and 'everyday'. Racism, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, snobbery – the things that divide us – do not feature in this version of British society. In VNS, I feel, the everyday operates as a mythic realm in which ordinary people are equated with 'the people,' holding out the promise of national community. (Morrison, 2000: 50)

Especially at the level of articulation of the signifier ordinary people the *Video Nation* production team found itself in an uncomfortable position, described in a quote from in the BBC's house magazine, *Ariel*: "Although there are probably no such things as 'ordinary people,' that's what Video Nation was to be about" (Assistant Producer Newby, 1994: 11). It is significant that the former executive producer of *Video Nation* – when asked – defined ordinary people as non-media professionals (Bob Long, 22 August 2002 interview), which contrasts with more class-based articulations that define ordinary people in an antagonistic relationship with the elite (see Laclau, 1977; Hall, 1981; Fiske, 1993; see also chapter 3). There were repercussions for the composition of the group of participants, as illustrated by the presence of members of the British aristocracy in the Shorts. An example is the Short *Horses* made by the Duke of Devonshire,²² who talks about his love of horse racing and of *his* horses.

The articulation of ordinary people naturally still implies the inclusion of people who do not belong to one of the many societal elites. Within the multitude of cultures on display, there is room also for popular culture, subculture or anti-culture, and for identity politics and the articulation of citizenship. Taking the broadly defined political and emancipatory perspectives and keeping in mind the importance of the Foucauldian micro-physics of power, the Shorts cannot be seen in isolation from the political domain (Dovey, 2000: 128; Matthews, 2007: 445). In some cases the political load is manifest, and the tactics of daily life are oriented against the political system, as is the case in one of the Shorts where a participant ostentatiously tears up her membership card for the British Conservative Party. In another case the presence of this political load is more subtle, and the Shorts become carriers of identity politics and cultural citizenship.

An example of this is the Short *Daffodils*, by Connie Mark (see Figure 10), who recites two stanzas from the eponymous poem by Wordsworth, followed by a stanza from a poem by Herrick,²³ while she portrays fields filled with daffodils. She is showing her cultural capacity in knowing these poems and her capacity to create her own bricolage. Again, this illustrates the interwoven-ness of the everyday and the sublime (in this case poetry). Additionally, she takes a position in the discussion on (post)colonial relations on the basis of her lived experience, quoting from these well-known symbols of cultural imperialism.²⁴ Their symbolic load becomes explicit when she states (in a tone of some bewilderment) that she was taught these poems by her British teachers in a school in Jamaica, when she had never seen a daffodil.

Figure 10: Culture and (post)colonialism: *Daffodils* by C. Mark.

“I remember when I was a child, I had to do this in school: poems about daffodils:

*‘I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Across the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance ...’*

Having those and other wonders said:

*‘Fair daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soone;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attained its noone.’*

The amazing thing is I never ever saw a daffodil in Jamaica, but because our teachers were all British, we have to learn British poems, and British history and British geography.”



2.4.2 *The cultural diversity of contemporary British society*

The second basic principle relates to the representation of the cultural diversity that characterizes the UK. A former managing director of the BBC formulates this topic in a speech, as follows: “Video Nation treats the tapestry of individuals and cultures that make up the United Kingdom with dignity and respect” (Birt, 1999: 13). The objective to guarantee cultural diversity is supported by the clear intention of the members of the production team to avoid stereotyping, and links to an appeal for societal unity and nationhood. *Video Nation*’s two former co-producers describe their position in an article in *The Independent*:

In a mass society that's quite fragmented, we need to be confronted with one another's similarities as well as our differences; and we desperately need the differences to be humanised. (Rose and Mohr, 1999: Media-13)

This neo-Griersonian appeal for national unity (Dovey, 2000: 131) – based on the above-mentioned similarities and differences or on transcending diversity in order to support national unity – is present in *Video Nation* in several forms. At the start of the project, representativeness and diversity are combined in a well-considered selection strategy. On the one hand, a general call was launched using BBC's radio and television channels, resulting in 7000 responses, among which about 3500 candidates returned the requested form. Of these, some 200 were visited by a member of the production team. About half of the first participant group was selected in this fashion. On the other hand, "pro-active research" was used to reach candidates from target groups that had proven difficult to contact and mobilize through the use of general appeals (Chris Mohr, 12 August 2002 interview).

In the first phase the production team aimed for traditional socio-demographic representativeness and an equal distribution of participants based on characteristics such as age, place of residence and income (Rose, 2000: 183). With a view to optimizing the diversity of the participant group, this ambition was abandoned in the second selection phase, when the production team explicitly scouted for participants from specific societal groups or who represented specific positions content-wise. The local websites applied a similar combination of a general call and proactive research (Chris Mohr, 26 September 2002 interview), with the one difference that the general call was permanently online.²⁵ Below is the London example (Figure 11):



Figure 11: London *Video Nation* section.

The nation is not only constructed by grouping the contributions of different participants in a series of televised Shorts and later in the archive, but also by the way the participants and the production team handle the medium when producing the Shorts. The individual contributions, based on "feeling, sentiment and subjectivity"

(Dovey, 2000: 127), are personal testimonies and forms of self-expression (Dowmunt, 2001: 20) that are oriented towards the nation. They offer images that originate and are consumed in a cycle of domesticity: “the camcorder records private life, which is brought into the public domain, for consumption in the private world of the living room” (Dinsmore, 1996: 54). In the Shorts the traditional narrative situation is replaced by a speaking to the nation approach; as Dovey remarks, “Contributors are all too aware that they are being given a chance to ‘speak to the nation,’ that they have a platform from which to project” (Dovey, 2000: 129).

At the same time the question arises as to which national community is being represented. Morrison’s (2000: 50) critique has been referred to above: Racism, xenophobia, misogyny and snobbery are not present in the *Video Nation* Shorts, which results in a very positive and uncritical portrayal of British society. In her conclusion Morrison writes:

Life is not cruel, degrading, divisive or meaningless the films say; this is a positive reality, this day-to-day of the life world. [...] I find the ethos of VNS beautiful and moving – being no stranger to ‘romantic faith’ myself – but I think it is important to recognise the argument that it risks ignoring the power dynamics that exist in British society and their impact upon all of our everyday lives. (Morrison, 2000: 60)

It could be said that many of the problems that Morrison enumerates *are* dealt with in the Shorts but from the position of the person confronted by the problem. The crime section of the web archive includes two Shorts on burglary, *Break-in* by Jean Lee and *Crime* by Colin O’Dell-Athill.²⁶ Imtiaz Viad, in the Short *Why*, reports on a racist-inspired attack:

It’s just so scary [...] And it’s not fair. [...] That’s not how society is supposed to progress. We’re supposed to be called a civilized society, and then you go up to people of a different colour, and then you hit them for being of a different colour. Why?²⁷

A second critique aimed at the representation of the national community is oriented towards the focus on the filming individual, which results in the exclusion of a number of elements of the social structure. One important exception is the frequent visual and audio presence of the family, for example, in the Short *Mouse*, where a father, accompanied by his family and some of his children’s friends, walks through a field looking for a location to release a captured mouse. Other social systems – such as the workplace and civil society organizations – are more absent, which is explained in part by a lack of enthusiasm among the participants and their colleagues to film in the workplace and, more importantly, by the focus of the project on the participants’ private lives (Mandy Rose, 13 August 2002 interview).

Alongside the reduced representation of social systems and the resulting risk of confining daily life to the private sphere (Morrison, 2000: 49), *Video Nation* also offers a

reduced representation of community, especially in the light of the more recent debates on co-creation. The various participants address the viewer and the nation; however, in these Shorts dialogue or debate between participants is absent. Communication among members of families is quite often depicted, but this type of communication rarely exceeds the frame of the Short. From this perspective *Video Nation*'s original claim to be an "on-line video community" is only partially substantiated. The participants consider themselves to be part of the *Video Nation* project – in other words there is a sense of belonging – and they speak to the nation from this perspective. But at the same time some of the vital components that constitute community, namely communication, interaction and dialogue, are missing (see Van Dijk, 1998: 45). Explicit references to other Shorts are not included for production reasons (Mandy Rose, 13 August 2002 interview), and the feedback form that was a later addition is not often used. When it is, it is used by website visitors, not participants. Although the participants are seen to be part of the national community, it remains problematic to consider the group of participants within the web-structure a 'community'.²⁸

2.4.3 Participation and "some really good concrete power"

The third basic principle of *Video Nation* is the decentralized power structure, which tends towards the more maximalist versions of participation, in particular in the television phase. Dovey (2000: 126) calls this "the most devolved power structure that TV institutions can offer". One of the former co-producers formulates this as follows: "I think, what they had was some really good concrete power, they had concrete power that we underlined and made very clear they got" (Mandy Rose 13 August 2002 interview).

In *Video Nation* three different domains can be distinguished, in which participants are attributed higher levels of power than is common within the mainstream media sphere. All three domains are based on the participatory attitude of the involved media professionals, which bears witness to the organizational subculture of the CPU from which *Video Nation* originated. The *Video Nation* staff accepts the participants as equal partners in the production process. This attitude is closely related to the Freirian (1992) approach to the egalitarian student–teacher relation, to Curran's (1997: 30) view of the media professional as the facilitator of participation in the public domain, and to Manca's (1989) plea for the media professional as the gate-opener, and not the traditional gatekeeper.

The first domain in which the participants are attributed more control is use of technology. A camcorder is placed at their disposal and the decision about what to film is theirs.²⁹ Moreover, former and current producers stated clearly that at all times they refrain from exercising pressure. An important rider to this is that not all the videos are shot by the participants alone, without assistance from the production team. In some cases – when confronted, for instance, with time constraints or specific content requirements

– a procedure of “assisted filming” is applied, and participants are counselled during the filming of the raw material. In the web phase the procedure of “assisted filming” became more frequent (Carole Gilligan 22 April 2003 interview), owing to the increase in participant diversity and the decrease in support.

The second domain where the position of the participants is strengthened is situated at the level of training and support. The participants receive a brief training, with a view to familiarizing them with the equipment, the filmic language and the legal consequences of working for a broadcasting company. Originally the production team opted for two-day workshops, but later the duration of these training sessions was shortened; in the web phase the training initially was one to one, but later, especially after 2009, became more group-based.

Third, in the domain of editing, participants are enabled to exercise control. As it was deemed impossible logistically to have participants physically present during the editing process, they are allowed an ‘editorial veto’. Rose (1995: 10) summarizes this right as follows: “to see any material we wanted to transmit in context and to say no if, for any reason they weren’t happy with it”. Also, the production team prefer to adopt an ‘open’ attitude towards editing the material handed in, and tend to exercise restraint towards interventions, which explains the absence of music and “fancy editing” (Chris Mohr, 12 August 2002 interview). A former co-producer described and summarized this attitude in the one word: “unobtrusive” (Chris Mohr, 12 August 2002 interview). The editorial veto has been invoked only rarely, but has been used. This method was still being used after *Video Nation* transferred to the web-environment, as illustrated by the following quote from the ‘faq’-file of the national website:

Who edits the tapes? We do, but Video Nation hands over control to you. If you are unhappy about a finished video, then it just doesn’t get shown. That way you are free to shoot first, decide later. (BBC Video Nation, 2002)

These more egalitarian power relations do not imply that the production team abandoned their professional management. They retained their control over the production process and the output in a number of ways. As one co-producer remarked, “It would be naïve to underestimate how – even in that context – we were the BBC people and they were the public” (Mandy Rose 13 August 2002 interview). The production team remained responsible for the selection of the participants, and for the concept development and its protection. Later, the features played a structuring role in allowing (and disallowing) content. During training the participants were familiarized with the style and concept the production team had created. The participants, in other words, were accustomed to the constraints with regard to the form and content deemed proper by the mainstream media sphere. The criteria for ‘good’ and ‘watchable’ were normalized during the training sessions. It was made clear, for instance, that a ‘subjective’ filming style was preferred to the observational style more common in home movies (Rose, 1995: 10), but also the

use of other documentary filming styles was discouraged.³⁰ Other constraints had an impact too: When confronted with the effect of the professional “stop-watch culture” (Schlesinger, 1987: 83), the production team, for instance, tended to cut back on its basic principles, and increase the impact on the filming process and its outcome.

The conceptual and stylistic preferences were consolidated by the contacts between participants and the production team, and can also be found in the output, which was edited by the production team. While providing support, the production team maintained a central position in the communicative network. Direct communication between the participants was not promoted, “[*in order not*] to blur the differences” (Chris Mohr 12 August 2002 interview). In contrast to the lives of participants, the private lives of the members of the production team remained out of sight. Finally, the members of the production team took on a motivating role. As the former executive producer put it, “We were never shy of asking people to film things” (Bob Long 22 August 2002 interview). Originally, these initiatives were structured by written content-related briefings and by so-called envelope-questions. This latter technique consisted of presenting participants with a sealed envelope and asking them to open it in front of the camera. One of the Shorts (*Video Nation* by Jean Lee – see Figure 12) shows this technique in operation. Also, the later focus on features can be seen as part of this stimulation role.



Figure 12: An envelope-question: *Video Nation* by J. Lee.

Alongside these quite structured techniques, some more content-related requests were embedded in the ordinary communication between participants and production team:

Sometimes they might have filmed something on a tape that was almost there but not quite so we might commission additional material or suggest that they might try again at a later date. There was this kind of in between stuff that went on all the time. (Chris Mohr 12 August 2002 interview)

Finally, the editing process was controlled to a high degree by the production team. The editorial veto was mainly a negative right that empowered participants to prevent material from being broadcast but, at the same time, was a motivation for participants to film without any restraint, and was again part of the arsenal of managerial techniques. The actual selection of material from the master tapes remained firmly the domain of the production team, whose functioning was driven by professional criteria, although some informal negotiation with participants was still possible. Also the decision to broadcast or webcast approved Shorts remained exclusively in the hands of the production team.

2.5 Conclusion

Video Nation is a project that was able to stimulate on- and off-screen access, interaction and participation. Although confronted by a number of constraints, which are visible only rarely on-screen, this project offers ordinary people the opportunity to address the nation; to show the national community the differences and similarities, the repetitive and the sublime, that characterize everyday culture; to illustrate the interconnectedness of the cultural, social, artistic and political dimensions; to engage in identity politics and the construction of cultural citizenship; and to prove that professionals are not urged to keep control over the media system but can share it with empowered non-professionals.

When looking behind the screen the complex nature of content-related audience participation in mainstream media organizations becomes clearer. As Pateman (1970) argued, (audience) participation can theoretically be defined as full. Within the context of mainstream media, the presence of media professionals unavoidably puts pressure on this possibility of full participation, even if these media professionals are located with a subcultural organizational shelter. Nevertheless, *Video Nation* attempts to maximize participation and to establish a power equilibrium between media professionals and participants. It substantially reduces the managerial impact of the production team and to a large degree fulfils its ambitions to create audience participation.

Crucial to protecting this power equilibrium is the participatory attitude of the media professionals, whose identity is no longer built solely on being the gatekeepers and producers of content but includes gate-opening and facilitating content creation. The following statement from a former co-producer shows that this change in position was not always effortless:

Early on it felt like an abdication of my role as a producer to let views I disagreed with be transmitted without context or comment. I don't think so anymore (though that's not to say that particular pieces aren't troubling). (Rose, 1995: 10)

This ‘abdication’ is never complete. Neither could it be expected to be complete. In the case of *Video Nation* the production team’s strategic management remains very much present during the production process. In most cases the participatory attitude of the media professionals prevents the power balance from being disturbed too much. In some other cases, for instance when the production team cloaks its own interventions and active role or weakens the concept by increasing the weight of its interventions (in the ‘assisted filming’ scenario), the institutionalized power imbalance returns to the foreground and reduces the level of participation, showing the difficulties of stabilizing the more maximalist participatory practices.

The power equilibrium between participants and professionals has from the beginning of *Video Nation* been under constant pressure from the institutional context of a mainstream broadcaster that, hesitantly, allowed a containable form of content-related participation that never evolved into forms of structural participation (not even within the CPU). The history of *Video Nation* also shows that this enclave of maximalist participation was unstable and often threatened, which eventually lead to its closure. This again illustrates the intrinsic instability of maximalist forms of participation in mainstream organizational (sub) cultures. Arguably, *Video Nation*’s position was already structurally weakened when its institutional base – the subcultural enclave of the CPU – was eliminated. Ironically, the shift to a web platform also reduced the participatory intensity of *Video Nation* – mainly by decreasing its support structure – though without causing it to give up on its basic participatory principles.

3. Case 2: *RadioSwap*

3.1 Introduction

Community and alternative media organizations have developed organizational models that can be seen as operationalizations of the maximalist participatory organization, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Participation, in its more maximalist articulations, features prominently in their remits and becomes translated into horizontal organizational structures and inclusive decision-making processes and practices. Their material reach is not limited to the organizations themselves. Characterized by fluidity and diversity, community and alternative media organizations function as nodal points in civil society rhizomes. At the discursive level, they are environments where participatory cultures and egalitarian subject positions are lived, nurtured and archived. Moreover, they are discursive machineries that incessantly produce discourses on participation.

But there is another side to this analysis. In contrast to the more optimistic (and sometimes celebratory) version of the analysis, as it is summarized in the previous paragraph, it is necessary to point to some of the many problems these organizations

have to face. First, facilitating participation is often a significant objective, but processes of exclusion and unequal power relations remain present, often at rather informal levels. The context of a capitalist society is also difficult to reconcile with the organizational objective of facilitating participation. Working within organizations that cherish participatory cultures is not always easy, since participatory processes tend to slow organizational decision-making, especially when conflicts emerge. They are machines with organizational cultures that offer specific consolidations of the societal flow – to come back to Deleuze and Guattari’s machine concept – which implies also that (some) organizational processes become hampered and restricted (as will be illustrated below). To broaden the machine metaphor: Community and alternative media organizations function as discursive machines with almost continuous output, but they are not always heard. Moreover, they do not always manage to play their role of crossroads within civil society. As Mattelart and Piemme (1983: 416) remark – already a considerable time ago – there is always the danger of localism or isolationism.

The tendency towards localism and isolationism is one of the major restrictions that community and alternative media organizations are required to deal with. The confinement to the local that is embedded in their objectives and organizational cultures often traps them on one side of the local/global dichotomy. This dominant mode of locality can be explained by the emphasis it receives in the interconnecting traditional media-centred approaches (see chapter 1). The alternative media approach uses large-scale mainstream media organizations as a reference point, almost automatically positioning alternative media organizations on the other side of the binary. The serving-the-community approach draws on the dominant conceptualizations of community, which – as Leunissen (1986) argues – refer predominantly to geography and ethnicity as structuring notions of the collective identity or the group relations. Of course, Howley’s (2005: 267) point that “community media rather forcefully undermined the binary opposition of the categories ‘local’ and ‘global’ in two discrete, but interrelated ways” is well taken when he refers to the “historicizing and particularizing [of] the penetration of global forces into local contexts” and to the “endless stream of variation and diversity of cultural forms and practices around the world” generated by community and alternative media organizations. Nevertheless, the dominant mode of locality keeps them at the same time firmly locked within its ‘essence’ of being part of the local community.

This reduction structurally weakens community and alternative media organizations in comparison to large-scale – and sometimes global – mainstream media organizations. It also complicates the possibility of connecting to other organizations and renders their potentially enlarged societal role virtually unthinkable. It is difficult, for instance, to imagine how community and alternative media organizations could feature in John Keane’s (1991: 150) futuristic redefinition of the public service model, based on the “development of a plurality of non-state media of communication which both function as permanent thorns in the side of political power [...] and serve as the primary means

of communication for citizens living, working, loving, quarrelling and tolerating others within a genuinely pluralist society”.

The model of the rhizome offers theoretical support for resolving, or at least reducing, this problem. Simply enlarging the scale of operations to overcome the confinements of locality would be a self-defeating strategy towards the elusive and diversified identity of community and alternative media organizations. To draw on Deleuze and Guattari's sentiment: Creating an arborescent structure would imply the creation of a copy of mainstream and large-scale media, and would not generate a map (see principles 5 and 6 of the rhizome: cartography and decalomania). Also the other characteristics of the rhizome enumerated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in *A Thousand Plateaus* – the principles of connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity and asignifying rupture – allow for a theorizing of the development of rhizomatic networks that takes into account the complexities of community and alternative media organizations in the construction of their networks. Rhizomatic connections provoke thinking about organizational structures where community and alternative media organizations can remain grounded in local communities and simultaneously become engaged in translocal networks characterized by the fluid articulation of a diversity of community and alternative media organizations. From this perspective, there is no reason why the rhizome should necessarily stop at the edge of the local community.

Appadurai's (1995) concept of the translocal allows more theorizing about these moments where the local is effectively expanded by moving into the realm of the outer context, which traditionally is not considered to be part of the local. The translocal then becomes the moment when the local is stretched beyond its borders, while still remaining situated in the local. As Broeckmann (1998) puts it, it is the moment where “different worlds and their local agents – individuals, organisations, machines – co-operate with global and nomadic agents within networked environments”. It is the moment where the local merges with a part of its outside context, without transforming itself into this context. It is the moment where the local simultaneously incorporates its context and transgresses into it. It is the moment where the local reaches out to a familiar unknown, and fuses it with the known. It is the place-based version of the rhizome.³¹

ICTs can play an important – but non-deterministic – role in the creation of these rhizomatic and translocal connections. ICTs, and more specifically networked computer communication, have been thoroughly researched through the metaphor of the rhizome. For instance, Spiller (2002: 96) writes the following in the introduction to the fragment of *A Thousand Plateaus* included in the *Cyber_reader*:

A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia is the philosophical bible of the cyber-evangelist. This book is possibly one of the most quoted philosophical texts in connection with the technological ‘spacescape’ that computers have created and augmented.

More relevant to the topic of this case study is that different types of civil society organizations have transcended geographical/national frontiers and have initiated the use of ICTs to support this construction of rhizomatic networks. Various names (and perspectives) have been used to describe the phenomenon: Keck and Sikkink (1998) referred to transnational advocacy networks and Keane (2003) to global civil society, whilst Smith et al. (1997) employ the notion of transnational social movements. Whatever name is attributed, ICTs are seen to play an important role within those networks of individuals and civil society organizations (Scott and Street, 2000; Cammaerts, 2005). Within the media sphere the rise of IMCs, especially, can be seen as a fascinating example. Focusing on Indymedia, Mamadouh (2004: 488–489) describes the interconnected functioning of these IMCs and the dialectics between the local and the global as follows:

The Indymedia websites provide platforms to mobilize activists at different scales at once, with global sites addressing a global audience and local sites addressing local ones, but both scales are entwined, constantly connected through newswires and links.

Earlier in her article, Mamadouh (2004: 487) stresses the importance of ICTs as decision-making tools for IMCs:

The Internet is a local resource for IMCs as they often run their decision-making through electronic lists, on top of regular meetings (often weekly). This resource is even more crucial to sustain the global network. The coordination activities of the global network occur through computer-mediated communication: via mailing lists and IRC chats.

These examples from within the realm of civil society, and even from within the sphere of alternative and community (new) media, raise important questions about the potential of alternative and community media to establish similar rhizomatic networks beyond the local, to overcome the reduction to locality and to link up with translocal and (even) transnational social struggles. In the next part of this chapter, I analyse a case study of *RadioSwap*, a very modest attempt to move beyond these confinements and to contribute to the generation of a more translocal rhizome.

3.2 Creating a more translocal rhizome? The RadioSwap case

A number of projects in Europe and the US focus on facilitating the exchange of audio content by alternative and community media organizations through ICTs.³² For instance, the Stream on the Fly project³³ is an Austrian-based collaboration of radio stations and companies, such as Public Netbase. Following several years of trialling, they now have

an operational “open-source, station-management interface, a programme exchange platform and a portal engine for radio programme reuse” (Alton-Scheidl et al., 2005: 1). The Programme Exchange Initiative was initiated by the British Community Media Association (CMA), and was “particularly aimed at assisting Community Radio stations in accessing the wealth of community radio programmes that are produced each year in the UK Community Radio sector”.³⁴ This initiative later evolved into the GetMedia database.³⁵ Finally, the A-Infos radio project, which started in 1996 and is based in the US, has almost 36,000 files in MP3-format, about 2500 of which last for more than two hours. A-Infos’ “goal is to support and expand the movement for democratic communications worldwide. We exist to be an alternative to the corporate and government media which do not serve struggles for liberty, justice and peace, nor enable the free expression of creativity”.³⁶

The present case study³⁷ focuses on a Belgian radio exchange project, called *RadioSwap*, which is a project involving six Belgian radio stations – Radio Campus (Brussels), Urgent (Ghent), Radio Universitaire Namuroise (RUN-Namur), FMBrussel (Brussels), Radio Panik (Brussels) and Radio Centraal (Antwerp). Radio Campus, Urgent and RUN are student radio stations, closely related to the basic principles of alternative and community media organizations. Radio Campus, the oldest of these three stations, was formally established in 1980, but was built on the heritage of an illegal radio station that started broadcasting in 1968. Its original objective was described as follows:

To be a quality radio station, a display for the university, and at the service of the university community, determinedly non-commercial and not giving into fashions, easy militantism, or external pressures, whether they are political or cultural (Former Radio Campus website, quoted in Carpentier et al., 2006: 33–34 – my translation).

Although the scope of Radio Campus broadened, it maintains a close relationship with the Free University of Brussels (ULB), which continues to have representation on its Board of Directors. Radio Campus currently has about 150 volunteers. The volunteers elect the executive council, which is in charge of the daily management of the radio station, from amongst their number. Urgent (1996) and RUN (1992) are more recent initiatives, but are also supported by large numbers of volunteers and based on principles of self-management. For instance, RUN (2010) describes its public as follows:

The people from Namur, locals [*de souche*] or here through migration, but also everybody that likes independent music (pop-rock, metal, hip hop, electro, chanson française [...]) and the people that are concerned by the societal topics that we discuss.

The fourth radio station, FMBrussel, was also originally a student radio station. It was established in 2000 by students from the Brussels film school Rits, but became a more hybrid ‘professionalized’ organization when the Flemish Community started subsidizing

it in 2004. The number of volunteers and their participation in the internal decision-making structures decreased, and the radio station can now be considered a mix of public broadcaster and community radio station (D'Hulst, 2005).

The last two radio stations are alternative radio stations, with strong participatory traditions. Radio Panik – broadcasting since 1983 – describes its website (and itself) as “a zone of sound turbulence” (Radio Panik, 2005). A later website self-description explicitly refers to alternativity in its opening title: “Radio Panik, an alternative radio station” (Radio Panik, 2008). The Antwerp alternative radio station Radio Centraal was established in 1980, and the following citation from its website shows how much it stresses its non-commercial and independent nature:

Radio Centraal disagrees with a society where economic interests decide what makes it to the media, and upon the course of politics. For this reason, every producer fills his own broadcasting time with unheard sound. And Radio Centraal wants to make a noise. We are not happy with the way our society is evolving, and we are rarely intrigued by current debates. We are convinced that the economy should be controlled by humans, and not the other way round. Economic pressure on the media threatens society. Radio Centraal, as a non-commercial media, sees it imperative to run in the other direction. (Radio Centraal, 2010)

Together, these six radio stations initiated the *RadioSwap* project, which started in 2002 and received funding from the Belgian federal government. In the first phase of the project the six radio stations were supported by four academic research centres: Groupe de Réflexion sur les Processus Organisationnels (GREPO), Recherche et Diffusion de l'Information Scientifique (RDIS), Centre de Recherches Informatique et Droit (CRID) and Centrum voor Intellectuele Rechten (CIR).³⁸

In the second phase of the project, CRID, the Centre for Communication for Social Change (CSC) and two commercial companies, Nerom N.V. and Info-Graphic SA, provided support. A first evaluation of the *RadioSwap* project was published by the CSC in June 2006 (Carpentier et al., 2006), and strongly informs this case study. After the project (financing) ended in 2006, the *RadioSwap* project came close to disappearing; it went offline in early 2008 (Pierre De Jaeger 7 August 2010 interview), but in autumn 2009 a new website development phase was launched, and this is ongoing at the time of writing this chapter (February 2011).

3.2.1 *RadioSwap's objectives*

Quite similar to the other European projects mentioned above, the main objective of this project is focused on the exchange of alternative and community radio content. *RadioSwap's* main objective was articulated on its first website as follows:

The *Radioswap.net* project aims to develop a technical as well as an organizational system that will allow staff working for non-commercial and community radio stations – inside and outside Belgium – to exchange radio programmes via the Internet. (*RadioSwap*, 2001³⁹)

On a second website the project objectives are regrouped under five headings: Seeking multilingualism; Directed at volunteers; Giving a greater place to forms of self-management; Dreaming of co-productions, partnership and news exchanges; and Willing to experiment (*RadioSwap*, 2002). The first item refers to the participatory nature of the six radio stations. They⁴⁰ function on a non-commercial basis, their staff is not remunerated and produces radio programmes on a voluntary basis, and there are co-decision structures that allow for structural participation. Moreover, the *RadioSwap* database is built on a participatory model, as described in the self-management item:

The point of all of this is not to build a ‘normalized network’ such as some of the networks found in the world of commercial radio. It is rather to develop a common tool, whose management would be shared, which the radio stations and their collaborators could exploit according to needs, in order to reinforce singularities and specificities. (*RadioSwap*, 2002)

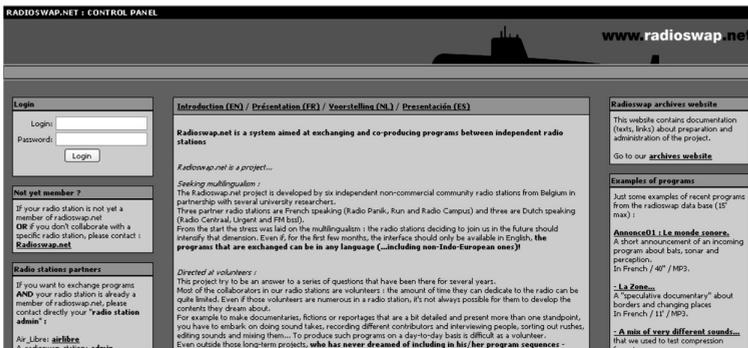
The project not only aims to “give the radio collaborators an opportunity to spread their programmes beyond their original radio” (*RadioSwap*, 2002), but also wants to construct and enhance networks between different individuals and organizations.

Another objective of the project is to make it possible to use the system to set up co-productions with other radio stations, or with outside partners. The system should allow collaborators to work together, at a distance, on the same content and the same programmes, each using her/his own way of working, with his/her own culture. (*RadioSwap*, 2002)

RadioSwap is no longer restricted to the six original ‘founding’ radio stations. In April 2007 *RadioSwap* included 81 radio stations or affiliated organizations and 209 registered users based in Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Hungary, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, the UK and the Czech Republic. These radio stations have uploaded 982 radio programmes, which account for 47GB of audio. When the *RadioSwap* data were uploaded into the new database in 2009, there were 83 stations or affiliated organizations, 1242 programmes and 52 series.⁴¹

Media and Participation

Figure 13: The RadioSwap websites.



2002-2005



2006-2008



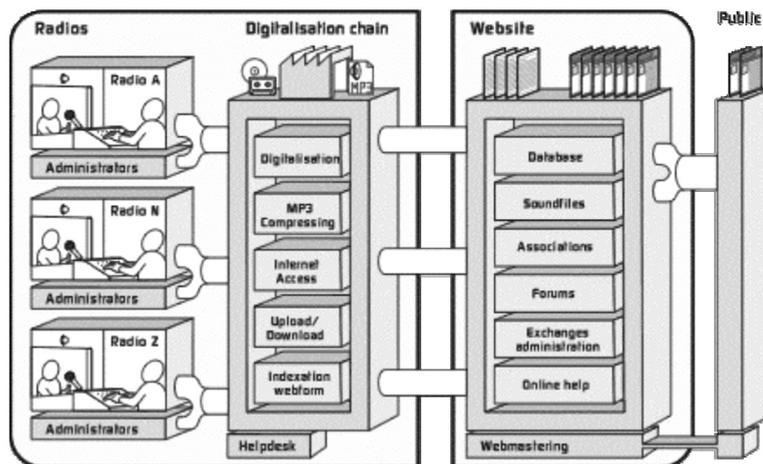
2009-2011

3.2.2 Rhizomatic technologies?

The *RadioSwap* technology and procedures (like the radio stations) were built on the idea of self-(data)management. The initial database construction was managed by a project group with representatives from all the participating radio stations. Although administrators were involved in the actual database construction, implementing the radio's participatory principles outside the radio stations proved difficult and the administrators' participation remained limited, despite the efforts of the *RadioSwap* coordinators. This limited involvement of the partner radio stations was considered problematic by the project management, who preferred to meet with interested individuals who represented evenly interested partner radio organizations, but were obliged to face continuously changing and only moderately interested individuals who could not (formally) represent the radio station. Although the reasons for the lack of interest are complex (see below), the fluid and horizontal organizational structures of the partner radio stations worked against the project:

We discovered, very gradually, that we weren't facing 'organizations' (community media or not) with whom we could construct a project based on their expertise [...], but a group of individuals who had agreed – not always willingly – to come to a meeting once in a while, but only to express their personal opinions. (Feedback from Didier Demorcy, *RadioSwap*, 22 September 2005)

Figure 14: *RadioSwap* production model.



RadioSwap (2001).

Despite the problems related to (participation in) the construction process, the password-protected interface facilitates radio producers to record, digitize, compress (using MP3 or OGG Vorbis compression) and upload the audio that they themselves have produced. During upload, the users provide the necessary metadata, allowing later use of search engines. These sound files (and their metadata) are stored on the *RadioSwap* server for retrieval by other radio producers, providing a material expansion of the radio content production of the participating radio stations.

The uploaded broadcasts are often locally embedded, via the large number of individuals who live their lives in the urban communities of these Belgian (or other) cities. This of course includes those radio producers that reach Belgium in the slipstream of the global ethnoscares. Their news and current affairs programmes combine local with national and international news items, and many producers have close relationships with local (branches of) civil society organizations, and with small local businesses such as record shops and cafes. Finally, these media organizations and their participatory approaches require (relatively) high involvement of their staff, who mostly live nearby.

The *RadioSwap* technologies facilitate the potentially global distribution of this uploaded material, although this of course is dependent on the willingness of the partner radio stations to re-broadcast the material. The exchange of radio content allows the alternative discourses and representations to circulate far beyond the local. The Antwerp radio producers, whose radio station has been experiencing severe restrictions to its broadcast range, point especially to the irony of being listened to in other cities, whilst facing problems 'at home,' being confined within a mere three-kilometre broadcasting zone.

Now you have the opportunity to have your programme broadcast in London, or Prague or Berlin, or wherever, even in Rotterdam. If this is happening, then it is really bizarre, because here [*at home*] we are trying to operate with this frequency and insufficient power from the transmitter. People living even three kilometres from the station find it difficult to get good reception, whilst people living hundreds of kilometres away in other countries get perfect reception. (Daniel Renders, Radio Centraal 14 April 2005 interview)

At the same time the interface does generate a considerable number of limitations. Most 'ordinary' users describe the interface as difficult, non-user oriented and time-consuming.⁴² They complain also about others' lack of systematic and regular uploading, and about the lack of uniformity in the metadata provided. They mention linguistic problems and problems related to lack of human, non-computer-mediated interaction. Despite these problems, most users do see and do validate the capacity to exchange audio and to broaden their networks, creating connections with other radio producers.

The most important points. First the material aspects, in other words, the possibility to easily exchange content. Second, the problem of putting the different actors in touch with each other. These contacts might be in the form of a conversation, or might involve exchanging programmes. We did send representatives to international meetings, etc, and we did decide to install structures for European lobbying which was a new venture. (Bernard Dubuisson, Radio Campus 18 July 2005 interview)

In analysing the resulting user practices, four patterns of usage were distinguished. In a limited number of cases entire broadcasts are regularly re-broadcast by other radio stations. This is the case, for instance, of *Rock Minute Soup*, produced by Radio Campus Brussels and re-broadcast by RUN, and *Micro Ouvert*, produced by Radio Campus Brussels and re-broadcast by Radio Campus Lille. A second ‘structural’ use is related to the idea of creating a *RadioSwap* slot in the programming schedules of the different radio stations. Although Radio Centraal, for example, has considered this option, it has not implemented it (yet). A third ‘structural’ use is related to specific thematic needs that arise when the ‘normal’ programming is suspended for radiophonic or journalistic projects or festivals. In that case the *RadioSwap* database provides an opportunity to locate thematically relevant content. The fourth pattern of usage is linked more to individual radio producers’ practices, and consists of using fragments of downloaded material within their ‘own’ time slots.

This does not mean that the radio producers embraced *RadioSwap*. The problems related to the construction and uptake of the *RadioSwap* project are (at least partially) linked to the position of the original *RadioSwap* project in relation to the alternative organizational culture.⁴³ Although initiated by members of the community radio stations, *RadioSwap* is to some degree defined as being outside of the radio stations. One of the producers formulates this rather directly:

It is a problem when a project comes from the outside, when it is not a project in which the radio station can participate in the formulation of objectives, when the project must be accepted as it is. (Karl Noben, RUN 21 September 2004 interview)

This balancing between being on the inside and the outside can be explained by the project’s dependence on government funding and the consequences for the project (such as the requirement for management procedures that are considered bureaucratic, and lack of continuity and uncertainty). Also the heavy involvement of people linked to academia is considered problematic (as illustrated by the quote below). Both these components can be seen as forms of resistance against what can be considered the more arbolescent parts of society, against which these radio stations need to protect themselves.

I think that the website needs to be completely changed. The way it has been built makes sense from the perspective of people working in a university, but it doesn’t

make sense from the perspective of the people that have to use it. (Wim Geeraerts Radio Centraal 5 October 2004 interview)

But there are also explanations that touch upon the nature of the alternative and community media organizations, and their organizational cultures. The technology used is still perceived as strange to the core business of audio broadcasting. The radio stations lack immediate and considerable benefits in relation to their organizational (participatory) remit. Moreover, differences exist between the positions of individual radio producers and the people in charge of the radio station's programming. Individual radio producers usually have only one-hour slots in the radio's programming schedule, and are not greatly inclined or motivated to broadcast 'other' material than their 'own'.

Principally, I think that I just have one broadcast, which I produce on a regular basis. There is no need to find ways to fill it and it was not conceived to be open to another broadcast(er). (Benoit Deuxant, Radio Campus 28 July 2005 interview)

At the same time the *RadioSwap* project is still seen as part of the world of community and alternative media rhizome. The project's identity reiterates the core values of the participating community radio stations, and thus serves as a discursive machine that supports the construction of alternative and community media identities. This process is exemplified (and symbolized) by the remark made by one of the radio producers in relation to the *RadioSwap* logo.

I like even the look of *RadioSwap*. It shows a submarine, with a periscope. It is a clear reference to the underground. I think that we will stay underground, despite efforts to affirm ourselves more publicly. (Jean-Christophe Poncelet, Radio Campus, 1 August 2005 interview)

As a discursive machine, *RadioSwap* is deemed important because it generates alternative discourses on (intellectual) property. The planned opening-up of the database to the 'general public' has created a series of legal problems concerning copyright, which are addressed by reverting to the promotion of copyleft material. One of the radio producers pointed to the importance of discourses that (at least attempt to) nuance the hegemony of commercial music production.



Figure 15: *RadioSwap* logo.

I do like the initiative, because it is instrumental in the distribution of non-registered music, and of the copyleft idea. Also the distribution of reportages is very interesting. (Daniel Renders, Radio Centraal, 14 April 2005 interview)

The *RadioSwap* project is also explicitly seen as a step towards the strengthening of the (rhizome of the) community radio movement.

If, thanks to *Swap*, we can find the ‘cement,’ the means to link together 10 to 15 radio stations, to form a strong association of alternative radio stations, to create a counterforce against the commercial networks. We could also have the power to go to the French Community [*one of the regional governments*] and tell them; we’re 10; we’re 15; we have *RadioSwap*; we need more frequencies. If *Swap* could play this role, become a political tool, then it would become alter-radiophonic. (Jean-Christophe Poncelet, Radio Campus, 1 August 2005 interview)

There are limits, nevertheless, to how far the rhizome can reach: It cannot move too deep into the arbolic. The idea of including commercial media in the *RadioSwap* project is rejected, as alternative and community media are positioned antagonistically towards these commercial media. These media are not to be granted membership, as radio producers feel very strongly (in a negative way) about the idea that these commercial media might benefit from their work.

Disregarding our financial situation now, or last year, or whenever, I think it is important that people do not make money from broadcasting our fragments. If they are rebroadcast, and commercials are put in before and after, well, then, we’re actually entitled to the money from those commercials, because we covered the production costs, however minimal they were. (Koen Verbert, FMBrussel, 6 August 2004, interview)

3.3 Conclusion: A translocal community of interest

With its focus on community radio producers, the *RadioSwap* database attempts to become a machine of machines and to construct a new community alongside the communities these radio stations are serving when broadcasting to their publics. In its architecture, this new community is a translocal community of interest, based on the exchange of self-produced radio content. Access to this community is negotiated through membership in the partner radio stations, which themselves are participatory organizations (albeit to different degrees). Once access is granted, the radio producers (again on a voluntary basis) can upload and download content, thus facilitating the circulation of alternative and community media content and adding nodes to the rhizome. Although there is a form of gatekeeping that creates access restrictions, the access model that *RadioSwap*

uses also shapes and structures the sub-rhizome *RadioSwap* (as part of the larger rhizome of alternative and community media) and thus allows for the generation of new nodes.

Despite *RadioSwap*'s ambition to create a community of interest that transgresses locality, and despite its contribution to the generation of alternative and community rhizomes, the question needs to be raised as to whether there is a sense of belonging, fluidly articulating the elements of the network, crucial to the definition of community (Morris and Morton, 1998). Does *RadioSwap*, in other words, show a certain degree of cross-cutting articulations that move beyond the arbolescent star-shaped network offering nothing but a service to radio producers?

A number of constraints necessarily produce a rather pessimistic answer to these questions. The first restriction is the size of the network. Although the numbers (of members, both individual and collective, and of hours of uploaded content) at first sight are impressive, the core group of regular users is limited.⁴⁴ Moreover, as the *RadioSwap* network is also linked to *RadioSwap*, a sub-community of radio artists has formed, which remains relatively disconnected from the other radio producers. Second, the project suffers from the fallacy of a technology-centred approach to human interaction (see chapter 5). The interface is seen as sufficient stimulation for community-building. This can only be considered illusory, especially because it conflicts with the general objectives and organizational cultures of the radio stations involved, which are focused more on organizing participation within their organizations than on participating in a project outside their organizations. This constraint is further strengthened by the (unavoidable) top-down approach used for (applying for) the project, reducing the possibility for the radio producers to appropriate the database and adapt it to their specific needs. This approach also makes the project a target for the deterritorializing strategies from (the more radical of) the radio stations, which usually target the state and the market. The radio producers interviewed sometimes appeared to be a disinterested and detached community of self-interest, but their remarks are merely translations of the structural and cultural constraints they have to face, not necessarily signs of total lack of interest.

The mindsets of alternative and community media organizations are often transnational, and there are links to national and transnational community media organizations. For instance, the sensitivity of these media organizations towards the problems of marginalized societal subgroups⁴⁵ allows members of those subgroups, from a diversity of nationalities and origins, to have their 'own' broadcasts and gain the ability to have their voices heard. But their organizational structures and cultures still equally remain often confined to the locality of a (geographically defined) community. In this case study we can see how organizational structures and cultures matter because they allow certain participatory practices and disallow others. The *RadioSwap* project is a very modest contribution to expanding this network of alternative and community media organizations and other civil society organizations. It is nevertheless important because it has explicitly incorporated this unattainable – at least in the short run – horizon. *RadioSwap* not only shows the difficulties that alternative and community

media organizations have to face when striving for a translocal identity, and how their participatory organizational cultures can actually impede upon this process, it is also a materialization of the need and the dream to move beyond the local rhizome, to follow the trajectory of a global civil society, transnational social movements and glocalized independent media centres, and to offer a viable alternative for the global (media) market.

Notes

1. Not surprisingly, Hatch (1997) refers here to the work of Weber (1947).
2. <http://www.indymedia.org/>.
3. See <http://www.storycenter.org/>.
4. See <http://www.ourmedia.org/> and <http://www.youtube.com/>.
5. See <http://www.facebook.com/> and <http://www.myspace.com/>.
6. Potentially, depending on its articulation, the public service remit could legitimize the transformation of entire public media organizations into (maximalist-)participatory organizations, but the present-day position of public media organizations (as part of the mainstream) does not seem to make such a transformation likely.
7. See Harvey (2000). Sometimes 1972 is also mentioned (see e.g., Crisell, 2002: 202).
8. Harvey (2000: 164) mentions George Stoney's film *You Are on Indian Land*, and the *Catch 44* series.
9. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation>.
10. http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/person/hencher_col_gordon.
11. In addition to the illustrative use of the Shorts that can be found at the national *Video Nation* website, this case study also draws on interviews with BBC staff members and with freelancers involved in the project (Bob Long, Chris Mohr, Mandy Rose, Carole Gilligan, Ameneh Enayat, Tariq Aziz and Rosemary Richards) and with Tim Williams of the World Service Trust. Chris Mohr read a draft version of an early version of this text and formulated a series of remarks and additions, a method that can be defined as a form of respondent validation (or feedback analysis). The interviews were held on the following dates: Chris Mohr: 26 April 2002, 12 August 2002, 26 September 2002 and 6 November 2002 (feedback); Mandy Rose: 13 August 2002; Bob Long: 22 August 2002; Tim Williams: 13 August 2002; Carole Gilligan: 22 April 2003; Ameneh Enayat: 29 July 2010; Tariq Aziz: 29 July 2010 and Rosemary Richards: 3 August 2010. Special thanks to them and to Adrian Toll for providing the stills. Other data used in the analysis are a selection of the *Video Nation* press archive (kept in the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham) and a selection of the video log files (selected on the basis of the presence of the keyword 'evaluation'), which (together with the raw material) is housed at the British Film Institute. Both archives were consulted on 14 August 2002.
12. http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/youmeus/videonation/video_nation_index.shtml.
13. http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/kth/programmes_vnss.shtml.
14. The situation as it was on 10 September 2002.
15. These new Shorts were produced in collaboration with BBCi Music (Reggae Music Memories) and BBCi News (the Race UK Shorts).

16. The situation as it was on 9 July 2003.
17. Situation on 17 April 2005.
18. Situation on 18 August 2006.
19. Situation on 17 September 2009.
20. Viewing rates range from 500,000 up to 9,000,000 viewers, and were heavily dependent upon the programmes that were scheduled before and after the Shorts (Interview Chris Mohr – 26 September 2002).
21. The training-Shorts were originally made available to potential participants on VHS (Interview Chris Mohr – 26 September 2002).
22. http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/person/devonshire_duke_of.
23. The dates of the English poet William Wordsworth are 1770 to 1850; the dates of Robert Herrick, poet and clergyman, are 1591 to 1674.
24. Wordsworth's poem has become a frequently used metaphor in postcolonial literature. A good example can be found in Greene's (1994) discussion on Kincaid's (1990) use of the daffodil poem in her novel *Lucy*.
25. After 2009, the system of the call is still used, but the contributions have to fit in specific features.
26. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/category/anger/>.
27. http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/u/uk_why.shtml.
28. Based on Merton's (1957: 299) discussion of the definitions of groups and collectivities, it could be questioned whether the participants can be called a group, and should not rather be referred to as a collectivity.
29. This choice was restricted with the Features becoming more prominent.
30. More recently, *Video Nation* opened up for more diverse styles (Tariq Aziz 29 July 2010 interview).
31. The translocal is not so different from the glocal (Robertson, 1995) since both concepts use fluid definitions of the local and the global, of place and space. One of the disadvantages of the concept of glocalization is that it cannot distance itself from its genesis, still taking the global as its starting point for analysis and situating the local in a reactive position. In comparison to the glocal, the translocal implies an inversed approach that allows the local to be the point of departure, and adds the global as a second component. In this way, translocalization acts as glocalization's mirror image.
32. There is also a long tradition of organizing these exchanges through more informal networks, for instance by making use of audio cassettes (see Pehlemann and Galenza (2006) for a series of German examples).
33. <http://sof.berlios.de/>.
34. <http://www.commedia.org.uk/about-cma/cmas-projects/the-showcase/programme-exchange/> (no longer available online).
35. <http://www.getmedia.org.uk/>.
36. <http://www.radio4all.net/index.php/about/>.
37. This case study is based on a qualitative analysis of a series of interviews and diaries. The six radio station coordinators (the administrators) were interviewed at the end of 2004: Anthony van Hoe, Karl Noben, Koen Verbert, Michel Goedart, Pierre De Jaeger (also project coordinator) and Wim Geeraerts. Pierre De Jaeger was interviewed again on 7 August 2010. Also nineteen ordinary *RadioSwap* users were interviewed (between July and September 2005): Anne Van Wichelen, Bart Cammaerts, Benoit Deuxant, Bernard Dubuisson, Chris Weaver, Daniel Renders, Diana McCarty, Elisabeth Zimmerman, Frédéric Mignon, Graziella

- Van Loo, Gregory Beck, Jean-Christophe Poncelet, Konstantin Petrov, Peter Gonda, Philippe Cunat, Ricardo Reis, Rokia Bamba, Simon Collet and Wendy Van Wynsberghe. Three people from this group of ordinary *RadioSwap* users (Anne Van Wichelen, Daniel Renders and Simon Collet) kept diaries for four months, describing the use they made of *RadioSwap*. Finally, the *RadioSwap* coordinators received and commented upon an earlier draft of this text. A feedback analysis of the reactions from Didier Demorcy and Pierre De Jaeger is included in this chapter. I am grateful to the *RadioSwap* coordinators and users, and the student researchers Andries Fluit, Nathalie Gonzalez, Nathalie Colsoul, Laura Schuerwegen and Jozefien Vanhaverbeke who worked on this project.
38. GREPO is the Reflection Group on Organizational Processes, RDIS is the Centre for Research and Diffusion of Scientific Information, CRID is the Centre for Research of Informatics and Law, and CIR is the Centre for Intellectual Rights.
 39. Translations of the citations are mine or those of the student researchers mentioned earlier.
 40. As already explained, the exception here is FMBrussel.
 41. Personal e-mail communication with Hadrian Bnin-Bninski on 8 March 2010.
 42. The users consider the uploading procedure with its compression and the required addition of metadata as especially time-consuming.
 43. The new *RadioSwap* development team might be able to position *RadioSwap* differently, as the formal links with government and universities no longer exist. At the time of writing, the development phase was ongoing, and the ‘old’ users had just been informed about the new *RadioSwap* interface (on 4 February 2011).
 44. When the *RadioSwap* data were integrated into the new database, it became clear that “46 of the 83 stations had no audio content and/or very little info about them” (Personal e-mail communication with Hadrian Bnin-Bninski – 8 March 2010).
 45. Item 5 of the 1994 Community Radio Charter for Europe of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC-Europe, 1994) states that “[*Community radio stations*] provide a right of access to minority and marginalized groups and promote and protect cultural and linguistic diversity”.



Chapter 5

Keyword - Technology



1. A conceptual introduction

1.1 *Technology and society*

The articulation of technology as a concept is a fairly recent development.¹ Also, technology has been associated with a very strong societal impact. For example, Bain's (1937: 860) article, which contains one of the seminal definitions of technology, starts with the following sentence: "Broadly conceived, technology is the most important single factor in producing, integrating and destroying cultural phenomena". Bain continues by defining technology as follows: "technology includes all tools, machines, utensils, weapons, instruments, housing, clothing, communicating and transporting devices and the skills by which we produce and use them".

In this definition there is a strong emphasis on the material, which we find also in Stiegler's (1998: 82) brief definition of technology as "organized inorganic matter". But even here, we find hints of its societal context in the emphasis on skills, knowledge and its organizational nature. Another illustration of this is Derry and Williams's (1970: 3) definition of technology as "that bewilderingly varied body of knowledge and devices by which man progressively masters his natural environment [...]". There are some definitions that place even more emphasis on the societal and cultural component. For instance, Volti's (2006: 6) definition reads as follows: Technology is "a system that uses knowledge and organization to produce objects and techniques for the attainment [of] specific goals".

This tension can be found in Guattari's work on the machine (see chapter 4). In his chapter *Machinic Heterogenesis*,² Guattari (1993: 14) refers to the "first type of machine that comes to mind", which is that of "material assemblages [...] put together artificially by the human hand and by the intermediary of other machines, according to the diagrammatic schemas whose end is the production of effects, of products, or of particular services". And in the next sentence, he immediately points to the need to go beyond³ the "delimitation of machines in the strict sense to include the functional ensemble that associates them with humankind to multiple components [...]". This list of components is lengthy, and includes material and energy components; semiotic components that are diagrammatic and algorithmic; social components; components related to the human body;⁴ representational components; investments by what he calls desiring machines;

and abstract machines. Guattari (1993: 14) terms this functional ensemble the machinic assemblage,⁵ in which the basic material components are called proto-machines: “the utensils, the instruments, the simplest tools and, [...] the least structured pieces of a machinery will acquire the status of a proto-machine”.

The arrangement (or assemblage) still has many interconnecting material components, as Volti's (2006: 5) argument of technology as a material system shows. Volti uses the example of the invention of the light bulb to show that the isolated material object is useless unless it is (quite literally) connected to an electrical generator through a network of electrical lines, combined with metering devices, which allows for its commodification. But Guattari's approach to the machinic assemblage includes more than materiality. Also, the discursive dimension and our sense-making practices of technology are considered of fundamental importance on a variety of levels. The individual use of technology is highly discursive, for instance, when people use technologies to generate distinctions or to support their identity constructions. As Du Gay et al. (1997) illustrate with the case of the Sony Walkman, cultural meanings are attributed through the production process of technologies, but the consumption process is also the location of a multitude of generated meanings. A similar argument can be found in the domestication approach to technology, which studies the integration of technologies in everyday life. As the quote below shows, this process of integration again has a strong discursive component:

When the domestication of technologies has been ‘successful,’ the technologies are not regarded as cold, lifeless, problematic and challenging consumer goods at the root of family arguments and/or work-related stress, but as comfortable, useful tools – functional and/or symbolic – that are reliable and trustworthy. (Berker et al., 2006: 3)

The processes of sense-making and the role of the discursive are not only restricted to the more micro-levels of society. Mackenzie (2002: 36) refers to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) work to express the fluidity of the signifier technology itself: “[*Technology*] refers to no single signifier or semiotic substance. [...] It would be possible to map out how shifts in the signification of the term ‘technology’ over the last centuries have allowed it to function as an empty signifier in relation to certain political and economic formations”. Despite the structural contingency of the meaning of technology, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory can also be used to point to the hegemonic articulations of technology, which (attempt to) fixate its meaning. This can be applied first of all to the dominant ways of using (and not using) specific technologies. Many technologies are surrounded by a wide variety of norms, rules and regulations that mediate their production and consumption. An obvious example here is military technology, which is a technology of destruction that is highly regulated, but still widely (and sometimes approvingly and even eagerly) used in specific circumstances.

The hegemonic articulations of technology also function at a broader societal level. Technology production and consumption, for instance, remain strongly embedded

within a capitalist hegemony. One other (related) example is the dominant articulation of technology within a discourse of progress, where technology is seen to be part of, or even a driving force for, a rational-linear process of societal self-improvement. Obviously, this discourse offers a very partial representation, as the technologies of death used during the Holocaust, for instance, most painfully show. Technology is embedded within society's power struggles and often comes at a very high cost to some specific groups or to all. To use one of McLuhan's (1964) concepts: Technology acts as the extension of man, but new extensions can also bring about numbness and amputations.

At the heart of the technology-as-progress discourse lies “a profound sense of optimism, that a rapidly expanding base of knowledge would contribute to an increase in the quality and virtue of the social and human condition” (Custer, 1996: 66). When applied to technology, this discourse of progress is often fed by a technological determinist logic, where technology is seen as an independent force that has the potential to realize utopias. This technological determinist logic is sometimes used also in an inverse, dystopian way, where it becomes articulated as a threat to progress. The Frankenstein version of this logic claims that “what began more than a million years ago as a human creation has taken on a life of its own, with technology advancing according to its own dynamic, and unrestrained by social arrangements, culture, and thought” (Volti, 2006: 271). This argument (in both its versions) is inherently problematic – as Volti points out – because it ignores the embeddedness of technology in the social: “New technologies brings changes to many aspects of society, while at the same time social forces do much to stimulate and shape these technologies” (Volti, 2006: 272).

It would be equally problematic, nevertheless, to deny any impact of technology on society. Here, we should bear in mind Williams's (2003: 133) remark that “While we have to reject technological determinism, in all its forms, we must be careful not to substitute for it the notion of a determined technology”. This argument can be taken a step further, in order to point to the constitutive role of technology within the social, together with a wide variety of other societal forces. Technology plays a significant part in the construction of humanity itself, and as Derrida (1993: 15) remarked, “the natural, original body does not exist: technology has not simply added itself, from the outside or after the fact, as a foreign body”. Mackenzie (2002: 5) raises a similar point, when he says that “[...] we can think, signify, make sense and represent who we are in part only because of technology”. Technology is not outside discourse for Mackenzie; he emphasizes that (like any materiality) technology resists the reduction to discourse and representation, and simultaneously impacts upon discourse and representation. This implies also that the dichotomization of nature and culture, human and technology, and the prioritization of one component of the dichotomy over the other should be avoided. This idea is nicely captured by Haraway's (1991: 177) short sentence “One is too few, but two are too many” in the *Cyborg Manifesto*. Haraway continues by arguing that high-tech culture offers a challenge of these dualisms in intriguing ways: “It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. [...] Insofar as we know ourselves in

both formal discourse (e.g., biology) and in daily practice [...] we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras”.

1.2 Media technologies

As is the case with any subtype of technology, media technologies are partially specific. Arguably, the specificity of media technologies lies in their focus on (the communication of) meaning. They are, to varying degrees, technologies of representation and communication, registration and distribution. Very different media technologies, ranging from speech and writing to the electronic media (including the internet), are clustered under this label, all with very different relationships to the material. But at the same time, these materials and the many proto-machines are arranged to enable their users to communicate through a variety of languages.

These media arrangements are not merely mechanical, they are also organizational. As was argued in the previous chapter, the mainstream media sphere is characterized by the presence of large-scale, vertically structured media organizations that are embedded in capitalist logics (even when they concern public broadcasting media). This impacts on the position of the technology within the media sphere, as the proto-machines are mainly connected to media organizations through the logics of ownership. Also, the objective of profit and audience maximalization, combined with the culture of professionalism, impacts on the position of technology within the media sphere. The organization of mass communication requires technology that has a considerable complexity (often called high-tech) and that is expensive. It builds also on the functional divisions of labour within the organization, where each manipulates different technologies or similar technologies differently, in combination with organizational networks, which also use specific divisions of labour (and of technology). This, in turn, adds to the need for professional operators of these technologies, who might be technicians, producers or journalists. Thus, we see how the combination of capitalist media organizations, high-tech and professionalism creates a self-legitimizing circle.

These media (organizational) arrangements are not pre-given, but are the outcome of social processes (see Lievrouw, 2002). Consequently, they could have been structured differently. Bertolt Brecht's (2001) radio theory is one example of a different way of thinking about the articulation of radio technology, namely as a tool of communication instead of as a tool of distribution. Media technologies can be used effectively in different arrangements. An example is alternative and community media arrangements, in which technology is put to different uses. These organizations, in which the media technology is embedded, are different in that they are often small-scale and horizontally structured, and also have limited financial resources. The mixture of a participatory ideology, which favours easy-to-use technologies, and limited financial resources – sometimes complemented with the ideological rejection of high-tech companies and a do-it-yourself

culture – results in the low-tech arrangements that are found, for instance, in alternative and community radio stations or alternative zines.

These alternative or non-mainstream arrangements also occur in social groups organized through communities (rather than organizations). Older examples are amateur broadcasting (or ham radio) and Citizens Band (CB) radio, which use(d) broadcasting (and reception) technologies to organize a fluid combination of one-to-one and one-to-many communication. As Haring (2007: xi) puts it, “[...] ham radio thrived on social interaction. It differed from amateur broadcasting such as pirate radio and from pastimes focused on listening to commercially broadcast or shortwave radio because it included both transmission and reception. This produced real-time conversations [...] and random meetings ‘on the air’ occasionally grew into friendships that continued by letters and further discussions via radio”. Moreover, some media technologies moved into the private sphere, as in the case of home photography, (home) video cameras and, to an extent, small music recording studios. The recent broader distribution of digital technologies has supported both processes. Easy-to-use digital technologies – through the popularization of the PC – were brought into the home, allowing large numbers of people, individually, or structured in communities and/or organizations, to employ them to produce and (sometimes) publish content. In his discussion of podcasting, Cesarini (2008: 100) mentions the opportunity for self-publishing in pointing to the “potentially revolutionary role podcasting could play in the coming years by allowing basically anyone to become their own radio station – free to express their own personal or political views, free to express their own musical tastes [...]”. As Kahn and Kellner (2008: 26) emphasize, user-friendliness plays a significant role: “Blogs, short for ‘web logs,’ are partially successful because they are relatively easy to create and maintain – even for web users who lack technical expertise”.

Media technologies are not only organizational (or social), but also cultural. This implies that media technologies are embedded in discursive environments that attribute meaning to the proto-machines, their uses (in the field of both production and consumption) and their place in society. These discourses are not necessarily stable, and can become constructed in a variety of ways. For instance, the object of the radio receiver has evolved from being initially a male technological toy that was often hidden, to an aesthetic object of display that features prominently in people’s living rooms (Moores, 1996: 75ff) and then made its way outdoors. Many of these media proto-machines have kept this prominent position, and remain permanently validated by this high-level visibility in numerous homes (and other places), which generates a demand for them to be treated respectfully.

But the usage of media technologies is especially relevant here since the media production and consumption cultures strongly impact on how media technologies are put to use. The production culture plays a role in defining how media technologies should ‘properly’ be used and by whom. These definitions of the ‘good’ use of media technologies normalize specific aesthetic and professional codes that structure the procedures of media

production and the resulting media content. Here we can find a complex and interacting set of discourses on production values, genre and format conventions, and technological mastery. These definitions also sustain and regulate the role of media professionals, articulated as the people capable of mastering media technologies. Their subject identities are (partially) constructed through their professional capacities as crafts(wo)men, but simultaneously construct the 'proper' use of these media technologies.

A similar logic applies to media consumption culture, where a variety of cultural processes, such as identity formation, distinction and domestication, impact on the way media technologies are consumed. Media technologies play an important role in everyday life, and their identities become articulated through these consumption processes, while they simultaneously contribute to the articulation of the identities of their users by offering them subject positions (illustrated, for instance, by the already-mentioned example of the Sony Walkman (Du Gay et al. (1997)). Especially when media technologies are being used as part of cultural, political or social struggles, the instability and contestability of these meanings becomes visible. In some cases these struggles are related to struggles with(in) the political system, sometimes even at the geopolitical level (as the case study in this chapter will illustrate), but in other cases they are related to the micro-politics of everyday life. An everyday example is Moores' description of the room of a 19-year-old baker who lives with his parents, and who has accumulated a considerable assemblage of media technologies. Moores (2000: 62) writes, "It is possible, I believe, to read the assembled goods as signs of a struggle to fashion some limited degree of autonomy in the face of parental authority". Also media technologies themselves can sometimes become the object of struggle, as Morley's (1986) analysis of the television remote control nicely shows.

Finally, media technologies are meaningful objects at a societal level. There is a long history of media panics that construct media technologies as harmful and a threat to society, mainly children and young people. As Drotner (1992: 44) argues, in media panics, "the mass media are both the source and the medium of public reaction". Also the utopian and technological determinist hopes in media technologies such as the internet, to make the world a better place, are discursive processes that affect and construct the meaning of (clusters of) media technologies at the societal level. Again, we can return to Couldry's (2003) argument that media organizations contribute to their own societal construction by maintaining the myth of media centrality. These hegemonic projects are intrinsically problematic as they fetishize and decontextualize media technologies, and overestimate their power, but these projects also show the cultural significance of media technologies.

1.3 Participation and media technology

Media technologies can be used to serve many purposes, including a maximalist participatory agenda. The investigation of the limits to the deployment of media

technologies for participatory ends brings us first to the debate on the neutrality of technology. Many have warned that (media) technologies are not neutral: One example is Guins's (2008: 15) statement:

Neoliberal control strategies are enacted and mediated through a range of devices, techniques, and practices that seek to regulate media and the subject of rule through 'empowered' practices with media technologies. In doing so, a liberal humanist understanding of technology is upheld that relies on an instrumentalist view of technology that renders all technology as neutral means, or 'tools,' for the realization of some human ends.

Without any desire to disagree with this analysis, the full rejection of technology as neutral runs the risk of producing a (potentially) essentialist position, where the forces of the social construction of technology are downplayed. Media technologies are the objects of hegemonic projects that (aim to) fixate their meanings, and aim to normalize these always particular meanings. Here, the discourse of neutrality is a discursive tool to serve this post-political strategy. Media technologies are rigidly embedded in societal contexts, and in this sense they are never neutral.

But the identities of proto-machines and machines, whether or not their identities have been rigidly fixated by a hegemonic project, can always become re-articulated. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 108) argued, the identity of an object is not embedded within the object itself, but is generated through a process of social construction.⁶ This implies that media technologies can become positioned and be used in ways that move outside the dominant (or hegemonic) definitions. From this perspective, media technologies are contingent and are open to re-articulation and reusage. Yet again, illustrations are provided by alternative and community media, which show that audio-visual media technologies can be used in ways that transcend the use made of them by mainstream media organizations. Media technologies might not be neutral, and their signification might be altered, pushing them into other (but still equally particular and non-neutral) positions.

This argument brings about another risk, which is that of ignoring the materiality of media technologies (or user practices). This could lead to the problematic belief that any media technology can equally serve any kind of purpose. Proto-machines incorporate specific codes that allow them to do specific things, and not to do others. They have what Norman (2002) calls affordances, qualities that allow for actions.⁷ A similar argument can be developed following Deleuze and Guattari's (1984: 36) definition of the machine as a system of interruptions: Machines interrupt the flow in particular ways, allowing some usages and disallowing others. Or from an ANT perspective (see Latour, 2005), objects also have agency. In the *Kinoautomat* case study discussed below, the impossibility of halting a film projector severely impacts on the participatory process. If we try to combine these different arguments, we can see that there is an oscillation of media technologies

between contingency and rigidity, where the discursive context fixates the identities of (proto-)machines, but also allows them to become unfixed. Similarly, the materiality of media technologies allows many different (sometimes unforeseen) usages, but also introduces a certain level of rigidity, not allowing for other particular usages.

This lengthy detour enables a more nuanced answer to the question of whether or not media technologies are participatory. Their embeddedness in societal contexts is a structuring element that can allow or disallow maximalist forms of participation. Media technologies are constructed through the organizational, production and consumption contexts in which they are situated. Mainstream media organizations, with their professional production cultures, have allowed media technologies to be used for participatory practices, but often only up to a certain extent, while alternative and community media have facilitated the use of (sometimes the very same) media technologies for more maximalist forms of participation. Consumption cultures also have not always favoured maximalist participation, since the more intense forms of participation are not always enthusiastically used (even when they are made easily available). The hyperactive user (at the level of both interaction and participation) often remains a rarity.

Media technologies themselves have specific affordances that allow for participation (or not). Of course, these affordances again are not outside the process of social construction, but hegemonic processes (such as the capitalist production process that is built on standardization) often fixate these affordances quite strongly. In order to see how the present-day affordances of media technology structure (maximalist forms of) participation, I return to the AIP model developed in chapter 1. Access to media technologies plays a key role in facilitating participation (as argued in the digital divide discourse). One of the basic elements here is the financial cost related to obtaining media technologies. For instance, printing presses and television studios require considerable investments, which structurally restricts access to participation. At the same time, we have witnessed the development of so-called consumption technology, which is fairly cheap, often highly portable and can be used for media production. An early example is photography (from the 1880s onwards) (Derry and Williams, 1970: 659), where “the effective demand produced by a great mass of consumers [*and producers*] has stimulated the development of a huge variety of photographic apparatus, ranging from simple disposables to sophisticated digital cameras” (Volti, 2006: 44). A similar argument can be made for the photocopying machine, the tape recorder, the camcorder, the mini-disk, the personal computer, audio-visual editing software, music sampling and sequencing software, and a wide variety of internet tools, in combination with less known low-tech developments such as micro-broadcasting (Kogawa, 1994).

In addition, access to a content producing organization or community is a significant element in facilitating participation. The importance of organizations (and communities) has been extensively emphasized before; here we should add that these organizations⁸ are often the ones that control the technologies for media production. In some cases,

these organizations, in turn, are regulated by governments in terms of the use of these technologies (e.g., in the case of many forms of electronic broadcasting).

These organizations (or communities) are also the sites where different professional and non-professional subject positions, and production and consumption cultures, in often unequal power relations, meet and interact. These interactions, and the power relations in which they are embedded, impact on the entitlements to use the media technologies. For instance, technological or professional expertise often legitimizes privileged access to the use of specific media technologies. Of course, these power relations do not remain uncontested, and are often the locations of struggles between minimalist and maximalist participatory positions.

In addition to interaction with the content producing organization, interaction with the media technology itself structures its participatory potential. Here, again, the affordances of media technologies matter: how they allow for collaboration and sharing, how they are rhizomatically (and less arbolically) connected to (larger) machines, what kind of operating skills they require, and what levels of complexity they have. Easy connections in networks of proto-machines and machines facilitate participatory processes, especially when the number of obligatory passage points is not too limited and connectivity is more rhizomatic and less hierarchical.⁹ Also high levels of technological complexity affect the participatory potential of media technologies because they increase the need for (sometimes professional) training in learning how to use the technological object. As already argued, high-tech easily aligns itself to professionalism and mainstream organizational forms.

Finally, participation is an important element in the technological policies of media organizations and in the development of technology itself. Mainstream media organizations and businesses in general have not proven prone to encouraging (or even allowing) these kinds of maximalist levels of participation. Market research is often the only means enabling the voices of ordinary users of media technology to be heard, rendering government regulation the most important (but also indirect) tool of participation in the field of technology development (Volti, 2006: 313). In other fields, such as the pharmaceutical industry or the GM food industry, more participatory tools have been used, sometimes enforced by activist strategies. These tools are in part extensions of the field of application of participatory design, although we should also keep in mind Beck's (1992) plea for the establishment of forums with citizens, experts, politician and industrialists. These tools (such as consensus conferences) have been organized based on different motivations and have achieved different levels of success.¹⁰ In the field of media technology development, these types of participatory practices remain very rare.

An important exception – assuming a broad definition of the field of media technology – is the free software movement (and the related open source movement) (Soderberg, 2007), where groups of programmers collaborate in software production on the basis of bartering, and allow access to the software source code. A seminal text on the free software movement is Stallman's 1985 *GNU Manifesto* (2005: 2) in which he writes:

I consider that the Golden Rule requires that if I like a program I must share it with other people who like it. Software sellers want to divide the users and conquer them, making each user agree not to share with others. I refuse to break solidarity with other users in this way. I cannot in good conscience sign a nondisclosure agreement or a software license agreement.

The free software movement is an example of the combination of open access to software technology and co-decision-making in its production. Stallman's (2005: 8) definition of free software as "software that users have the freedom to distribute and change" illustrates the importance of access. Nevertheless, there are limits, which later became embedded in the copyleft principle, but were already set out in the *GNU Manifesto*:

GNU is not in the public domain. Everyone will be permitted to modify and redistribute GNU, but no distributor will be allowed to restrict its further redistribution. That is to say, proprietary modifications will not be allowed. I want to make sure that all versions of GNU remain free. (Stallman, 2005: 2)

These instances of joint media technology production, however, are rare in other parts of the media sphere. In many cases participation in media technology production remains minimalist or non-existent. Of course, the use of media technologies for organizing participation through the media, and participation in the use of media technologies, in many different forms, still take place within the media sphere.

2. Case: *Kinoautomat – One man and his house*. The lack of uptake of participatory technology¹¹

2.1 Introduction

At the 1967 International and Universal Exposition (Expo 67), the Czechoslovak pavilion featured the interactive film *Kinoautomat – One man and his house*,¹² where spectators could influence the storyline of the film by voting for one of two possible storylines. In order to enable this early form of audience participation, the film theatre armchairs were equipped with voting technology, and a basic computer processed the votes. Following each round of voting, results were projected onto the screen, the decision was announced and the film continued.

Through these participatory technologies the audience was allowed to co-decide on the film's storyline, something that so far had been (and continues to be) the privilege of the film producers. This process structurally altered the power relations within the film theatre, where traditionally interaction with the film text is limited to the abilities of

audience members to generate different readings. As Havránek (2002: 106) formulates it, “The *Kinoautomat* made the passive viewer active and offered him the opportunity to become what we might today call a film ‘user’”.

Despite its novelty, *Kinoautomat* was soon forgotten. After the Expo 67 event, *Kinoautomat* was screened at HemisFair 68 in San Antonio (US), at the specially reconstructed Prague cinema Kino Světozor in 1971 and 1972, and at Expo 74 in Spokane (US). After that there were no more screenings. One nice indication of the oblivion that overtook this film is a short letter to the editor of the *New York Times* of 28 January 1993. In this letter, Ronald Blumer responds to a review (published on 13 January 1993) of the 20-minute interactive film *I’m Your Man* (see below), which was being screened at the New York Loews Theatre:

The first theatrical showing of a live-action interactive film (‘When the film audience controls the plot,’ *The Arts*, Jan. 13) is not a first. The most popular exhibit at Expo 67 in Montreal was a presentation called *Kinoautomat* at the Czechoslovak pavilion. It was a totally delightful screwball comedy, directed by Radúz Činčera, in which every five minutes or so the audience controls the plot by pressing buttons on their chairs. The screen was surrounded by a series of squares which would light up red or green so that you could see your vote being tallied.

Kinoautomat experienced a revival when Czech television aired parts of the film in 1996, and when Radúz Činčera’s daughter, Alena Činčerová, in cooperation with Chris Hales and Adéla Sirotková, reconstructed the film in 2006 and 2007, screening it at several festivals and again at Kino Světozor. Then, on 10 April 2008, *Kinoautomat* was released on DVD.

This case study investigates¹³ how the specificity of the technology that was used impacted on the participatory potential of *Kinoautomat* and how it allowed for a more maximalist form of audience participation, at least within the context of film consumption and production. Simultaneously, I am interested in showing how the political context (with a project emanating from the Czechoslovak New Wave and just before the Prague Spring), the way the technology was actually put to use, and the way that the entire event was framed foreclosed its possibilities of a more structural impact on the participatory process. Finally, the case study tries to broaden the question raised by Hales (2005: 58) when describing the film’s restoration. He asked, “why did it take until 2004 before any real interest was paid in preserving and recording factual details of a true landmark project of new media?” In this case study, the question becomes that of why the film was forgotten for so long, but also why the *Kinoautomat* principles were applied so rarely to increase participation in the film viewing experience.

2.2 *The film*

In 1965, the Office of the General Commissioner for the Czechoslovak Expo 67 participation (Svitáček, 1966: 18) announced a tender for participation in the 1967 World Exhibition in Montreal. The Czechoslovak (documentary) film director Radúz Činčera had already made a number of documentaries, including *Romeo a Julie 63* (*Romeo and Juliet 63*) in 1963 and *Mlha* (*The Fog*) about the Prague Theatre *Na zábradlí* in 1965. The latter won the Golden Medal at the Bergamo Festival in Italy. Činčera had worked as a director and dramaturgist in the Popular Science and Educational Film Studio in Bratislava since 1952, and was employed as scriptwriter and director at Krátký Film¹⁴ in Prague in 1956. His proposal for the World Exhibition in Montreal, the *Kinoautomat* film, was accepted and the film went into production at the Filmové studio Barrandov (the Barrandov Film Studio) in 1966. In 1965, Činčera applied to the Czech Office for Patents and Inventions for a patent on his invention, which was granted in 1967.¹⁵

Based on his “missing the contact with the audience” (Alena Činčerová 30 March 2009 interview), Radúz Činčera constructed the *Kinoautomat* concept, which not only incorporates the interactions of live actors with film, as in the *Laterna Magika* performance at the Brussels Expo 58 (see Havránek, 2002), but builds mainly on the participation of the audience in the development of the narration, as Činčera explains:

[...] the substance of *Kino-Automat* does not lie in the combination of film with live actors, as is often mistakenly thought, and as is the case of *Laterna Magika*. Its principle is based on the possibility of direct participation of the viewers in the story development. The story stops many times during the performance and the viewers have the possibility to influence its progress according to their own wishes. The viewers’ opinion is expressed by an electric voting appliance run by a computer. The majority vote decides, on behalf of the main character, how the story will proceed. This direct participation in the developing story substitutes the atmosphere of a theatre performance, thus, for the first time in the history of cinematography, breaking through one of the basic barriers between theatre and film. (Činčera, in *Národní Filmový Archiv*, 2004: 194–195)

As this quotation indicates, Činčera wanted to articulate the filmic experience as closer to the world of theatre, inspired – as Beranová (2007) argues – by the work of Moholy-Nagy, who was a strong advocate of increased audience participation in theatre performance. For instance, in 1924, Moholy-Nagy (2001: 25) wrote, “It is time to produce a kind of stage activity which will no longer permit the masses to be silent spectators, which will not only excite them inwardly but will let them take hold and participate – actually allow them to fuse with the action on the stage at the peak of cathartic ecstasy”. In the 1960s, theatre continued to experiment with these forms of audience involvement. For example, *Kinoautomat* stage designer Josef Svoboda, who had already been involved in the 1958

Laterna Magika performance and its consolidation as an experimental movement in the Czechoslovak theatre scene, and who had a strong track record of organizing audience interaction and participation in the 1960s, is quoted by Havránek (2002: 104), referring to the Boston Opera Group's 1965 production of the Luigi Nono opera *Intolleranza*:

During a protest song sung by a black singer, the camera filmed the theatre audience, projecting their image on screen. People enjoyed seeing their own faces. At a certain point we changed the picture from a positive to a negative so that the screens were suddenly showing a black audience. Some spectators were upset. We filmed and played that as well.

After acceptance of the *Kinoautomat* proposal, Ladislav Kalaš became the film's producer and a team of directors and scriptwriters was established, with two more directors (Ján Roháč and Vladimír Svitáček), and a scriptwriter (Pavel Juráček). The lead actor, Miroslav Horníček, later also contributed to the script.

Roháč (1932–1980) had worked in ABC Theatre, Laterna Magika¹⁶ and Semafor Theatre, and had been a Czechoslovak television scriptwriter since 1955. In 1957, he joined the Barrandov Film Studio, where he directed (amongst others) *Konec jasnovidce* (*The End of the Fortune Teller*, 1957), *Kdyby tisíc klarinetů* (*If a Thousand Clarinets*, 1964) and *Dobře placená procházka* (*Well-paid Walk*, 1966) (Bartošková and Bartošek, 1986: 355–356).

Svitáček (1921–2002) started to shoot short documentary films at the end of the 1950s and was eventually employed by Czechoslovak Television. He worked closely with Roháč, co-directing *Konec jasnovidce* (*The End of the Fortune Teller*, 1957) and *Kdyby tisíc klarinetů* (*If a Thousand Clarinets*, 1964). Like Roháč, Svitáček was also involved in Laterna Magika (Fikejz, 2008: 283–284).

Juráček (1935–1989) worked first as a journalist before studying scriptwriting and becoming a dramatist at the Barrandov Film Studio in 1962, where he directed and wrote the script for *Postava k podpírání* (*A Stature to Shoring*, 1963) and *Každý mladý muž* (*Every Young Man*, 1965). In 1965 he was the scriptwriter on *Nikdo se nebude smát* (*Nobody Will Laugh*, 1965). His most famous scripts are *Ikarie XB 1* (1963), directed by Jindřich Polák, and *Bláznova kronika* (*A Fool's Chronicle*, 1964), directed by Karel Zeman (Hames, 2008: 163–173).

Horníček (1918–2003) was an actor, director, dramatist and writer, who had worked in the Municipal Theatre (Pilsen), and the Větrník Theatre, National Theatre and ABC Theatre. He was also one of the founders of the Semafor Theatre. His first film was the 1949 *Pan Novák* (*Mr Novák*), and he acted in several films including *Byl jednou jeden král* (*Once Upon a Time, There Was a King*, 1954), *Hudba z Marsu* (*Music From Mars*, 1954), *Kam čert nemůže* (*When The Woman Butts In*, 1959) and *Táto, sežeň štěně* (*Dad, Find a Puppy*, 1964) (Fikejz, 2007: 426–427). He also was the host of the television talk show *Hovory H* (Bren, 2010: 50).

Juráček wrote the literary script, and the three directors took charge of the technical script (Svitáček, 1966: 19). The scripts were finalized on 7 September 1966 and 14 November 1966, respectively, and shooting began on 25 November 1966 (Národní Filmový Archiv, 2004: 194–195).

The film's production phase was – at least to a degree – quite regular, as *Kinoautomat* cameraman Jaromír Šofr explains: “It was as usual, it was the normal stuff of filmmakers in the process of realization ...” (Jaromír Šofr 15 June 2009 interview). The actors had an entire script, and it was explained that “this [*was a*] special film” (Alena Činčerová 30 March 2009 interview), but at the same time (because of the fragmented shootings) they found it difficult to picture the outcome of the film. Alena Činčerová, for instance, refers to Libuše Švormová, who played Marta Nováková in the film: “She told me ‘I never realized I was involved in doing such an amazing thing,’ because, you know, because they never saw it. Not one of them went to Montreal” (Alena Činčerová 30 March 2009 interview). However, at the technical level (post-) production became complicated because of continuity problems, and also because split screens and so-called dead-screens (*mrtvolka* in Czech) were used. As Šofr explains, “these moments were technically very complicated because they were based on duplicate material, duplicate stock [...]. As usual, to maintain the perfect image concept, continuity, it was more complicated than in the case of a normal, ordinary movie” (Jaromír Šofr 15 June 2009 interview). The film was completed on 3 April 1967, and was transported to Montreal on 22 April 1967 (Národní Filmový Archiv, 2004: 194–195).

In the meantime, the technical component was developed by a group of companies, which included Kinotechnika, Ústřední půjčovna filmů and Elektropřístroje. Vladimír Smrž, former head technician at Kinotechnika, explains the constellation: “Kinotechnika was a state company. If someone needed technical support for his or her film, they called us and then we would prepare all the stuff for them” (Vladimír Smrž 24 August 2009 interview). Ústřední půjčovna filmů was the Czechoslovak film distributor, which also provided material-technical support for the cinemas (Danielis, 2007; Havel, 2008). Elektropřístroje (2004) was a national company based in Praha-Modřany, specializing in electronic equipment. It designed the *Kinoautomat* computer. Key people who worked on the technical equipment were Václav Hosman, the vice-head of Kinotechnika's AV department; Zdeněk Malina, the head of the prototypical plants in Kinotechnika; Bohumil Míka, the head of Kinotechnika's developmental department; and Jaroslav Stejskal, a technical deputy at Elektropřístroje (Václav Hosman 10 October 2009 interview; Jaroslav Veselý 8 September 2009 interview; Hosman, 2005). As already mentioned, the stage was designed by Josef Svoboda.

The film premiered on 28 April 1967, with opening speeches in the Czechoslovak pavilion from Miroslav Galuška (the General commissary of the Czechoslovak Expo 67) and František Kahuda (the Czechoslovak Minister of Education and Culture) (Horníček, 1968: 14). Only a small group of *Kinoautomat* people, including the three directors, the

producer, the Kinotechnika team and the stage actors, attended Expo 67. None of the ‘regular’ actors were present.

The film was a success, as Horníček (1968: 57) records: “Day by day, week by week, month by month interest in the performance grew. The queues were longer every day and the auditorium for 125 people could be sold out for five times”. In the Czech Television magazine *Retro* (31 May 2009), the journalist Jaroslav Halada wrote that the Czechoslovak pavilion received 8,350,000 visitors. This ranked it amongst the five most popular pavilions, after the USSR, Canada, the US and France (“USSR, Canada, Biggest Attractions”, 1967). Also, pictures of long queues of visitors, waiting to enter the pavilion, confirm the success of the entire endeavour (see Figure 1). In a newspaper article in *The Telegraph Journal* (13 October 1967) an anonymous journalist complained that Expo 67 had only one flaw: “the chronic, characteristic long line-up outside any pavilion worth seeing”. She or he specifies, “People have waited patiently – often in driving rain or frigid cold – for as long as five hours to get into Labyrinth or the Czech[oslovak] pavilion”. Horníček explains the success as follows:

First of all, it wasn’t sudden. Czechoslovakia had a great reputation since [it received the] golden medals for the Expo 58 in Brussels. And there were the [New Wave] films. No one can imagine, how famous Czechoslovak film directors are – Forman, Menzel, Passer and others. And what about *Obchod na korze?* [the Oscar-winning *The Shop on Main Street*]. Ms. Ida Kaminská (main actress in *Kinoautomat*) has already performed in New York. Ms. Desmarais, who had judged the value of this film during the Cannes film festival wants to promote and sell our film. (Horníček, 1968: 117)



Figure 1: The Czechoslovak pavilion at Expo 67. © Alena Činčerová

2.2.1 *The viewing context: Expo 67*

The 1967 International and Universal Exposition, approved by the Bureau of International Exhibitions (BIE), took place from 28 April to 29 October 1967 in Montreal (Canada), on a series of (new and already existing) islands in the St Lawrence River. The BIE (2008) on its website refers to the participation of 62 nations and more than 50 million visitors registered, which makes it one of the largest BIE-sanctioned expositions. The cost of Expo 67 was nearly Cdn\$432 million (it generated an income of over Cdn\$221 million). When the exhibition closed, the newspaper comments were very positive. One day before it closed, *The Globe and Mail* featured an article titled *In Expo Canada Came of Age* (28 October 1967). The same day, the *Winnipeg Free Press* published an article with the title *Expo Runs Out Of Time Sunday - But The Smell Of Success Will Linger On*. And the *Calgary Herald* published an upbeat article on the same day (*Expo Triumph*), which opened with the words “An important page in Canada’s history will be turned tomorrow when formal ceremonies are held to bring Expo 67 to a close. Expo has proved to be the greatest world’s fair in history. [...] But it has turned out to be much more than just a fair for Canada. It has been a national experience”.



Figure 2: Radúz Činčera in front of the US biosphere pavilion by Richard Buckminster Fuller. © Alena Činčerová

The Czechoslovak pavilion¹⁷ on the Île Notre-Dame was designed by Vladimír Pýcha and Miroslav Řepa, and featured four restaurants, a club and a series of exhibitions, including *World of Children* (with a 2000-puppets theatre), *Hall of Centuries* (with copies of) national treasures), *Tradition* (with glassware, china, glass sculptures and figurines), *Inspiration* (with jewellery and handmade laces), *Symphony* (Svoboda’s diapolyekran, with about 100 display cubes projecting images) and *Metamorphosis* (on problems of pollution and overcrowding) (“Czechoslovakia”, n.d.). Horníček (1968: 117) described the pavilion as follows:

And then, our pavilion was opened. The most restrained from the outside. It was a kind of joke – the design was determined by certain strict requirements – it should have an afterlife in Písek after Expo 67. I have nothing against the architects Mr. Pýcha and Mr. Řepa. The joke was precious. [...] And it was good for harmony. This pavilion is like a constellation of stars – with great architects Mr. Cubr, Mr. Hrubý and Mr. Pokorný, a glass exhibition, brash spectacle by Jiří Trnka, a Christmas Crib from Třebechovice, architect Josef Svoboda, polyvision, diapolyekran by Josef Svoboda, directed by Emil Radok. Every one of its squares is like one part of a bigger picture or is a small picture itself, Kybal’s laces [...].

On the Expo 67 Czechoslovak pavilion section of the Library and Archives Canada website,¹⁸ the popularity of *Kinoautomat* was again emphasized: “The multimedia presentation Diapolyekran, a three-dimensional animated mosaic, features 100 display cubes projecting images of various subjects, such as the creation of the world, and industrial progress. A film in which visitors tell the story is one of the most popular”. (Library and Archives Canada, n.d.)

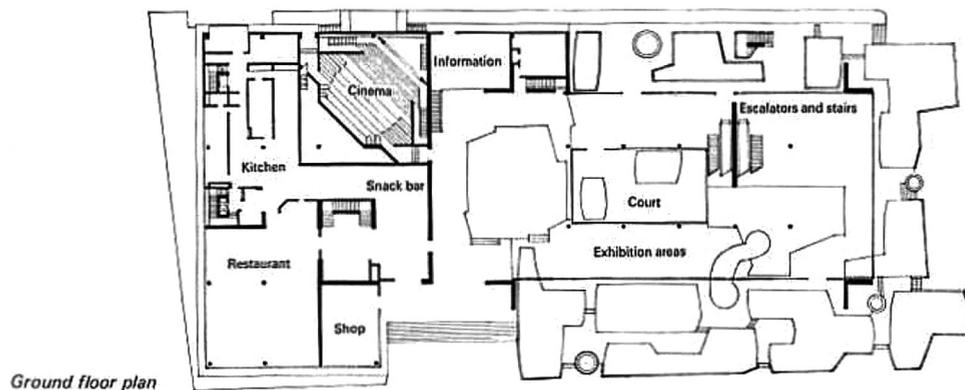


Figure 3: The ground floor plan of the Czechoslovak pavilion. Source: Kalin (1969)

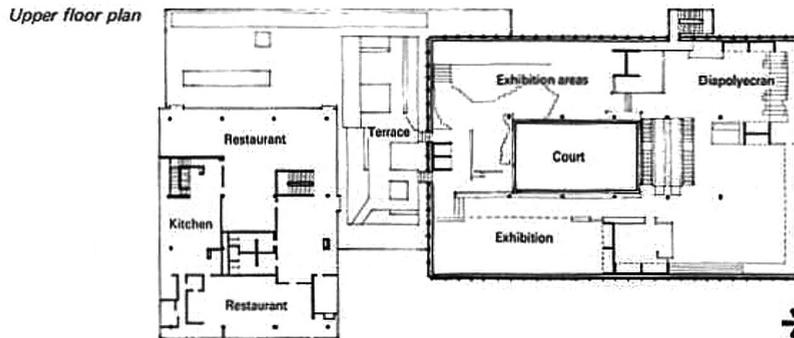


Figure 4: The upper floor plan of the Czechoslovak pavilion. Source: Kalin (1969)

On the ground floor was the 124-seat amphitheatre-shaped cinema (Hosman, 2005), where *Kinoautomat* was screened three times a day, at 2 pm, 3.30 pm and 5 pm (Siskind, 1967: 13). Zuzana Neubauerová recalls that there were “ten or twelve lines [of seats] and three steps between them and the screen”. (Zuzana Neubauerová 9 October 2009 interview) The tickets were free, but were only available 30 minutes before each show, and screenings lasted for about an hour (Siskind, 1967: 13).

As Hales (2005: 60) reminds us, live moderation was a key component of the film: “the four essential elements of Činčera’s *Kinoautomat* were a fictional branching film, live moderation, a means for each audience member to make a choice, and a display board to verify the authenticity of the voting”. The main stage actor was Miroslav Horníček, the actor who also played Petr Novák in the film. The *Kinoautomat* principles were applied to a cartoon, which was also screened three times a day.¹⁹ Alena Činčerová explained in her interview that this *Kinoautomat* for children was “performed by Jiří Šlitr and Sylvie Daničková, who also performed the *Kinoautomat* with Mr. Horníček” (Alena Činčerová 19 August 2009 interview). The role of the *Kinoautomat* stage actor was far from easy, as the timing had to be meticulous (see below). A rather basic problem was that Horníček could not speak English, and had to memorize his interventions phonetically (Horníček, 1968: 14). Eventually, it became clear that an additional stage host was needed. As there was no budget for another stage actor, Ján Roháč organized an on-site casting amongst the fourteen Montreal hostesses, selecting Zuzana Neubauerová (Zuzana Neubauerová 9 October 2009 interview). According to Horníček (1968: 60), this choice turned out to be very successful.

Along a series of precisely defined moments, the audience could vote by pressing the green or red buttons built into their armchairs. Each seat button was connected to a light box in the frame around the main screen, which lit up green or red (depending on the vote) so that individual votes were visible (and could be checked by the audience). Alena Činčerová explains,

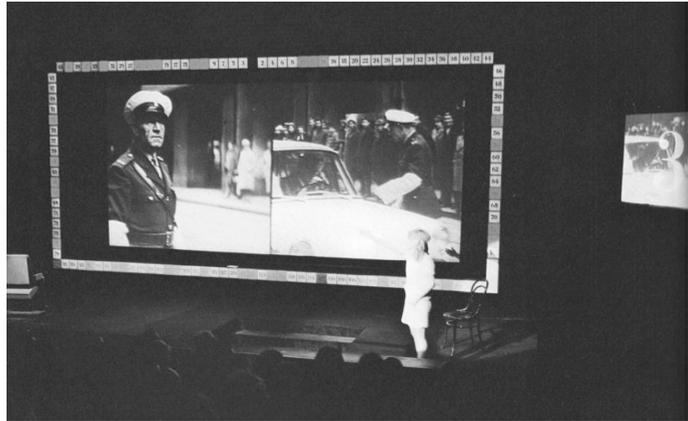


Figure 5: *Kinoautomat* at the Czechoslovak pavilion. © Fulford (1968: 90) – with on the left-hand side the number 36 that indicates that 36 people voted for the option to obey the traffic police officer.

there was a screen surrounded by numbers [...] you have to imagine this, there was really [a cable] going from each seat to the computer room [...] there was only the computer, and many wires coming together, and the wires were connected to the frame around the screen, so you [...] you knew, you have a seat number [...] and you could really control it, [the number] is lit either red or green. (Alena Činčerová 30 March 2009 interview)

2.2.2 *Storyline(s)*²⁰

The basic plot of the film is based on the confusion caused by the presence of a female neighbour, Věra Svobodová, in the flat of the main character, Petr Novák, and the chain of events that lead up to a fire in their apartment building. After the opening scene of the fire and the evacuation of the residents (a device used to introduce all the main characters) the film switches to flashback to reconstruct events and establish Novák's culpability.

Already in the opening scene, Novák adopts a self-accusatory position, stating in a close-up that he is to blame. The host then appears (onstage or on-screen²¹) and asks Novák whether he is sure, and explains that 'we' are going to go through the story to "try to find his mistake". Only during the second half of the film do we learn that Svobodová, who was locked out of her flat because of Novák and through no fault of her own, had left an iron plugged in, which eventually (presumably) caused the fire. The filmic narration (apparently) ends with Novák trying to get into a phone booth, to report himself to the authorities, still convinced that he is to blame.

This is not the end of the film, because the moment when Novák tries to enter the phone booth initiates another phase in the film, characterized by a stage/screen dialogue between the host (in the Montreal version this was often Miroslav Horníček, the actor who played Novák) and the Kinoautomat voice in the film. While the host is convinced of Novák's guilt, based on an empiricist position, the female voice of the Kinoautomat uses a highly rationalist discourse to argue for the unavoidability of the events and for Novák's innocence. The Kinoautomat starts her argument by stating,

But one has to think logically and accurately. I have already processed all the data on this subject. With your permission I will feed back to you the sequence of events if you [with Novák equated to the host Horníček] had not stopped at the wrong door.

The next scene shows a second version of the key scene in the film, showing Novák not to be responsible for Svobodová locking herself out of her flat (the person to blame is Svobodová's 'real' lover, a fireman). These events are shown in fast forward, with the addition of graphical elements to direct the spectator's attention to specific elements, and emphasizing the analytical reasons for re-screening the modified scene. Two other options (one where Novák introduces Svobodová to his family, the other where the entire family is killed, and we then see Novák tearing down the door of the flat where the iron is about to burst into flame) are screened in slapstick mode, but again show the unavoidability and inevitability of the fire. The last scenario is introduced by the host as follows: "You are trying to suggest that the ending would have been the same whatever decision Mr. Novák would have made. But what if he would have simply broken down the door and turned off the iron?" Kinoautomat then answers that it would not have made any difference, and the final scenario shows Novák managing to break down the door, only to discover that the iron is not plugged in.

The last part of the film is based entirely on a dialogue between the human host and the Kinoautomat computer, in which the latter employs a rationalist discourse, adopts an Olympic overview and (thus) gains access to the 'whole' truth. In contrast, the human host is misled by her or his empiricist stance. This modernist triumph of technology is combined with a strong emphasis on determinacy and the ultimate lack of human agency, as the outcomes of the events are represented as unavoidable and necessary. Ironically, there is one moment of hope for humanity, where, at the very end, one of the film's characters (Zemková, an elderly neighbour) interrupts the host, 'pushes' aside the screen that was used to offer the audience another choice (about Novák's guilt or innocence), and explains that she started the fire because she so much enjoys sliding down the firemen's chute. But this reclaiming of human agency through the confession of guilt does not affect the inevitability of the final outcome, which the Kinoautomat computer had explained in pointing to the complex social structure of the apartment house and the personalities of its inhabitants.

The human/computer tension unavoidably also affects the position of the audience. In the last part of the film, the host explicitly aligns her or himself with the audience, and builds a chain of equivalence with the host, Novák, the author and the audience. When debating with Kinoautomat whose is the guilt, the host first states that the truth is known only to the author, structurally contesting Kinoautomat's access to truth. "And who is the author", the host then asks, only to respond immediately, "It is you, ladies and gentlemen. This is not Mr. Novák's story, it is your story. Mr. Novák, that is you". After another vote, the host articulates this human chain of equivalence with the notion of collective guilt, stating that "Mr. Novák does not exist. Mr. Novák, that is you. And me too. We are all Mr. Novák. And we are all guilty". In addition, the audience's participation becomes articulated by the film's logic of linear causality, as the unavoidability of the final outcome qualifies the spectator's interventions into the narration. Through the emphasis on determinacy, the audience's involvement is articulated as incapable of changing the final outcome of the represented events. Moreover, the interventions of the audience are mostly restricted to deciding on the strategies that Novák uses to clear out the misunderstanding about Svobodová. Only the vote about hitting the porter or not (in order to switch off the electricity) is directly related to preventing the fire. At the end, the audience is invited to vote on the ending of the film with the following words: "This is not Mr. Novák's story, it is your story. [...] And here we are again, two possibilities and two endings. One, the happy one, bright and gay. The other, the sad one, black and horror. Make your last choice, ladies and gentlemen. The happy one, green. Horror, red". But this vote has no impact on the narration, and the host continues after the vote with the following (parodist) statement: "Congratulations, from the 32 [*sic*] different stories that could be told, you have picked today the nicest combination. My compliments. Well, I don't say this because I'm speaking to you. I say this every time. And now, the end according to your wishes". There still is no spectator decision about whether or not the fire occurs because it is represented as unavoidable, fixed by the opening scene of the film. Also one of the secondary texts, a Czechoslovak press release, points to the lack of ability to change the final outcome of the film, a situation that is framed as an illustration of "the experience of man in our modern society: life continues along the road of destiny irrespective of Man's decisions" (Czechoslovak press release quoted in Delaney, 1967). From this perspective, democracy is articulated as incapable of changing the outcome of a societal process (albeit at the micro-level), which at least approximates a critical representation of the democratic process as a form of token-democracy.

Nevertheless, the audience does have an impact on the middle part of the film's narration. The film on six occasions uses a forked structure, allowing the spectators (collectively) to decide between two options. The host appears and explains the two options, which are both visible on the two halves of the screen, in freeze-frame. During the explanation, a short fragment of both options is screened, and then the vote is organized. The host announces the decision, and the selected option increases in size until it occupies the whole screen. Horníček (1968: 57) summarizes the voting procedure as follows:

the story comes to a halt six times, six times can spectators decide between two alternatives. They can see both of them on-screen. The picture stops and the wide screen enables to see two different versions. Then the left screen continues a bit and suggests what will come. And stops again. The same principle takes place in the right half. [...] Everyone has two buttons in his or her armrest. And sees his or her number on the luminous frame around the screen, so he or she can control the course of the election. No one could anticipate, how would the viewer reaction would be.

The six votes during the middle part of the film allow the spectators to have an impact on the screened narration. Depending on the outcome of the voting, a different combination of fragments is screened, resulting in 2⁶ or 64 possible combinations.²² However, this does not mean that the film could have 64 different endings. As the overview below (Figure 7) shows, the forked narration is always reunited. In other words, the spectator's collective decision has an impact on the selection of the components of the film, but not on its basic narration and its outcome.

When the spectators are faced with the decision about whether Novák should allow Svobodová to enter his flat, they are presented with two options (see Figure 6). They can decide to have Novák refuse her entry, or they can allow Novák to let her in. In the first case, Svobodová meets her husband (Pavel Svoboda) and is locked out of her apartment. She then meets Marta Nováková, who thinks that her husband is having an affair with Svobodová, resulting in Nováková leaving in anger. In the other option, the events take



Figure 6: *Kinoautomat* (split) screenshot on the choice of letting Svobodová in or not. © Alena Činčerová

place in a different order, but the outcome is the same: Svobodová is allowed to enter; Nováková comes home, finds Svobodová in her flat, thinks that Svobodová is having an affair with her husband, and leaves. Then Svoboda arrives at the flat, finds his wife there, they go outside and Svoboda locks his wife out of the flat. The forked narration joins up into one narration when Svobodová (re-)enters the Novák flat and locks Novák out. He then faces a dilemma (another spectator decision) about whether to follow his wife to her mother's house or to stay and console Svobodová.

In one of the six decision spheres, the film demonstrates the reality of the decisive powers of the audience. Immediately after the spectators have decided about whether Novák should stay and console Svobodová or follow his wife, the filmic narration is interrupted by the host, who stops the film and asks the spectators to reconsider their earlier decision: "Let's return to the previous choice. Go back Mr. Novák". We then see a fast rewind, bringing us back to the point of departure for the earlier vote. The host says, "You now have an opportunity to do something that in real life wouldn't be possible". With a new vote on the original decision, the spectator is offered the possibility "to decide what has already been decided". Simultaneously, the evidential nature of this procedure is also emphasized by the host: "By the way, sometimes people don't believe that our Kinoautomat can really play what they will choose. Here is the proof".

As the overview in Figure 7 also shows, not all votes impact on the narration. The film starts with a test vote, and there are two instances when the spectators are asked for their opinions about the identity of the person ringing the doorbell (vote 6) or about Novák's alleged guilt (vote 9). The last vote (vote 10) offers the choice between a happy ending and a sad ending, but the outcome is the same.

The voting procedure opens up a filmic narration for spectator interventions, and ruptures the cultural monopoly of the Author(s)/producer(s) on the construction of a filmic narration. From this perspective, the film has a clear participatory-democratic component. At the same time, the spectator's decisions have no impact on the outcome of the film, and when the spectators are invited to decide on the outcome, their choice has no effect. This explains why a number of critics have argued that this film is a parody and critique of democratic choice: Spectators are allowed to decide on secondary issues but cannot change the main structure, which is seen as unavoidable and beyond human control. From this perspective, participation is articulated as illusionary and the film becomes seen as a Sartrean reminder that 'we are caught like rats'.

At the symbolic level, there are several arguments that can be proposed to contextualize this democratic critique by re-articulating *Kinoautomat* as a political critique, aimed at the global level and the communist regimes. First, there are a number of references to the Cold War. The fire in the apartment building can be read as a symbolic reference to the threat of the Cold War setting the globe ablaze. A key sentence that supports this interpretation is the host's intervention during the discussion with the Kinoautomat: "We are all Mr. Novák. And we are all guilty". This sentence supports the reading of the film as a global warning, and a call for global responsibility. Moreover, the Manichean logic of the Cold War, dividing

Figure 7: The *Kinoautomat* voting structure.

The host introduces the film with a test vote (“Don’t push the red button; it will cause a fire”.)

Vote 1 Test vote.

The fire and the evacuation.

Flashback starts. Novák causes Svobodová to be locked out of her apartment.

Vote 2 – choice 1 Should Novák let Svobodová enter his apartment?

Svobodová locks Novák out. Novák’s wife leaves for her mother’s.

Vote 3 – choice 2 Should Novák follow his wife or comfort Svobodová?

Rewind.

Vote 4 – choice 3 Should Novák follow his wife or comfort Svobodová?

Novák leaves and meets the captain in front of the apartment building. They decide to follow Novák’s wife but are stopped by a police officer.

Vote 5 – choice 4 Should they stop for the police officer or not?

The pursuit fails and they return. The doorbell rings.

Vote 6 Is it Novák’s wife or Svobodová’s husband?

Novák’s family enters, Svobodová hides on the balcony and her husband enters the flat. Novák takes Svobodová’s husband to another witness, who refuses to let them in.

Vote 7 – choice 5 Should Novák force his way in or not?

The witnesses fail to collaborate and he returns to his apartment. The family discovers Svobodová on the balcony. After she has realized that the iron is still plugged in, Novák runs down to shut down the electricity. The porter tries to prevent this.

Vote 8 – choice 6 Should Novák hit the porter or not?

The fire.

Vote 9 Should Novák give himself up or not?

Novák goes to a phone booth to report himself but cannot enter it. The dialogue between the host starts, and three alternative explanations are shown.

Vote 10 What kind of ending does the audience want, a happy one, or a sad one?

The host congratulates the spectators for making the best choice. Zemková appears on-screen and confesses that she started the fire. She is shown sliding down the chute again.

Legend: Black indicates votes that affect the narration; grey indicates votes that do not affect it.

the world into two blocs, is elaborated and critiqued when one of the film's characters, a (former) captain, goes off into a monologue about the need for more structure: “[...] we all live without any system. We need a proper system. A system is essential for every rational person”. With some fanaticism in his eyes, the captain suggests that the “whole building” could be “divided right down the middle. Let's say we could make it an east block and a west block. It would very definitely help us to orientate ourselves”.

Secondly, the film contains a number of subtle references to the communist regime(s), using Aesopian language/imaginary, and writing between the lines, as could be applied to many different cultural fields operating under oppressive regimes (O'Neil, 1997: 125–126; see also Hájek (1992: 6) on the use of allegories in *Samizdat*, and Heister (1999) on so-called *verdeckte Schreibweise* in the context of Nazi Germany). The above reference to the Cold War logics and the division of the world into Western and Eastern Blocs can obviously also be read as a critique on the communist regime(s). Similarly, the statement that “we are all guilty” can be seen as a critique of the silent majorities in the Eastern (and Western) Bloc countries. Thirdly, as well as the captain, the other representatives of authority in the film are problematized and ridiculed. The apartment building porter is depicted as highly bureaucratic and inhumane, adhering strictly to the rules. When Novák is climbing from the balcony, for instance, risking his life to make his way back into his flat, the porter stands on the ground floor, shouting to Novák that he should be careful not to scratch the paint. In one scene, after the arrest of Novák and the captain, the captain is shown with his head bandaged, which could be interpreted as a reference to police violence.²³ A very subtle detail perhaps is that the last name of two of the film's main characters, Svoboda, means ‘freedom’ in the Czech and Slovak languages, although it should be added that this is also a very common name in Czechoslovakia. Finally, the film contains a remarkable reference to privacy, individual freedom and human rights (which is – with the luxury of hindsight – also an unforeseen but shocking reference to the Eastern Bloc invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968), when in one scene (and one scenario) Novák forces his way into the apartment of the young student couple. Before this option is put to the vote, the host points to the ethical dilemma: “The question I want to ask is: Does one have the right to intrude on the privacy of the others? Is it permissible to prove yourself innocent, if it means trampling on the right[s] of others?”

2.3 *The technology*

2.3.1 *A particular alliance of propaganda, art and technology*

Kinoautomat required the mobilization of a wide range of people, organizations and technologies. After the success of the *Laterna Magika* exhibition at the Brussels Expo 58, the Czechoslovak communist regime wanted to present itself as remarkable again (Czech

Television, 2009). Since world exhibitions were sites where the symbolic and cultural Cold War was fought, often by displays of sophisticated national technologies that allowed claims of a contribution to the modernist project of progress, the high investment was of secondary importance. When interviewed for the Czech Television Magazine *Retro* (broadcast on 31 May 2009) one of the pavilion's architects, Řepa, confirmed that there were no financial constraints on the construction of the pavilion. Also, in the case of *Kinoautomat*, both Jan Balzer, production-assistant of *Kinoautomat* (9 September 2009 interview), and Alena Činčerová (19 August 2009 interview) confirmed that the budget for the film was generous.

Moreover, the project was fully supported by the Czechoslovak regime, in spite of the various political preferences presented by the many authors and actors (Petr Kopal from The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, 25 August 2009 interview). The *Kinoautomat* cameraman, Šofr, confirms the non-interventionist attitude of the Czechoslovak regime because it served to articulate the regime as tolerant:

I think it was not problem of this project at all. [...] It was accepted gratefully by all the government leaders of the Communist Party [...] For this regime, [*it was necessary*] to prove a kind of liberal atmosphere, and film creativity. So for this regime, all this was accepted very gratefully. (Jaromír Šofr, 15 June 2009 interview)

This generates an interesting paradox: Traditional films, with their many stereotypes of social realism, were produced for internal distribution in Czechoslovakia, whilst Czechoslovak directors could produce innovative projects for audiences abroad (Svatoňová, 2009), if they upheld the regime's cultural propaganda.

At the same time, *Kinoautomat* is not merely a story of incorporation into the Czechoslovak regime's discourses. *Kinoautomat* and many of the people involved in the production of this film were firmly embedded in the 1960s New Wave movement, which included authors and directors such as Ivan Passer, Jan Němec, Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel, Jaromil Jireš, Věra Chytilová and others. In a reaction to social realism, originally promoted in Czechoslovakia by Klement Gottwald (who was president from 1948 to 1953), the New Wave films increased the role of form again, and highlighted a different reality, by making use of non-professional actors, dark and absurd humour, and avant-garde narratives, and by focusing on psychological detail (Iordanová, 2003: 97). Even before the Prague Spring reforms of 1968, the New Wave films had a political-critical dimension but "addressed political issues in an indirect, oblique or Kafkaesque manner" (Hames, 2006: 73), similar to the *Kinoautomat* narration and form. Despite these latent-critical attitudes the New Wave directors could still use the infrastructure of a film industry that already in 1945 had been nationalized.

Later, in 1968, when Alexander Dubček became First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, more overt critiques of the communist regime were possible, but this situation came to an abrupt end with the Warsaw Pact invasion and the post-

invasion policies of so-called ‘normalization’. But even before 1968, the New Wave had taken a critical position, and was actively pleading for social change, “determined to replace the propaganda images of Socialist Realism, the official aesthetic of the Soviet bloc countries, with those of real life” (Hames, 2006: 69). A similar discursive positioning can be found in the words of *Kinoautomat* cameraman Šofr:

But I think it was kind of spontaneous, new generation, and we were [...] our attitude was very critical towards the creator, towards the confections of the old filmmakers employed in Barrandov, so we were very critical and we found it very boring [...] And besides, in these times many movies were just propaganda [...] of the political leaders in our country. For us, this was absolutely not acceptable, it was unacceptable for us, we as young students, we were absolutely critical [...]. (Jaromír Šofr, 15 June 2009 interview)

These critical voices were found in other worlds too, and were firmly embedded within literature and the theatre. Authors such as Milan Kundera were already producing critical texts in the 1960s, evidence of a flourishing Czechoslovak literary scene, and Czechoslovak theatre “mounted a stream of highly imaginative, powerfully executed productions in both large institutional theatres and small studio environments” (Banham, 1995: 275). In this period, Czech(oslovak) theatre “began a process of freeing itself from ideological and political constraints and tried to reflect contemporary life with a contemporary idiom” (Císař, 2010: 350). Banham adds that two directors stood out for their large-scale work: Otomar Krejča (whose most frequent collaborator was Josef Svoboda) and Alfred Radok. Radok and Svoboda, in the 1950s, developed the *Laterna Magika*, which consisted of technology-based formal experiments (combining stage action and projected film) that also moved away from the dogmas of social realism. In his interview, Šofr bears witness to the fascination for these (so-called (dia)polyekran) technologies, which were also used at the Expo 67:

There were special *laterna magika*, and many famous creators were involved like Evald Schorm, for example, but it was based on simultaneous screening, on multiple, different screens and I remember that I was also enchanted by this when I was a student, enchanted by the idea of multi-screening because it was, it was simultaneous, multi-effect, it was [...] I believed in the so-called polyekran [...]. (Jaromír Šofr, 15 June 2009 interview)

The opposing mechanism of the propagandistic use of technology to signify the communist regime’s superiority and the artistic fascination with these very same technologies allowed for transgression of a series of traditional frontiers (between film and theatre, between human and technology, between presence and absence). This particular alliance (in a Gramscian sense), despite the opposing political positions, provided a multitude of opportunities for experimental designs and innovative art.

2.3.2 *The production of the proto-machines*

In the case of the *Kinoautomat* project, a wide variety of technologies was deployed, supported by the state companies Ústřední půjčovna filmů, Kinotechnika and Elektropřístroje. The screening of the film in Montreal required a complex procedure, as film projectors could not be stopped. This necessitated the use of two continuously running and synchronized main projectors (see Figure 8), which each projected one of the two storylines. When the audience was invited to make a choice, and a split screen was used, two additional projectors were brought into play (and here the earlier-developed polyekran technology that allowed for these kinds of split screens was incorporated (Eigl, 2009)). A fifth projector was used for the black screens and for projecting the score, and there was a sixth projector kept in reserve. All the projectors were produced by the Czechoslovak company Meopta, which was (and still is at the time of writing) based in Přerov.²⁴ Jaroslav Veselý, who was responsible for the *Kinoautomat* performance at Kino Světozor in the 1970s, which replicated the five projector system, explains:

Five different projectors [*were used*] – three Meoptons IV (3 x 35mm), tailored for big spool boxes, and two Meoptons II B (2 x 16 mm). The first Meopton IV projected one version of the story, the second one the other version, the third one was just for a black screen, or ‘dead pictures’ [*mrtvolka in Czech*]. Two Meoptons II B were there because of the quite short sequences during the audience’s decisions. The speaker presented the audience with two different options and both options were played for a while. Then the audience had to select one possibility – the score [*of the vote*] was screened with the middle Meopton IV, there was an iron box with numbers, and the decision of the voters was shown. (Jaroslav Veselý, 8 September 2009 interview)

This implied a very energetic role for the projectionist, who had to cover the lenses of the relevant projectors, so that the correct part of the film was screened. As Jan Eigl (a physicist at the Film Faculty in Prague) explained,

The great difference between *Kinoautomat* and polyekran in Brussels [*was that*] the polyekran presentation was fully automatized, all eight projectors were shooting at all times and there was no place for any randomness. *Kinoautomat* was interactive, so it required the presence of a projectionist, who had to react to what the people chose. (Jan Eigl, 31 August 2009 interview)

The procedure adopted, based on the relentlessly continuous film projection, necessitated extremely well-timed interventions from the stage actors.

Apart from the projection, the voting required a complex technological configuration, which was also developed by Ústřední půjčovna filmů, Kinotechnika and Elektropřístroje. The entire cinema was wired to allow each member of the audience



Figure 8: A Meopton IV projector at Kinotechnika in Prague. © Ondra Holomek

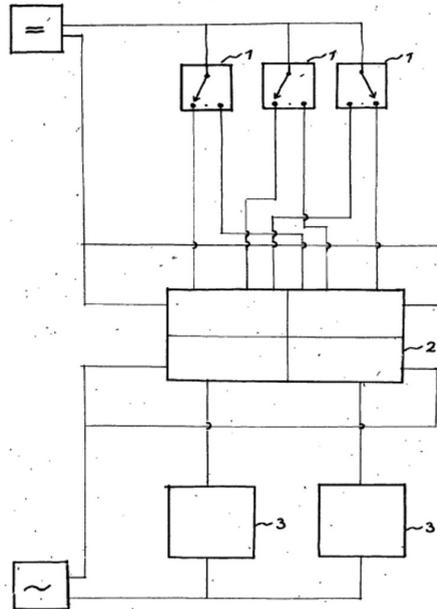


Figure 9: The basic design of the voting technology (from the Czech patent record). Source: Úřad pro Patenty a Vynálezy (1967: 3)

to vote by pressing one of two buttons. Veselý describes what the voting apparatus looked like: “It was just a Bakelite box, white and brown with two buttons” (Jaroslav Veselý, 8 September 2009 interview). These boxes in the armchairs were connected to a primitive computer (a ‘processing appliance’ based on a relay system), and to the frame around the projection screen: “Every seat had its own buttons – a green one and red one – for voting. The signals went through cables underneath the audience to a ‘pseudocomputer’ [*relátková skříň* in Czech] with a telephone counter and light bulbs” (Jaroslav Veselý, 8 September 2009 interview). Most of the voting technology, like the computer, was out of sight.

A very early draft of the setting (see Figure 9), which was part of the 1965 Czechoslovak patent application (Úřad pro Patenty a Vynálezy, 1967), contains a schematic representation of how the switches in the armchairs (1) were connected to the voting computer (2) (called ‘processing appliance’ in this document), which in turn steered the two main cameras (3). The design suggests that the cameras were connected to the voting computer, but in the Montreal screenings the projectionist manually selected the ‘correct’ main camera.

2.3.3 *Power relations embedded in the technology*

Kinoautomat allowed the spectators to make their votes at specific and limited numbers of moments. This form of participation implied a rupture with the traditional – hegemonic – positioning of the spectators in cinema, where they were (and still are) confined to their seats in a darkened room, and where their gaze can wander freely, fulfilling their – as Mulvey (1975) puts it – scopophilic and voyeuristic fantasies. Although spectators still have ample possibilities for interpretation and signification, the film text is almost always beyond the control of the spectators, as the power to generate the text that is being screened is reserved for the film’s authors. Even when we (have to) acknowledge that the power dynamics of the film’s production are complex, that a multitude of actors with specific and sometimes diverging interests and identities is involved in this production process, and that the authors (sometimes) take the imaginary spectator into account when producing the film, this still positions the spectator as passive in relation to the decisions that involve what will be projected on the film screen.

Kinoautomat partially altered this unequal power balance between authors and spectators, by offering its spectators a choice between a series of film fragments. In total, the film consists of 22 components, ten of which are fixed and twelve belong to the forked decision structure. Through a mechanism of collective decision-making, spectators could generate a relatively unique combination of components, opting for one of the 64 different possible stories. From this perspective, *Kinoautomat* broke with the hegemony of the Author to decide about the screened text, and diverged from the hegemonic model of cinema.

At the same time, there were quite a number of limitations to the participatory model of *Kinoautomat*. Although *Kinoautomat* ruptured the Author’s hegemony over the screened text, it simultaneously protected the Author’s control over the produced text because the 22 components were decided upon and produced by the producers, within the logics of traditional film production culture. Obviously, *Kinoautomat* was not a case of spectator self-production, but still reserved a substantial role for its producers. Hales (2005: 64) summarizes this limit as follows: “The often raised criticism that making choices in an interactive narrative made from pre-made segments is hardly more sophisticated than pressing the required combination of buttons on a hot-drink vending machine”. Also, participation was limited by the way the 22 components were arranged, and by which components could be decided about. As the beginning and the ending of the film were fixed, the spectators’ ability to generate structurally different narrations with different outcomes was blocked. Moreover, as the analysis of the film text (see above) shows, the spectators’ interventions were mostly confined to decisions in relation to Novák’s attempts to convince his wife that he was not having an affair, and had little influence over whether or not the fire happened. Also the stage actor’s interventions and the voting procedure reduced the abilities of the spectators to participate more intensely. The interventions of the stage actor, who has the spatial authority (Carpignano et al., 1990: 48)

in the cinema theatre, were highly scripted, and left no room for an extensive dialogue or deliberation with the audience. The spectators were still positioned in their seats, and the decision-making procedure reduced their role to mere voting within very small and well-guarded time slots. In other words, we see not deliberative democracy being played out, but representative democracy, in a version that is reminiscent of the competitive-elitist democratic model – *à la* Schumpeter (1942). Horníček (1968: 58–59) frames this in a more positive way: “This kind of activity is still tolerable. They stay in the dark. No one illumines them, no one let them go to the podium, no one want to know why they decided that way. They can exhibit without leaving their seats. Without speaking [...]”

The film text hid most of these complexities, and offered the spectators the promise of almost unlimited impact, where the notions of causality and agency became centralized. For instance, at the start of the film, when the voting system is explained, the spectators are called upon *not* to press the red button, as this will “cause a fire”, which is of course followed by the images of the apartment building on fire. When after vote 3 (whether Novák should follow his wife or stay in the apartment building) the film is stopped, and the audience is offered the same choice again, they receive the explanation that this is an opportunity “to decide what has already been decided”. At the end of the film, the spectators are offered the choice between a happy and a sad ending (vote 10). Most importantly, the forked structure of the film, and the impact that this structure has on the level of participation in co-constructing the film’s narration, is not mentioned.

These limits on the intensity of participation lead to uncertainty, and disappointment among spectators and analysts. For instance, Laurel (1993: 53) writes that “it is rumoured that all roads lead to Rome – that is, all paths through the movie led to the same ending”, clearly expressing uncertainty about the decision-making structure of *Kinoautomat*. Earlier, one of the key and rare reviews on *Kinoautomat*, by Jan Kliment from the *Rudé právo* (the official newspaper of the Czechoslovak Communist party), had critiqued the film for its lack of structural participation (a situation that is slightly ironic within the Czechoslovak political context). Kliment (1971: 5) wrote that he had enjoyed the performance and had pushed the buttons, but then he had realized it was not a fair-play game, as the plot developed according to the authors’ intentions. Later, Naimark (1997/1998: 29–30) offered a similar critique, reframing *Kinoautomat* as a “satire of democracy”: “How did they do it? Deceit, of sorts. [...] The artfulness, ultimately, was not in the interaction but in the illusion of interaction. The film’s director, Radúz Činčera, made it as a satire of democracy, where everyone votes but it doesn’t make any difference”.

The affordances of the film technology played a crucial role in deciding about the intensity of the participation that was offered. One obvious argument is that production of a film is a long-term process, which, in the case of *Kinoautomat*, started in 1965 with the tender, while its production phase occurred in 1966 and 1967. Moreover, the use of these kinds of technologies has a strong cultural component. Not only does the complexity of the material require the acquisition of specific skills, but the identity of the

filmmaker (as the person who is capable of using the technology ‘properly’) is embedded in a professional production culture, which articulates the filmmaker as creative and artistic, which, in turn, privileges the author concept. In other words, the *Kinoautomat* directors were still filmmakers, who were inspired by a number of theatre experiments, to use the technology they were familiar with, and to add a participatory dimension to their creative work.

Although the authors might have wanted to maximize the numbers of votes and possible combinations, the technical impossibility of stopping projectors and changing reels forced them to use a forked narrative structure, combined with a fixed beginning and ending. As Hales formulates it, film is “a linear and extremely unforgiving delivery system, and it would have been high-risk (and probably impossible) for a projectionist to attempt to stop the current reel and lace-up the reels of each possible choice at extreme short notice whilst maintaining continuity” (Hales, 2005: 57). It is precisely the inability to stop the film that positioned the stage actor and the spectators, and excluded any likelihood of extensive deliberation, because the stage actor could intervene only during fixed timeslots, and the voting was according to an evenly and rigidly defined timing.

These complexities related to the use of film technology almost automatically excluded more intense forms of audience involvement. This led Radúz Činčera to conclude later that “*Kinoautomat* in 1967 represented a Stone-age of interactivity as to the technology [...]” (Činčera quoted in Hales, 2005: 62). He did continue by saying that *Kinoautomat* “is a very original and advanced presentation form, still attractive and impressive until today – and it is easy to improve by recent computerized components”.

2.4 *Post-Expo 67*

2.4.1 *A sleeper in Czechoslovakia*

After the Expo 67 event, *Kinoautomat* was screened at a number of other (BIE-sanctioned) world exhibitions: HemisFair 68 in San Antonio (US) and Expo 74 in Spokane (US). Moreover, it was also screened at the specially reconstructed Prague cinema Kino Světozor in 1971 and 1972, but after that *Kinoautomat* disappeared from the screen for more than twenty years.

There were attempts to market the film outside Czechoslovakia and the exhibition circuit, but these attempts failed. Initially, US companies expressed some interest. Alena Činčerová describes this interest in the *Zašlapané projekty* documentary (Czech Television, 2009): “My father had returned from Montreal full of energy and had many different offers to present the movie all over the world”. She continues, “there were many profitable offers from Universal Studios Inc. or Paramount Pictures”. In a March 2009 interview, Alena Činčerová also explains that her father was invited to work in Canada

and the US: “So afterwards telegrams were coming ‘please come to Canada’; ‘please come to the United States’. And if he had done so, he would have been a very rich man” (Alena Činčerová, 30 March 2009 interview).

Within the Czechoslovak communist context, all ownership rights belonged to the Czechoslovak state and not to the director. As Petr Kopal explains,

There was no intellectual property, no intangible rights in that era. All films which were made in Czechoslovakia, belonged to the state. It was produced by Czechoslovak Film and could be sold by the Czechoslovak Film export Company. [...] The Czechoslovak government had ordered this film from Radúz Činčera and he did this work for them. It was a personal misfortune for Činčera, but he was not the only one who was not well-paid for his work. (Petr Kopal, 25 August 2009 interview)

The Czechoslovak state decided to sell the rights to Marie Desmarais from the Canadian company *Eurofilm*, who had already released the Oscar-winning *Obchod na korze?* (*The Shop on Main Street*, 1965), but this did not result in a release in the US or in Canada, in the 1960s or 1970s. Radúz Činčera also applied for copyright protection at the US Copyright Office, and this was granted on 18 March 1968.²⁵ Later, when *Kinoautomat* was being screened at Expo 74 in Spokane (US), Československý Filmexport registered *Kinoautomat* as a trademark at the US Patent and Trademark Office, but this was discontinued in 1982.²⁶

In Czechoslovakia, there were some calls for local screenings. For instance, Anton Hykisch (1968: 114), one of the major representatives of “Generation 1966”, wrote at the end of the 1960s, “Whoever saw the Czechoslovak pavilion, is very excited as am I. But the main question is whether we are able to introduce the glorious fame of polyekran or *Kinoautomat* to the people in Czechoslovakia, not just to the Expo ’67 visitors”. But soon after Expo 67, the Prague Spring began and ended, and was followed by a period of restoration, commonly referred to as ‘normalization’. Nevertheless, in 1970 the Prague cinema Kino Světozor was reconstructed to screen *Kinoautomat*, which required a number of substantial changes to the film theatre. As Alena Činčerová explains, “It was necessary to rebuild the cinema for *Kinoautomat* – to enlarge a projector cabin and also to lay cables under the audience” (Alena Činčerová, 19 August 2009 interview). Some of the changes made to Kino Světozor are still visible (see Figures 10 and 11).²⁷ In an interview, one of the Kino Světozor’s collaborators, Habartík, referred to the changes made to the projection cabin: “They had to rebuild this cinema completely. Here you can see the projectors’ cabin. There are only two windows in normal cinemas, but you can see six of them in Světozor” (Radim Habartík, on 13 July 2009 interview).

The Prague version of *Kinoautomat* premiered on 14 January 1971, experiencing a success similar to that achieved in Montreal. One of the stage actors, Jaroslava Panýrková, recalls this success:

The beginnings of the Czechoslovak performances were grandiose. We had to play two performances a day, there were a huge queues outside the cinema every evening [...] The visitors were like a small children. And it was easy about ideology – there was no comrade but just a Mr. Novák. (Czech Television, 2009)

The numbers of screenings and spectators for 1971 are quite impressive: Březina (1997: 175) mentions 498 screenings and 199,983 visitors (see also Národní Filmový Archiv, 1973a). But in 1972, the interest of audiences had waned, and only 45 screenings were organized in the first nine months of 1972, with a total audience of 13,568 (Národní Filmový Archiv, 1973b). In September 1972 screenings were discontinued, as Veselý explained:

It was very successful, one year Světozor had played *Kinoautomat* almost every day and you could see queues in front of the cinema. But in the end, the interest waned. Those people who wanted to see *Kinoautomat*, had already seen it and the new ones didn't come. (Jaroslav Veselý, 8 September 2009 interview)

Figure 10: The remains of the cabling system at Kino Světozor. © Ondra Holomek



Figure 11: The expanded projection cabin at Kino Světozor. © Ondra Holomek



2.4.2 *Kinoautomat's disappearance*

There are a number of possible explanations for the disappearance of *Kinoautomat* from the screens. One key explanation focuses on the impact of normalization and the resulting censorship, which might have affected the screening of *Kinoautomat*. There are

a number of arguments to support this thesis. First, there is the summation by Alena Činčerová that

It is a little miracle that he succeeded to present a version of the film in 1971, four years later. And it ran, twice a day, for a year and a bit. And then it was banned, like everything good from the so-called New Wave. And it was lost for many many years, for generations. (Alena Činčerová, 30 March 2009 interview)

This thesis is supported by Eduard Hrubeš and Jaroslava Panýrková (Czech Television, 2009) and by Jan Balzer (albeit in a more nuanced way) (Jan Balzer, 9 September 2009 interview). Second, there is the fact that Radúz Činčera in 1967 became vice-chairman of FITES, the Czechoslovak Film and Television Union, which was banned in January 1970, after major animosity with the communist regime (Cysařová, 1994; Hoppe, 1997). Other key people involved in *Kinoautomat* saw their careers ended (or severely curtailed) during the era of normalization. For instance, Miroslav Horníček's television talk show *Hovort H* was cancelled (Bren, 2010: 50); he also did not get many film roles after 1968, although he reappeared on the television screen and “continued to be one of the country's most beloved entertainers” (Bren, 2010: 51). Pavel Juráček in May 1968 had been singled out by the Soviet embassy in Prague as a scriptwriter who “criticized a socialist society in his films” (Žuravlev, 1968). Juráček was forced to leave Czechoslovakia in 1977 and stayed in West Germany until 1983. Also, after his return, and until his death in 1989, his position remained problematic. Finally, there is the argument that the critical review of *Kinoautomat* in *Rudé právo* (on 19 January 1971) could have harmed the film's reputation.

But there are a number of convincing counterarguments that nuance these explanations. An obvious one is that *Kinoautomat* was screened in Prague in 1971 and 1972, when normalization was already being implemented. A second one is that although Činčera did not direct many films after *Kinoautomat*, he remained very actively involved in producing new audio-visual projects that achieved high visibility, partially through the mediation of the Arts Centrum (Matějček, 2007), such as the Antipode Theatre for the British Columbia Pavilion in Expo 70 in Osaka (Japan), the Sound Game Show for the 1971 ‘Man and His World’ Exhibition in Montreal (Canada), the Quadraphonic Silence for the Laterna Magika in Prague (Czechoslovakia) in 1984, the Actorscope and Selectorama for the Czechoslovak Pavilion in ‘Expo 86’ in Vancouver, (Canada), and the Cinelabyrinth for the Flower Expo 90 in Osaka (Japan). Also the collaboration with Kinotechnika remained intact, as Veselý explains: “We had many projects with Radúz Činčera in 1970s. He was a kind of genius. We tried all his new inventions first in some small festival Agrokomplex in Nitra. The cooperation with Radúz Činčera was unique” (Jaroslav Veselý, 8 September 2009 interview). A final argument is that our archive research did not produce any traces of *Kinoautomat* being censored or even problematized by the communist regime.

Alternative explanations for the disappearance of *Kinoautomat* can be found in the tailing off of interest from spectators combined with the absence of any new films produced according to the *Kinoautomat* system. Kopal points to the decline in viewer interest, and at the same time minimizes the potential impact of the critical review in *Rudé právo*:

If I am right, the performances of *Kinoautomat* went from January 1971 to September 1972. It was a great period, a really long time, but interest started to decline after a time. Yes, it might have been influenced with some negative articles in *Rudé právo*, but I think that in the case of *Kinoautomat*, they did not play such an important role. (Petr Kopal, 25 August 2009 interview)

Obviously, the *Kinoautomat* system might have been more successful in maintaining spectator interest in Prague if the communist regime and the Barrandov Film Studio had been willing to invest in more *Kinoautomat* films.²⁸ But here we enter the realm of speculation, as there may have been several reasons for the unwillingness to invest.

Another line of argument is related to the technology, and the cost of both the equipment and staff. The screenings in the Prague cinema *Kino Světozor* required reconstruction of the entire cinema, cabling the theatre for the audience voting equipment, and enlarging the projection cabin to accommodate the five projectors. The production of the film also required additional investment, and a similar point can be made for the screenings, which required stage actors and highly trained projectionists. A political economy approach to interactive film supports the argument that these kinds of investments might be (considered) legitimate for high-profile exhibitions that support specific – propagandistic – policy objectives, but that it is unlikely that the regular cinema circuit (in East or West) would be willing to make this kind of long-term investment. This kind of argument is offered by Jan Balzer:

The main problem with *Kinoautomat* was that you could not just buy the film, you had to rebuild the entire cinema. It was expensive and risky to buy this film [...] it was not a normal film. And that was the main problem: The owners of these cinemas were afraid that interest in *Kinoautomat* would run out in three weeks and that only the hall and voting equipment would remain [...] Of course, they also needed a live actor (or at least some hostess). (Jan Balzer, 9 September 2009 interview).

For the final line of argument we need to jump ahead in time, and also consider the lack of success of later interactive films. Before *Kinoautomat*, only one film (*Mr. Sardonicus*, 1961, directed by William Castle) had, unrightfully, claimed to offer spectators a choice: At the end of the film the option was offered to reward or to punish the villain (the so-called ‘punishment poll’), but the choice could not affect the ending.²⁹ Decades after *Kinoautomat*, the 20-minute film *I’m Your Man* (1992) was released, claiming to

be the first interactive film. Interfilm had developed a similar system to *Kinoautomat*, but this time using laserdisc technologies, and three-button joysticks for voting. It later released three more films, *Mr. Payback* (1995), *Ride for Your Life* (1995) and *Bombmeister* (1995), which were screened in about 40 cinema theatres in the US (ChoicePoint Films, 1998). But in spring 1995, Interfilm Technologies closed its doors. In 1998, ChoicePoint Films released *I'm Your Man* on DVD. Later DVD films and television programmes that featured narrative choices either proved not necessarily very successful or remained articulated as gimmicks, exceptions or art experiments.³⁰ Attempts have been made to bring interactive film back into the movie theatre: For instance, in the German film *Last Call* (2010) the main character 'calls' a random audience member on her or his mobile phone to ask for help.³¹

In contrast, gamebooks (or interactive novels) such as *Choose Your Own Adventure* books, or video games (including first-person shooters, which can have strong narrative components,³²) have proven very successful genres. Thus, this brings us back to the normality of passive spectatorship (at the material level, not at the level of interpretation) and the sacrality of the (film) Author. Although interactive films such as *Kinoautomat* were appreciated by their spectators, they never managed to disrupt the normality of a movie-going culture based on a combination of active interpretation and passive immersion, and without active co-decision-making. Simultaneously, the right to create remains firmly and exclusively in the hands of the author concerning cultural products that are shown in the cinema theatre (in contrast to a series of other spheres – see Lietsala and Sirkkunen, 2008; Roig Telo, 2009).

2.4.3 *The film's afterlife*

As mentioned, after the Prague (1971–1972) screenings and the Spokane exhibition (1974), attention on the film decreased drastically. In the mid-1990s the renewed attempts to screen it proved successful, as Czech public television broadcast the film³³ on 16 November 1996, at 20:00. Česká televize used two of their channels (ČT1 and ČT2) creatively, to allow the audience to vote for one of the two scenarios.

In 2006–2007 Alena Činčerová, together with Chris Hales and Adéla Sirotková, restored *Kinoautomat*. In February 2006, it featured at the National Film Theatre in London (UK), and in May and June 2007 Kino Světozor again screened the film. Later, *Kinoautomat* was shown at other festivals, such as the Motovun Film Festival (Croatia) in July 2008, Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle Upon Tyne (UK) in March 2009, Offscreen in Brussels (Belgium) also in March 2009³⁴ and Filmfest DC in Washington DC (US) in April 2009. On these occasions, a new type of wireless equipment was used to facilitate the voting. The stage host remained a role that, in some cases (such as the Offscreen festival in Brussels), was taken on by Alena Činčerová. She explains,

So, until today, we've played in Switzerland, we then used an English version with a German-speaking actor on stage, then we played in Croatia at the Motovun Festival, with me [*as stage actor*] with the English [*version of the*] film, we played in Newcastle, in Brussels, also in Slovakia several times, and next month we are going to the United States. (Alena Činčerová, 30 March 2009 interview)

Finally, the restoration of *Kinoautomat* also resulted in the release of a DVD on 7 April 2008 (Hejdová, 2008). DVD technology offers a number of advantages, which brought Alena Činčerová to conclude,

When I was producing this DVD with *Kinoautomat*, an English professor [*Chris Hales*] said something quite profound. 'This film was made especially for DVD.' And then I realized, my father had been ahead of his time, more than 30 years before the invention of DVD, he had invented this interactive film. (Alena Činčerová, 19 August 2009 interview)

In the DVD version, the stage actor is integrated into the film, and the external voting equipment is replaced by two on-screen buttons. Obviously, when the DVD is played in a home setting, the viewing context is structurally altered and the cinema theatre experience is lost. In 2009, the DVD went on sale at Kino Světozor and at a number of e-shops. In October 2009, the total number of *Kinoautomat* DVDs sold was 635.³⁵

2.5 Conclusion

One of the important conclusions from the *Kinoautomat* case relates to the history of media participation, and the fact that, already in 1965–1967, the concept and praxis of interactive film had been developed. *Kinoautomat* also shows that a wide diversity of media technologies (including film) can be used to organize participation, and that the participatory process is co-determined by the affordances of this technology. In the case of *Kinoautomat*, its authors altered the structure of the movie-going experience by allowing spectators to co-decide on the narrative they would receive. This shift in power relations between author and spectator, in one of the most sacred places of (media) authorship, was an avant-garde intervention and a participatory statement that can be considered maximalist because it is embedded within the context of traditional film production where audience participation is (almost) non-existent. Ironically, this film emerged from an oppressive communist Czechoslovak regime, which used the film as part of its cultural propagandist strategies.

But at the same time, the use of film technology severely restricted the authors' options to intensify spectator participation and co-decision-making. From this perspective, the film is a much less maximalist form of participation. The film production logics, which

combined high-tech equipment, highly qualified staff, extensive organizational support structures and (thus) major investment, unavoidably kept most of the film's production firmly in the hands of professionals. Within the cinema theatre, the film projection logics again reduced the opportunities for the spectators to intervene more, because the authors had to use a forked structure and the film reels could not be stopped. Because of this, the spectators and stage performers were subject to strict time constraints, and democracy was reduced to voting. These restrictions also explain why some commentators framed *Kinoautomat* as an 'illusion of interaction,' ignoring the abilities that spectators still had to construct the narrative of the film. Moreover, the costs related to preparing a film theatre for a *Kinoautomat* screening (in the 1970s) were high. It required the reconstruction of the projection cabin (to accommodate more projectors), and of the actual theatre (in terms of the cabling for the voting equipment), in combination with higher exploitation costs caused by the necessary presence of the stage actor and a trained projectionist.

Obviously, the lack of uptake of interactive film cannot be reduced to mere technological (or, for that matter, economic) arguments. Even though technological innovations (such as wireless voting equipment or DVD technology) have reduced the high structural costs of screening interactive films, the genre has clearly not become the dominant model in film production and consumption. Arguably, more cultural explanations come into play when analysing this lack of uptake, as production cultures – both the economic and artistic components – and reception cultures articulate a different (and hegemonic) model of what film should be. This renders *Kinoautomat* an extraordinary cultural object, articulated as a historical avant-garde film experiment (which is to be exhibited) without any strong claims to be part of a contemporary artistry, because of its neo-realist inspiration. The film also becomes articulated as an exceptional event, which is different from the 'normal' cinema experience, and thus becomes a constitutive outside for the regular/mainstream film. *Kinoautomat* thus never could (and still cannot) benefit from being integrated into the normalized movie-going experience, which strongly reduces its potential cultural and ideological impact. *Kinoautomat* does, however, remain a crucial milestone in the history of media participation.

Notes

1. Although Aristotle used the concept of *techné* to refer to the goal "to create what nature finds it impossible to achieve" (Guattari, 1993: 13).
2. James Creech's translation of this book chapter, published in *Rethinking Technologies* (1993), is preferred here to the later book publication.
3. Also in earlier publications, Guattari, together with Deleuze (1984), used the machine concept in a much broader way. See chapter 4 for a short discussion.
4. Mumford's (1934) argument about megamachines, which refers to the use of an organized mass of human bodies to build the pyramids, offers a good example here.
5. I prefer to use the concept of the arrangement here.

6. Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 108 – emphasis in original) formulate this idea as follows:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. [...] What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence.

7. In Norman's (2002) approach they are also seen as readily perceivable.
8. In the case of communities, individual or organizational ownership of media technologies still plays a significant role.
9. To illustrate this briefly: owning a mini-disk offers participatory opportunities, but the connection of the mini-disk to other proto-machines such as a microphone, editing software and broadcasting equipment, within, for instance, the context of a radio station, is equally important.
10. See Abraham (1995), Joss and Durant (1995), Sclove (1995), Epstein (1998), Rowe and Frewer (2000), Phillips (2006), Powell and Kleinman (2006), Király (2007) and Laurent (2009).
11. My warm thanks to Irena Reifová and Ondra Holomek for their much appreciated and indispensable help with the research project. Czech citations were translated into English by Ondra Holomek. I am also grateful to Bob Hunt and Michael Moya, who did some of the research in Canada, and to Maria Bakardjieva for her feedback. The contributions of all the interviewees, and especially Alena Činčerová, have been invaluable. Alena Činčerová offered to provide feedback to a draft version of this chapter, and in a first response she requested a more detailed overview of the film's structure and narration to be removed from this chapter. These parts were effectively removed. A request for additional feedback did not result in a reaction.
12. In the rest of the chapter, *Kinoautomat* will be used, instead of the full title (*Kinoautomat – One man and his house*). When referring to the *Kinoautomat* system (as it was intended to produce more than one film), or to the voice of the *Kinoautomat* in the film, I use regular type.
13. The analysis is based on a series of interviews, combined with archival research in three Czech archives (Moravský Zemský Archiv, Národní Archiv and Národní Filmový Archiv) and in a series of Canadian archives and libraries (Centre Canadien d'Architecture, Montreal's municipal archives, Bibliothèque et Archive Nationale de Québec, McGill University library, Concordia University library and Cinémathèque Québécoise). The following Czechoslovak newspapers and magazines were analysed for reviews: *Filmové a televizní noviny* (1967), *Filmový přehled* (1966–1967, 1971), *Mladá fronta* (1971), *Nová mysl* (1966–1967, 1971), *Svobodné slovo* (1971), *Tvorba* (1966–1967, 1971), *Večerní Praha* (1966) and *Zemědělské noviny* (1966–1967). And the following Canadian newspapers were searched from 28 April 1967 through until the end of May 1967: *Montreal Gazette*, *Montreal Star*, *La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Toronto Telegram*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Calgary Herald*, *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, *The Province (Vancouver)* and *Winnipeg Free Press*.

The following interviews were conducted: Balzer Jan, Producer-assistant of *Kinoautomat*, 9 September 2009; Beneš Jaromír, Historian at Moravský Zemský Archiv, 15 July 2009; Činčerová Alena, daughter of director Radúz Činčera, 30 March 2009 and 19 August 2009; Eigl Jan, Physicist at FAMU, 31 August 2009; Habartík Radim, *Kino Světozor* collaborator, 13 July 2009; Horníček Jiří, Historian at Národní Filmový Archiv, 13 July 2009; Hosman Václav,

- Vice-head of Kinotechnika's AV department, 10 October 2009 and 13 October 2009; Kopal Petr, Historian at Ústav Pro Studium Totalitních Režimů, 25 August 2009; Matula Václav, Constructor and later Head of Constructors in Meopta from the 1950s to the 1990s, 16 August 2009; Neubauerová Zuzana, Stage actor in Montreal and San Antonio, 9 October 2009; Smrž Vladimír, Engineer at Kinotechnika, 24 August 2009; Šofr Jaromír, Cinematographer *Kinoautomat*, 15 June 2009; Svatoňová Kateřina, Researcher Film Department, Faculty of Arts, Charles University Prague, 8 September 2009; and Veselý Jaroslav, responsible for the *Kinoautomat* performance at Kino Světozor in the 1970s, 8 September 2009.
14. Krátký Film was part of the Barrandov Film Studios.
 15. The patent application is dated 26 November 1965; it was granted on 15 April 1967. The patent number was 122758. The document explicitly mentions that all patented inventions are state property, which renders the patent merely symbolic (Úřad pro Patenty a Vynálezy, 1967).
 16. Both the Expo 58 version and the Prague Laterna Magika theatre.
 17. In 1968, the Czechoslovak government donated the main part of the pavilion to Canada, as a gesture of gratitude for the help of rescue workers and medical staff after the crash of a Czechoslovak airliner on 5 September 1967 at Gander International Airport. The Newfoundland Government reconstructed the pavilion and in July 1971 it re-opened as the Grand Falls Arts and Culture Centre (see <http://grandfalls.artsandculturecentre.ca/gphistory.asp>).
 18. See <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/expo/index-e.html>.
 19. Siskind (1967: 14) gives a description of the cartoon:

Mornings the children make their own choices. A live actor draws a bird who enters the cartoon world on the screen, and the young ones (and not-so-young, who enjoy it just as much) decide such world-shattering questions as: 'Should the bird be allowed to learn to fly by himself? Or should the cat be let out of its cage speed the learning up?'
 20. This analysis is based on the DVD version of *Kinoautomat*.
 21. In the live version, the host appears onstage; in the DVD version the host is integrated into the DVD.
 22. The counting of possible combinations is calculated in different ways, as on one occasion the spectator is offered the same choice again. For this reason, Hales (2005: 55) reports only five decision points, while Horníček (1968: 57) mentions six choices. The *Kinoautomat* host (on the DVD) refers explicitly to 32 possible combinations (or five decision points).
 23. In the other scenario the captain has a car accident, and then the bandage makes more sense. From this perspective, the bandage in the other scenario (where they are arrested) could be seen as a continuity problem. But the audience that watches the arrest version has no knowledge of the car accident.
 24. <http://www.meopta.cz>.
 25. Both *Kinoautomat* and *Cineautomat* were mentioned in this registration (number AF0000027719 – see <http://www.copyright.gov/records/>). On 11 March 1996, the copyright protection was renewed.
 26. The trademark registration application was filed on 24 May 1974, and *Kinoautomat* was registered on 26 August 1975, with registration number 1.1018.966. On 19 January 1982, the registration was cancelled under section 8, which meant that the 'declaration of continued use or excusable nonuse' was not filed or rejected (date retrieved through the Trademark Electronic Search System (TESS) of the United States Patent and Trademark Office). In 2008,

Alena Činčerová had the trademark *Kinoautomat* protected by the Czech Industry Property Office (Úřad Průmyslového Vlastnictví, 2008), after a first attempt in 2007 had failed.

27. Most of the changes related to the *Kinoautomat* screenings of the 1970s have disappeared, as Radim Habartík, one of Kino Světozor's collaborators, explains:

Nowadays, there are only few traces of *Kinoautomat* of that era left. The voting equipment was trashed during the reconstruction and I really think it's impossible to find any traces. There was a voting machine in this room, but this box is also not here anymore. There are only a few cables left now. (Radim Habartík at Kino Světozor, on 13 July 2009 interview)

28. Činčera did attempt to have Juráček write another script (a detective story) using the *Kinoautomat* system, but this plan failed (Kopal, 25 August 2009 interview). Matějček (2007: 66) also mentions that the Iranian Empress Farah expressed her interest in bringing a not "too sophisticated" version to Teheran, but this plan also did not materialize. At the 1981 'Portopia' exhibition in Kobe, the *Kinoautomat* principle was used for another film, called *Kouzelná cesta aneb Dobrodružství japonské letušky v Praze a dalších metropolích* (*Charming Trip or The Adventures of a Japanese Air Hostess in Prague and other Cities*).
29. Also a film like *The beast must die* (1974) involved the audience by asking them to consider different options during a 'Werewolf break', but spectators did not have the ability to influence the narration that was screened. In addition, there is a long tradition of creating additional sensorial experiences in the movie theatre. For instance, in the early 1900s, the attraction *Haleš tours and scenes of the world* seated spectators in a theatre that resembled a train carriage, which (in some cases) rocked and where the sounds of railway clatter could be heard (Musser, 1990: 429).
30. Examples on DVD are *Tender loving care* (1997), *Point of view* (2001) and *Switching* (2003). Television examples are the French *Salut les Homards* (1988), the German *Mörderische Entscheidung* (1991), the Danish *D-Day* (2000) and the Finnish *Akvaario* (2000).
31. Within the realm of fan culture and the open source movements, several film projects based on joint self-production have been completed (see Roig Telo, 2009), but these projects fall outside the type of audience participation discussed here.
32. A recent example of an interactive drama video game, which has a high level of narration, is *Heavy Rain*, for PlayStation 3.
33. Hales (2005: 58) suggests that this broadcast version was incomplete.
34. I was able to attend the Offscreen screening of *Kinoautomat*, and witnessed the enthusiastic audience participation.
35. E-mail communication with Miroslava Nezvalová (Bontonfilm production) on 23 October 2009.

Chapter 6

Keyword - Quality



1. A conceptual introduction

1.1 *The concept of quality*

Quality is a pervasive notion that occurs in a wide variety of societal domains. Within the cultural domain its intrinsic articulation with aesthetics, beauty, civilization and culture has produced a Gordian knot that is indeed virtually impossible to untie. At the same time the quality concept, however complex and multi-layered, unavoidably incorporates and invigorates processes of distinction, hierarchization and judgement. While avoiding falling into the trap of the nihilist forms of cultural relativism, this text investigates the possibilities of opening up the quality concept to more political-democratic discourses, which on the one hand show its potential for an articulation of quality within a democratic framework, but on the other also allow for deconstruction of the rigidities of the concept itself.

These rigidities of the quality concept are best exemplified by going back to nineteenth-century (and even older) discourses on culture, where quality is equated with culture. If we take Arnold's famous description of culture in his 1875 preface of *Culture and Anarchy*, for instance, we can see at work the process of fixation combined with the hope of salvation.

The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know on all matters which concern us most, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically [...]. (Arnold, 2004: 2)

Arnold's emphasis on "total perfection" and "the best which has been thought and said in the world" is an example of this nineteenth-century chain of equivalence, where aesthetics, excellence, civilization and culture became articulated as an inseparable whole. This chain also affects the positions of the producer of culture *and* the audience because the artist-producer becomes the generator of excellence, culture and civilization, through

his (and more rarely through her) access to and understanding of the relevant cultural codes (see also chapter 3). The artist-producer's excellence, culture and civilization thus became embedded within the cultural artefact, rendering it part of society's cultural stock. The Aristotelian logic – “Every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well” (Aristotle, 1976: 93) – also connects the (art) audience with the cultural artefact, the artist-producer and the embedded cultural codes, through the generation of aesthetic pleasure. The audience's cultural capital that is already in place facilitates the reading of the cultural codes embedded in the cultural artefact, further enriching the audience's cultural capital, and generating a civilized form of aesthetic ecstasy, which interpellates the audience and brings it into the world of culture and civilization. In his 1914 essay *The Aesthetic Hypothesis*, Bell's (1997: 23) argument is an illustration of these forms of interpellation and incorporation: “The forms of art are inexhaustible; but all lead by the same road of aesthetic emotion to the same world of aesthetic ecstasy”.

As has been argued extensively, this chain of equivalence – articulating aesthetics, excellence, civilization and culture (and including the quality element) – played a key role in supporting the hegemonization of a bourgeois taste culture, through which class (and gender) politics were organized. High culture and aesthetics – supported by the establishment of a cultural canon and the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion – manifested themselves as distinguishing features to legitimize social difference. To use Bourdieu's (1984: 491) words, “What is at stake in aesthetic discourse, and in the attempted imposition of a definition of the genuinely human, is nothing less than the *monopoly of humanity*” (emphasis in original). This process also affected the concepts of excellence and quality, which became instrumental in describing and privileging the cultural product (the work of art). Part of this hegemonization process was the normalization of quality as an internal-inherent characteristic, covering up the workings of the canon and the external-institutional attribution of quality as a labelling practice. (Fully) deciphering these internal-inherent characteristics required what Fiske (1989: 130) calls the critic-priest, who could “control the meanings and responses to the text” and assist in the “formal educational processes by which people are taught how to appreciate ‘great’ art”. Through the intermediation of the critic-priest and the cultural system, quality and excellence contributed to this “attempt by the bourgeoisie to exert the equivalent control over the cultural economy that it does over the financial” (Fiske, 1989: 130).

Interestingly, Fiske's critique on the bourgeois nature of the cultural system is combined with an attempt to re-articulate the quality concept. In his analysis in *Understanding Popular Culture*, he (rather obviously) strongly defends the importance and relevance of popular culture and its audiences, and critiques high culture for its universalizing and hegemonizing ambitions. In a critique of the high arts system, he focuses on the concepts of difficulty and complexity, to show how they are complicit in creating and supporting the low/high cultural hierarchy:

The difficulty or complexity of ‘high’ art is used first to establish its aesthetic superiority to ‘low,’ or obvious, art, and then to naturalise the superior taste and (quality) of those (the educated bourgeoisie) whose taste it meets. (Fiske, 1989: 122)

He then continues to argue that complexity is not the monopoly of high art, based on a combination of audience-based and text-based perspectives. As he puts it, “The complexity of popular texts lies as much in their uses as in the internal structures” (Fiske, 1989: 122). Quality (in popular culture) can be found, for instance, in the “densely woven texture of relationships” (Fiske, 1989: 122) and in the intertextuality of popular culture (Fiske, 1989: 124), but also in the structural openness of popular cultural texts and their ability to leave gaps because they only allude to and “superficially” sketch “in the broadest brush strokes” (Fiske, 1989: 122). These texts that are full of gaps are very demanding of their audiences, who are faced with the difficult and complex task of interpreting them. For instance, “the interior feelings and motivations of a character” have to be inferred from “a raised eyebrow, a downturn at the corner of the mouth, or the inflection of the voice as it speaks the cliché” (Fiske, 1989: 122). This necessitates a knowledgeable and producerly reader who is able to construct a link between the popular culture text and his or her own social experience, to attribute meaning to the text. *Understanding Popular Culture* contains a warm plea to focus on the relevance that popular cultural texts generate for their audiences, in order to understand the modus operandi of popular culture. This already brings us close to an audience-based definition of quality, which Schröder (1992), for instance – building on Fiske – develops further. Schröder (1992: 207) argues that, “The text itself has no existence, no life, and therefore no quality until it is deciphered by an individual and triggers the meaning potential carried by this individual”. Schröder immediately goes on to warn against a too strong emphasis on the sovereignty of audiences to process their own meanings, as “in hierarchical societies culture, and textual readings, are necessarily patterned along class (and other) lines” (Schröder, 1992: 207). But at the same time he (re)introduces the ecstatic dimension of quality, reminiscent of Bell’s (1997: 23) argument about aesthetic ecstasy (see above). In Schröder’s case, this ecstatic dimension refers to the ways that a text speaks to the imaginations of its audience, producing pleasure and popularity. Slightly broadening the scope, I would argue that Schröder defends a quality model that is audience-based.¹

Returning to Fiske, we see that he combines an audience-based approach with a text-based perspective. Through the need for an active audience, combined with textual density and openness, embedded within an intertextual popular culture system, Fiske builds the argument that complexity and quality cannot be limited to high art, but are also characteristics of popular cultural texts. This migration of the quality concept to popular culture can also be found in debates about quality television, although in these cases the concept of quality (in contrast to Fiske’s argument) is often confined to specific types of popular culture products. Being somewhat vague about the concept and without devoting too much time to the relationship between television and documentary, Robert

Thompson's (1996: 59) opening sentence of the *Hill Street Blues* chapter in *Television's Second Golden Age* perfectly summarizes his use of the quality concept: "Sometime in the 1980s, TV became Art".

Within quality TV debates, there is often a careful positioning towards the nature of quality, referring to the social construction of quality and the contextualized nature of the concept. In other cases, the quality TV concept is left undefined, or the focus is on specific programmes, and sidesteps the definition of quality. But some authors do attempt to articulate the quality TV concept. One example is Cardwell (2007: 26), who refers to "certain textual characteristics of content, structure, theme and tone". Focusing on American quality TV in particular, she writes that these programmes tend to "exhibit high production values, naturalistic performance styles, recognised and esteemed actors, a sense of visual style created through careful, even innovative, camerawork and editing, and a sense of aural style created through the judicious use of appropriate, even original music" (Cardwell, 2007: 26). Bignell and Lacey (2005: 72) – talking about television drama – emphasize the Fiskian importance of the audiences' interpretations, and at the same time refer to programmes that are "aesthetically challenging, conducive to social change, or the product of authorial creativity". This brings us to the documentary film tradition, where quality is seen as a similar combination of aesthetics, creativity and social relevance; witness Grierson's seminal definition of the documentary as the "creative treatment of actuality" (Grierson, 1946 – cited in Hardy's introduction to this book).

Both the discussion on aesthetic/artistic quality and the quality TV debate lead us to yet another definition of quality, which focuses more on craftsmanship, and the skills of the producers of cultural artefacts. Within this perspective, the quality of the artefact is derived from the qualities of its producer. This definition overlaps with the approach to aesthetic/artistic quality, given the link between the artist-producer and the cultural artefact through the access to cultural codes, but this overlap is only partial. This brings us to the difficult relationship between arts and craft, as thematized, for instance, by Collingwood. Collingwood (1968: 18) does accept that an artist (like a poet) is "a kind of skilled producer; he produces for consumers; and the effect of his skill is to bring about in them certain states of mind". At the same time he resists what he considers the reduction of the artist to craftsman, through the "technical theory of art", which he considers a "vulgar error, as anybody can see who looks at it with a critical eye" (Collingwood, 1968: 19). Although the debate becomes more complicated for the applied arts, and in the age of mechanical reproduction, Collingwood argues for a difference on the basis of a characteristic of the cultural artefact, more specifically on the basis of its level of individualization. While "the craftsman's skill is his knowledge of the means necessary to realise a given end, and his mastery of these means" (Collingwood, 1968: 28), "the end which a craft sets out to realise is always conceived in general terms, never individualised" (Collingwood, 1968: 113).

Despite these differences, the craftsman is still able to generate quality. Collingwood's examples of the craftsman (who is 'like the physician') illustrate the connection between

quality as a characteristic of a producer, and the notion of the profession. As McQuail (2008: 53) argues, the notion of the profession combines the possession of a core skill, which requires a high level of education and training in a number of sub-skills (including technical skills), with a set of other characteristics, including the ethic of service towards clients and society, autonomy, detachment, and (potentially) the idea of vocation or calling. These characteristics (at least partially) distinguish profession from occupation, protect the profession from being (totally) colonized by the economic system, emphasize its (additional) societal relevance and status, and provide guarantees of the production of quality outcomes. But these outcomes are (as Collingwood has argued) general and skills-based. This distinguishes aesthetic/artistic quality from what I will call here professional quality: Mastering the means aimed at the generation of professional quality has no individualized ends (such as producing aesthetic ecstasy); the outcome is based on the general qualities of the producer, which in turn, become embedded in the cultural artefacts.

In the field of media production, the concept of professional or creative craftsmanship (Brown, 1987, quoted in Schröder, 1992) is still used, for instance by the media industry. Support for this statement can be found in Bignell and Lacey's (2005: 71) statement that explicitly links producer skills in the television industry with quality: "Within the television industry, quality refers to the lavishness of budgets, the skills of programme makers and performers, and the prestige accruing to programmes because of their audience profile and seriousness of purpose." This professional identity construction – and the way it relates to other identities like ordinary people (see chapter 3) – of course has been thoroughly questioned, by alternative and community media discourses and new media discourses (both of which point to the craftsmanship of ordinary people). However, professional or creative craftsmanship has not disappeared from the media sphere. Bignell and Lacey's statement, for example, illustrates that the notion of professional quality can transcend the functioning of the individual craftsman-media professional. One obvious illustration of this is the concept of the quality newspaper, which allows the quality concept to span the operations of entire media organizations. (Professional) quality continues to be produced through the interplay of skills, ethics, autonomy, vocation and relevance, and the (mastery of) means is still deployed towards generalized ends, but these characteristics are seen as being held by organizations (and not by individuals).

In some definitions of quality, these production values and ethics become disconnected from their producers in order to emphasize the relevance of the cultural artefacts for society. Here, quality becomes grounded in the beneficial societal impact the cultural artefact produces, which can be situated at many different levels. For instance, what Schröder calls the ethic dimension of quality can be included in this category because this dimension emphasizes the role of cultural artefacts to "[*expand*] the individual viewer's vision of what the human condition, in its multiple manifestations along lines of class, race, gender, age, etc., is and can be" and "to have actualised the individual viewer's meaning potential to explore alternatives to entrenched and oppressive ways of seeing" (Schröder, 1992: 212). Although sometimes articulated as a characteristic of an entire media sphere (e.g., diversity),

often specific types of media content are seen as privileged sites for producing this type of societal impact. For instance, the cultural significance attached to mediated information in creating and sustaining an informed citizenry is often legitimized through this type of quality definition. (Hard) news then becomes the materialization of the Enlightenment ideologies that structure articulations of this type of quality, although similar arguments have been developed about popular culture. In labelling this quality model, I prefer to use the concept of social quality, inspired by the (reasonably) recent use of this concept within the field of social policy and community development (despite its differences²) (see Beck et al., 1997, 2001; Phillips and Berman, 2003).

A final quality concept is technological quality. Again, it is an industry-based concept, and refers – more than professional quality – to the technologies that were/are used to produce or distribute cultural artefacts, or to render them visible or audible. While professional quality is grounded in the characteristics of individuals (or organizations), technological quality tends to bracket human interventions and focus on the use of specific proto-machines for the generation, distribution or visualization of cultural artefacts (see chapter 5). Although a multi-dimensional and highly contextualized concept, these specific proto-machines are considered to be quality artefacts within present-day technology-saturated societies when they are born out of a professionalized and standardized production process, when design objectives and actual usage opportunities are aligned, when they do justice to the cultural artefact they distribute, and when they can be defined as stable and reliable, state-of-the-art and innovative (without being experimental). At the same time, technological quality cannot be detached from the culturally dominant discourse of (technological) progress, which frames what can be considered state-of-the-art and innovative and what should be considered outdated and insignificant. More (but not exclusively) than is the case with other concepts of quality, the concept of technological quality is affected by the operations of the market, which often results in a conflation of quality with commercial success and degree of adoption.

If we compare aesthetic/artistic, audience-based, professional, social and technological quality, and the ways that these concepts of quality are being used within the diversity of media landscapes, there are obviously many differences. A key distinguishing component in these different variations of the quality concept is the location of quality. While aesthetic/artistic quality focuses on the cultural artefact, celebrating the autonomy of the artefact (without erasing the importance of the artist-producer), professional and technological quality displace the location of quality. In the case of professional quality, the professional producer and her or his characteristics become the locus of attention. In the case of technological quality, the technology itself becomes the location of quality. Here, the cultural artefact becomes disconnected from the (technological) quality concept. Finally, audience-based and social quality also move away from the cultural artefact, and locate quality in what the cultural artefact does or offers to its audiences or its society. Figure 1 provides an overview of these five models of quality and their privileged locations.

Figure 1: Models of quality.

	<i>Producer</i>		<i>Artefact</i>		<i>Reception</i>
Aesthetic/ artistic	Artist-producer with access to cultural codes	⇐	Individualized and culturally relevant cultural artefact	⇒	Knowledgeable and ecstatic audience (through the mediation of critic- priest) <i>(Audience knowledge and pleasure)</i>
Professional	Craftsmanship and professional skills (individual and organization)	⇒	Skills embedded in general cultural artefact		
Audience-based	<i>(Serving or pleasing the audience)</i>		Consumed cultural artefact	⇐	Audience pleasure and popularity
Social	<i>(Socially responsible producer)</i>		Socially relevant cultural artefact	⇐	Desirable societal impact
Technological	Focus on producer of technology (and not of cultural artefacts)	⇐	Technological artefact	⇒	Consuming technology

Note: Italics indicate less prominent articulations.

Despite these differences, these concepts have many similarities. In the context of this analysis of quality, their stability and their retained focus on the artefact (directly or displaced) are especially important. In the above-described approaches, quality is still often seen as stable, as taken for granted and almost universal, often covering up the external-institutional attribution of quality and its always particular articulations. Also, the artefact still takes a key position. In the aesthetic/artistic quality approach, quality remains closely connected to the cultural artefact, but in the technological quality approach also, the artefact is privileged, although in this case the technological artefact replaces the cultural artefact (without wanting to claim that technology is outside culture). In the case of professional quality, the focus is diverted from the artefact. But the artefact reappears through the craftsmanship of the producers, whose professional quality guarantees the artefact's quality. And in the audience-based and social quality concept, the cultural artefact is considered the trigger of the audience's *jouissance* or the instigator of desirable social impacts.

These commonalities serve to close off other meanings of quality. The focus on stability tends to hide the constructed and changeable nature of quality, and the focus on the artefact reduces the significance of process-based approaches to quality. One way to emphasize these components is to develop a more democratic-political approach towards quality, focusing on the democratic nature of the production process and its

outcomes. The concept of social quality elaborated above holds particular promise of a more democratic-political re-articulation of the quality concept, which also allows the notion of quality to be linked to participation.

1.2 Opening up the quality concept: Democratic quality

The social quality model discussed above allows for a more political-democratic articulation that emphasizes the importance of participatory-democratic processes (and outcomes) as the criterion for quality, and focuses more on the (participatory nature of the) production process. In line with its political and democratic nature, this concept is termed democratic quality. This concept (like the quality concept in general) is not without its complexities, mainly because the existence of minimalist and maximalist articulations of democracy and participation affects the concept of democratic quality. In this chapter, these complexities are bracketed in order to allow a broad overview (or typology) of media practices that enhance democracy and participation, whether they be more minimalist or more maximalist. Nevertheless, the preference for more maximalist preferences, which is the key normative (phantasmatic) position in this book, persists.

This broader typology has been fed by an action research project, which evaluated a series of Belgian mainstream media projects that aimed to democratize media content and media production processes. This action research project was integrated into the King Baudouin Foundation's (KBS) 'Media and Citizens' campaign, and resulted (among a series of other publications) in a bilingually published version of a typology of democratic media practices. This first typology was based on a literature review of the media and democracy field, combined with an explicit focus on a number of journalistic reform projects, such as new journalism, human-interest journalism, peace journalism, development journalism and public journalism (Carpentier et al., 2002). In a second phase of this media and citizens campaign, this typology was translated into media practice, with two juries (independent of the KBS) selecting 22 participatory media projects,³ eleven from each language group/region, which were being subsidized by the KBS.⁴ These projects were evaluated in the third phase of the campaign (Carpentier and Grevisse, 2004). The last two phases of the project were devoted to further enriching the typology.

In this text, I revisit the original typology of democratic media practices as it was published in the reader *Reclaiming the Media* (Carpentier, 2007a). This typology consists of four clusters: the strictly informative cluster, the representation of the social cluster (focusing on a community and its subgroups), the representation of the political cluster, and the participatory cluster. Its twelve dimensions are illustrative of the variety and breadth of the arsenal of methods and practices that are available to increase what is seen as the democratic quality of media. Since it is aimed at supporting democratic change, each of the typology's components is articulated as a dimension, with two poles. Thus,

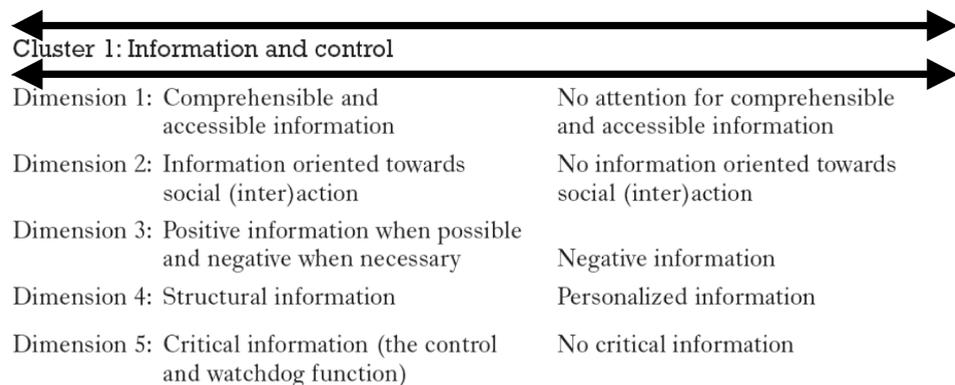
the need to obtain a balance between the poles of each dimension, and between the different dimensions, is structurally integrated into the typology. At the same time, this typology contains a large number of options, many of which are difficult to implement at the same time. For that reason, the typology is framed as an *à la carte* menu.

1.2.1 Cluster 1: Information and control

Cluster 1 focuses on the importance of specific information characteristics in order to increase the democratic quality of mainstream media output. Obviously, one should keep in mind that information is not a neutral concept, and that it is epistemologically impossible to map the exact boundaries between ‘factual’ information and the representations that information contains. Factuality builds on representational regimes that are unavoidable in terms of their presence, are varied in nature, and at the same time are targeted by hegemonic projects. But it still remains possible to elaborate (factual) information characteristics that can strengthen the democratic quality of media output. Figure 2 provides an overview of these characteristics.

The first dimension formulates a necessary condition for all democratic communication, namely its comprehensibility and accessibility, in order to overcome the mechanisms of exclusion. The next three dimensions (each in its own way) are related to empowerment of the audience. Information oriented to social (inter)action (dimension 2) makes it possible – as affirmed by Puissant (2000: 28) in his comments on the instruments of public journalism – to “systematically inform people about all the occasions they are given to participate in discussions and civil activities [*considered relevant*]”. This kind of information pays attention to initiatives from within civil society, aimed at complementing information on the political system.

Figure 2: Cluster 1 of democratic quality.



Source: Carpentier (2007a: 168).

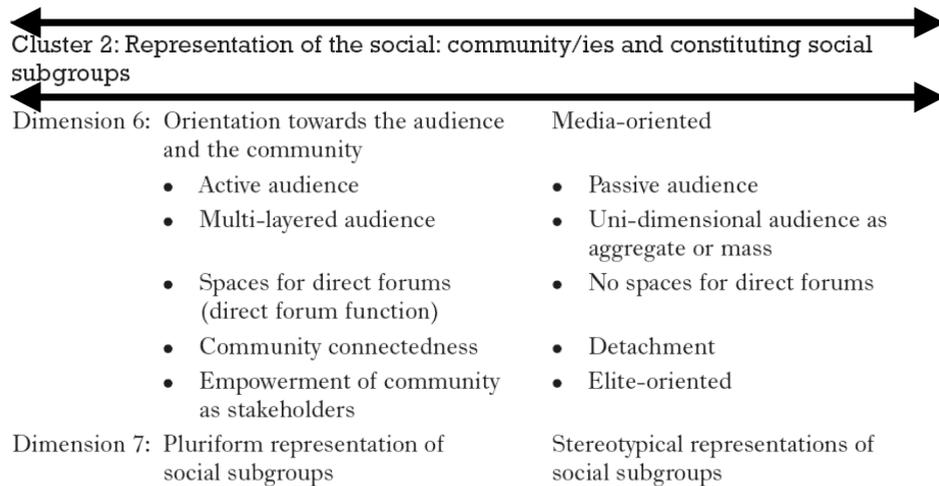
Positive information (dimension 3) also encompasses an action-oriented component in the form of giving “large and small examples of people who had made some difference” (Merritt, 1995: 89). This is based on the argument that an overload of negative information would not validate, motivate or stimulate citizens’ active engagement. Structural information (dimension 4) allows audiences to contextualize news events and to see them as parts of long-term evolutions and social phenomena. Although structural information is often seen as contrasted to personalized information, underestimation of the socio-political value of private and/or individual experiences does not serve democratic communication. This structural information dimension is related to the fifth dimension, which focuses on critical information and reveals dysfunctions within the functioning of the state and the market.

These five dimensions of the strictly informative cluster are positioned within a complex field of tension towards each other, and towards their abilities to increase democratic quality. As already mentioned, these dimensions (and the entire typology) should be seen, therefore, as a scale. The significance of more comprehensible information is not a desire for a retreat into simplicities, nor is it trying (completely) to undermine the expert status. Similarly, the emphasis on communication that stimulates social (inter)action should not be interpreted as legitimization for a narrowing-down (or dumbing-down) of the information on the political system. Finally, the importance of positive news should not be used as an excuse to (further) reduce more critical journalism. This typology of media practices aimed at reinforcing democratic quality structurally incorporates a permanent need for a balancing of more traditional practices with some of the alternatives introduced here.

1.2.2 Cluster 2: Representation of the social: Community/ies and constituting social subgroups

The second component of the democratic quality typology focuses on a representational logic through the importance attached to fair representations of societal subgroups and their recognition. Here, society is considered a conglomerate of all types of individuals (including ordinary people, but also the diversity of societal elites) and subgroups, small- and large-scale communities, criss-crossed by differences related to class, ethnicity, age and gender. The democratic importance of respectfully representing the citizenry within public spaces should not remain confined, however, to the individual level. Representing citizenship includes the creation of imaginaries of citizens organizing themselves in order to rationally and emotionally defend their (collective) interests and develop a series of public activities from within civil society. It is this complex combination of individuals and collectivities, groups, communities, organizations, and societal categories that shapes the nation as an ‘imagined’ (Anderson, 1983), or as a political community. Participation in and through the media plays a key role in this second cluster, through the importance attributed to self-representation in contributing to these processes of respectful representation.

Figure 3: Cluster 2 of democratic quality.



Source: Carpentier (2007a: 168).

Cluster 2 (Figure 3) includes two very specific dimensions: on the one hand, an orientation towards the audience and the community (dimension 6), and on the other hand, the importance of pluriform representations (dimension 7). An increase in media’s democratic quality can be achieved first through a focus on their audiences and communities, rather than a medium-oriented – one might also say a self-centred – approach. At the same time, it is necessary to take the complex, situated and multi-layered meaning of the signifier audience into account (see chapter 1). Putting these complex and active audiences at the centre of the media organizations’ attention allows them to be articulated as directly concerned stakeholders, and enables media organizations to increase their community connectedness.

The seventh dimension starts from the (representation of) specific (misrepresented) groups. Based on the equality argument, access to, and interaction and participation in the media landscape for/of all social groups is seen as a component of democratic quality. Likewise, the right of these social groups to feel correctly represented is also to be included. This seventh dimension includes the mere presence of members of different social subgroups, avoiding what Tuchman (1978) refers to as their symbolic annihilation. The next step is to focus on their active presence, avoiding their (literal) disappearance into the background. The third component is the avoidance of stereotypes.⁵ Smelik and her colleagues (1999: 45) summarize these components by contrasting forms of stereotypical representation with the notion of what they call “pluriform representation”. Here, members of misrecognized groups are actively present. Moreover, the duality of the oppositions that characterize stereotypes is deconstructed, thereby enabling a

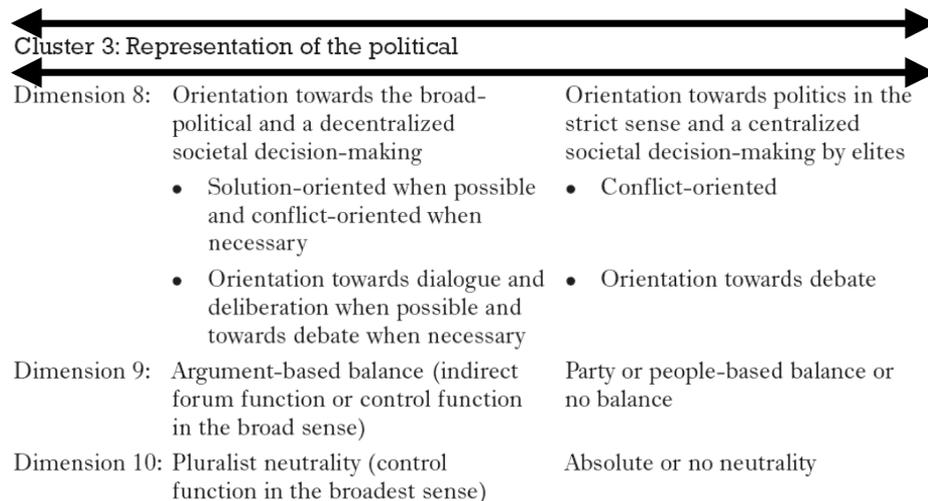
greater diversity of societal representations. Hall (1997a: 274) adds to the list of possible strategies the importance of working from within the complexities and ambiguities of representation. In other words, he is pleading for “contest[ing stereotypes] from within”.

1.2.3 Cluster 3: Representation of the political

The representation of political and democratic practices *an sich* is also important in this typology on democratic quality. Chapter 1 devoted much attention to the complexity of the political, and there is no need to reiterate these arguments in detail here. It suffices to point to the broad definition of the political, which brings to the foreground the maximalist definitions of democracy. In this third cluster, the contribution of media organizations to the enhancement of democracy is located at the level of representational logics that pay attention to the broad-political and do not restrict attention to the key component of minimalist democracy, that is, the political system. This cluster thus implies fair and respectful representation of the political itself, without a reversion of media organizations to the reductionism of minimalist democracy. Also, media organizations themselves are seen as part of the political, and as crucial agents in the defence of the general principles of democracy.

There are three dimensions of the typology on democratic quality in Cluster 3 (Figure 4). The more general dimension, which covers the orientation towards a broad political and decentralized societal decision-making (dimension 8), is complemented

Figure 4: Cluster 3 of democratic quality.



Source: Carpentier (2007a: 169).

by two rather more specific dimensions: providing an argument-based balance (dimension 9), and defence of the values considered universalized, here described as pluralist neutrality⁶ (dimension 10). Dimension 8 refers to the importance of societal deliberation, dialogue and debate. Democratic quality is enhanced by avoiding reduction of the political to the political system, and of news and information to hard news. At the same time, more solution-oriented approaches are also supportive of democratic quality. But this text cannot be seen as an overly simplified plea for the dialogue/deliberation model and the solution-oriented model, which again would contradict the ambition to avoid a dichotomization of the typology. Democratic quality is served by a more balanced approach between dialogue/deliberation and debate, between (information regarding) social consensus and social conflict, and between (information about) solutions and problems. In a mediated context, respect for democratic quality would not lead to banning issues from being represented as conflicts, but they could only be represented as such if these issues actually occur within the framework of a (serious) conflict. And, even in that situation, attention for and efforts made towards conflict resolution remain necessary, combined with an effective representation of a diversity of opinions, without generating polarization (a requirement articulated in peace journalism).

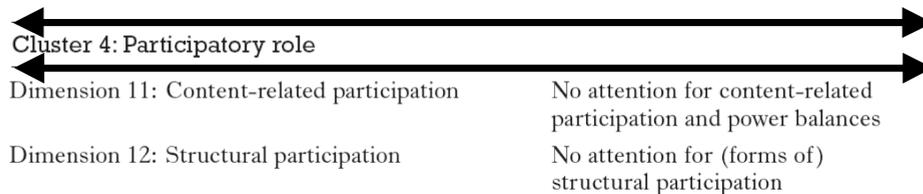
The notions of dialogue/deliberation and debate can be applied also to two basic components of the media professional's identity, namely the striving for balance (dimension 9) and for neutrality (dimension 10). This allows a re-articulation of these components in a way that is supportive of social deliberation, dialogue and debate. The ninth dimension links democratic quality to a more argument-based balance (as opposed to a party- or person-related balance) in media representations (as is found, for instance, in journalism). This dimension is strongly related to the theoretical reflections on deliberation, where the arguments (and not the persons) take a central position. The application of these reflections implies that the social diversity of discourses and arguments, and the context within which they are situated, is taken into account.

The tenth dimension directs the focus towards the ideological-normative context. Especially in journalistic reform projects, such as public journalism and development journalism, neutrality is said to be no longer valid in situations where the values that are considered universalized are under threat. Democratic quality then consists of the active protection of these values. Examples of universalizable values in this context are not completely unrestricted. The values I would mention here are democracy (and the resistance against dictatorship and tyranny), peace (and the resistance against war and violence), freedom (and the resistance against human rights violations), equality (and the resistance against discrimination) and justice (and the resistance against oppression and social inequality).

1.2.4 Cluster 4: The participatory role

The fourth cluster of this typology is participation, which has been discussed extensively in this book (Figure 5). The argument here is that increased levels of content-related and structural participation in and through the media are significant components of democracy quality. Opening up the media sphere allows citizens greater participation in it. This cluster is seen also as a dimension, which has maximalist participation in the media sphere at one side, and evolves, through minimalist participation to no participation at all.

Figure 5: Cluster 4 of democratic quality.



Source: Carpentier (2007a: 169).

2. Case 1: 16plus, Barometer and the rejection of participatory products

2.1 Introduction

In this case study the reception of two north Belgian participatory media products is used to illustrate the significance of the quality concept for debates on participation. The first is situated in the world of ‘new’ media, and concerns a YouTube-like online platform called *16plus*. The second is *Barometer*, the TV programme that was discussed in chapter 2. In both cases, the reception study shows little enthusiasm or downright rejection on the part of their audiences, although the focus group members use a maximalist (and almost contradictory) discourse of media democracy, and fiercely critique the mainstream media and their professionals. Through an analysis of these multi-layered audience receptions, this case study shows that participatory practices are not unconditionally appreciated by audience members, but are subject to specific structuring elements that are related to the notion of quality. To different degrees, this case study shows the importance of quality for the evaluation of participatory practices.

2.2 *The reception of participatory media products*

16plus was one of VRT's (the north Belgian public broadcaster) online platforms, which began netcasting in March 2006, and became a clear local alternative to YouTube or Google Video: "After 'blogging' (keeping an internet diary), 'vlogging' is now on the rise: putting your own video movies on the internet. From now on Flemish youth do not have to visit one or another English-language website like video.google.com or youtube.com. They can publish their work for free on a site which is designed especially for them" (VRT 2006a – my translation). VRT's 2006 *Annual Report* mentions that *16plus* shows that "Flemish alternatives for YouTube can be successful" (VRT 2006b: 51 – my translation). Its success was relative, however, since almost two years after its launch, *16plus* had stored some 3180 items (count on 15 March 2008). The number of visitors was higher: Nico Verplancke⁷ mentions 120,000 unique visitors in the first seven months of *16plus*'s existence, although in October 2006 (when the nine groups – see below – uploaded their Science Week projects) the number of visitors was low (1027 unique visitors). Nevertheless, *16plus* established its relevance through collaboration with one of VRT's radio stations, Studio Brussel, which broadcast some of the music produced by *16plus* participants. Most famously, one of these participants (Liam Chan) was 'discovered' by *16plus* and Studio Brussel, and received a contract offer from EMI. But these modest successes were not enough to prevent VRT from closing the *16plus* website at the end of 2009.⁸

Given the abundance of choice of available material and the angle taken in this chapter, a selection was made based on material produced by clearly inexperienced non-professionals, who were experimenting for the first time with the participatory opportunities being offered to them. Nine films were selected, resulting from the work of nine groups of youths, who received some video training at the 7th *Flemish Science Week*⁹ (which took place between 23 and 27 October 2006) within a small Institute for Broadband Technology (IBBT) project, in collaboration with *16plus*. The nine films, which range in length from 2 minutes 31 seconds to 12 minutes 12 seconds, are *Ways of Eating*, *The Shopping Ladies*, *Drinking*, *Multicultural Ledeberg*,¹⁰ *The Commandments of Nonsense*, *Buttocks in Belgium*, *Colourful Ledeberg*, *Fashion* and *Everyday Life in Ghent*. The formats used in these films are all fairly similar, and consist of a collage of interviews on the street, and in shops, with a diversity of people, some simply refusing to be interviewed, others patiently answering questions like "Imagine that next year, New Year's Day would be on a Friday, and even on Friday the 13th?" (a question in *The Commandments of Nonsense*, related to superstition). The sound quality of the films in many cases makes them rather difficult to understand, and in at least one case (*Fashion*) spots of rain on the camera lens are clearly visible. The films do not all have an introduction, or a clear storyline, and the relationships between the different parts are not always explained.

As their titles indicate, the content of the nine films is focused very much on everyday life. The films allow the viewer to look at 'normal' scenes of everyday life, that are without

added layers of aestheticization or narrative structure typical of more professional media products. Instead we get to see the raw data of the everyday, without much decoration. The camera wanders from conversation to conversation, engaging in everyday chit-chat, shying away from the spectacular, talking about (as most people do for much of the time¹¹) the small things in life. In this sense, the camera becomes a little *flâneur* that observes (with some distance and detachment) what de Certeau (1984) calls the discreteness or the singularities of everyday life.¹²

The nine films offer us a series of perspectives on the structure of everyday life, with its habits and repetitions embedded in culture, but they do not add much narrative structure to these everyday life structures. Arguably (and without disregarding the importance of conversations, narrations and myths relating to everyday life), everyday life cannot really be restricted to the narrative. We find support for this position in de Certeau's (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, when he writes that "stories' provide the decorative container of a *narrativity* for everyday practices. To be sure, they describe only fragments of these practices. They are no more than its metaphors" (de Certeau 1984: 70 – emphasis in original). Not only is a large part of the practices of everyday life constituted of material ways of operating such as walking, dwelling and cooking (de Certeau 1984: xix), these practices of everyday life also resist (discursive) representation because they are characterized by a mobility that "adjusts them to a diversity of objectives and 'coups,' without their being dependent on a verbal elucidation" (de Certeau, 1984: 45).

Apart from issues related to the (de)narrativization of everyday life, these films are also modest attempts to address the politicization of everyday life. Hidden within the de-narrativized representations of everyday life, we find in the nine films the very subtle presence of a number of political-ideological dimensions, which show the political nature of the everyday. The films deal with a multicultural society and its linguistic diversity, with resistance towards the consumerism embedded in the fashion industry, with the sexual politics of birth control, and with the popular resistance against non-sexist attitudes (through the telling of jokes), but also with the Foucauldian micro-politics of the university, where it is not just students who (are invited to) talk about their drinking, but also an individual introduced as a Ghent 'professor',¹³ resulting in the following interview:

'Professor': I'm not sure if it is true that they [*the students*] drink this much. Actually, I wouldn't exaggerate it.

Interviewer: And in the days you were a student, was it like that as well?

'Professor': It happened that I [...] yes [...] went over the line, yes (drinking).

The analysis is based on a combination of interviews with three media professionals,¹⁴ and qualitative content analysis of the nine films and fifteen focus group discussions. The focus group discussions¹⁵ were organized at the end of 2007 and analysed using qualitative analysis techniques. In each of the focus groups, two or three of the nine films

were screened and then discussed, by a total of 131 respondents, whose discussions were moderated by primary and secondary moderators.¹⁶ Internal homogeneity was based on educational level and age, while an equal distribution was achieved (across focus groups) on the basis of sex and region.¹⁷ Figure 6 provides an overview of the four clusters of the focus group discussions; in each cluster (except cluster 3) four focus groups were organized based on a young/old (Y/O) and lower education/higher education (L/H) matrix.

Figure 6: The *16plus* focus groups.

<i>Cluster 1</i> (FG1-4)				<i>Cluster 2</i> (FG5-8)				<i>Cluster 3</i> (FG9-11)			<i>Cluster 4</i> (FG12-15)			
Y/L	Y/H	O/L	O/H	Y/L	Y/H	O/L	O/H	Y/L	Y/H	O/L	Y/L	Y/H	O/L	O/H
Everyday Life in Ghent				The Shopping Ladies				Ways of Eating			The Commandments of Nonsense			
Multicultural Ledeborg				Colourful Ledeborg				Drinking			Buttocks in Belgium			
The Commandments of Nonsense				Fashion										

The second subcase is based on the access TV programme *Barometer*, which was broadcast in 2002 on VRT's TV1 channel, and which was introduced in chapter 2. Again, I exploit a combination of interviews with media professionals,¹⁸ and qualitative content analysis of programme episodes¹⁹ and focus group discussions. For the focus groups, a selection was made (based on thematic diversity) of four episodes from the first series. These four episodes were broadcast on 30 April, 7 May, 14 May and 28 May 2002. Fourteen focus group discussions were organized, with a total of 122 respondents. Similar to the *16plus* case, primary and secondary moderators were involved,²⁰ and internal homogeneity was based on educational level and age and an equal distribution (across focus groups) on the basis of sex and region.²¹ Figure 7 provides an overview of the four clusters of the focus group discussions, again based on a young/old and lower education/higher education matrix, in combination with the topics of the *Barometer* episode that they were shown.

Figure 7: The *Barometer* focus groups.

Cluster 1 (FG1-4)				Cluster 2 (FG5-6)		Cluster 3 (FG7-10)				Cluster 4 (FG11-14)			
Y/L	Y/H	O/L	O/H	Y/L	Y/H	Y/L	Y/H	O/L	O/H	Y/L	Y/H	O/L	O/H
30 April 2002				7 May 2002		14 May 2002				28 May 2002			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practising firemen • A 16-year-old happy mother • A practical joke involving a traffic light • A mucoviscidosis patient receiving a pair of new lungs • A complaint against rack renters • Elderly skydivers 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ode to the potato • A reaction to the “complaint against rack renters” film • Enjoy life, with measure • Five generations of women • Physically challenged on horseback • Love in a home for the elderly 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in the restaurant and cafe business • Children playing music with garbage • Baby with slow-growing right hand • Farmer has his cow consecrated • A reaction to the “physically challenged on horseback” film • UFO experiences 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mastectomy • Clean streets • Women’s football • The Lets system • A reaction to the “cutting trees” film • The elderly back to school 			

2.3 16plus

2.3.1 Focus group critiques on 16plus

The *16plus* focus group respondents argue at length about why they disliked the nine films, in a number of cases describing them as banal. For instance, Yvette (F, 60y, H, 16plusFG3²²) summarizes her critique on the interviewing as follows: “there was actually no single important question. These are all banal things. They are banal things”. Watching the films sometimes provoked harsh comments, such as the following statement from Alain (M, 52y, H, 16plusFG7): “The main advantage of these films is that they are short”. Some even doubted the authenticity of the films: “They are so amateurish. I even got the impression that they did that on purpose, it was so over the top [...] That’s my impression” (Danielle, F, 50y, H, 16plusFG7). The negative evaluations of the focus group respondents focused on three components of the films: the level of the content, the reasons for making the films and (especially) the formal qualities of the nine films.

At the level of content (the focus on everyday life), the respondents pointed to lack of relevance and usefulness, which can be interpreted as a lack of social quality. Shari (F, 17y, H, 16plusFG2), for instance, says, “Yeah, I really don’t understand what the use is”. Their irrelevance is related to the poor educational and informational level of the films

shown to the respondents, illustrated by a (again ironic) fragment from one of the focus group discussions.

Hendrik (M, 20y, L, 16plusFG1): It wasn't that educational. I didn't really learn something from it, I think.

Jan (M, 17y, L, 16plusFG1): Well, I do know a new joke now.

Dries (M, 17y, L, 16plusFG1): Yes, maybe so.

Joran (M, 18y, L, 16plusFG1): Which one? I've already forgotten it.

Similarly, the focus of the films on everyday life provoked comparisons with holiday pictures, which positions these films firmly in the realm of the private, and again can be considered symptomatic of the perceived low social quality of the films.

The second component of the films that was critiqued is related to the (perceived) motives of the producers. Here, the banality of the films is attributed to the producers being bored and having nothing else to do, or to their ambition to be noticed, as illustrated by Dries's quote (M, 17y, L, 16plusFG1): "These are people that want to be noticed and put something on the Internet". The 'killing time' argument is used by Anneke (F, 34y, H, 16plusFG2), when she says, "It's difficult to have an opinion about it, because there is really no contribution. There was nothing in it, there was no content. There was [...] it was just killing time".

The aesthetic and technical quality of the film was the third focus of major critique from the respondents who argued either that there are no real topics or content, or that topics are treated very superficially. At the same time they launched an avalanche of more formal and damning critiques. The films were described as poorly filmed (with the raindrops on the camera lens receiving frequent mention), the framing and editing of the films was seen as problematic, and the poor sound quality was heavily criticized. In general, they were judged to lack aesthetic quality. The respondents referred to the lack of narrative structure and focus, and to the poor preparation and research of the producers ("They are just improvising" (An, F, 23y, H, 16plusFG6)), a criticism that was reinforced by their condemnation of use of dialects and the sloppy appearance of the films' producers. One of the respondents concluded that they were not even trying: "But it is apparently not even their ambition to deliver something good, because they are not making their best effort" (Dorien, F, 21y, L, 16plusFG1).

On many occasions, the perceived lack of aesthetic and technical quality is juxtaposed with the quality of professional media productions. Here, professional quality acts as a constitutive outside that provides the discursive framework for disapproval of amateur productions. Max (M, 20y, L, 16plusFG10), for instance, describes what would be necessary improve the quality of the films: "Everything [*needs to change*]. The sound and the images [...] It needs to be recorded by a decent camera, and the sound should be recorded by a sound engineer, and the editing should be done by an editor. Somebody specialized".

2.3.2 *Focus group discourses that legitimize 16plus*

Despite the consensus on the poor formal and content-related qualities of the nine films, a number of discourses emerged that legitimize the existence of these films, most of which are related to democratic quality and the importance attributed to participation. However banal these films are perceived to be, the respondents were quick to agree about the democratic right of ordinary producers to create and publish films like these. They pointed to the importance of the learning process for the producers, and the pleasure it generates (for the producers though – not necessarily for their audiences). These legitimizing discourses also use the professional media as a constitutive outside, but this time for critiquing mainstream media as manipulated and unreal(istic).

The discourses of pedagogics and pleasure are reasonably straightforward legitimizations of the films. On the one hand, the respondents refer to the learning process and the ability of the producers to improve their skills (as part of a learning-by-doing process, or through the feedback they receive). As Fabio (M, 26y, H, FG6) puts it, “Who knows, they might put together a perfect one and a half hour film in 10 years time”. The respondents also speculated about the possibility that the films were a school assignment, and part of a more institutionalized learning process. It was interesting also that some of the older focus group respondents referred to their own learning process as ‘film amateurs’ (using 8-millimetre cameras). At the same time, the respondents point to the pleasure that the producers had derived from making these films, and the ability of producers to be creative. Jos (M, 49y, H, FG7) formulates this as follows: “The question also is whether we should always strive for the high arts [...] My first impression also was: they are just messing about, but these people have actually been quite creative. They weren’t just consuming, they were having fun”. Another element of this discourse is the pleasure generated by showing one’s film outputs to members of one’s own social networks.

The respondents referred also to a discourse of democracy, freedom and empowerment as legitimation for the existence of these films. The producers were deemed to be free to exert their democratic right to publish the material, and infringement of that right was often immediately decried as censorship, and rejected. The democratic rights discourse is combined with an emphasis on ordinary people, as these films were seen as ways to provide media access to ordinary people for both the youth who produced the films and for the people who featured in them. Despite the debates caused by the complexities of the concept ‘ordinary people’, the respondents point to the authenticity and spontaneity of the films, which, in turn, are seen as a way to ‘really’ represent reality. The access of ordinary people to the media then becomes a privileged way to achieve a realist portrayal of everyday life, as summarized by Jos (M, 49y, H, 16plusFG7): “but I also think that [...] at the beginning it looks like nothing, but now, by talking and thinking about it [...] it is a very realist image”.

The discourses of pedagogics, pleasure and democracy are complemented by a fourth discourse that legitimizes the existence of these films by reverting to the outside identities of media professionals and mainstream media organizations. In contrast to the argument set out above about professional quality (which discredits amateur producers), the discourse of professionalization is a side-swipe at media professionals and mainstream media organizations, through which the nine films gain importance and legitimacy. Eva's (F, 25y, H, FG6) brief remark bears witness to this logic of difference: "It's just a forum to show things that do not reach us through the television or newspaper [...]" The nine films are deemed not only different but also more real and authentic because they are subjective (whilst professional journalists are seen as having to be neutral), because the ordinary people featured in the films gain unmediated access, without "words being put in their mouths" by "professional journalists" (Tiny, F, 83y, L, FG11), and because they are not part of a commercialized media system focused on the spectacular, which is fiercely critiqued in the focus groups. Through these differences, the authenticity and realism of the non-professional films becomes valued. In the professional media system, ordinary people are seen as victims of media professionals: "Even if they show ordinary people in the media, on television, they can do with them what they want to" (Muriel, F, 17y, L, FG5).

2.4 Barometer

2.4.1 Focus group critiques on Barometer

In contrast to the reception focus groups of *16plus*, the *Barometer* respondents' criticisms were less emphatic about aesthetic and technical quality problems and the problems related to the motives of the film-makers. These groups focused more on lack of social quality. Although the respondents expressed their appreciation of the programme, they were generally unenthusiastic about *Barometer*, whose relevance was repeatedly questioned. The respondents were generally neutral or indifferent about the programme, or in some cases claimed that it was useless, silly, light-weight and insignificant. Stijn (M, 21y, H, BaroFG6), for instance, describes the *Barometer* participants as "very subjective, very small people that [...] have something to tell. And it isn't extremely convincing". Other participants refer to the lack of informational and educational value:

Jesse (M, 23y, H, BaroFG8): The educational value wasn't that high, I think.

Menno (M, 19y, H, BaroFG8): I think there have been worse programmes on television.

Jesse (M, 23y, H, BaroFG8): Yes, that's true, yes, yes.

Kristel (V, 24y, H, BaroFG8): [Programmes] that really make them look ridiculous.

Jesse (M, 23y, H, BaroFG8): They keep their dignity somehow [...]

In their evaluations of *Barometer*, the focus group respondents often referred to the genre of human-interest in general, and to specific north Belgian human-interest programmes (such as *Man Bites Dog*, *In the Gloria*, *Life As It Is*, *Exit 9* and *Jammers*²³). There was almost complete unanimity that *Barometer* belongs to the human-interest genre cluster, because of its focus on everyday life stories, on personal and individual experiences, and on emotions, and because of its positive approach to the social. Although the authenticity of the ordinary participants is seen as the programme's main strength (see below), the lack of relevance (and social quality) critique in *Barometer* became intertwined with similar but more general critiques related to its human interest. Ria (F, 55y, H, BaroFG10), for instance, remarks, "But if they are going to film somebody of us (ordinary people), than nobody is going to watch it. That is too boring, that is too monotonous". A few seconds later, Monique (F, 52y, H, BaroFG10) says, "That is something we're experiencing on a daily basis, we don't need to get to see that on television". An extract from another focus group provides another example:

The idea that 'everybody has to appear on television, and everybody has something that is of interest to them and you should be able to share that with the world' [...] I absolutely disagree. I wouldn't bother people with what I am doing. It isn't interesting to other people. And that applies the other way around [laughs]. (Greet, F, 21y, H, BaroFG6)

The critique about the lack of social quality of the mediated representation of everyday life is strengthened by the perceived need for heavier professional intervention, in order to contextualize the personal experiences and narrations provided by the *Barometer* participants. The heavy emphasis on the programme's lack of relevance in the focus groups is not to imply that critiques related to the motivations of *Barometer* participants did not emerge in the focus group discussions. However, they were interwoven with the critiques on lack of relevance, with focus group respondents detaching themselves from *Barometer* participants and from potentially interested audience members (in contrast to the focus group respondents). This process of detachment was demonstrated first by the insistence that the films produced by the *Barometer* participants were mainly relevant only to the film-makers in enabling them to appear on television, to have their voices heard, to express themselves, to tell their stories, to "lay their egg" (as Luc (M, 54, BaroFG4) puts it), but also to get something off their chest, to voice their frustration or desperation, and to call for attention or for help. This distancing from the participants was further strengthened by their articulation as strange, abnormal, marginal or – through a more spatial logic – rural: "It is really a village, with the classic hobbies, and the story behind them. I don't think you'll see city folk in there" (Jeroen, M, 21y, H, BaroFG6). The second way focus group respondents disconnected themselves from the audience of *Barometer* was in pointing to the existence of audiences that *might be* interested in the programme, because they (but not the focus group respondents) could identify with

the people on the programme, or the situations they found themselves in, or because it perhaps helped or inspired them.

Finally, the focus group respondents used critical discourse on the quality of the produced material. But, as already indicated, this criticism was much less vehement than that levelled at the *16plus* films. In the *Barometer* focus groups, participants were repeatedly positioned by the focus group respondents as amateurs, but at the same time, were excused on the basis that technical problems (such as shaky cameras) were not considered dominant and did not affect the structural content. As one focus group respondent put it, these technical problems gave the *Barometer* films ‘charm’:

Siska (V, 47y, H, BaroFG14): It’s absolutely not bad for amateurs.

Moderator: And what does make this a good film, and what makes it bad?

Valérie (V, 37y, H, BaroFG8): They managed to communicate their message, eventually. If though it wasn’t professionally recorded, they still managed to show what they were engaged in and what they wanted to tell. If they succeeded in doing that, then the film was successful too.

Siska (V, 47y, H, BaroFG14): It wasn’t good technically speaking, but maybe this was its charm [...]

The juxtaposition with media professionals persists, with respondents repeating that more intense involvement of professionals would have improved the technical quality of the films. For instance, TJ (M, 20y, L, BaroFG11) puts it as follows: “Your camera perspective will always be better if you have a professional crew doing it”. However dominant and taken-for-granted these professional aesthetic and technical quality criteria are in the focus groups, the respondents accepted the more amateurish films and expressed the need to avoid too much professional interference in their production process. Even the presence of the host was debated extensively, and the editing and selection of the *Barometer* video films, although acknowledged to be necessary, was frequently regretted.

2.4.2 Focus group discourses that legitimize Barometer

In the case of the reception of *Barometer*, the programme is mainly legitimized by its capacity to offer a forum or a podium for ordinary people to narrate and represent their personal stories, opinions and experiences. Again, we can recognize the democratic argument. This “very early form of User Generated Content” (Ellen, V, 21y, H, BaroFG6) as one participant called it, is linked to “the democratization of television” (Bert, V, 21y, H, BaroFG6), where “it is no longer the large production companies or casting firms that decide who gets on (television). Everybody can have a go, John Doe. But I think that this is still more interesting for people who have the urge to say something”.

This discourse is combined with a (communication) rights discourse that emphasizes the rights of ordinary people to communicate and represent themselves on television, and which values their presence in one of the key public spaces. Their presence is also articulated as authentic: Despite some remarks about nervousness and over-preparation, the respondents considered the representations as natural, spontaneous, real and honest. For instance, Steven (M, 22y, L, BaroFG7) says, “[*These films are different because they are*] life stories, taken from everyday life, real and not fake”. Or Stijn (M, 21y, H, BaroFG6): “It reminded me of *Man Bites Dog* [*a Belgian human-interest programme*], but it is actually much more honest. I found it fun the people could film themselves, and could decide everything themselves”.

This explains also why the respondents are sceptical about the idea of including experts on the programme because this would affect the power balance, and potentially would create a situation that is “patronizing if you would have an expert look over their shoulders” (Luc, M, 54y, L, BaroFG6). But it is mainly the media professionals and the mainstream media system that (as in *16plus*) become a constitutive outside. The work of the participants is defined as authentic and spontaneous because the interventions of media professionals remain limited. Moreover, media professionals are articulated as restricting of the democratic capacity of the media, partially because of their media-centredness. Pascal (M, 49y, H, BaroFG14) provides us with this critical analysis:

Television is and remains organized deceit. And you should take that into account that if you make a programme it is of course with just one intention, and that is to make sure that people are sitting in front of the TV and that they have their ratings.

This generates an interesting paradox in which the mainstream media are seen to offer a poor perspective on reality and are deemed manipulative, but are accepted because they master the aesthetic and narrative professional standards. On the other hand, the ‘amateur’ films have limited aesthetic and narrative qualities, but offer more realist and authentic perspectives on everyday life.

The discussions on the motives of the film-makers and the discourse of pleasure are very much to the fore in the focus groups and strongly embedded in the democracy and rights discourse. Although the focus group respondents were largely indifferent about the produced content, and the lack of relevance critique was present – “Everybody has the right to be on television. But I would keep it for more useful things” (Isabel, V, 16y, L, BaroFG1) – they do recognize the communicational need (and rights) that motivated the makers to participate in the production of *Barometer*, the authenticity generated and the pleasure they derived from being part of these participatory practices. Also the audience becomes articulated within this discourse, as the symbolic power of these self-representations is valued,²⁴ following a line of argument characteristic of the evaluation of the democratic capacity of human-interest programming. As Sarah (V, 25y, H, BaroFG6)

put it, “Simply the ordinary person that gets to see ordinary people on television, instead of news about – I don’t know – whatever has happened”.

At the same time, the respondents do see that there are limits to *Barometer’s* level of participation. They mention especially the media professionals’ interventions at the levels of selection and editing. The host of *Barometer* mentions explicitly in his introduction that he selected the contributions actually broadcast in the programme, so the respondents identify this as one of the major interventions made by the production team. Some respondents refer to censorship (Veronique, V, 44y, H, BaroFG14); others talk about the consequences for those whose films were not selected:

The ones that were left lying in the corner, that’s all the same story, they will probably feel very unhappy. They made as much effort, and they were as motivated, and they thought their ideas were as good and as important (because they invested the same energy) as the people that happened to make it to television. (Pascal, M, 49y, H, BaroFG14)

The second professional intervention that was discussed was the editing. Here, the discussion is less clear-cut because the respondents had little factual information about the production team’s practices. The result was much speculation, with some respondents expressing their opinion that it was “100% uncut” (Jan, M, 24y, L, BaroFG7), others talking about “minimal editing” (Hugo, M, 24y, L, BaroFG5) and others framing it as manipulation: “So it is manipulated a bit by the television (professionals)”. Although this intervention was not problematized by the respondents, they regretted that the participants lost control over the end product, and that the participatory process was limited.

In some cases, the respondents distrust the (professional) production team and (without being invited by the focus group moderators) took their speculations to another level. During one conversation, the respondents discussed the possibility that the production team assisted during the filming (because it is “too organized” (Carl, M, 24y, L, BaroFG7)) or prepared the shoot beforehand.

Koen (M, 27y, H, BaroFG6): I think that they visit the participants beforehand.

Kristel (V, 24y, H, BaroFG6): Yes, they first discuss it, I think so.

Koen (M, 27y, H, BaroFG6): Giving them guidelines, ‘do this, do that, [...]’

In another conversation, the respondents discussed the possibility that the production team did not wait for videotapes to be sent in, but actively recruited participants. In this discussion, one of the respondents (Tim, M, 25y, L, BaroFG6) expressed his opinion that it might all be “fake”, saying he “can’t imagine that an elderly couple says, hey, let’s make a movie of us going to our mobile phone class”. He later added that *Barometer* “makes it

appear that these people have sent in the names on their own initiative”, to which another respondent replied, “Nothing gets on television by somebody’s own initiative” (Phille, M, 21y, L, BaroFG6).

2.5 Conclusion

Given the importance often attributed to participation (including in this book), the negative reactions of the focus group respondents to the two media products (which offer, at least at first sight, these more intense and maximalist forms of participation) are perhaps surprising. There is an exception: At the ‘theoretical’ level, the respondents express their appreciation of the participatory practices they get to see, and frame these practices on the online forum and on television within what is termed here a democratic quality discourse. They feel strongly that ordinary people have the right to perform online, and on television, and that access to these representational realms should not be reserved for media professionals and members of elites. They repeatedly criticized the mainstream media system at several levels, for instance for its ways of representing our realities, the abuse of the power it claims to have, the abuse of the (ordinary) people involved, and the media-centredness and commodified nature of its objectives.

However, this is not to imply that the focus group respondents were fans of the two programmes they got to see. The participatory nature of the production process (and its outcome) may be ‘theoretically’ applauded in the focus groups, but the actual materializations are met with fierce critiques or with indifference. In the case of *16plus*, the use of the ‘new’ online technology does not protect the films from severe critique. The perceived lack of aesthetic and technical quality in particular forms the basis of a series of harsh discussions that almost completely discredit the films. In the case of *Barometer*, the televised programme, the critiques were less harsh, but the respondents still failed to see any social quality in what was screened for them, and remained indifferent and disconnected. They accept the personal relevance for the film-makers, but consider that to be insufficient to legitimize distribution on prime-time public television.

The reactions of the focus group respondents show that mediated participation is not in itself enough for a programme to be positively valued. In order for it to be appreciated, a number of conditions must be met. The (rather extreme) case of *16plus* shows that the basic conventions related to aesthetic and technical quality, as defined by the professionalized mainstream media system, are deeply rooted within the taste cultures of these (north Belgian) audience members, and that a radical – however unintended – rejection of these conventions is considered unacceptable. The *Barometer* case at the same time exemplifies that these quality conventions are not absolutely rigid, and that there is some space for ‘amateurs’ to diverge from them. Nevertheless, these case studies also illustrate the need for (some degree of) training, or the familiarization with more traditional articulations of quality, as was implemented in the earlier phases

of the *Video Nation* project (see chapter 4). But more importantly, the *Barometer* (and the *16plus*) case shows us that the respondents also use social quality as a key principle for evaluating media output. They critique *Barometer* for falling into the human-interest trap of privileging the private and the personal without transcending it. Both reception analyses show that the respondents experience a strong need for media to be magical, to use (aesthetic and technical) languages that are exceptional, and to narrate stories that are socially relevant. Just showing everyday life, or just organizing participation, is not enough.

3. Case 2: Alternative and community media constructions of quality: Negotiated quality

3.1 Introduction

Although the concept of democratic quality already includes a less stable articulation of quality, through its focus on representational and participatory processes as part of the definition of quality, we can take this discussion a step further by placing more emphasis on the unstable and negotiated character of quality. Negotiated quality refers to the establishment of quality as a dialogical-participatory process, in which all the actors involved, including audience members, contribute to defining quality. This re-articulation is grounded in research on quality definition negotiations in Swiss and Austrian community radio stations,²⁵ and more specifically through an analysis of interviews with community radio producers and administrators at Radio LoRa, Radio Orange, Radio Fro and RadioFabrik.²⁶ Obviously, this is a small selection of people, and involves community radio stations in only two European countries. As the focus of this text is not on discovering the complexity of quality definitions in community media in general, but rather to show and (then) theorize about the presence of the concept of negotiated quality, this does not pose structural methodological problems.

These analyses attempt to provide a re-articulation of the quality discourse, where the maximalist participatory culture and openness – characteristic of alternative and community media organizations (see chapter 1) – result in an unfixed and contestable definition of (media) quality. This focus on alternative and community media of course does not imply that the quality concept is completely fixed in mainstream media configurations, but I would argue that the participatory nature of alternative and community media creates a specific context in which more rigid (often professional-based) quality concepts are transformed into a negotiated quality concept.

3.2 Quality definitions in alternative and community media

The Austrian and Swiss community radio stations where the interviews with the eight community media producers were organized are reasonably stable. As Peissl and Tremetzberger (2010) explain, the first legal basis for broadcasting in Switzerland was established in 1982, which allowed the Swiss Radio LoRa to start broadcasting in Zurich soon after. In 1997 it became possible to use 1 per cent (raised to 4 per cent in 2007) of the national broadcasting fee to support private broadcasters. In Austria, the legal framework came later, in response to pressure from pirate groups, and it was not until 1995 that the first licences were allocated. The majority of Austrian community radios were licensed between 1998 and 2000 (Purkarthofer et al., 2008: 14). In 2009, negotiations for an Austrian community radio fund were successful. In summary, the alternative and community sector is now well established in both Switzerland and Austria.

The radio producers in their interviews all emphasized (albeit to varying degrees) the maximalist participatory nature and alternative characters of their radio stations, which position them as the third sector. As Anu Poeyskoe (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) briefly formulated it, “you have the jukebox on the one side, and you have this upper-class radio on the other side”. The mixture of participation and alternativity feeds a rejection of traditional quality concepts. To quote Anu Poeyskoe (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) again, “Nobody wants to have a definition of good programming that has some sort of universal meaning, because that is a really subjective definition”. Nicole Niedermüller (Radio LoRa 13 August 2008 interview) takes a similar position when talking about quality management:

This is a kind of discussion I can get really angry about. Because, I think that the question is: ‘Who is defining quality?’ And I often see male, white heterosexual people that have university degrees, telling an immigrant woman about quality.

The rejection of power imbalances seen as an intrinsic part of the traditional quality definitions, together with the maximalist-participatory and alternative nature of these community media, leads to the deployment of three major alternative discourses on quality. The first discourse can be seen as a continuation of the democratic quality concept.

3.3 Discourses on democratic quality

Nicole Niedermüller’s reference above to immigrant women immediately foregrounds the importance of the (self-)representational dimension of democratic quality. The quality that community media offer builds on providing access to and facilitating participation of a wide range of societal subgroups, including the misrecognized and

sometimes even stigmatized groups in society. Through these logics of self-representation and participation, ordinary people are offered the opportunity to have their voices heard, to talk about their daily lives, to express their situated knowledge and to narrate their everyday experiences, a process that is articulated as a quality component. An illustration here is Anu Poeyskoe's (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) reference to one of the main questions Radio Orange tried to answer in its start-up phase: "How to bring people, daily things and their opinions, how to bring them in a radio programme? What is good material for radio?"

This notion of self-representation as (democratic) quality is not limited merely to the process of providing access and participation, but also includes the outcome of the process. The radio producers define their non-mainstream and alternative content – produced through the logics of self-representation and participation – as part of their quality. As Adriane Borger (Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview) put it when talking about the work of the radio's programme commission, "the discussions in the programme commission are normally about the quality of music. And there are quite clear criteria, I would say. Because what we don't want is mainstream [...]" Or, in the words of Gerhard Kettler (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview), "[*Orange*] is not a mainstream radio, we want to bring people of these other programmes [...]" His colleague, Pawel Kaminski (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview), continued, "I do not like the programmes [...] which try to imitate the mainstream formats, and they play like the mainstream music. [...] Somehow you've achieved the opposite effect to what you wanted, because it's not serious, it's not alternative [...]" These articulations of quality are grounded in the importance of producing alternative representations that complement and sometimes contradict the representations generated by the mainstream media. The circulation of alternative discourses, formats and genres is seen as contributing significantly to a more pluralist-democratic society.

The articulation of non-mainstream content as quality is supported also by the rules-bound approach, which distinguishes community radio from access radio (such as the German *Offener Kanal* concept). Anu Poeyskoe (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) summarizes the radio content rules system as "the famous anti-anti-anti", which implies that community media are anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-fascist and anti-violence (although again some variation is possible). To use Adriane Borger's (Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview) words, "We say we don't want any racism, we don't want any sexism, we don't want any kind of violence and so on". The producers interviewed all confirm the importance of this rule-bound protection of their non-mainstream identities, and (when asked) often related instances of these rules being violated, in some cases leading to the cancellation of particular radio programmes, very rare within the field of alternative and community radio stations. Gerhard Kettler, Radio Orange's programme coordinator (3 April 2009 interview), describes one case where two programme-makers broadcast racist cabaret recordings, which led to heated discussion within the radio station. Important here is the way that the democratic quality of the radio station was protected by the

radio's programme commission, but also how a dialogical conflict resolution system was applied.

Recently, there was a broadcast by two guys who normally play swing music, and on this day they [*played*] some cabaret recordings from the sixties. Austrian cabaret recordings. And they started playing them, and it was... it started like being, yeah, somehow funny, but not really [...] Then it became immediately very racist, using very racist definitions of black people, but also being very racist in the content. [...] So there at the studio we started to have a conversation with them, which was accidentally broadcast because at some moment they switched off the recordplayer and the microphones went on air. I think this was quite good [...] this conflict going on air. It's not according to our statutes; you don't play something like this here. [*They had*] quite strange ways to excuse it [...] it's not being abusive, these are only jokes' and so on. And then there was discussion in the team: 'Should we leave it like this or should we communicate this case to the *Program Beirat* [*Orange's programme commission*]?' This was a discussion [...] because you have to know, these were [...] old time communists, let's say, and anti-fascist of course, but also, they're workers. [...] Then there was this meeting between them and the *Program Beirat* [...] and now they are obliged to attend an anti-racist workshop [...] this was also an interesting case because it involved discussion within our team.

One final articulation of democratic quality is grounded in the structural participation and horizontal decision-making of the radio organization, which are deemed crucial for the democratic functioning of these media organizations, although their implementation generates a wide range of challenges. These difficulties are part of the daily administration of the organization, as illustrated by Simon Schaufelberger's (Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview) brief anecdote: "we have our technician who calls himself some kind of anarchist and he once got so angry that he said: 'Well, I want to have a boss. I want to end these endless discussions'". But these difficulties can also be found at the level of the relationships between producers (who are often volunteers) and staff members (who are sometimes paid). Here one of the major difficulties lies in involving the radio producers in the democratic functioning of the community radio organization. This again affects the definition of democratic quality, illustrated by the Radio Fro interview, in which lack of quality is defined as "narrow-mindedness". Thomas Kreiseder (Radio Fro 7 September 2008 interview) continues by describing his detached position: "I'm coming in and I'm doing my stuff and I'm not interested in what others are doing". In contrast, quality in community media is also seen as contributing to the "generation of more open systems, more open groups or communities of shared interests".

3.4 Re-articulating the professional quality discourse

Apart from the discourse of democratic quality, the interviewed community radio producers also refer to what was labelled earlier in this text as the professional quality concept. But at the same time, they re-articulate this professional quality concept because the entire ideology of alternative and community media is built on the concept of providing access and participation to non-professionals.

Although there are some references to the skills related to the radio format (with an appreciation of the “voices electrifying you” (Pawel Kaminiski, Radio Orange)) and its dialogical nature, the skills required to use the technology and journalistic skills are often mentioned. Anu Poeyskoe (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) summarizes the problem of lack of technical skills as follows: “The good quality content is of no good use if I can’t understand it”. The notion of technical quality is used by Adriane Borger (Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview), again to refer to possession of the skills necessary to operate the radio technology.

There are people who think that technical quality is not an issue so we shouldn’t even talk about it. But, we, let’s say, the programme commission of Radio LoRa does think it is an issue and we are trying [...] to see that people are making technically good programmes. [...] On the other hand, sometimes it takes years to get people to do the technically right thing. And even after all those years you don’t get them there. So of course this wouldn’t be a reason to cancel a programme.

But at the same time this quote illustrates how careful the interviewees are to avoid using the quality concept as a *condition sine qua non* from which to judge a programme. Technical quality, on the other hand, is deemed important, but acquiring the skills required to achieve it is articulated as a learning process, which could take years. Even in the case that the radio producers never actually master all of these skills, this should not be problematized: “Like using the telephone is really difficult for a lot of people because sometimes, well they may receive one telephone call every two weeks, so they forget how to do it” (Simon Schaufelberger, Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview).

All the interviewees emphasized strongly that these technical (and journalistic) skills should not be imposed or enforced, but that radio producers should receive informal or formal training. More and more formal training is being organized (e.g. by the Zurich-based organization klip&klang), although informal training (“like the older people instructing the younger ones and giving them tips and supporting them” (Simon Schaufelberger, Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview)) still takes place too. Both formal and informal learning are organized “so that [*people*] are not victims of the technology”; the objective of training is “empowering people to use the technology the way they want to use it”, is the way Thomas Kreiseder (Radio Fro 7 September 2008 interview) formulated it. Or, in Gerhard Kettler’s (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) words, “It’s

like showing that it is not some kind of magic. Of course, it is magic, but you could also do it”.

Again the participatory-emancipatory alternative and community media ideology can be seen as the main explanatory component in this approach. It explains also why lack of technical and journalistic skills is not seen as problematic, in contrast to more mainstream environments where a lack of technological mastery would be defined as “sacrilege” (Anu Poeyskoe, Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) and where the professionalized environment would require the utmost respect for journalistic procedures. This argument was used by Adriane Borger (Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview), who said that “It’s also about participation and the way that we want to give a radio space to people, [*which is*] not only dependent on the quality of their programme.” Also, the personality and individuality of the producers were invoked as reasons not to problematize the lack of (technical and journalistic) skills, as is illustrated by the anecdote on “wonderful exceptions” offered by Nicole Niedermüller (Radio LoRa 13 August 2008 interview):

Because, during the last months the meetings on quality management for all the community radios in Switzerland were held. [...] They asked us to bring some examples so that we can talk about quality in community radios. And I brought an example from a really, really lovely, and wonderful lesbian radio show. She’s introducing an interview and she is doing all the things wrong that it is possible to do. You know, she tells the listener what the person is going to say, she makes mistakes and stuff like that. But she does it in such a cute and charming way, that every, everybody says: ‘Oh great, great! What a wonderful show’ and stuff like this. And this was also interesting for me to bring this to the meeting, to just make them, to show them, you know [...] It is one thing that there are books written about quality and there is another thing. We also organize our own quality standards. But there are also some wonderful exceptions.

These nuanced approaches to technical and journalistic quality are grounded also in the re-articulation of professional quality. A recurring argument is related to the importance of the non-professionality of radio producers, which refers to their positions as volunteers, and also to their embeddedness in alternative production cultures. One illustration is this quote from Anu Poeyskoe (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview):

[*what*] I expect from a good community radio [...] is to hear things I can’t hear somewhere else. So for me, that’s quality. What I value very much is if something is authentic, because that’s what we lack in the radio-landscape elsewhere. And what I value is programming that goes deep in an issue. I don’t mean in a scientific sense because that is covered by public broadcasting, but I mean in terms of personal involvement.

This re-articulation of professional quality is based on a combination of authenticity, commitment, empathy and subjectivity. As Simon Schaufelberger (Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview) puts it, “There is quality in this radio on a lot of things. And especially in the personal commitment of the people doing shows. I think this is the highest quality for a radio like [*LoRa*]”. Or to use Thomas Kreiseder’s (Radio Fro 7 September 2008 interview) words, “it’s difficult to describe this in words because most of the time it’s just a feeling about an enthusiasm”. These characteristics of the producer are contrasted with those of the media professional, who is articulated as objective but inauthentic, and with little to communicate: “You can hear that there is a personality and that it’s not a trained speaker who has a certain, well, who is given a list of tracks to play and commenting on that” (Simon Schaufelberger, Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview). Although it is not always easy to avoid the mainstream media cultures, community media are claimed to produce more authentic programming: “They have to say it from their own perspective and this is important for community media, to say it from own standpoints, so I think this is not professional, this is much better” (Gerhard Kettler, Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview).

It is within this debate that technological quality (as discussed above) was mentioned, but again in a model oppositional/antagonistic to mainstream media. Nicole Niedermüller (Radio LoRa 13 August 2008 interview) here refers to usability, simplicity and user friendliness as an alternative criterion for technological quality.

if you go to a professional studio they have such complex and difficult to use equipment, that you really have to be a technician to use it. And if we buy, you know, some recorder and stuff like this, then it’s really important for us to keep it simple [...]. So that many many different people, also people that are not familiar with all this technical stuff, can use it and have a good result (Nicole Niedermüller, Radio LoRa 13 August 2008 interview).

3.5 A participatory definition of quality: Negotiated quality

A third major discourse on quality within community media is termed negotiated quality. The maximalist participatory nature of alternative and community media destabilizes the traditional (universalized and professionalized) definitions of quality. Through their resistance to the power imbalances embedded in the concept of quality (in which professional media are seen to produce quality content and amateur media are discursively excluded from the quality signifier), community media not only foreground alternative models of quality (see above), but also submit the definition of quality to their participatory processes. By opening up the definition of quality to their participatory cultures, they unfix and destabilize quality, showing its constructed nature.

One major discursive strategy is the refusal of the one-quality concept, which is contrasted with the more relativist definition that emphasizes the diversity of quality. An

illustration here is Adriane Borger's (Radio LoRa 14 August 2008 interview) position: "I think we need the whole variety of approaches and ways of doing a programme. And of course you can [...] every individual programme you can look at it and see if it's good or not but first you have to decide what good means in this case. It can mean very different things".

Quality then becomes an agonistic confrontation among these different positions on quality. Within the maximalist participatory tradition of alternative and community media, this almost unavoidably implies the organization of dialogic processes to determine quality. Anu Poeyskoe (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) formulates this as follows: "to discuss making programmes with other people making radio programmes is probably the only way to achieve quality in communication media". This is echoed by Nicole Niedermüller (Radio LoRa 13 August 2008 interview) when she says that "There are some rules we developed and there are some standards we developed. But, we also have the idea of, you know, discussing and reflecting these standards all the time in an open process and to guide people".

These dialogic processes are organized at different levels of the radio stations. As most of these community radio stations have (paid) staff members and formal decision-making structures (i.e. boards of administrators and programme commissions – often with radio producer representatives), these are obvious sites for these dialogical processes to take place. This also applies to the intake procedures for new programmes, and to the processes involved in conflict resolution (described above). At a second level, the radio producers become involved in this dialogical process, mainly through what the interviewees call the feedback mechanism, where staff members or more experienced producers provide feedback to other producers, if time and resources allow. At Radio Orange, the feedback system is combined with a self-definition of quality – "Every programme had to say what is quality for themselves" (Gerhard Kettler, Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) – providing an anchoring point for future conversations about quality. Again, the feedback system is applied with restraint, with some interviewees pleading for minimal forms of feedback in order not to interfere with the programme makers' intentions. Others, however, prefer more collective forms of feedback:

Sometimes I say to them; 'Well, I would have done it like this.' I prefer it if there are a couple of women at the meeting so there are different people with all the different ways of listening to radio shows. Because this is [...] then you get a broader feedback. (Nicole Niedermüller, Radio LoRa 13 August 2008 interview)

In particular, staff members indicated that they are very careful not to impose their quality definitions, knowing that (as staff members) their opinions might carry more weight than is desirable. One suggestion was to adopt the strategy of positioning oneself as the listener, not a staff member: "I don't want to tell him what he has to do as programme coordinator, I said it as a listener. And in this way I have some discussions, and I think it's constructive" (Gerhard Kettler-Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview).

Apart from the more informal feedback system, most radio stations have instituted workshop-based forms of learning, where the quality dialogue can take place in a more organized way. In the extract below, Thomas Kreiseder (Radio Fro 7 September 2008 interview) explains how his station's workshops function:

We have developed, like, serious workshops and actions over the past few months. Where people get the chance to learn stuff, to meet people and so on. And we want to focus on that more. So we have a new person who is working exclusively in that field. And that's how we think that the programmes will become high-quality. Because people will be able to reflect on their work and to compare it with other programmes.

Finally, in some cases, even listeners participate in the quality dialogue, albeit in less organized ways. Here, we find a (subtle) reference to audience-based quality, although it could be argued that because of the low thresholds to, and high ambitions to, facilitate audience participation, community media producers use the term audience-based quality in referring to (non-)professional quality. But in some cases, audience members, who are not involved as producers at the radio station, actively intervene to protect the radio station's quality. Gerhard Kettler (Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview) explains how it was discovered that one of the station's reggae shows "was quite homophobic":

Nobody thought of problems, the show was running for two years or more. And then the listeners did a direct action; a group of left-wing activists came to the show and talked, debated on that show. And then we could say 'thank you,' because we hadn't realized what was going on in the show, and then we took action. (Gerhard Kettler, Radio Orange 3 April 2009 interview)

3.6 Conclusion

Quality is often seen as a rigid concept that is approached in a dichotomized way: Cultural artefacts (such as radio programmes) are seen to be of quality or not. This essentialist approach to quality might be part of our common sense, but it simultaneously ignores the constructed nature of our taste. Moreover, quality serves as a discursive tool to hegemonize the media professional's position, in ways that are unnecessarily antagonistic. The professional/amateur opposition is in part fed by the idea that only professionals can produce quality, at the levels of the aesthetic, technical, professional, social and even democratic.

Of course, we should not forget the outcome of the first case study in this chapter, which showed that some amateurs are not capable of producing the hegemonized forms of professional and technical quality. For that reason their products were disliked by the people asked to watch them. But this case study should not be seen as a claim that non-professionals do not have access to quality, in its many and various forms. Moreover,

care should be taken not to see quality as an essentialist concept that is unchangeable and completely fixated. As in the case of any signifier, quality is susceptible to a variety of re-articulations that might structurally alter its meanings over time and space.

This book does not include many case studies of alternative and community media (with the exception of one of the chapter 4 case studies). There are more than sufficient examples to be found, of both their fascinating maximalist participatory practices and also of the limits to these practices (see Bailey et al., 2007 for some of our own case studies). The case study included here offers a very specific, but important, approach by focusing not on how quality can work against participation, but how participatory practices can enhance and even (co-)define quality.

The small set of community media interviews shows how within these media organizationsthesacralqualityconceptbecomesdeconstructed,byshowingitsproblematic past and universalist claims, while at the same time deploying it by embedding it in the participatory tradition of alternative and community media. Negotiated quality thus becomes a transversal concept, which potentially affects all of the previously discussed quality concepts, positioning the concept itself in a participatory-democratic debate. Of course, at the same time, it is necessary to be prudent. Both democratic and negotiated quality, just like any other concept that is embedded in a democratic-participatory logic, remain vulnerable to shifts in the (informal) power balances, requiring permanent attention and care to protect the power equilibriums that feed them.

Notes

1. Schröder does not focus exclusively on the ecstatic dimension of quality; he also discusses ethical and aesthetical dimensions of quality, which refer (in my interpretation) to models of social and aesthetic/artistic quality.
2. Within this field of social policy and community development, Beck et al. (2001: 7) define social quality as “the extent to which citizens are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potential”. They distinguish four components of social quality, namely socio-economic security, social cohesion, social inclusion and empowerment/autonomy. Their emphasis on well-being and individual potential, considered to be socially beneficial, creates the link to my use of this concept, which aims to indicate the cluster of quality concepts that attribute importance to cultural artefacts on the basis of their societal impact.
3. The organizations involved were Belga, RTBF Radio, VRT (Radio 1 and the Equal Opportunities Department), BEL-RTL Radio, Sud Presse Group, Internationaal Perscentrum Vlaanderen, Fédération des Télévisions Locales, Indymedia, Divazine, TV Brussel, Télévesdre, No Télé, TV Limburg and Antenne Centre Télévision. The newspapers involved were *Gazet van Antwerpen*, *Het Nieuwsblad*, *La Libre Belgique*, *Le Soir Junior*, *Het Belang van Limburg*, *Le Ligueur* and *Femmes d’Aujourd’hui*.
4. The KBS subsidies were euros 197,950 (Dutch-language group) and euros 217,957 (French-language group).
5. Keeping in mind Dyer’s (1984) differentiation between types and stereotypes.

6. As Manca's (1989) concept of pluralist objectivity is considered too broad, it is renamed pluralist neutrality.
7. See his PowerPoint presentation, *16Plus. An Interactive Site for (Young) Creative People*, at http://v1.ibbt.be/archive/ilabWS/ppt/16_plus.pdf.
8. Personal communication with Filip Faste and Sam Ickx on 13 September 2010.
9. <http://www.vlaamsewetenschapsweek.be/>.
10. Ledeberg is a small, densely populated working-class district in the north Belgian city of Ghent.
11. As Heritage (1984: 239) remarked, "The social world is a pervasively conversational one in which an overwhelming proportion of the world's business is conducted through the medium of spoken interaction".
12. It would be careless to claim that the nine films do not refer to a structure because, of course, everyday life is highly structured (see chapter 3). If we return to Felski's (1999/2000: 18) seminal definition of the everyday, we see clearly the importance of structure (as habit and repetition), since everyday life is "grounded in three key facets: time, space and modality. The temporality of the everyday [...] is that of repetition, the spatial ordering of the everyday is anchored in a sense of home and the characteristic mode of experiencing the everyday is that of habit". Relating everyday life to the specific social conditions of daily life under industrial capitalism, Lefebvre (1971) also emphasizes the temporal and repetitive characteristics of everyday life.
13. The 'professor' interviewee is head of a departmental secretariat in the University of Ghent.
14. For this case study, Wim Hannot interviewed Filip Fastenaekels (new media team VRT and *16plus*), Lode Nachtergaele (IBBT collaborator *16plus*) and Tine Deboosere (VRT moderator *16plus*). All interview and programme citations are translations from Dutch by Wim Hannot and the author.
15. A 16th focus group discussion was not used in the analysis because of quality problems.
16. I want to thank Lynn Bernaerts, Leehana Bouchat, Isabel Chairez Alfaro, Annick De Pelsemaeker, Zita De Pooter, Niki Desmaele, Kim Goethals, Elke Lostermans, Sarah Musschebroeck, Southida Phongprasanesak, Bart Suykens, Laura van Eeckhout, Martine Vanaken, Jellina Vanderheijden, Carmel Vandersmissen and Elvera Weusten for their valuable help; Wim Hannot for coordinating their efforts; and Jo Pierson for his kind support for the project.
17. The fifteen focus groups had the following age distribution: 10–19 years: 29 respondents; 20–29: 37; 30–39: ten; 40–49: nine; 50–59: thirteen; 60–69: eleven; 70–79: 14; and 80–89: eight. The respondents had received the following types of education: no degree: one; lower education: twelve; secondary education: 62; and higher education: 55 (polytechnic: seventeen; university: 24; not specified: fourteen). Sixty-one of the respondents were male and 70 were female. They live in the north Belgian provinces of: Antwerpen: eleven; Henegouwen (south Belgium): one; Limburg: sixteen (and Dutch Limburg (Netherlands): ten); Oost-Vlaanderen: fifteen; Vlaams-Brabant: 46 (and Brussel: twelve); and West-Vlaanderen: twenty. As *16plus* is not very well known, it is no surprise that only eighteen respondents were familiar with the website.
18. I again want to thank David De Wachter, Geert Dexters, Faiza Djait, Adil Fares, Paul Lashmana, Sabine Lemache, Tine Peeters and Yolanda Van Dorsselaer, who conducted the interviews with Michiel Hendryckx (Presenter *Barometer*), Isabel Dierckx (Kanakna *Barometer* Producer), Wendel Goossens (VRT Producer *Barometer*), Noel Swinnen (Manager Kanakna), Frank Symoens (Production Manager TV1 VRT) and Jean-Philip De Tender (Channel Adviser TV1 VRT). Also thanks to Maaika Santana for interviewing Eva Willems and Joke Blommaerts (*Barometer* researchers).
19. Here I want to thank Ann Braeckman for her help with the analysis.

20. I want to repeat my gratitude to Annemie Geudens, Anne Van Sande, Sarah Van Looy, Nele Schoonacker, Bart Van Bael, Eline Ledent, Ting Ting Hu, Kristien Janssens, Katrijn Rosseels, Jolijn Swinnen, Caroline Vanschoor, Sarah Roelandts, Sara Verbeeren and Claire De Smet for their work on the *Barometer* project.
21. The fourteen focus groups had the following age distributions: 10–19 years: eleven respondents; 20–29: 56; 30–39: seven; 40–49: thirteen; 50–59: 21; 60–69: ten; and 70–79: four. Sixty-three of the respondents were male and 59 were female. They live in the north Belgian provinces of Antwerpen: 56; Limburg: three; Oost-Vlaanderen: ten; and Vlaams-Brabant: 51 (and Brussel: two). Only six respondents said they knew of *Barometer*.
22. The first three codes refer to the sex (Female/Male), age and educational level (High/Low) of the focus group respondents. The 16plusFG or BarometerFG code refers to the number of the focus group.
23. *Man Bites Dog* (*Man Bijt Hond*) focuses on ordinary people's small stories, *In the Gloria* (*In De Gloria*) is a satirical programme that critiques human-interest programmes, *Life As It Is* (*Het Leven Zoals Het Is*) deals with everyday life in specific social systems (e.g., a police station or an airport), and *Exit 9* (*Afrit 9*) and *Jambers* screened human-interest documentaries. In the focus groups the respondents distinguished *In the Gloria* and *Jambers* from *Barometer* by referring to the more respectful, less ironical and less spectacular nature of *Barometer*, but still saw these programmes as one genre cluster.
24. In this context, the discourse of pedagogics is also used, but (in contrast to the *16plus* case) only to refer to the opportunity for the audience to learn from these self-representations.
25. As these media organizations define themselves as community radio stations, this label will be used here.
26. I want to thank Nadia Bellardi for her valuable help and support with this case study. The following is an overview of the interviews with the community media staff:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Community radio</i>	<i>City</i>
Nicole Niedermüller	13 August 2008	Radio LoRa	Zurich
Adriane Borger	14 August 2008	Radio LoRa	Zurich
Simon Schaufelberger	14 August 2008	Radio LoRa	Zurich
Thomas Kreiseder	7 September 2008	Radio Fro	Linz
Alf Altendorf	5 December 2008	RadioFabrik	Salzburg
Gerhard Kettler(*)	3 April 2009	Radio Orange	Vienna
Pawel Kaminski(*)	3 April 2009	Radio Orange	Vienna
Anu Poeyskoe	3 April 2009	Radio Orange	Vienna

(*) Joint interview

Chapter 7

A Short Conclusion¹



The idea driving this book is that participation is not a fixed notion, but is deeply embedded within our political realities and thus is the object of long-lasting and intense ideological struggles. Throughout the history of the study of participation, there have been both laments about the slippery nature of this concept and blatant attempts to privilege one specific meaning. In the first case, participation is seen as a problematic concept, overused and overstretched, and therefore useless for rigid academic analysis. Alternatively, the complexities of participation are hidden behind the one (preferably ‘ultimate’ – and assuming that a particular one is mentioned) definition selected, resulting in the black-boxing of the participatory struggle.

I see no reason to complain since complexity and instability are phenomena that have always been closely connected to humanity, and conceptual contingency should not be regretted, but studied. The search for harmonious theoretical frameworks to capture contemporary realities might have been an important fantasy of the *homo academicus*, but also it might not do the analysis of these realities any favours. This does not mean that conceptual contingency needs to be celebrated and radicalized; after all, “a discourse incapable of generating any fixity of meaning is the discourse of the psychotic” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112). It requires careful manoeuvring to reconcile the conceptual contingency with the necessary fixity that protects the concept of participation from signifying anything and everything.

It is exactly the notion of struggle that provides the entry point into this complex, dynamical process of signification. Participation, with its close connection to democracy and the political, is articulated through this struggle and its many different loci. Obviously, the locus of politics has proven important because the immanent tension between participation and representation generates an almost permanent *mettre en discours* of the concept of participation through discursive and material practices. The history of the democratic revolution is characterized by an ongoing struggle to attempt to increase levels of participation, (first) through establishment and reconstruction of voting systems, (later) through increased political activity (in the more strict sense) outside institutionalized politics, and the increase in the interconnections between institutionalized politics and these other societal realms (e.g., via new social movements or other civil society structures).²

If we take a closer look at other societal fields, and transcend the realm of institutionalized politics, participation has obtained a surprisingly prominent presence. We can find similar struggles over the intensity of participation within these other

societal realms. This book looked at only three – but very significant – societal fields (outside democracy and institutionalized politics) that provide loci for the struggle over participation. The spheres of spatial planning, development and the arts and museums, which are not necessarily political in the strictest sense, but are very political in the broad sense, show the importance and long-standing nature of these debates on participation. Not only have they generated crucial theoretical and empirical insights – for instance, Arnstein’s (1969) famous ladder of participation – they have shown how pervasive and ever-present the debate about participation is in society. One surprising observation that emerged during the research for this book was that the debates on participation have mushroomed within the social: Whenever a structural power imbalance occurs, attempts are organized to redress this imbalance by increasing the level of participation of the disadvantaged actors. Of course, the debate on media participation is a good example of the omnipresence of the concept of participation: In the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, participation in and through media has been on the agenda in the debates on, and practices of, alternative and community media, the world information and communication order, talk shows, reality television, new media, and the several other areas not discussed in this book.

The overview of these struggles related to the intensity of participation illustrates that the democratic revolution is not progressing linearly. It is not destined to eventually reach ‘the’ end to (participatory) history. Democracy and participation are the objects of a struggle that is unlikely ever to be settled, since more balanced power relations are always at risk of new imbalances. It is exactly the existence of political struggles and the idea – to use Lefort’s (1988) metaphor – that the seat of power is empty that guarantees the impossibility that power struggles will reach a final closure. Democracy and participation are always processes ‘in the making’, and never established situations, however eager we are to believe that democratic harmony can be established in the last instance. This impossibility of finalizing the democratic project does not contradict the possibility of hegemonic or post-political strategies that provide particular fixations within temporarily and spatially conditioned contexts. In such contexts, particular articulations of participation can gain dominance; in other contexts, new articulations might arise and replace those previously dominant.

The broad overview of participatory histories shows that, in the twentieth century the 1960s and 1970s provided the context for a wave of democratization, which translated into the development of a multitude of participatory frameworks that cherished relatively intense forms of participation. The 1980s, in contrast, was a period of backlash when participation featured much less prominently on societal agendas. In the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century, participation returned to the stage, first through the emphasis on interaction (e.g. Bourriaud’s (2006) relational aesthetics, and the first generation of new media discourses), and later in a more fully fledged form (e.g. the second generation of new media discourses related to web 2.0). Here, again, I avoid any suggestion of a linear development, even across these decades and in their

more minimalist or maximalist forms of participation. Dominant articulations, whether they concern more minimalist or maximalist forms, provoke resistance and allow for counter-hegemonic practices. An interesting case is Bruce Nauman and his “ongoing efforts at positioning us in radically disorienting ways” (Jones, 2010: 152). In his artwork from the 1960s – the heyday of participation – Nauman used participation to critique participatory art, summated by his dictum “I mistrust audience participation” (Frieling, 2008a: 34). Another example from the field of the arts is the work of Beuys, who developed many of his artworks in the 1980s, an era not seen as being the most receptive to more maximalist participatory ideologies. Within the field of media, we can see that in the Belgian case for instance, but also in countries such as Ireland, the UK, Sweden and France (to mention but a few), there were many alternative and community radios established in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which have continued to exist, (later) in parallel with a series of maximalist participatory online initiatives such as Indymedia. The Czechoslovak *Kinoautomat*, a historical participatory achievement of the 1960s, was initially financed within a totalitarian communist regime, and was brought to Prague when its authoritarian communist regime had been reinstated (after the Prague Spring) and was cruelly ‘normalizing’ its oppressive grip on Czechoslovak society.

Of course, it is often forgotten that there is even a history of (media) participation. One of the reasons for writing an elaborate genealogy of the participation concept in the fields of democracy, arts, development, spatial planning and media was to show that the theorization and organization of participation within these (and other) fields is not new, and has a very long history. This book embeds participation firmly within the democratic revolution, a process that has been ongoing for at least 200 years. The choice to look at the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first in this sense is misleading because the history of participation goes back much further. One interesting example is Ostertag’s (2006) history of social justice movement media; another is Darling’s (2008) work on participation in early Spanish-American newspapers. Although establishing the clear historical beginnings of participatory practices is a difficult and problematic endeavour, it is nevertheless apparent that the history of participation did not start with the popularization of the internet. However interesting and relevant the struggle over participation in the field of ‘new’ media has become in the contemporary era, the attention that it has generated has detached this particular struggle from the many others that have been waged in other eras, and are continuing to be waged in other fields. For instance, articulating the alternative and community media movement as Jenkins (2006: 231) does, as the “prehistory” of contemporary participatory culture, might not be the best way to do justice to these organizations and to the history of participation.

These struggles over the articulation of participation and how intensively it should be theorized, organized and practiced cannot be analysed as completely open and totally fluid. At some point participation simply stops being participation. Participation is a floating signifier that can take on many different forms. Potentially and theoretically it

can shift in any possible direction. And in practice it effectively takes on a wide range of forms because it is an object of political struggle. Simultaneously, because participation is embedded within a particular context, there is a discursive area that it cannot leave without becoming disconnected from the frameworks that support its meaning. Because of its articulation in a specific social, political and cultural reality that generates discursive rigidity and inertia, it cannot shift to *any* possible meaning, at least not immediately or without serious dislocation. Where exactly limits of meaning are placed is always debatable; it is in part an analytical choice, and in part a theoretical choice.

The theoretical strategy used here to clarify participation's contemporary discursive limits is negative-relationist. In a negative-relationist strategy, concepts are defined through their juxtaposition to other concepts. In the case of participation, it is seen as structurally different from interaction and access. Access and interaction remain important conditions of possibility of participation, but they cannot be equated with participation. The concept of access is based on presence, in many different forms: For instance, presence in an organizational structure or a community, or presence within the operational reach of media production technologies. Interaction is a second condition of possibility, which emphasizes the social-communicative relationship that is established, with other humans or objects. Although these relationships have a power dimension, this dimension is not translated into a decision-making process. My argument here is that, through this juxtaposition to access and interaction, participation becomes defined as a political – in the broad meaning of the concept of the political – process where the actors involved in decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are (to an extent) egalitarian.

The qualification 'to an extent' reintroduces the notion of struggle because the political struggle over participation is focused precisely on the equality and balanced nature of these power relationships. Participation is defined through these negative logics – distinguishing it from access and interaction – which demarcates the discursive field of action, where the struggle for different participatory intensities is being waged. This is also where the distinction between minimalist and maximalist forms of participation emerges (see Figure 1): While minimalist participation is characterized by the existence of strong power imbalances between the actors (without participation being completely annihilated or reduced to interaction or access), maximalist participation is characterized by the equalization of power relations, approximating Pateman's (1970) concept of full participation.

Figure 1: A simplified version of the AIP model.



It is important to emphasize here the dynamical nature of this approach towards participation. It is crucial to recognize that structural power imbalances persist and have been normalized in many societal fields. In practice this means that in many societal fields, including, for instance, mainstream media, the logics of power and control create privileged positions for people whose participation has become taken-for-granted, even to the degree that use of the concept for their practice seems awkward. Within mainstream media organizations (framed by their hierarchical structures) media professionals participate in the production of media content. This implies also that the involvement of other actors, who do not have this privileged position, is less taken-for-granted. Often, the concept of participation is used to denominate the practices of this latter group, but this is an unnecessary reduction that shifts to the background the decision-making process where all are (or could be) involved. Also, through these logics, participation sometimes becomes defined in a democratic-populist fashion, resulting in complete and antagonistic reversal of these power relations. As participation deals with equalizing (not reversing) power relations, the notion of agonism offers an intellectual solution to think how the different actors can respectfully reconcile their positions in order to organize a more balanced decision-making process that recognizes all involved.

The dynamical nature of participation is also related to its multi-sitedness. Participation occurs (or can occur) in a variety of societal realms, which generate a multitude of interconnections of discursive and material practices. Since my analysis focuses on media participation, it becomes necessary to distinguish two basic sites of participation, termed participation in the media and participation through the media. This analytical difference allows (at least part of) the attention to remain on the media sphere in order to scrutinize how people enter into balanced or unbalanced decision-making processes within this media sphere; simultaneously, it functions as a continuous reminder that people participate in society through their presence, interaction and/or participation in the media sphere (even when this participation process in the media sphere is unbalanced).

At the same time, one should be careful to presuppose an automatic and positive relationship between participation in the media and participation through the media. Participation in the media does not mean that the voices of the participants will automatically and intensely impact on all other societal spheres (including the sphere of institutionalized politics). In complex and multi-voiced societies all voices – whether they carry more or less weight – are added to the many choirs that can be heard on a permanent basis, where a single voice can only rarely deafen the others. In this sense the expectation that participation in the media is a privileged channel to allow for participation in society can only be considered a naïve fantasy that ignores the complexity of the polis. This limitation does not mean that participation in the media and participation through the media are irrelevant, but care should be taken that an evolution to a more balanced society is not smothered by the disappointment over participation not living up to expectations that can never be met.

Moreover, especially maximalist forms of participation have shown to be difficult to implement and sustain. It is no coincidence that the many case studies in this book are illustrative of the difficulties of organizing these more maximalist forms of participatory practices. For instance, the reception studies of *Temptation Island*, *Barometer* and *16plus* show the rejection of participatory media products because of the logics of disidentification or rejection of the material's (aesthetic, professional or social) quality. Participation often takes place in settings not necessarily geared to these maximalist versions. Or to frame it differently (maximalist forms of) participation is (are) subjected to a series of structuring elements, which might work in enabling ways, but also might be limiting. As always particular combinations of the material and the discursive, these structuring elements (co-)construct the participatory processes and their intensities, through their intimate relationships with the workings of power.

The first structuring element, (the participatory nature of) identities, has a strong discursive component, but through the logics of performativity, also gains an equally strong material component. The subject positions of media professionals, ordinary participants and other actors³ can, and often do, legitimize existing power dynamics inherent in media production, by articulating media professionals as owners of this process, or as first movers. In some cases (e.g., *Barometer* and *Temptation Island*) where this traditional identity of the media professional becomes post-political and shifts beyond contestation, it can severely disrupt the participatory process. Moreover, both the *Temptation Island* and *Barometer* analyses show the tendency of mainstream media professionals to cloak their management and to render their power positions invisible, which is highly problematic from a participatory perspective. But more participatory identities, as we have seen in projects such as *Video Nation*, and in alternative and community media organizations, can also facilitate a more maximalist participatory process.

The second structuring element relates to the nature of the organizational structures and to the existence of participatory organizations. We should not forget that many (mainstream) media organizations still function in capitalist logics, which impacts strongly on their objectives, and often works against a definition of media participation as a primary organizational objective. The *Jan Publiek*, *Barometer*, *16plus*, *Temptation Island* and even *Video Nation* case studies show how difficult it is for mainstream media to organize these more maximalist forms of participation, given their organizational objectives and material structures. The *Temptation Island* case, especially, illustrates the dangers of participation for its participants, who become docile bodies, subjected to a variety of management strategies and to the disconnected gaze of the audience members, reducing their positions to almost mere ordinariness (in a Lefebvrian sense).

But at the same time, a project such as *Video Nation* illustrates that more maximalist projects can be realized within the remit of a mainstream media broadcaster (despite the fact that the *Video Nation* project originated from one of the BBC's subcultural components). In contrast, the organizational structures of alternative and community

media seem still to be better equipped to deal with the organization of participation, although this may not always transpire in ways that celebratory alternative and community media approaches (implicitly or explicitly) claim. The *RadioSwap* project shows the attempts to overcome the localism and isolationism that often characterize this sphere by constructing (originally in a participatory way) a translocal network of alternative and community media producers, but the project also still faced many difficulties, which almost led to its demise.

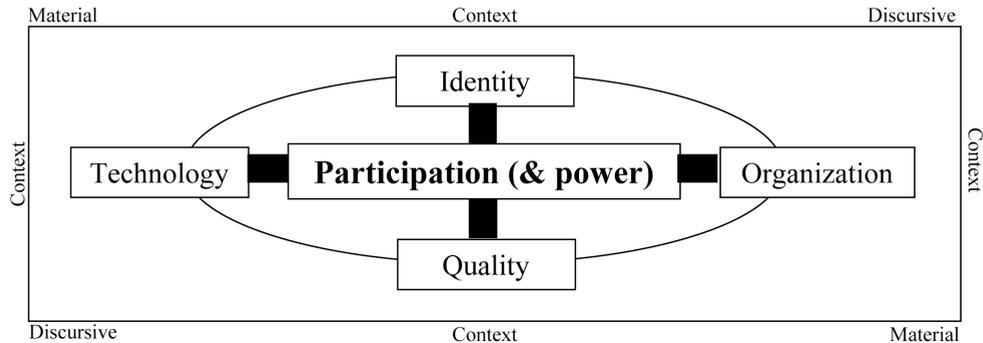
Third, the discursivity and materiality of technology and its affordances also impact on the participatory process. Media technologies are not neutral, in the sense that they are embedded within a series of material and discursive practices that structure the use of technology. For instance, radio has often been used as a tool of distribution, despite Brecht's (2001) call for radio technology to be used as a tool for communication. The hegemonic articulation of radio technology as tool of distribution apart, Brecht's radio theory shows that it is possible to develop different articulations of this technology. Later radio practices – again within the field of alternative and community radio – illustrate that more participatory practices have been enabled through radio technology. These examples show that the affordances of technology should not be fixed in an essentialist way, but that there are many possible re-articulations of these affordances. Moreover, the *Kinoautomat* case shows that – despite the difficulties that were encountered – it was possible to use film technology to produce a participatory process in the movie theatre, where participation is rarely allowed for. This does not mean that 'anything goes', and that the material can be put to use in an infinite number of ways. Technology's materiality allows many applications but also creates limits to its applicability. The *Kinoautomat* case shows how the materiality of the film technology had a severe impact on the film's participatory intensity, and on its future success, together with, for instance, the resistance of dominant film audience cultures against interactive film.

The fourth structuring element again has a strong discursive component, as it relates to the different quality discourses. But again, if we take into consideration the practices that are produced through these quality discourses, and that perform and produce them, quality discourses also have material components. Moreover, these quality discourses are multi-layered and sometimes contradictory, as quality can have several components including aesthetic, audience-based, professional, technical, social and democratic quality. These quality discourses play a significant role as they allow evaluation not only of the participatory process that is embedded within the media content, but also of the actual media content. Through this evolution (the perceived lack of) quality becomes a condition of possibility, as negative evaluations (can) lead to rejection of the participatory process and the input of participants. The cases of *Temptation Island*, *16plus* and *Barometer* show, sometimes in painful ways, that the perceived absence of quality (in the reception of these programmes) works against them and their participants. Quality is an object of hegemonic projects, where modernist articulations of aesthetic and professional quality continue to play prominent roles. Media content that diverges

too much from these conventions risks critique, ridicule and ultimately rejection. The negative responses to strong violations of the dominant quality conventions show that organizing participatory practices (and democratic-participatory quality) does not suffice to trigger the appreciation or acceptance of media content. At the same time, these conventions are not absolutely rigid, and the different components of quality interact with each other in driving the appreciation of audiences.

The group of four structuring elements identified here (see Figure 2) of course should not be considered an exhaustive list, and many other elements (e.g., pleasure, affect, engagement, trust, space, knowledge, media formats and genres, ...) could be added. Nevertheless, the absence of any claim as to their exhaustiveness is not to ignore the importance of identity, organizational structure, technology and quality discourses in their impact on the power relations that define media participation. In their materiality and discursivity, each of these components structurally can impede or facilitate participatory processes, and shift them towards more minimalist or maximalist versions, but they also can enter into complex interactions that in some cases work in opposition, and in other cases enhance each other.

Figure 2: Four structuring elements of participation.



Finally, it is important to reiterate my position in this debate since any intervention in the debates on participation implies an ideological positioning. I value the more maximalist forms of participation, which I see as important ways to further democratize our democracies and extend the ongoing democratic revolution. Establishing a more developed balance between participation and control, within a broad-political and multidirectional framework that takes account of societal heterogeneity and conflict, and which includes all societal spheres, is seen as an important instrument to create a more just society. This does not mean that participation should be celebrated as the ultimate solution to all societal problems, nor that participation should become disconnected from all of our other democratic values and transformed into the ultimate democratic fetish. This also does not imply that the right to participate (just like the

right to communicate) should be transformed into an obligation to participate (or to communicate). Participation should remain an invitation – permanently on offer and embedded in balanced power relations – to those who want to have their voices heard.

Notes

1. Here I want to thank Léonardo Custodio for his feedback on this chapter.
2. Although this is not the place to engage with Putnam's (1995) *Bowling Alone* argument, I would contend that the process of individualization can be reconciled with the increased political role of civil society.
3. A similar argument could be made for non-media-related subject positions, e.g. related to gender, ethnicity, age, class, etc. Although notions of class are made present through the analysis of the subject position of ordinary people, and gender featured prominently in the *Temptation Island* case study, a more elaborate analysis could be developed to study the impact of a broader range of subject positions.



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