

**Review of Carpentier, N. (2011), *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle*, (Intellect)**

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**Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological- Democratic Struggle** by Nico

**Carpentier.** Bristol: Intellect, 2011. 405pp., £19.95, ISBN 9781841504070

The relationship between media and participation has over time become obfuscated by vague interpretations across a diverse array of academic fields. *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle* offers a rich, interdisciplinary overview in order to amalgamate and address the diverging definitions from democratic theory, spatial planning, development, arts and museums, and communication studies. In each a struggle is exposed between minimalist and maximalist dimensions of participation: a constant dispute over whether participation is limited to representation within institutionalised systems, or whether it is part of a convergence of the political and social. Nico Carpentier maintains that power dynamics, and the struggle to minimise or maximise equal power positions (p. 11), are ubiquitous among the vying conceptualisations. By way of conclusion, he collates these findings within the Access, Interaction and Participation model (p. 130); access and interaction are crucial components that enable acts of participation, but are differentiated due to the power relationship within a variety of decision- making processes.

In the second part of the book Carpentier empirically examines this definition in relation to a number of structuring elements that play an enabling or disabling role in relation to the participatory process: identity, organisation, technology and quality. A number of mixed-method case studies are employed that mirror the minimalist vs. maximalist theme. For example, within the analysis of media organisations, Carpentier examines the BBC's Video Nation, an illustration of a power equilibrium between media professionals and citizens, and participation fostered through the sharing and discussion of user-generated content in the form of video submissions (p. 246). In contrast, scrutiny of the community radio network Radioswap offers a cautionary tale of how participatory organisational

structures can in fact impede citizen influence and replicate embedded, hierarchical power structures (p. 259).

Fundamentally, Carpentier actively celebrates participation as a concept in flux: it is precisely the struggle over its definition that encapsulates the constantly evolving power dynamics (p. 352). However, the book is at pains to highlight the importance of definitional constraint, something it succeeds in doing through the introduction of the Access, Interaction and Participation model. The book offers a lucid yet exhaustive account, combining both intricate theoretical detail with prudent and informative examples. As a result, it makes for a thorough, historically contextualised introductory text for emerging scholars, while the empirical contributions should entice seasoned academics from a diverse range of fields including political theory, communications and political sociology.