MEDIA & SOCIETY
How do interactive media technologies organize participation in public life?

What are some of the differing accounts of interactivity?

How are power relationships formed and managed in an interactive media system?

We begin this chapter by conceptualizing social and interactive media. We then map out some key claims about interactivity. Interactive media:

- Enable new forms of participation: ordinary people can create and circulate content and express their point of view
- Are responsive and customized
- Facilitate greater transparency and surveillance.

INTERACTIVITY, PARTICIPATION AND POWER

In the Utah desert the US National Security Agency has built one of the largest data centres on earth. Many of the activities taking place at the centre were revealed by Edward Snowden during 2013. The purpose of the facility is to ‘intercept, decipher, analyse, and store vast swaths of the world’s communications as they
zap down from satellites and zip through the underground and undersea cables of international, foreign and domestic networks’. The centre collects the ‘complete contents of private emails, cell phone calls, and Google searches, as well as all sorts of personal data trails – parking receipts, travel itineraries, bookstore purchases’ in order to paint ‘detailed portraits’ of our lives (Bamford 2012).

We often think of the power interactive media have granted to ordinary people. Where once we were merely consumers of mass media, now we can actively produce and distribute content. Where once we could only listen, now we can speak back. Although these narratives sound good, they deserve scrutiny. While some celebrate the capacity of interactive media to enable various forms of public expression (Benkler 2006, Jenkins 2006, Hartley 2010, Jarvis 2011, Jenkins et al. 2012), others argue these claims to empowerment are overstated and misleading, that in fact this is a far more controlling system and that our participation is an integral part of established concentrations of power. Interactivity, so the argument goes, does little in its own right to increase the quality of life or economic, political and social power of ordinary people (Andrejevic 2007, Dean 2010, Lanier 2010, 2013 Morozov 2011). While we can blog, upload videos and photos, comment, like and share content with each other, each of those activities takes place within a system that watches, responds, manages and profits from those activities. There is no doubt the audience is active, and we live in a media culture that calls on us to participate every day. What matters though is that we make careful distinctions between being ‘active’ and being ‘powerful’ (Morley 1993: 16). What are the qualities of our participation? Who does participation benefit? What kind of political and cultural formations does participating in interactive media produce? How do interactive forms of media change the way meaning is made and circulated? And what role do ordinary people play in making and circulating meaning? How are interactive media implicated in the exercise of power?

The media system being built around us can no longer be understood simply in terms of who says what to whom with what effect. We must also account for how speaking is interrelated with watching and listening. Power is concentrated not just in the capacity to speak, but also in the ability to collect and analyse information and create and manage interactive networks. This involves watching and responding to what others say and do – channelling, amplifying and constraining them. The data centre in the Utah desert offers one illustration of the immense concentrations of power that go hand in hand with the development of interactive media. If we are to have a robust account of the power that interactive media grant ordinary people to speak, we need a corresponding account of the power that interactive media grant often-established actors like states and corporations to watch everyday life. We then need to consider how this watching conditions the social spaces and processes in which we act. We need to carefully examine the capacity to speak in relation to how we are heard in meaningful ways.

**WHAT ARE SOCIAL MEDIA?**

Social media are embedded within interactive digital networks. Interactive digital networks comprise the whole range of internet technologies that collect, organize and circulate information. Social media refer to the emergence of web and mobile technologies that enable users to create and circulate content within social networks.
Users create and circulate content

Social media are characterized by users who create and circulate content within a network of other users. Those networks are shaped by a combination of user preferences and automated decisions made by those who control the network. On social media we tell a story about ourselves and our everyday lives (Livingstone 2008). Our peers, corporations, media organizations, political parties and governments provide us with content and cultural resources that we incorporate into our identities. We communicate who we are via the news stories we comment on, the brands we like, and the political and popular figures we make jokes about or express faith in. This story about ourselves is constructed as a mobile and real-time part of our daily life.

Commercialization of the web

Social media are part of the ongoing technical development and commercialization of the web. Google, for example, bought YouTube for $1.6 billion in 2006 as part of their strategy of integrating ‘search engines with content, social networking and advertising’ (van Dijck 2009: 42). Facebook bought Instagram in 2012 for $1 billion so that they could retain control over the flow of personal photographs through the social web. Social media are increasingly central to how the web and networked economy function. Social media networks are converging with the provision of services and the databases of state and commercial institutions. Web technologies are becoming more responsive and flexible. Algorithms that intuitively read, organize and interpret information for users will be intrinsic to the next generation of the web. Social media users’ creation and circulation of information is increasingly integrated with automated algorithms and databases that shape, manage and harness those activities.

Media devices and everyday life

The web that is developing around us is one that not only affords greater opportunities to make and circulate information, it will also be more intuitively integrated into our everyday life. Via devices that we carry around with us it will be able to locate, organize and present information to us in real time based on an array of different variables: where we are, what we’re looking at, who we’re with, who has come to this location in the past, where we’re going, where it predicts we will go next, what we’re talking about, what our mood is, what our tastes are, what our past movements or preferences are, what people like us have done or thought or said in the past, and so on. The web is a series of interconnected databases and algorithms that delivers customized information to us, just as much as we contribute and circulate information through it. The fundamental difference between this media system and a broadcast one is two-fold. Firstly, on broadcast media like television every member of the audience saw the same content. That is no longer the case; the interactive media system customizes content to individuals by watching and responding to users. Secondly, on television we saw content produced by professionals within bounded institutions. That is also no longer the case; we now see a mix of content that is produced by individuals and ordinary people. Professionals play the role of producing, editing and managing the flow of content.
Social media and social life

Media are social practices, something humans do (Couldry 2012: 33). Practices are enabled and constrained by power relations. We use media to organize the social world: coordinate societies, interact with each other, build communities, create and maintain trust, and convey and legitimize ideas, people and values. We use media to create and maintain social institutions and our way of life. Couldry (2012) maps out some of the intrinsic practices that form interactive and social media:

- **Searching**: search engines are a hub of online networks (2012: 45). The information we access online about news, politics, health issues, maps, popular culture, finance and so on begins with search engines. Increasingly, those searches are informed by information that Google collects about us. Search engines are key points of organizing information and representations and are therefore key nodes of control in the creation and maintenance of networks (2012: 105).
- **Showing**: everyday life is mediated and shown in online networks (2012: 47–48). Whether it is a large public event like a protest or a disaster, or a personal event like a party, ordinary people use smartphones to record, upload and circulate images and content in real time. Whenever something happens someone will be there to record and circulate it. Much of what we show online isn’t so much a product of our own creative and analytic efforts to represent the social world, but rather an immediate live cataloguing of daily life.
- **Presencing and archiving**: individuals and institutions put information about themselves online to sustain a public presence (2012: 50). These activities are key to constructing a social identity. Being present in networks is critical to building social, economic and political capital. If presenting is the live real-time maintenance of being seen and felt in networks, then archiving is the process of managing information traces over time (2012: 51) to create ongoing narratives and histories about our lives, identities and communities (2012: 51).

Social media are part of a series of social practices that we use to create our identities and organize our lives. As we move through everyday life with our smartphone in hand we search for places on maps and recommendations on review sites; we show images of events that unfold around us; and we create digital traces that position us in social networks in ways that are visible publicly to our peers and privately to the databases and algorithms of platforms.

Social media and the active user

Social media platforms need active users who create and circulate content. The active user is a provider of sociality, content and data (van Dijck 2009: 47). Without them the platforms couldn’t function or create value. Social media platforms, though, work to channel and contain user activity by ‘brokering sociality’ and ‘engineering connectivity’ (van Dijck 2011: 10). Platforms are built around dynamic power relationships. The forms of communication and control that social media enable are the result of an ongoing ‘negotiation between owners, users, content producers, law makers, engineers, marketers
about the control of data and technology’ (2011: 12). The active user is constructed and constrained within the possibilities of the platform (2011). Users can only be active on the terms that are set by the social media platforms they use.

Social media platforms are a combination of material structures and hardware (like server farms and broadband networks) and immaterial processes like databases, software and user interfaces. These platforms, protocols and interfaces set the coordinates and protocols for communication (van Dijck 2011: 3). Just as broadcast media of the twentieth century called into being particular publics and action, and reshaped how commercial and state institutions interacted with those publics, networks of today are transforming public communication and life (2011: 3). Power on a social media platform is not grounded only in relationships of who produces and who consumes content, but more fundamentally in who controls the communicative spaces, processes, networks and flows of content.

INTERACTIVE MEDIA ENABLE NEW FORMS OF PARTICIPATION

Throughout the twentieth century our active meaning making and decoding of media texts was largely confined to our private lives. We could read the newspaper or watch a television programme and come to our own interpretations and views of the representations we encountered. We had little capacity, however, to express our ideas in a wider public context. For most of us, our views were confined to our friends and family, and perhaps to other civic bodies we participated in (like a trade union, a church, a sporting club or a local pub). Interactive media have expanded the capacity for us to publicize ourselves, our everyday lives and our perspectives to a wider audience. Via blogs and social media platforms anyone with access to the internet can create and circulate content. Using the communication conventions of online networks – like hashtags, discussion boards or groups – we can also circulate our views to a network of people who are interested in the same issues or events as us. We can also use those technologies to organize social networks and formations around shared interests and ideas. The fact of this capacity of ordinary people to publish and circulate their views and organize social networks shouldn’t automatically lead us to conclude, however, that they are now more powerful, or that mainstream media are less powerful, or that elites are now more accountable. Instead, we need to consider how these technologies organize how power is made and maintained.

Arguments about the active audience have come and gone since the emergence of mass broadcast media in the 1930s. Media and audiences have always been ‘interdependent … joint constructors of meaning’ (Livingstone 1993: 7). While hegemonic discourses are always under construction and contingent, they weren’t ever dependent on a media system that prevented people from thinking or saying what they really thought. In western democracies most people appear to consent with the ideology of the mass media. In this context, the more active the audience is the more they circulate and promote the messages and content of the mainstream media and its commercial and political allies. Morley (1993: 14) argues that while hegemonic discourses are always insecure and incomplete, this doesn’t mean they are easily deconstructed in practice. In fact, we need to understand how the active meaning
making of audiences – and indeed their resistant decoding and creative modification of meanings – are interlaced with their submission and complicity with hegemonic structures. Our creativity and resistance helps hegemonies function: it helps them to appear legitimate, accommodating and open-ended. If this could be said about television, it becomes even more important when we examine interactive forms of media that are even more dependent on our participation.

**Considering the quality of participation**

What interactive media bring to the mix perhaps is the mass amplification of the ability of audiences to create and circulate meaning. This participation appears to more readily affirm hegemonies than disrupt them. What we need in the interactive era is not just an understanding of the interaction between audience and text, but also how interactive media manage audience participation – encoding them into the continuous production of texts and meanings. Texts are no longer discrete bundles of meaning produced and distributed to an audience for decoding. Interactive media continuously incorporate the audience into the production of the text. The audience watches itself participating. What we need to pay attention to then is how texts establish and manage the coordinates within which that participation takes place. One reason this matters is that increasingly our participation as audience members is coextensive with our participation as citizens (Livingstone 1998: 197). It is in our everyday practices as audience members that we reproduce larger social structures and communicative processes (Morley 1993: 17).

This raises some important considerations:

- Ordinary people may have more opportunity to speak but this doesn’t mean they are circulating new or different meanings. Much audience participation involves recirculating already existing media content without adding new meaning to it.
- Even if ordinary people are free to say whatever they want and circulate truly oppositional or radical ideas online, it doesn’t necessarily follow that this will have any material effect on the real world. Where we do see real change, the activities of citizens on interactive media networks is often unfolding within a context where hegemonies are under other material, political and economic pressures.
- We need to pay careful attention to the quality of public dialogue on interactive and social media. The capacity to circulate information is only meaningful if the content we circulate is accurate, credible or constructive.
- Interactive and social media networks are often characterized by emotional or affective forms of communication. These media networks mobilize how we feel as much as what we think. Social media can rapidly amplify and circulate feelings of outrage and anger. These affective responses can be uneven, spontaneous, unpredictable and reactive. They can also spread quickly throughout a network.
- Online networks are often organized around a small group of ‘knowing’, educated and elite users. These are people who are educated, media-savvy and socially connected. They know how to channel publicity to generate responses from the network, and to use those responses to advance their own political and commercial interests.
• Interactive and social media platforms are increasingly composed of fragmented sectional interests. Users gravitate towards networks composed of people like them. Media organizations and social media platforms encourage and engineer this segmentation. In liberal democracies this segmentation is mostly undertaken for commercial reasons; in other states it can also be undertaken for political reasons. Regardless of the purpose, this segmentation does have effects on the nature of public life and political debate.

• Interactive and social media are characterized by savvy, snarky and ironic forms of communication. On the surface, participants who make clever and informed jokes about the powerful, or convey their cynical distance from the claims of the powerful, appear empowered. They appear informed and knowledgeable. But too often this surface disposition belies a fundamental apathy.

While there is no dispute that we are now more active participants in the creation and circulation of media content, what really matters is careful analysis of the qualities of that participation. We need to distinguish between ‘speaking and being heard’ (Hindman 2009). It doesn’t matter that we can speak if no one is listening, or if our capacity to express ourselves isn’t interrelated with material political processes that might change the world. That is, we need to pay attention to how our voices are valued both in terms of the quality and content of what we have to say, and the process of speaking and being heard (Couldry 2010). Nick Couldry encourages us not to fall for the claim that growing incitements to speak and participate are automatically empowering; instead we have to carefully examine how media, cultural and political processes engage us and value our voices. While ordinary people have the capacity to make and distribute meaning within interactive media, it does not appear to give them the ability to shape the way interactive space is organized (Hindman 2009, Turner 2010, Andrejevic 2011). We need to distinguish between the capacity to create content and the capacity to manage the spaces within which meaning is circulated.

INTERACTIVE MEDIA ARE RESPONSIVE AND CUSTOMIZED

During the twentieth century we developed an understanding of media representations appropriate for a broadcast media system. We grew accustomed to thinking of media representations as being publicly distributed and relatively static. Whatever a newspaper printed or a television station broadcast was final at the moment of transmission and available to anyone who accessed that publication or channel. In distinction, an interactive media system is responsive and customized. There are many ways that interactive media respond and adapt to users. The basic conceptual distinction though is that a broadcast media system couldn’t make immediate and real-time decisions about the content it served a specific audience member, whereas an interactive media system can. A print publication or television station could conduct market research that informed their content and programming decisions. This research would shape content over a long period of time. And it did have effects on the way that audiences were segmented (see Turow 1997). This was a relatively imprecise activity,
however, and viewers could still actively choose to view content that wasn’t targeted at them. An interactive media system, however, shapes the content that it serves based on rapidly increasing flows of information it collects about users.

The more that audience members engage with interactive media systems, the more information they collect about them and the more effectively they can control the content served. For the most part, the decisions of organizations like Facebook and Google on the content that is served is guided by their commercial interests to serve content that fits their advertising-driven business models.

**Customization**

The sorting and customization of content enabled by interactive and networked media systems has benefits for both media organizations and consumers. For consumers, customization arguably offers greater convenience. As the interactive networks we use learn our interests and preferences they can make it easier for us to find the content we are seeking. As Amazon collects your purchase history it can recommend books it predicts you might like. As Google collects your search history and location it can serve you search results appropriate to where you live and what your interests are. These networks can also deliver content on-demand. The rise of businesses like Netflix and Hulu are rapidly moving television towards a post-broadcast business model. Viewers no longer sit down at a specified time to watch a television programme; they log on and stream content at their own convenience, often suggested to them by the platform’s algorithms. There are opportunities for organizations that can take advantage of these more networked, asynchronous and fragmented forms of content production and delivery. They are no longer confined to having to create a mass audience that will consume one selection of content. They can continuously serve an array of different combinations of content to individuals based on their interests and demands. This increases the capacity for selling content and targeting advertisements.

A number of critiques (Hindman 2009, Lanier 2010, Morozov 2011, Pariser 2011, Turow 2011) have raised questions about the social and political consequences of a media system built on the routine sorting and customizing of content based on information collected from users. Pariser (2011) coins the term ‘filter bubbles’ to describe the selections of content we are served based on the information that networks collect about us. He uses the example of Facebook’s news feed algorithm to make his point. Facebook makes decisions about the content it shows in a user’s news feed based in part on decisions it makes about the closeness or affinity between that user and other users in their network. The algorithm recognizes affinity being performed when users acknowledge each other with likes or comments, share similar interests, express similar ideas or share connections in common. Pariser explains that although he has both progressive and conservative friends on Facebook, he is more inclined to express progressive views himself and share items of content to his own profile from progressive friends. Over time, Facebook learns that he has an affinity with progressive political views and news content, and so gradually removes conservative friends and content from his news feed. It is important to note that Facebook does not do this by deliberately labelling people and content ‘progressive’ or ‘conservative’ based on a judgement about the meaning of content being circulated. Its algorithm doesn’t understand meaning; it makes a judgement based on the affinity between people based on who and
what they interact with. It determines that some people are like others in terms of their interactions and expressions, but it doesn’t necessarily know what the specific nature of that affinity is.

Pariser argues that he wants to read the views of his conservative friends, he just doesn’t often post those views himself or engage with them. Aside from his personal preference to read conservative content, he makes a broader political point. That is, democracy depends on us encountering the views of people who aren’t like us. During the twentieth century we lived in largely broadcast democracies, where the function of the media in part was to construct a public within which different points of view were disseminated, canvassed and debated over periods of time (although this is partly an idealized account of broadcast democracy). In an interactive post-broadcast democracy we risk losing this broad-based public, as we are sorted into smaller bubbles of people who are already like us.

These observations about the filtering of content online raise three important issues:

- Automatic algorithms become the new gatekeepers. Media systems have always had gatekeepers who decide what information is shared with the public and how events and ideas are represented. Traditional gatekeepers are journalists, editors and media advisors. They interact with each other to shape the way events are represented. While these gatekeepers still exist, in an interactive media system automatic algorithms also make decisions about the content that you see, and this can shape your view of immediate events or longer term understanding of issues.
- In a networked form of communication we can only see those parts of the network that we are connected to. The system learns which connections matter to us, and prompts us to make new connections based on our past or current interests. It predicts the kind of position we would like to have in a network. This means, though, that parts of public life, points of view and people become increasingly invisible to us. We are confined to parts of the network consisting of people like us.
- Networks are asymmetrical. Publics are constructed, performed and called into being continuously. Networks create a constantly-shifting set of connections between individuals based on convenience, proximity and affinity. They do not create publics where people with different points of view encounter and negotiate with each other.

Predictions and decisions
The consequences of increasingly customized information don’t only extend to what we know about. They arguably also change our orientation to the truthfulness of representations. The ability to customize our media also leads us to choose between interpretations of events and issues. The problem is not only that we don’t see the multiple sides of a debate, but also that we increasingly become immersed in a chosen perspective. We choose the facts that match how we feel about an event or issue (Andrejevic 2013: 49). We don’t make choices based on our judicious or evidentiary assessment of perspectives. News becomes a customizable commodity. We customize based on our feelings and identity, as much as our assessments of the veracity of representations.
The responsive and customizable nature of interactive media doesn’t just impact on the news and views we see in our Facebook news feeds, news sites we visit, and Google or Amazon searches. It has far-reaching and constantly evolving impacts. This is not just a matter of the information used about us as individuals, but also the information collected and used to make predictions about people like you (Andrejevic 2011). Consider the kinds of information an organization like Facebook could collect over the course of your life. It would know not just about your life, but the life course and prospects of the many thousands and even millions of people who share similar demographic characteristics, interests and everyday patterns as you. It can use that information not just to make decisions about what kind of person you are now but what life you are likely to lead in the future.

**Algorithmic culture**

As we use mobile devices we generate flows of information that algorithms make decisions about. Algorithms are the range of automated or procedural decisions media systems make in assembling flows of content and brokering audience attention. Hallinan and Strihas (2014: 3) define algorithmic culture as the ‘use of computational processes to sort, classify, and hierarchize people, places, objects, and ideas, and also the habits of thought, conduct and expression that arise in relationship to those processes’. Algorithms are part of an interactive media system. As they become more important to how content is sorted and displayed to audiences, professional communicators devise ways to tune their activities to the decision-making logic of algorithms. News organizations, film and television producers, brands, politicians and any group seeking publicity need to create content that algorithms will judge to be of interest to audiences.

Hallinan and Strihas (2014) warn that this might create a new kind of cultural conformity. Algorithmic decision making tends to ignore objects that can’t be categorized, that polarize opinion or that get an unpredictable reaction. As algorithms play a larger role in deciding what cultural content we see, we may see less culture that is genuinely disruptive, innovative and speculative.

**FILTER BUBBLES**

Watch Eli Pariser’s TED talk ‘Beware online “filter bubbles”’. You can find a link on the Media and Society website study.sagepub.com/carahandlouw

Pariser argues that algorithms like Facebook’s news feed or the Netflix recommendation system tend to show us content that reflects ideas we already agree with, while making the lives and ideas of people who are different to us less visible.

Some argue that these algorithms give audiences what they want, while others say media and cultural producers have an important public role to play in challenging audiences and exposing them to alternative ways of life and points of view.

What are the consequences of algorithms deciding what content we see?
Shaping how we experience space

Responsive and customized forms of media shape the way we see the world around us in the first place. Morozov (2013) takes the example of the map, a media text that for hundreds of years has remained relatively objective. That is, the map of a city was the same for me as it was for you. Google, however, are making maps increasingly responsive and customized. The map of your city might appear differently to you compared to another citizen. The maps we see will give preference to our interests and the places frequented by our friends and people like us. Businesses might be able to pay to make themselves more visible on the maps of individuals they are seeking to target. This makes our choices far more predictable over time. We will go to the places that Google nudges us towards by making them more visible to us, instead of discovering places in our city accidentally over time. These media technologies profoundly change the everyday experience of life in a big city.

Space and our experience of it becomes just another form of information that can be collected, organized and customized as part of an interactive media system. The problem, as Morozov (2013) puts it, is that this system doesn’t allow for the ‘disorder, chaos and novelty’ that have been an essential ingredient in creative and innovative cities and societies. Furthermore, these maps likely privilege commercial spaces with recommendations to us as consumers, and slowly the public spaces on maps become less visible and less important. These interactive maps might play a role in shaping our understanding of our cities and public spaces in the first place. They represent sites of consumption as important, because these will have reviews, recommendations and advertisements, whereas public spaces slip from view. ‘In Google’s world’, Morozov (2013) argues, ‘public space is just something that stands between your house and the well-reviewed restaurant that you are dying to get to. Since no one formally reviews public space or mentions it in their emails, it might as well disappear from Google’s highly personalised maps.’ Morozov’s example points to the mobile and locational aspect of the responsiveness of media. Broadcast and print media were largely confined to particular sites of consumption; they didn’t follow us around on a device in our pocket all day. The interface between Google search, targeted advertisements, maps and mobile devices prompts us to consider the way increasingly responsive forms of media reshape how that content is embedded in, and structures, our everyday life.

Algorithms organize and shape content you see, which in turn might affect your world-view and your capacity to use the media to participate in public life. This has a collective impact as it fragments public discourses. Profiled and sorted into niches, do we lose the capacity to use media to negotiate important social, cultural and political issues? Importantly, it also calls for a new understanding of control. Rather than shape our identities and lives only with ideological content, media shape our lives with a responsive and predictive mode of control that constantly anticipates our interests, life chances, life course and political viewpoints in ways that don’t tell us what to think, as much as they anticipate and shape the information we use to construct our understanding of the world.
process of creating and distributing meaning. Interactive media though don’t just speak, they also watch. On the one hand we need to consider how surveillance is intrinsic to interactive media and the networked economy. On the other hand we need to consider how interactive communication technologies enable greater transparency of social and political institutions and power. At the same time as we are seeing states and corporations rapidly develop enormous surveillance capacities, we are also seeing the emergence of new forms of transparency based on the ability to collect and share information. Broad-based and accessible Freedom of Information systems in many democracies, sites and communities of information sharing and disclosure like WikiLeaks or Reddit, and the use of blogs and micro-blogging networks in many developing and authoritarian countries, all point to ways in which interactive technologies can enable ordinary people to reshape power relations by subjecting the powerful to greater scrutiny and transparency. At the same time though many of these activities are readily incorporated into the power relationships of network societies. The more citizens use social media to organize themselves politically the more easily the powerful can track their opinions and movements. The revelations of WikiLeaks, despite being the largest leak of classified information in history, did not disrupt the US hegemony in any meaningful way. Governments all over the world are developing increasingly savvy ways of circumventing and managing Freedom of Information regimes. As quickly as interactive media afford new opportunities for transparency, the powerful work out ways to both control and benefit from those opportunities.

WHAT IS SURVEILLANCE?

Surveillance is watching with purpose (Lyon 2011: 14–16). Surveillance involves the ‘focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, production or direction’. Surveillance technologies are a routine and normal part of everyday life in industrialized and networked societies. Surveillance was instrumental in the creation of institutions, discourses and mechanisms for producing, disciplining and managing populations (Foucault 1977). Institutions set rules, standards, procedures and norms for governing life in liberal societies. Techniques of observation, examination and judgement are used to ensure individuals comply with the discourses of institutions. Those individuals who internalize the rules monitor and govern themselves. The collection and organization of information underpins the very functioning of modern societies. With the emergence of interactive media, however, surveillance has dramatically expanded, becoming a ubiquitous part of our everyday public, private and work lives.

Surveillance involves relations of power in which ‘watchers are privileged’ (Lyon 2011: 14). One group watches another in order to manage them as a market, public or population. Importantly though, surveillance usually also relies on the participation and consent of the watched. When we use the internet, travel through public space, open a bank account or take out an insurance policy, make purchases on our credit card, or upload content to our social media profile, we consent in practice to that information being collected, analysed and used to manage further relationships with us and the population of which we are a part.

Surveillance technologies are interwoven with our everyday social lives. We make ourselves and our lives visible to the cameras, databases and algorithms of the networked society. As we move through
the city we leave information behind (Lyon 2011: 111). Surveillance is a process of assembling or
linking together media technologies, databases, social spaces and practices. Think of your smartphone
as a node in an assembly or network of surveillance processes. The camera in the phone, its GPS
capabilities, and the internet searches, maps and apps all generate information that is logged in various
databases. Surveillance isn’t something that just happens ‘in the clouds’. It is a material process that
requires large amounts of investment in server farms, hardware and labour at one end, and users log-
ning information about their everyday practices and expressions at the other. Surveillance and media
technologies are constantly being assembled in relation to each other. We do our part in integrating
surveillance into everyday life. We routinely engage in mutual (Trottier 2011) and lateral (Andrejevic
2002b) forms of surveillance as part of our social lives – when we trawl through the photos of acquaint-
ances on Facebook or search the names of work colleagues on Google. Surveillance is not imposed on
us by some Big Brother ‘out there’: it is an ordinary and visible part of our everyday lives.

In a networked society the process of making and managing populations is information intensive,
and therefore relies on technologies that collect, manage and organize that information. Surveillance
involves a series of commercial and state activities that are entwined with each other. Corporations and
states need to track, profile and classify people and populations in order to make decisions about them
and to manage them. Interactive societies and economies have developed within a neoliberal context
characterized by links between governments and corporations. Corporate innovations in surveillance
technologies have been adapted to the state, and corporate and state databases are integrated (or at
least share access with each other). As states and corporations interact with each other to build these
very large surveillance systems it raises important questions about who ‘defines categories’ (Lyon
2011: 186): ‘When people’s life-chances depend upon what category they have been placed in, it is
very important to know who designed the categories, who defines their significance and who decides
the circumstances under which those categories will be decisive.’ The issue is that those who are
watched have decisions made about them but the information used to make those decisions is opaque.

**Disciplinary and productive forms of surveillance**

While we commonly think of surveillance in a disciplinary sense – that is, surveillance systems are
used to watch over and identify individuals who are deviant – surveillance more commonly serves pro-
ductive purposes. It doesn’t just identify risks, it also identifies opportunities (Lyon 2011). Databases
produce populations that can be used for some purpose: potential consumers, voters or participants.
Careful observation of populations generates opportunities by identifying new patterns, practices and
innovations (Zwick and Knott 2009). A database is also a tool for producing new network formations
that are useful and valuable. Databases can identify ‘creative, non-conforming, and unexpected forms
of consumer life’ that often ‘evolve out of the social and cultural innovations generated in uncontrolled
and undisциплинованых spaces of consumer culture’ (2009: 225). Databases are part of an interactive media
system that doesn’t need to control populations with particular ideas and beliefs – that is, in a representa-
tional and ideological sense – but rather controls them by watching and responding to them. Used in real
time, databases respond to individuals depending on their location, place in a network, mood, activity or
demands. Databases organize populations, identify risks, modulate social relationships, anticipate inter-
Productive forms of surveillance are emergent, convergent and increasingly predictive (Andrejevic 2013). In a networked interactive media system, data is collected continuously and used for it are constantly emerging. Data collected for one purpose is readily appropriated for other uses as the capacities of databases expand. Increasingly, networked organizations bring data together to create new and useful assemblages. For instance, Facebook collects data about its users’ everyday lives, while credit card companies collect information about their purchases. The two organizations might agree to converge their databases to examine patterns that might be mutually beneficial in building their markets and the value of their respective networks. Social and interactive media also offer whole new kinds of data, and new connections between data sets. In addition to who we are, where we are and who we interact with, databases can increasingly collect and use affective data – that is, how we feel about particular things, places, times and people. Tracking the expressions and sentiments of people and populations in real time is useful in predicting and managing consumption, political events and economic transactions.

Just as we often think of surveillance in a disciplinary sense, we also often imagine information in a representational way. That is, data is useful because it contains a particular meaning. Mark Andrejevic (2013: 35) argues that the forms of information management and surveillance enabled by interactive technologies means:

Two different information cultures will come to exist side by side: on the one hand, the familiar, ‘old-fashioned’ one in which people attempt to make sense of the world based on the information they can access: news reports, blog posts, the words of others and the evidence of their own experience. On the other hand, computers equipped with algorithms that can ‘teach’ themselves will advance the instrumental pragmatics of the database: the ability to use tremendous amounts of data without understanding it.

Big data analysis is pushing towards predictive rather than explanatory forms of analysis. That is, we don’t need to know why something works, just that it works. For example, Facebook might notice that you often check in at particular places and times of the week and that other people like you do the same thing. It doesn’t necessarily need to know why you do it or what it means (for instance, people who like a certain music genre go to a particular bar each Friday night), but this data enables Facebook to predict this pattern of behaviour over time and perhaps connect that data with other content or information it has in useful ways (targeting content or advertisements, or understanding how the social graph intersects with social places and practices).

Surveillance raises many questions about what are personal, private and public goods or resources. While we could think about privacy in terms of secrecy (things we don’t want people to know) or intimacy (aspects of our lives that are personal), we should think beyond just our personal privacy to larger questions about control:

- Who owns these networks?
- Who collects, stores, analyses and uses the data?
- What do they do with this information now and in the future?
- How is information used to make decisions about us?
- How do we address the control of information within a democratic society?
In a networked society interactive media assume an importance to the functioning of the economy and politics beyond simply circulating ideas. Power rests with those who build and control the networks of information and communication used to run markets, manage populations and increasingly also organize ‘hard’ forms of power like warfare.

PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC LIFE

So far we have argued that rather than take the internet to be inherently democratizing because it enables ordinary people to express their point of view and to bypass traditional information gatekeepers, we need to examine:

- What kinds of participation do the internet and social media enable?
- Who gets to participate?
- What kinds of public social processes and institutions do the internet and social media facilitate?

Blogging

Hindman (2009) canvasses three key claims that have been made about the democratizing nature of the internet:

- The internet broadens debate. Where broadcast media were the preserve of select voices, online anyone can speak.
- The internet enables participation. Where traditional forms of political activity like joining a party are declining, the internet enables the rise of a range of new informal forms of political action that are appealing to citizens traditionally disengaged from politics.
- The internet makes politics more transparent. Information about the political process can be shared and accessed by members of the public more broadly and easily. There are no constraints on the amount of information that can be distributed and who distributes it, and there is less ability for gatekeepers to control what information is distributed.

To these arguments Hindman (2009) offers two responses:

- Firstly, most traffic on the web travels between a small number of powerful nodes. Major search engines, social networks and news organizations control the flow of most content through the web. If you are going to find out some information about a political event or issue you will most likely go to a search engine like Google, a social network like Facebook, or a major news organization’s website. These players shape the flow of political information through the web.
- Secondly, blogs are predominantly the media of a new elite, who largely reflect entrenched forms of power and privilege. To produce the content required for a popular and widely read political blog, a blogger needs to be a well-trained professional communicator with the economic and cultural resources to produce compelling content. This includes: the time and money...
to fund the production of content; the cultural capital to understand politics; access to political
insiders and sources to glean information; and the critical analytical skills to find, read and
interpret documents. Furthermore, he finds that the more educated the blogger, the bigger their
audience is.

Hindman (2009) argues that there is a difference between speaking and being heard online. Online
audiences are just as concentrated as traditional media audiences. Only a few are really heard. To
become powerful in this network you need not just to create content, but also to gain the attention of
other nodes – who read your content, circulate it further, link to you and so on. To become a powerful
node requires technical, economic, social and cultural capital. In recent times, Nate Silver is perhaps
emblematic of the highly educated and well-regarded political bloggers. Silver produces a form of
content that draws on the resources available in the interactive, networked, big data era. He works
for major media organizations, and is highly educated and well connected with the political elite. His
blog is widely read because he offers highly skilled analytics of population-level data. Silver doesn’t
necessarily provide new and alternative understandings of politics, rather he uses data to offer a
well-educated audience ways of enjoying the prediction of election outcomes.

NATE SILVER AND DATA-DRIVEN BLOGGING

The popularity of Nate Silver during the 2012 US Presidential race offers one example of the
attention and influence a well-resourced and educated blogger can exert on the coverage of
politics. Silver uses big data to offer a new kind of meta-coverage of the political process. Where
established cable news pundits continually called the Obama–Romney race as very close, Silver
predicted a 90 per cent chance that Obama would win. Silver illustrates and extends Hindman’s
arguments. He is a highly educated, white, middle-class male. After rising to prominence as a
blogger, he joined the New York Times, and moved into the centre of the media-political process
in the US during the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections. Silver is not just a blogger; he is
also symptomatic of another aspect of interactive media – the way big data analysis reshapes
how we use information to represent public life. Silver can only do big data analysis of politics
in a society where vast sets of data are readily available and where he can get access to those
(often private and commercial) sets of data. He is part of a new kind of political elite, reshaping
public discussions of politics and upsetting and undermining established elites along the way.
His blog doesn’t necessarily reshape the way the public participates in the political process,
but rather how they understand the way that political preferences are aggregated, predictable
and – in his words – designable. Silver, unlike the political bloggers Hindman studied, produces
a form of content that draws on the resources available in the interactive, networked, big data
era. This reshapes how we understand the political. We shift away from using media to attempt
to understand each other, and towards using media to predict each other’s actions and views.

(Continued)
Silver’s combination of analysing big data sets and blogging about his findings is a new form of meta-coverage; he enables the public to be insiders who have access to how the political events will unfold. This data is used to shape, as much as inform, the public. Silver argues that his meta-coverage of the political process – that is, calling the race – is ‘good’ whereas pundits’ coverage is ‘bad’, because his is based on empirical data. The issue is that this kind of meta-coverage encourages us to imagine populations as predictable. As we do so, social and political questions become a matter of having enough data to diagnose and solve the problem. Silver’s analysis is underpinned by the creation of a particular kind of public – one that willingly submits to surveillance. The more they participate, the more they register their information, the more they can be told about predictions being made about them. Those predictions shape them as a public. Silver illustrates how bloggers aren’t just a new elite in the sense that they get to speak about the political process; they also legitimize the networked, informational, predictive form of politics brought about in part by interactive technologies. As our public and political culture celebrates interactivity as politically empowering, it legitimizes an interactive media system that promises democratization, while at the same time engaging in ever more sophisticated modes of control of information and concentrations of power.

How does Nate Silver’s coverage contribute to democratic debate and participation?

You can find links to Nate Silver stories and talks on the Media and Society website study.sagepub.com/carahandlouw

Social media and political events

If blogging is primarily the media of a well-resourced and educated elite, then it might be argued that social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook facilitate more broad-based participation of ordinary people in public life and political events. The events of the Arab Spring, and other uprisings and protests in authoritarian regimes, have been lauded for demonstrating the role that social media play in facilitating political revolutions. It goes without saying that these claims should be treated cautiously. While social media may have been a tool used to circulate information in these events, it was most likely not the catalyst or a determining factor in any political revolution. The events like the Arab Spring or the 2009 Iranian elections are far more complex than that.

Social media do though change the way information circulates about political events, and that does shape the way people think, feel and act. Papacharissi and Oliveira (2012) offer a helpful study of tweets using #egypt during the Egyptian revolution in 2011. They argue that ‘Twitter is frequently used to call networked publics into being and into action during periods of political instability’ (2012: 268). Twitter is used to distribute information about events by mainstream media, established actors and ordinary people. The live, repetitive and mobile nature of the platform creates a background ambience for events. Twitter users augment traditional news values with other features (2012: 273–275):
• **Instantaneity**: Twitter users post ongoing and instant updates of events as they unfold.

• **Crowdsourced elites**: elite status is granted via interaction (retweeting and replying) based on how important or useful their content is to the network. The network produces elites by bringing them to the centre of information flows. Some elites are established actors like journalists or political figures central to events who people look to as events unfold. Others have a temporary value to the network given their proximity to events or their live coverage. The networks link them in and out as it requires them.

• **Solidarity**: tweets express solidarity via common identity, cause and values. Twitter functions not only as a site for debate or information, but for the large-scale amplification of sentiments and beliefs. Twitter provides important affective energy for events.

• **Ambience**: the constant feed of tweets sustains an always-on live coverage and anticipation of events. Individuals take events and narrate them via their own emotions and sentiments. This creates an ‘ambient information sharing environment’.

The continuous, live, unfolding ambience of Twitter’s coverage of events can be described as an ‘affective network’. As individuals convey their feelings they anticipate and shape events. How people feel in relation to each other and seek the attention of others shapes public networks like Twitter. Rather than a rational exchange of meaning, ideas or debate, what takes place is a continuous circulation of feelings and affects. In the case of a political revolution, social media doesn’t play the role of making the case for the revolution, or mediating between competing demands, but rather in sustaining and mediating the network of actors facilitating political events. News gets caught up in these networks, and takes on an affective dimension. As journalists and individuals report events, others in the network circulate those reports together with their own sentiments. Rather than create content, they circulate and amplify affect. Individuals tweet from their place in the network, blending ‘drama with fact’ (Papacharissi and Oliveira 2012: 278) and news with emotion and opinion. Individuals use Twitter to find and convey their place in the story. This repetition and mimicry engages participants emotionally rather than cognitively (2012: 278). Participants in a social network re-tweet, share, endorse, disagree, joke and express their feelings about events. They take an aspect of events, their position in relation to it, and circulate it through the network, often with their emotions, sentiments or identities attached. This ongoing process determines the trajectory of messages (or memes) through a social network.

Networks have nodes of power and influence:

• The link structure of networks makes some websites – search engines, social networks, news sites – central hubs of information.

• Economic, institutional and cultural resources make some individuals – bloggers, journalists, political figures, industry leaders – prominent within networks.

• Proximity to events make some individuals temporarily important conduits of information in networks. Proximity can take material and cultural forms. If you are physically at a political...
event with a smartphone your content will quickly flow to the centre of networks. Or, if you have a specialist understanding of events because you know the key players or drivers, the network will seek out your expertise for as long as it is useful to narrating and explaining events.

The affective nature of these online networks is significant and important. None of these leaders can autonomously make themselves a centre of power. They always depend on attracting and sustaining the attention and interaction of others in the network to maintain their presence.

Networks can also be used by powerful actors to promote and drive conflicts and disruptions, as much as they are used for collaboration and dialogue (Bratich 2011). Bratich (2011: 621) details how the US State Department funded groups that distributed ‘technical knowledge and social media skills’ to young protestors in authoritarian regimes. This illustrates how powerful established actors use social media to organize political movements. For Bratich (2011: 622) ‘we are witnessing a convergence of sovereign and network powers’ where states integrate into networks. The State Department’s Alliance of Youth Movements brought together established and new media organizations to train youth in building genetically modified grassroots organizations. This involved a mixture of top-down and bottom-up cultural production. The use of social media in political protests and events does not necessarily ‘spring from authentic populist or spontaneous community aspirations’ (Bratich 2011: 627).

What each of these perspectives demonstrates is that networks are complex and evolving configurations of attention, influence and power. They are not necessarily more or less empowering for ordinary people than other forms of public communication. They do enact different configurations of power that inform how public and political life unfolds.

**THE VISUAL NATURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

Visual content is critical to the live and affective dynamics of social media. Kraidy (2005, 2006) examines the use of popular culture and new media in political activity in the Arab world. Kraidy (2012) illustrates the connection between videos and social media in circulating sentiments about political events. He argues that videos – often made on smartphones and laptops – adapt old forms of political action like satire, theatre and home-made puppetry with the new digital video and social networks. Videos become especially powerful for several reasons:

- Using smartphones and laptops, citizens can easily produce videos.
- Using the internet, videos can be widely distributed, bypassing state and media gatekeepers.
- Videos can use popular culture codes and images that are easily understood around the globe.
- Videos can be resent and recirculated.
To illustrate, Kraidy (2012) examines videos produced by Syrians during the uprising and civil war. Top Goon is a satirical series of videos produced by a group of young Syrians living in Beirut. The videos used finger-puppets, theatre and popular culture formats to satirize Assad and the Syrian regime. One of the videos uses the global format of the *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* television game show. The video makers adapted the format to ‘Who Wants to Kill a Million?’, with Assad appearing as the contestant answering questions such as ‘If you could commit a massacre in the capital, Damascus, who would you put in charge?’ and ‘Who’s the dumbest person in your regime?’

Kraidy (2012) describes videos like Top Goon as creative insurrection: the use of cultural resources and media technologies under life threatening duress. This below-the-line media circulates online and gets appropriated by mainstream media where it creates alternative perspectives on political events. Kraidy argues that the videos are powerful not because they attempt to facilitate debate and dialogue (they don’t), but because they capture attention. Videos circulate across platforms like mobile, television, web and tablet and become the talk of everyday life. They animate ordinary and popular discussions. The videos and their circulation create a performative public as they are replayed and circulated. Aside from their content the practice of sharing jokes about the regime creates social connections.

Public life is performed via the circulation of texts. The repetitive circulation of texts gains attention, brings a public into being and acts as a petition against the powerful. The content of the arguments of the videos is not what matters, the arguments against Assad and the Syrian regime are well known, the role the videos play is in creating content that can be circulated to gain attention. They gain attention because they affect their audiences – with humour, anger and hope. By sharing the videos individuals seek to express how they feel about the situation, and in doing so, affect their family, friends and social networks.

How do insurgents exploit the visual, mobile and networked nature of online media?
What claims about the power of interactive media do you find plausible?
How do interactive media enable marginalized groups to resist dominant groups and represent their identities?
What are the affordances and risks of interactive media to democracy?

You can find links to talks by Marwan Kraidy about the use of insurgent videos in Syria on the Media and Society website study.sagepub.com/carahandlouw

MAPPING OUT POSITIONS ON INTERACTIVITY

Interactive media ‘constitute the means to build a different type of social organisation’ (Couldry 2012: 109). Our media and popular culture commonly present interactive and participatory media as ‘good’. We are constantly encouraged to participate, express our views, comment, like, vote and so on. We are told this activity makes us active and empowered. Interactive media are presented
as better – more exciting, more enjoyable and more empowering – than old top-down broadcast forms of media.

Government, corporations and established civil society actors actively resist dramatic reorganizations of power. They see networks as tools to maintain their power. Evidence of networks disrupting global flows of power over the past generation have not materialized. The processes of neoliberalism, globalization and concentration of wealth set in train at the beginning of the network society have continued apace. Networks are incredibly useful and profitable tools to elites that learn how to use them. And the already established elite are in the best position to mobilize the resources required to build and maintain networks. Information abundance and networks offer established actors just as many opportunities as they do ordinary or disempowered people (Couldry 2012: 124).

While there may have been a moment when networks afforded new opportunities for reshaping power relationships, established players are emerging that control and constrain the uses of networks. The commercialization of the web and the large-scale surveillance of the internet by the state are two examples of this. Given this, we ought to ask (Couldry 2012: 115):

- How do networks facilitate and constrain flows of power?
- How do networks sustain political agency?
- How are societies configured by networks?
- How are narratives about interactive media and empowerment constructed?
- How do different groups attempt to make their narrative about interactive media legitimate?

There are a variety of responses to these questions that speak to the affordances and capacities of interactive media (Dahlberg 2011). Interactive media:

- enable the circulation of useful information that informs rational choices
- allow for multiple positions and preferences to be accounted for
- support deliberation, debate and argument that eventually arrive at agreement and consensus
- provide space for marginalized and excluded groups to resist and contest dominant ideas or configurations of power
- offer the technical capacity for new forms of social cooperation and collaboration to emerge
- enable performances that create networks of attention and affect.

Just as we can identify several ways interactive media might support political agency, we can also point to some of their shortcomings. Couldry (2012) questions the capacity of interactive media to sustain long-term, meaningful, positive political projects. He implores us to think of the long-term contexts and structures that sustain political action and the public. He cautions against views that foreshorten the social by celebrating individuals acting in temporary networks around singular issues (2012: 117). Without social institutions that support public life, networks are empty (2012: 118).

While networks might enable new forms of communication and participation in public life, they appear to (Couldry 2012: 125–128):
• Be weighted towards short-term disruptions rather than long-term positive projects; this serves the interests of established actors.
• Enable established actors to amplify their messages and circulate information, without increasing the capacity for ordinary people to be meaningfully heard.
• Increase the opportunities for counter-politics, but displace opportunities for sustained action around explicit goals. Networks encourage transparency, revelation, being a watchdog, veto and feelings of outrage and anger: they destabilize and amplify feelings rather than contribute to ongoing social processes and publics.
• Create forms of participation which serve the interests of corporate media: there is no correlation between internet access and political participation (2012: 127). In an on-demand media system it is actually easier to avoid politics, and if your social network incrementally avoids politics then algorithms and filters will increasingly dis-embed you and your social world from the political.
• Saturate everyday life with media in ways that constrain the possibility of political action: as ordinary people and their everyday lives become more publicly visible this places a constraint on positive politics, that is, the hard work of ‘persuading others to change how they live’ (2012: 128). This is because networks inflate forms of disruptive counter-democracy while at the same time closing out the possibilities and opportunities for ordinary forms of democracy; formal forms of political action disappear, as informal, temporary, disruptive forms of political activity proliferate.

Democratic politics needs trust in networks that do not categorically exclude any group or allow any group to act autonomously from the public (Couldry 2012: 118). Networks saturate everyday life with media, and this reinforces the status quo and decreases trust, which both count against the possibility of meaningful forms of change or dealing with complex social and political problems.

MANAGING PARTICIPATION

The information abundance and short-term insurgent forms of political action characteristic of interactive networks also require new forms of political management. Political elites now need to invest significant resources in managing information, open government and the continuous short-term demands of an always-on information network. The spin and media management that are typical of contemporary democratic government are at least in part interrelated with the continuous, emotive, short-term revelations of social media. This arguably distracts elites from doing their job: they too become oriented to short-term and reactive democracy, rather than guiding populations in the establishment of long-term positive political projects and corresponding social institutions and public spaces. Furthermore, good governance involves taking hard and unpopular decisions. The more that interactive networks orient publics towards continuous exposure, transparency and instantaneous assessment of a population’s sentiment towards those decisions, the higher the risks and consequences
of those decisions. If all decision making is in the open, subject to the continuous feedback of the network, then taking hard decisions becomes difficult, perhaps impossible. Politics collapses to managing real-time feedback from the public.

The continual and amplified circulation of information arguably distracts attention both from examining the real workings of political power and from developing material and meaningful political projects. The old critique of media focused on its top-down structure and its control of particular meanings and representations. We now need to think beyond control of the production of particular representations and messages, controlling the ideas in our heads. Instead, we need to make sense of a mode of control that manages the spaces in which we interact, modulating the ideas we see and circulate, and predicting who we are, what we want and who we might be. We need to think beyond individual privacy concerns to how an interactive media system profiles, sorts and manages populations, flows of ideas, political processes and cultural practices.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we’ve examined the paradox that while on the one hand interactive technologies enable forms of communication that are participatory, empowering and democratic, they simultaneously lead to more intensive forms of surveillance and control. While ordinary people are able to participate in making and circulating meaning, in doing so they contribute to the creation of networks that watch, track and respond to them. Mark Andrejevic (2009: 41) argues that our task is twofold: ‘To consider the ways in which the deployment of networked digital media contribute to and reinforce the contemporary exercise of power, and to imagine how it might be otherwise.’ To do that he suggests we distinguish between the ‘real interactivity’ of participating in ‘shaping the structures that regulate our social lives, not just in increasing the range of choices available within the horizon of those structures and the social relations they help reproduce’ (Andrejevic 2009: 49). Perhaps most importantly, we need to differentiate this form of interactivity from what Žižek describes as ‘pseudointeractivity, the urge to “be active”, to “participate”, to mask the nothingness of what goes on’ (Žižek 2008: 183). Such a distinction is crucial to the project of making interactivity live up to its promise, rather than settling for the claim that it already has’ (Andrejevic 2009: 49).

To conclude, we can offer some preliminary answers to some of the key questions of this chapter. In an interactive and networked media system:

- **Where is power located?** Power is located in networks that control the flow of information: search engines like Google, social networks like Facebook, database companies like Axciom and DoubleClick, political organizations like Obama’s 2012 Presidential campaign, and state bureaucracies like the National Security Agency.
- **How is power structured?** Power is structured around participation and interactivity. If a system can watch and respond to participation, it isn’t as dependent on controlling what is said. The more we participate the more the system can adapt and control.
• **What is the dominant form of communication?** The dominant form of communication is participatory.

• **How does interactivity legitimate itself?** With the promise of giving voice to ordinary people and by neutering opportunities to reflect critical points of view. For instance, Facebook only has a ‘like’ button. Critical and challenging views by their very nature don’t generate affinity or engagement and so are filtered out of feeds and networks.

• **Who benefits from this system?** Organizations and people who can collect, access, organize, and manipulate information; organizations and people who can build and manage networks; and organizations and people who can harness and modulate participation.

Celebrations of interactivity that focus only on the ability of publics to access information and speak avoid a thorough account of the qualities of participation and good government. In these accounts, participation becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. This scuppers the possibility of careful deliberation about the quality of participation (Couldry 2010), the difference between speaking and being heard (Hindman 2009), and critique of a system that relies on participation in general but pays no attention to particular ideas and expressions (Dean 2010). The problem remains distinguishing between active and empowered, and deliberating over what kinds of participation are desirable (Andrejevic 2007). In the interactive era new divisions of power emerge within access to and control over flows of information (Andrejevic 2013: 59).

**FURTHER READING**

The readings below offer a variety of critical perspectives and arguments about interactivity and participation relating to personal privacy (boyd 2008, Fuchs 2012), the way social media structures relationships (van Dijck 2011), political participation (Dahlberg 2011), and theexploitation of audiences (Andrejevic 2011).


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