Cultural Studies
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Available online: 15 Sep 2011

To cite this article: Nico Carpentier (2011): CONTEXTUALISING AUTHOR-AUDIENCE CONVERGENCES, Cultural Studies, 25:4-5, 517-533
To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2011.600537

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Nico Carpentier

CONTEXTUALISING AUTHOR-AUDIENCE CONVERGENCES

‘New’ technologies’ claims to increased participation, novelty and uniqueness

New media discourses are often engulfed by a variety of claims that emphasize their specificity. We can find the formulation of strong claims of novelty and uniqueness, in combination with processes of forgetfulness in relation to the societal roles of old media technologies. This article starts with a discussion on (new) audience theory, mapping and structuring the diversity of audience articulations with a focus on two of its main dimensions: the active/passive and the interaction/participation dimension. This mapping will then be used to problematize and critique the strong claims of novelty and uniqueness that ‘new’ participatory technologies have generated. Moreover, this theoretical mapping will also show that audience theory turns out to be quite stable in its capacity to facilitate the understanding of the diversity of relations between humans and media technology. Three claims are scrutinized: the shift from one-to-many to many-to-many communication; the re-articulation of the audience into the ‘produser’; and the convergence of top-down business with bottom-up production and consumption practices. Each of these claims is critically evaluated, in combination with a case study discussion that shows the complexities and contradictions of these claims. These three case studies are the BBC’s Video Nation project in the UK, a reception study of nine films on the Belgian online video-sharing platform 16plus, and formal participatory (alternative and community media) organizations.

Keywords audience theory; participation; interaction; novelty; convergence culture; produser

Introduction

As enthusiastic and sometimes messianistic discourses of novelty still engulf ‘new’ media technologies and practices, in combination with calls to re-articulate (or re-new) our present-day ideological and theoretical frameworks,
there is an evenly strong need to evaluate the novelty and uniqueness of these practices, to contextualize them by confronting them with media practices ‘from the past’ (which are as always still very present), and to consider the applicability of the ‘old’ (so-called outdated) theoretical frameworks to make sense of the diversity of participatory practices that characterize the media configuration of today.

The starting point of this article is audience theory, and more specifically, two of the main dimensions of audience theory: the active/passive and the interaction/participation dimensions. The strategy behind this starting point is to show that the signifier audience — a key theoretical concept in Media Studies — has not lost its conceptual strength, and can provide us with a well-functioning connection with past theorizations of media use in order to counter the tabula rasa tendencies of (some) new media theories. Moreover, foregrounding the interaction/participation dimension of audience theory will allow me to show the diversity and complexity of audience activities, and open the discussion on the history and differences in intensity of participatory practices.

This choice for audience theory as a starting point implies that I do not subscribe to the idea that the signifier audience has become outdated and should be abandoned. On the contrary, the signifier audience can provide us with a set of bridges with our intellectual traditions, allowing for the evaluation of the specificity of the claims made on behalf of the online active audience. In this article, three of these specificity claims will be examined, and their problems discussed, each time with the support of a small case study: the shift from one-to-many to many-to-many communication; the re-articulation of the audience into the ‘produser’; and the convergence of top-down business with bottom-up production and consumption practices.

The active/passive and interaction/participation dimensions in audience theory

There are of course many approaches for structuring the ways the concept of the audience has been theorized, and a ‘totalizing account [is] a logical impossibility’ (Jenkins 1999). The starting point of my analysis is the identification of two major dimensions that are labelled the active/passive and the micro/macro dimension, based on Littlejohn’s *Theories of Human Communication*, where 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.’ (Littlejohn 1996, p. 310) One of these two dialectics (or dimensions), the active/passive dimension, will be discussed in the first part of this article. At
the same time the argument will be made that this active/passive dimension — and more specifically its reduction to processes of signification — needs to be transcended by combining this dimension with the participation/interaction dimension.

The active/passive dimension in the articulation of audience

Allow me to start with the obvious. Especially, the passive audience model has a long history, and is very present in one of the most stubborn communication models in the history of communication studies: the sender-message-receiver model of Shannon and Weaver (1949). Later versions and variants add a feedback loop, but these additions do not fundamentally alter the position of the receiver as ‘ending point’ of communication processes. In contrast, the approach of the human subject as an active carrier of meaning is echoed in the development of Eco’s aberrant decoding theory (1968) and Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model. Also the uses and gratifications theory and the deduced models rely to a large degree on the concept of the active audience. The importance of the uses and gratifications theory is not only this emphasis on the active audience member, whose selectivity originates from utilitarian considerations. At least of equal importance is — from an analytical point of view — the complete reversal of the sender-message-receiver model (Nightingale 1996, p. 8).

The participation/interaction dimension in the audience articulation

The ‘traditional’ active/passive dimension (extremely) briefly sketched above often takes an idealist position by emphasizing the active role of the individual viewer in processes of signification. This position risks reducing social activity to these processes of signification, excluding other — more materialist — forms of human praxis. Here, it is argued that the active/passive dimension itself hides another dimension, which will be termed the participation/interaction dimension (see Figure 1). In other words, audience activity consists of two components, interaction and participation, which are seen as very different concepts. The interaction component of audience activity refers to the ‘traditional’ processes of signification and interpretation that are triggered by media consumption. Obviously, the polysemic readings of media texts are an integrative part of this component. But also the identity work, where audiences engage with the media texts that are offered to them is included in the interaction component of audience activity. This is for instance captured by the ritual or mediating quasi-interactive aspects of the media [see respectively, Carey (1975) and Thompson (1995)] where the symbolic-significatory linkage between media and audience is emphasized.

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, in a similar way that Wasko and Mosco (1992, p. 7) distinguished 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 participate in society by voicing their opinions, knowledges and experiences. Obviously, the structures and cultures of the media sphere itself (and its many components) and the ideological-democratic environment strongly impact upon the intensity of the participation.

Participation ‘in’ the media deals with the participation of non-professionals in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media 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 their right to communicate into practice. Although mainstream media have attempted to organize forms of audience participation (Livingstone and Lunt 1996, Carpentier 2003, McNair et al. 2003), especially community and alternative media have proven to be more successful in organizing more deepened forms of participation in the media (Girard 1992, Downing et al. 2000, Rodriguez 2001, Bailey et al. 2007).

At the same time, the signifier participation has been used in many different ways, stretching and emptying its meaning. Here, Pateman’s (1970, pp. 70–71) definition of participation, which refers to influence or (even) equal power relations in decision-making processes, can be used to avoid that the signifier participation becomes over-stretched. As argued more extensively before (see Carpentier 2007), this implies that participation cannot be equated with ‘mere’ access to or with interaction with media organizations, as authors like for instance Jenkins do. One example of this conflation can be found in Convergence Culture where Jenkins (2006, p. 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 at the same time very

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**FIGURE 1** The two dimensions of audience activity.
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 2. These components are the participation in media production, the participation in society through the media and the interaction with media content. The first component, participation in media production, is supported by three elements: access to, interaction with and participation in the media organization.

The specificity of the online active audience

Especially from the 1990s onwards — and in some cases earlier, as for instance with 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, not only would render most information available to all but also would create a whole new world of communication, within its slipstream the promise of a structural increase of the level of (media) participation. Meanwhile, this dream seems to have come true, at least at first sight: while at first, people still had to make the effort to construct their own web pages, the web 2.0 technologies now provide popular and accessible ways to publish texts, images and audio-visual material. At the same time, these ‘new’ technologies have often led to the formulation of strong claims of novelty and uniqueness, in combination with processes of forgetfulness in relation to the societal roles of old media technologies.

FIGURE 2 Participatory dimensions of audience activity.
Claim 1: The shift from one-to-many to many-to-many communication

One of the main specificity arguments is based on the structural nature of the shift from one-to-many to many-to-many communication. 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, p. 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, p. 163)

A first problem with this position is the homogenization of audience articulations and practices. The overview in the first part of this article has shown the richness of the signifier audience, which can incorporate a wide variety of meanings. Claiming that the meaning of the signifier audience is now limited to only one specific meaning, or that the concept should be abandoned altogether, does not do justice to the polysemy and versatility of the audience concept. Moreover, audience practices are characterized by the use of a diversity of media, some of them based on one-to-many mechanisms and others based on many-to-many logics. When for instance looking at research that study time use (see Holmes and Bloxham 2009 for an interesting example based on an observational method), we tend to see a complex mixture of different media technologies at different moments.

Secondly, as already suggested above, audience activity cannot be detached from the long history of participatory practices within the media. Mainstream media but especially alternative and community media have a long history of organising participatory processes at the level of content and management, and still continue to play a crucial role. Of course, it would be difficult to deny the increased diversity of participatory practices supported by an increased availability of technologies, but articulating the alternative and community media movement as the ‘prehistory’ of the contemporary participatory culture— as Jenkins (2006, p. 231) does— might not be the best way to do justice to these organizations and to the history of participation. If we keep this diverse history of participation in mind, we can again qualify the acclaimed novelty of the more recent forms of participation. Arguably, this is more a matter of modality and visibility than of novelty (see Jenkins 2006, p. 135), where one can only wonder whether the increase in popularity and the widening of the net has—at least in some cases—not (negatively) impacted on the intensities
of the participatory processes. To reframe this question: Do new media environments allow for more intense forms of participation in media production, or do these media ‘merely’ increase interaction with media organizations and content?

An interesting case here is the BBC’s Video Nation project in the UK (see Carpentier 2003, but also Thumin 1999, Dovey 2000, Rose 2000, Matthews 2007, Rose 2008). The Video Nation project started in 1992, long before web 2.0, and its basic concept was to provide camcorders to a semi-representative selection of ‘the audience’, to train these (approximately) 50 people and ask them to film fragments of their daily life. Important in the context of this article is that one of Video Nation’s basic principles was its decentralized power structure. As Dovey (2000, p. 126) put it, Video Nation had ‘the most devolved power structure that TV institutions can offer’. In Video Nation, three different domains can be distinguished where participants are attributed a higher degree of power than is common within the mainstream media system. This increased control was first of all situated at the level of the use of technology: A camcorder was placed at their disposal and the decision about what to film was theirs. Secondly, the position of the participants was strengthened by providing them with training and support. Thirdly, also in the domain of editing the participants were enabled to exercise control. As it was deemed impossible (logistically) to grant the participants physical presence during the editing, they were offered an ‘editorial veto’ that was specified in the contract. Rose (1995, p. 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.’

After 1994, the weekly output (for 40 weeks a year) of the Video Nation project consisted of five Shorts, in most cases broadcast before Newsnight on BBC2. During the six years of their broadcast career on TV, about 1,300 of these ‘mini-portraits’ or ‘windows on the people’s worlds’ (interview with Chris Mohr, 12 August 2002) were produced. The yearly production comprised three hours of longer documentaries (Rose 2000, p. 176). Ironically, the first phase of the Video Nation project ended in June 2000 because of the position of the Shorts. Their place in the programme schedule was claimed by a new BBC2 controller for tighter scheduling in order ‘to hold viewers’ (McCann 1999). After some small online projects, 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’ (personal communication with Chris Mohr, 6 November 2002). In comparison with the original TV-based existence of the Video Nation Shorts, a series of differences arose. Not only did the viewing experience change, but also the participatory intensity was affected, in a negative way. In the first (TV) 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 of tape every fortnight. In the second (web) phase, Video Nation’s
home became BBC England, and a large number of regional centres were involved (currently 33, see BBC 2010). One of the major consequences was that the number of people who could gain access to the project was increased, ironically to the detriment of their level of participation. The webshorts were (and are) filmed by participants who, in many cases, only had the cameras at their disposal for a limited amount of time, and produced a limited number of Shorts. In some cases, the training session was immediately followed by the filming of the first Short in order to save time and resources (interview with Carole Gilligan, 22 April 2003). After the restructuring of Video Nation in 2009, it also became impossible to submit just any kind of content, because content had to relate to pre-defined Features. In 2009, the Video Nation production team became more centralized, and the regional library-loan system and support from regional Video Nation producers was abandoned. Although the online version of Video Nation was still very much about ‘what people want to say and not about what [the media] demand’ (interview with Rosemary Richards, 3 August 2010), the changes in the Video Nation procedures show that the shift from old to new media technologies does not necessarily increase the participatory intensity. Early April 2011, Video Nation was closed by the BBC as part of its 50% online service reduction.

Claim 2: The re-articulation of the audience into the ‘produser’

A second claim on specificity is based on the privileging of the ‘user’, and his/her transformation into the ‘produser’ (e.g., Bruns 2007, or the ‘prosumer’ – Toffler (1980)). This can be seen as part of a longer evolution of increased audience autonomy. At the theoretical level, more and more attention has been spent on the audience activity part of the active–passive audience dimension, first at the level of interaction with media content (or the idealist level). Barthes’ (1984) Image Music Text contains the seminal essay The Death of the Author, implying that there was no privileged vantage point that fixed the interpretation of a text. Later, the participatory component of audience activity (or the material component) gained more strength, as we witness a convergence between the producers and receivers of discourses at the level of the production process. The old Author (the media professional) is claimed to also have lost control over the production process, as the ‘produser’ has overcome the rigid separations between both categories. The shift in the balance from audience activity as interaction with media content to audience activity as participation in the production process supports this claim of specificity.

There are nevertheless a number of problems with this claim. The conflation of user, producer and audience complicates the notion of the audience in two (almost contradictory) ways. Arguably, the notion of the user became popular because of its capacity to emphasize online audience activity, where people were seen to ‘use’ media technologies and content more actively. This semantic process only emphasized the passive connotations of the
signifier audience by creating a distinction between the signifiers audience and user, but at the same time problematically privileged online media worlds (and their (prod)users) as sites of audience activity. But paradoxically, when user, producer and audience become conflated, the user-component dominates the chain of equivalence, articulating all audiences as active participants; rendering passive consumption either absent or regrettable. Moreover, the lack of attention for the reception of online content leads to the presupposition that this content is appreciated and considered relevant by its audiences (in the assumption that the content is even ever discovered). In a way, this puts the audiences of online content into a passive position, ignoring their ability to actively interpret (and for instance dislike) online content. In other words, the interaction/participation dimension suppresses here the passive component of the ‘traditional’ active/passive dimension.

If we turn to (a rather extreme example of) a reception studies of online content, we can see that this disliking can definitely occur. A reception study of nine films on the online video-sharing platform 16plus, produced by clearly inexperienced non-professionals, who were experimenting for the very first time with the participatory opportunities offered to them, brought about an avalanche of critiques on the material and its makers (Carpentier 2009). The format used in these films is based on a collage of interviews on the street and in shops with a diversity of people. Although the films had their merits in acting as little flâneurs that presented a hyper-realistic picture of everyday life, the films diverged from mainstream media conventions in a variety of ways. The soundtrack of the films is, in many cases, rather difficult to understand, and in at least one of the films the raindrops on the camera lens are clearly visible. The films do not always have an introduction, or a clear storyline, and the relationships between the different parts are not always explained. The films allow the viewer to look at the ‘normal’ scenes of everyday life, without adding a layer of aestheticization or narrative structure, which is more typical of professionally produced media products. Instead, we get to see the raw data of the everyday, without much decoration.

The 16plus focus group respondents argue extensively and continuously why they dislike the nine films. At the level of the content of the films, the respondents point to the lack of relevance and usefulness. The second component of their critique is based on the (perceived) motives attributed to the producers. Here the films are criticized because the producers were seen as being bored and having nothing else to do, or as wanting to merely get themselves noticed. The formal quality of the film is the third component of critique. The respondents formulate a lethal set of critiques in this area: the films are described as poorly filmed (with the raindrops on the lens mentioned frequently), the framing and editing are seen as problematic and the sound quality is poor. In general, they complain about a lack of aesthetic quality. The respondents also refer to the lack of narrative structure and focus, and to the poor preparation and research by the producers.
But even more importantly in the context of this article, the focus group respondents use the ‘skilful media professionals’ as a constitutive outside which provides the discursive framework to criticize the productions of the amateur producers. On many occasions, the perceived lack of aesthetic, narrative and technical quality is juxtaposed with the quality of professional media productions. This generates an interesting paradox in the focus group discussions, where the mainstream media are seen to offer a poor perspective on reality and are deemed manipulative, but they are accepted because they master the aesthetic and narrative professional standards. In contrast, the work of the amateur producers (or the produsers) is considered authentic and an important contribution to the democratization of the media field, but their actual work gets totally discredited when it is seen to lack ‘professional’/ ‘traditional’ aesthetic and narrative qualities. This shows how strongly these ‘professional’ quality discourses still mediate the evaluation of media content.

Claim 3: The convergence of top-down business with bottom-up consumption and production practices

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, p. 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’ argument is based on a multiple media approach that overcomes the old/new media divide, in combination with attention for the intertwining of active consumers and corporate media. Very much in line with Fiske’s (1989) position, Jenkins sees popular culture as a meeting place of active audiences and mainstream media, as an intersection of participation and commodification.

Here, the 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, as it 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 main societal driving forces that have for instance displaced media professionalism. Audience activity thus becomes (seen as) instable in space and time, and embedded within structural uncertainties where
large groups of people join in collaborative projects, produce output and then disperse again.

But again one could claim that the arguments in favour of the digital culture’s specificity focus on the increased intensity and entanglement of these convergences. Moreover, the convergence culture argument is characterized by a series of problems. Firstly, the convergence argument also seems to be investing strongly into a set of commercialized media worlds, which tends to homogenize ‘the media’ and hegemonise media’s tendency towards commodification. Without wanting to discredit the importance of audience resistance in popular culture, non-commercial media models – whether they are public media or alternative and community media – feature less prominently within these logics, which again disadvantages older (and sometimes more intense) forms of participation.

Secondly, even if we (momentarily) accept the focus on commercial media, we need to take into account Jenkins’ argument that a high price is paid, as the risks of being incorporated are substantial. The media industries have not disappeared and ‘To be desired by the networks is to have your tastes commodified’ (2006, p. 62). This also impacts on the production sphere, as the audience’s leisure time is often transformed into (free) labour (Terranova 2000) and consumers are disciplined into work (Zwick et al. 2008). The locus of control of many of the interfaces that facilitate and structure these participatory processes remains firmly in the hands of companies that are outside the participatory process.

Thirdly, we should be careful not to lose sight of the importance of formal organizational participatory structures. Here, the conflation of community and organization in the convergence culture argument poses a serious problem, as 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, to an ignoring of (the differences in) power dynamics within organizations and communities, and to a neglect of the sometimes problematic power positions of participating (or interacting) individuals in a context of networked individualism (Wellman 2002). Audiences are frequently positioned by media industries (who are themselves highly organized), technologies and themselves as aggregated individuals, which decreases their power position. Moreover, the media industries’ privileges are also protected by the audiences’ lack of resources (e.g. time). Just like the audience cannot be hyper-active in its interpretative capabilities, it often cannot be hyper-productive in its capacity to produce content. Organized audiences (see Reyes Matta 1986), more than individuals and communities, find themselves in stronger power positions, as they can benefit from the support, protection comfort and resources of these organizational structures. Moreover, formal participatory organizations offer safe-havens and cultural archives for the development, storage and recollection of participatory practices and tools.
Here, for a last example, we can return to alternative and community media studies. Although this field is characterized by a wide diversity in structures, cultures and practices, one crucial component seems to be omnipresent within the field, and that is the participation of a community (however it is defined) in the media organization (Carpentier et al., 2003). In other words: They are organizational nodal points that facilitate the participation of specific communities. One illustration of the centrality of participation is the ‘working definition’ of community radio adopted by AMARC-Europe (1994, p. 4), the European branch of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters. AMARC-Europe labels a community radio station as ‘a “nonprofit” 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.’ Of course, the next question then probes to the nature of this participation. A first answer comes from Berrigan (1979, p. 8): ‘[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.’ In practice, Pateman’s (1970, p. 71) definition of participation is seen at work: Community (and alternative) media not only allow but also facilitate the participation (as decision-making) of members of the community in both the produced content and the content-producing organization (see Prehn 1991, p. 259).

What is crucial to these formal participatory (alternative and community media) organizations is that they show the importance of the organizational embeddedness of participatory cultures. They have played this role long before web 2.0 even became conceived. As organizations, and as a vibrant part of civil society, they incorporate and uphold (admittedly, in different degrees and with many problems) some of the basic principles of democratic communication and communication rights by organising, facilitating, protecting and struggling with the participatory nature of their content production and their organizational management. Community and alternative media do establish different types of relationships with the market and/or the state, often for reasons of survival, but can still be seen as potentially destabilizing the rigidities and certainties of public and market media organizations (Carpentier et al. 2003). Most importantly, community and alternative media show the possibility to maintain the more maximalist versions of participation in media environments.

Conclusion

Also at the theoretical level we need to be careful not to let the discourse of novelty smother the long theoretical tradition(s) of studying the audience. Audience theory turns out to be quite stable in its capacity to facilitate the understanding of the diversity of relations between humans and media.
technology. The core theoretical dimensions that structure audience theory have not been downgraded by rise of the digital culture; on the contrary, they allow us to reflect on the changes that characterize the present-day media configuration. Through the lenses of audience theory we can see that the strong emphasis on informally organised audience activity covers up some of the complexities of production and reception, and the (un)equality of the power relations that operate in both fields. Audience theory also allows us to avoid the conflation of interaction and participation, which in many cases prevents us from noticing that in the present-day media configuration the maximalist forms of participation have remained rare whilst at the same time the opportunities for interaction have structurally increased.

One additional reason for keeping the history of participation in mind is that it has produced a (limited but significant) number of radical examples that – protected by formal organizational structures – attempted to maximize media participation, at both the level of content production and organizational decision-making. These older forms have not disappeared, but coexist with the evenly radical examples in the digital landscape [for instance some of the cases of fan activism and production discussed by Jenkins (2006)]. These radical participatory projects have provided structural support for the democratic imaginary of full participation, which phantasmagoric realization serves as the breeding grounds for civil society’s attempts oriented towards democratization of the media. These radical participatory practices are the ‘real’ Temporary Autonomous Zones that Bey (1985) wrote about: the radical-democratic media archipelagos that are often carefully hidden away, and dissolve before they can be incorporated by mainstream media corporations. As horizons, these radical media organizations (disregarding the technologies they use) remain a necessity to continue and to deepen the participatory processes that have been set in motion, and are now involving more people than ever.

Notes

1 For a discussion of the micro/macro dimension, see Carpentier (2004).
2 It should be added that Jenkins does distinguish between interactivity and participation (Jenkins 2006, p. 305) and that he (in some rare cases) uses the concepts of participation and interaction next to each other, leaving some room for the idea that they are indeed different concepts (Jenkins 2006, p. 110, 137).
3 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. For this reason, a grey arrow is used to indicate this component in the figure 2 model.
4 To the regret of some, see Keen (2007).
5 Of course, care needs to be taken not to over-stretch this signifier either.
Video Nation material was in this phase in some cases still being broadcast on television (see BBC 2010).

In the case of new media participation, this has partially been compensated by the attention for the ‘lurker’ in online communities, but the pejorative sound of this concept might be more of an indication of the problem than a solution.

For a discussion of this project’s methodology, see Carpentier (2009).

Notes on contributor

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