Cultural participation and jurisgenerative conversations

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Revue Hybrid
How could we not rejoice in cultural participation? Participating is always better than being excluded or remaining passive. Culture makes us better, brings us together and elevates us. This is what we thought, not without good reason, for a few decades during the 20th century. Something, however, has been turned upside down in recent times. Even among supposedly progressive circles, participation is often reputed to act like a fly trap, and culture, when it is not perfumed with the scent of a shopping mall, sometimes smells like a graveyard. Laurent Cauwet, who has been fighting for avant-garde poetry with the publishing house Al Dante during the last thirty years, against all the good reasons that condemn poetry to economic suicide, analyses without complacency this reversal in *The Domestication of Art*. Christophe Hanna documents in *Argent* the pauperization, at the same time as the joyful endurance, of a whole generation of poets who live and make creation alive, in a diffuse marginality that is de facto excluded from both culture and (mainstream) participation.

Is it the sudden hegemony of digital platforms that has discredited cultural participation? Is it its “manufacturing” by industrial means that has emptied it of any democratic stake? How can we redefine participation and culture to give them some meaning in the current context?

We will sketch out some answers to these questions by first examining the profound changes that have overturned the values inherited from the twentieth century in the call for public participation. We will then look at a political theorization of jazz improvisation articulated by the poet and philosopher Fred Moten to revitalize our conception of democracy in the age of platforms. We will end by reading closely the first book published by media theorist Vilem Flusser, in 1963, in order to draw an analysis, more actual than ever, of the different types and levels of participation observed in our networked sociality (now re-centralized on a few large quasi-monopolistic platforms).
The manufacture of market mobilization

As illustrated by several surveys published in this dossier, a large part of what can be classified as “cultural participation” does not emanate from a demand or a need that would go from the bottom up, from users, from the public or from the excluded, to the authorities, the directors of institutions or ministries. Our imaginary of democracy likes to envisage les sans-part (“people without a share”), to use Jacques Rancière’s beautiful expression, mobilizing to obtain their share of a common cake that has been cooked by them but tasted by others. The Third State in 1789, the proletarians in the 19th century, women in the 20th century, (post)colonized peoples in the 21st century: all of them have fought to wrest the right to participate in activities, deliberations, and decisions that until then were taken by others and for others above their heads. The progressive democratization of our societies consisted in this slow and difficult conquest of a listening granted (through countless struggles) to those who were not heard, and whose speech was often violently repressed—condemning them to be subjected to a culture in which they did not participate.

By contrast with this historical movement of insurgent emergence, the manufacture of cultural participation discussed in this issue of Hybrid is often driven by dynamics that are more top-down than bottom-up. They can be classified under two types, sometimes separate, but more often mixed in various proportions.

The first type governs all cultural institutions whose existence and survival depend on their ability to finance their activities along the lines of the market economy. The last three centuries have seen the establishment of a regime of increasingly plethoric cultural supply. The multiplication of newspapers in the 19th century, the multiplication of low-cost books, the appearance of radios and televisions in the 20th century, and of course the explosion of cultural goods offered for free on the internet in the last thirty years have created a situation in which the competition for audience has become the fundamental problem of all cultural productions.

The consumption of material goods has long been a one-time problem, in cases of market saturation, technological innovation or a sudden change in taste that makes a product obsolete and suffering from overproduction. But, on average, human societies maintain a certain balance between what they produce and what they can consume in terms of material goods. This balance has completely broken down in a few decades as far as cultural goods are concerned. On the YouTube channel alone, according to 2019 figures, 500 hours are uploaded every minute, and it would take 82 years of life to watch the videos added in one hour. Even though more than two billion of us watch these videos at the rate of 80,000 in one second (BDM 2019), the distribution of our attentions is very heavily concentrated on a tiny proportion of what goes online, and the vast majority of content is only viewed sporadically. If we add to this the 80,000 books published in France each year, live performances, theatrical films, TV series and video games—and if we remember that all the resources invested in the production of a cultural good can only hope to realize their value if they pass through the attention of a spectator, listener or reader—we measure the violence of the competition for our attention in such a plethoric world.

If, by buying a book or a ticket to a show, we participate directly in the payment of the cultural good that is proposed to us, an indirect mode of financing has been established
since 1830, when directors of the daily press had the idea, simultaneously in France and in the United States, of selling their newspaper at half the production costs, the other half being reimbursed by the sale of advertising space to advertisers. It is from this date that our attentions have been properly “merchandised”; transformed into a commodity that can be sold like wheat, oil or fabric.\(^\text{5}\) As Shoshana Zuboff’s close analysis of *Surveillance Capitalism*\(^\text{6}\) has shown, based on the example of Google, an increasingly large share of cultural goods is now financed by the commodification of “behavioral surpluses” and of “predictive derivatives” that the GAFAM and other BATX (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent and Xiaomi) extract and distill algorithmically by tracking everything that our smartphones snitch on our movements and attentional gestures.

In other words, the culture that is being implemented through the omnipresence of our cell phones establishes a regime of permanent and total mobilization,\(^\text{7}\) as Maurizio Ferraris has well analyzed: platforms must make us move (if only a finger on a touch screen) in order to be able to collect and sell the data that record our movements (and therefore our habits, our tendencies, our propensities, our intentions). The different types of movements that are attributed to cultural participation (consulting a museum’s website, giving an evaluation, answering a questionnaire, commenting on a program, sending a photo or a film) are clearly part of this structural need to mobilize us through our “mobile phones”: cultural participation online is, properly speaking, a matter of *e-motions*, where the “motives” that move us are largely mobilized by others.

In this sense, the culture of participation deserves to be seen as an enormous data pump through which platform capitalism “treats” our attentions, not only by promising appealing sweets of all kinds, but more fundamentally in the same extractivist way that industrial capitalism has for centuries *traité* (“treated-traded-and-milked”) coal, oil, or labor power (animal and human).\(^\text{8}\) By providing feedback, grades and opinions, by filling out questionnaires, by sending photos and texts, we participate in the culture of our time, as the donkey circling the well participated in the energy production of past centuries.

### The manufacture of democratic legitimacy

There is, however, a second type of manufacture of cultural participation, which does not rely directly on the commodification of our attentions, but on the capture of democratic legitimacy. In a country like France—where people have the good idea of expecting the State to grant cultural productions an exceptional status that partially removes them from being strictly aligned on market forces—a director of a public museum or of a regional art center does not need to sell her visitor’s attention or behavioral surpluses to ensure the functioning of her institution. In principle at least, a part of the money collected by taxes should ensure that artistic productions are independent from what can be sold or bought.

Even if any use of the word *Culture* with a capital C should be considered with suspicion, because of the arrogance, the impostures and the exclusions that it carries, one could empirically circumscribe the domain of “Culture” to those activities that a still dominant ideology values apart from market demands—hence the necessity to make a “cultural exception” to finance them through taxes in the name of the common good.

Things are much more complex than that, however, since our societies claim to be based on the political values of democracy, where it is the opinions and feelings of the
majority of the people (rather than the elitist values of a self-proclaimed aristocracy) that are supposed to govern us. Hence this liberal thorn in the side of all those who intend to justify the financing of the (avant-garde) arts in the name of democracy: if what counts in a democracy is what the people want, then it is the most massive tastes that are the most legitimate. Since the knights defending “Culture” rarely consider soccer games, reality shows or video games as the best of what our democratic culture has to offer, they must base their action on a cleverly established gap between what the majority of people actually like (and consume), and what they could potentially like, should they be provided easy access to it.

As this liking cannot remain purely or eternally potential, the knights must arm themselves with a minimum of empirical data to prove that they are not the only ones to hallucinate a non-existent popular craze. Hence this second pragmatic definition: belongs to “Culture” that which is in constant need of proving that it has an audience (a proof that is not required for soccer matches or video games). A symptom of this pressure can be seen in the paradox of what Stéphane Jouan has defined as a “cultural hyper-offer”: a race, for the directors of institutions, to multiply shows in order to multiply spectators, with the aim of proving (to public funders) the “impact” of culture—while undermining this impact by the very multiplication of the offer.

Within this second regime, cultural participation is manufactured in order to document the effective liking that some members of the people have for the “Culture” to which they are being introduced. As this participation is only exceptionally massive from a quantitative point of view—and when it is the case, voices are quickly raised to question the true “artistic” value of the cultural supply—everything is put in place to valorize at best the qualitative intensity of the aesthetic experience. It is not because of a need to commodify attention, but because of a need for democratic legitimacy that visitors, spectators, listeners, readers must move.

Hence the remarkable convergence observed over the last few decades between the most official of cultural institutions and the most rebellious of artistic practices, in their situationist contestation. Cultural participation is situated today at the intersection (a priori uncomfortable) between two perfectly heterogeneous injunctions.

On the one hand, supposedly speaking from below and from the margins, radical activist currents demand that spectators become spectactors: watching or (passively) listening to a show, from the comfort of one’s seat at the back of a darkened theater, means accepting the dominant distribution of roles and shares, even if what is being played out on stage claims to overturn it. Art must move us to act, here and now, from the inside of the theater. It must transform the world and not only interpret it: it must blur and activate the separation between the audience in the hall and the actors on stage. In short, it must move us to participate.

On the other hand, managed by cultural institutions from above, after spectators have seen the show or the exhibition, they must be made active in documenting their experience, in saying how it has transformed them, how they will act differently in reaction to the shock it has produced in them. Here too, they are urged to move (and not only be moved), to show that the hall and the stage act together to improving our common world. In short, here too, participation is required.

Jacques Rancière, in *The Emancipated Spectator,* has clearly shown the limits and blind spots of participatory injunctions emanating from situationist positions. The convergence between subversive insurrections and managerial injunctions, in calling...
for cultural participation, deserves to make us suspicious of both. The manufacture of cultural participation resembles an avatar of *The Manufacture of Consent* Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman\(^\text{11}\) denounced in the United States of the Reagan era: an intellectual authority claiming to be a democracy must orient the tastes and thoughts of the masses, it must manufacture the conditions that will move the people where it needs to go (even if this involves manipulative practices along the way).

The difference between these two manufactures lies in the fact that the 1980s American press had a content to pass on (defending the order of the capitalist world by disqualifying all that opposed it), while the French cultural participation of the 2000s has no propagandist ambition. This invites us to think that the regime of government has changed. In accordance with Gilles Deleuze’s intuitions, our “societies of control”\(^\text{12}\) do not need so much to forbid us or to oblige us to think in such or such way. They regulate themselves by favoring our self-expression through platforms of communication designed to absorb and to resorb all that will be expressed on them. The multiple injunctions to cultural participation observed on all sides deserve to be considered in light of this general reversal: if anything deserves to appear as “subversive,” within our current dynamics of frenetic communication, it is no longer to say (this or that), but to be silent (long enough to hear the emptiness of what is said).\(^\text{13}\)

**Jurisgenerative study**

The manufacture of cultural participation has only been considered in the previous sections as a cunning of market or governmental reason, to extract profits or legitimacy from the very mobilizations supposed to free them from their alienations. This picture is certainly too dark and too one-sided not to be deceptive. It is therefore necessary to understand how participation can also be part of emancipatory dynamics. This is what the last sections of this article will attempt to do, by proposing a series of principles intended to help evaluate the relative merits of the various forms of cultural participation.

A first step consists in asking ourselves under what conditions participatory mechanisms set up for the reasons mentioned above can be turned around or diverted to produce effects other than those expected from above. I will answer this question by looking to the poet, philosopher and political theorist Fred Moten for a first principle, according to which *cultural participation can only combat oppression insofar as it emanates from a situation of study that can lead to a jurisgenerative process.* To understand this first intuition, one needs to outline what Moten means by the words “study” and “jurisgenerative.”

As discussed in a series of texts written with Stefano Harney and published as *The Undercommons*,\(^\text{14}\) study occurs as soon as speakers converse on a basis of equality of intelligences and of a sharing of their incompleteness. The parties involved in this conversation do not rest on hierarchical positions of authority, they accept that none of their selves is sovereign, that no one is in control of the exchanges. They bring each other towards a higher intelligence, necessarily common, by “adjusting their mutual respect”\(^\text{15}\) as they go through their relational and argumentative trials and tribulations. The practice of study shakes our individualistic habits in that it invites us to “consent not to be a single being,” according to a phrase that Fred Moten takes from Édouard Glissant. We are always more than one (because so many others speak through
our mouth) and always less than one (because we do not master this multiplicity of voices under the single authority of a sovereign subjectivity. True participation can only occur, substantially to nourish our common culture, if such conditions are given that the participants are in a situation of study, to be conceived as a situation of collective improvisation (of which improvising composers of the jazz tradition offer a paradigmatic example).

As for the jurisgenerative principle, Fred Moten takes it from the conceptual reversal proposed by legal theorist Robert Cover. Instead of the State and its courts being the original source of laws, Cover suggests that “it is the multiplicity of laws, the fecundity of the jurisgenerative principle, that creates the problem to which the court and the State are the solution.” Far from creating laws ex nihilo, as narrated by Hobbes, the modern State’s primary function is that of pruning this permanent excess of legal generativity, in the name of a monopoly that bears not only on the legitimate use of violence but, much more fundamentally, on the capacity to be recognized as a legitimate source of jurisdiction.

The jurisgenerative principle invests cultural participation with a power that does not only consist in legitimizing pre-existing propositions or authorities, but in being the place of emergence of still unpublished laws. Participation is not only understood as a validation (or as a critique) of the choices that have already determined what belongs (or not) to the domain of “Culture,” what constitutes a good (or a bad) interpretation, a good (or a bad) argument in a debate, good (or bad) taste, virtue (or crime). Jurisgenerative participation is about the constant emergence of a spontaneous production of alternative and sometimes contradictory rules about (and from) what makes the strength and merit of cultural productions as well as, more generally, about (and from) the ways in which our collaborations should be organized. It is not just about making one’s voice count (in a poll or in a statistical quantification), but about questioning the very principles of counting and accounting, of rights and responsibilities, of speech and silence.

The jurisgenerative principle thus calls for welcoming, within any regulated situation, that which goes beyond the simple unfolding of pre-established combinatorics, but introduces the possibility of an alteration of the rules themselves. In linguistic terms, this principle allows any writer to invent not only new sentences, but new modes of writing, which enrich and sometimes transgress pre-existing standards of grammaticality. To truly participate in one’s culture, as a writer, filmmaker or musician, is to allow that culture to metabolize itself through one’s self—which implies
“consenting not to be a single being”—but it also requires the ability to write, film, perform in a way that touches, disturbs and rearranges the syntaxes governing inherited creative and interpretative protocols.

28 In the case of the cultural participation whose manufacture is studied here, the jurisgenerative principle is not restricted to questioning the dominant grammars by setting forth new rules, potentially perceived as bad taste, improper, incorrect, wrong, criminal. It implies, on the part of those from whom it emanates, to be in a position to give, impose or wrest force of law to the claims that are generated in the course of improvisational studies. As Raphael Bottani-Levy remarked in a personal conversation, for the generation that inherits environments that have been devastated by centuries of ecocidal extractivism, the most difficult thing is not so much to want to change the rules as to find the means to translate the claims into articles of law: jurisgenerativism is not only a matter of grammar, but above all of jurisdiction.

Conversational participations

29 An emblematic example of jurisgenerative cultural participation could be found in the activities of associations such as Labo Citoyen or CitizenWatt, whose practices of study reclaim a common capacity to “counteract” an improvised science based on the needs of the multitudes, rather than on the authority of States or on corporate interests. Armed with smartphones and Arduinos, do-it-yourself and open-source software, these amateur activities improvise a “citizen captology” which monitors air pollution in different neighborhood or documents the electricity consumption of our daily activities. By doing so, they actively participate in the most sensitive, crucial and urgent dimensions of our contemporary cultures. Rather than a manufacture of cultural participation, we are dealing here with do-it-yourself workshops and fablabs, eager to take our dominant industrial cultures to task. Not only does this participation emanate from the people and their capacities of study, without responding to solicitations, needs or greeds coming from above. But these practices establish new dialogues, new debates, new rules and new agents of interaction, with the explicit vocation of going against the grain of the institutional, commercial or governmental authorities from which we usually receive the questions to debate, as well as the laws to respect.

30 It seems highly revealing that, when Laurence Allard justifies the practices of this citizen captology using smartphones and sometimes platforms to capture, transmit or visualize urban pollution rates or energy resource consumption, she evokes a sensor-citizens capable of “speaking the data language, rather than being spoken by big data.” These emerging practices of local generation of small data, that nobody asked from above, “are all examples of conversational uses of self-produced data, allowing the agents to speak for themselves and to say something about their world. These conversational data can constitute a way out, a hack, an alternative and a solution, to the algorithmic abstractions denounced by critical thinkers of big data.”

31 Huge amounts of data circulate at every moment through our smartphones and our bodies, underneath our threshold of consciousness and our deliberations. A whole field of practices, inseparably artistic and political, is built around a claim of active participation in this (in)culture of big data. Where top-down cultural participation tends to treat spectators and visitors like rats in a labyrinth, whose “reactions” are
modulated and counted at will, the cultural participation exemplified by citizen captology activates a conversational intelligence, wherein stakeholders do not exchange mere (behavioral) “reactions” but (dialogical) “responses” (enunciated and addressed)—well in line with the valuable distinction set up by Vinciane Despret in the field of animal experimentations.22

32 The central role of conversation in such examples of cultural participation takes on a striking significance if we consider it in the light of an astonishing globe-shaped graph proposed by Vilém Flusser in his very first book, published in Portuguese in 1963 in Brazil, under the title of Lingua e realidade. The third chapter is largely devoted to the analysis of “this great conversation in which we participate and which is reality as a whole.”23 On the world map of the globe (fig. 1), the layer of this “conversation” (conversação) is located just North of the Reality Equator line, while the lower layer (according to a still firmly Eurocentric valuation) is that of “small talk” (conversa fiada). “These layers consist of networks that can be considered, subjectively, as formed by intellects that irradiate and absorb phrases and, objectively, as formed by phrases that intersect within intellects.”24

Figure 1

Image 11A908B800016F0E0001682D0FF3002E3467DCDC.emf

Vilem Flusser, graph of the physiology of language from Lingua e realidade (1963).

The proper function of the conversational layer, as illustrated by discussions between seller and buyer as well as by scientific controversies, is to generate information: “intellects are the places within conversation where information emerges or is accumulated. A new science, cybernetics, studies these processes, without realizing, I believe, the exact territory of its study: the conversational layer of language.”25 By imagining “electronic brains” that will soon participate in these conversations in order
to constitute themselves as “intellects,” Flusser anticipates by several decades the ontological status of what we precisely call smart phones: “mechanical intelligent voices” capable of participating in the conversations from which the information that constitutes our reality emerges.

In a later text, dated 1974, Flusser describes quite precisely our smartphones by envisioning a new form of television which “could resemble a telephone with a screen,” as well as “a typewriter with a screen and coupled to a computer.” What interests him in this vision of the future is the conversational possibilities of this “dialogic television,” whose platforms of connection would merge the “networks of the post office and the telephone.” He clearly sees them as inducing a revolution in our modes of cultural participation:

By allowing everyone to speak with everyone else, and to speak about a reality perceived in a different new way [everyone producing his or her own images of reality, instead of having only the single vision given by centralized mass media], this would be equivalent to a generalized politicization, because society would then be gathered on a planetary agora, and everyone could “publish.”

In this world, only dreamed in 1974 but now ours, cultural participation consists in inserting one’s images and one’s words within “this great conversation which is reality,” in being able to constitute publics, within a “planetary agora” whose Greek reference suggests well that it constitutes a jurisgenerative place: a scene of debates producing laws. The question we face today, as Flusser anticipated, is how to arrange this great conversation so that it is jurisgenerative. This is precisely what the world map of Lingua e realidade attempted to map out.

The implications of these half-century-old analyses for our understanding of cultural participation in the age of digital platforms become clear when we understand the contrast that distinguishes conversation, located North of the Equator, from banal small talk, composed of “conversational detritus” discarded South of the “Reality line.” “Phrases formulated by intellects participating in the conversation layer are picked up by pseudo-intellects participating in the small talk layer, never being fully apprehended or comprehended.” These pseudo-intellects “are puppets, imitations of intellects, embryonic intellects,” which “are not together (Mitsein), but are ready at hand (vorhanden): “they simply reflect this information mechanically, as if they were billiard balls”—so much so that “electronic brains will be more real than these pseudo-intellects.”

It is not hard to recognize in this layer of small talk the stereotypical portrait of the stultifying exchanges in which Internet users would indulge in our world of digital platforms—a world where fake news would proliferate faster than truths, where bots would be the least inane of the participants, and where machines would be better equipped than humans to resist conspirationist manipulations. On the threshold of the third decade of the 21st century, this cultural participation in the planetary agora seems to be unanimously condemned: the smarter the devices, the dumber the users—such is the refrain monotonously sung by a chorus of analysts always ready to deplore the decadence of our times and our morals.

To counter in advance (or at least to nuance) this apocalyptic vision, Flusser took the trouble to recall that intelligence is neither a state, nor an essence, but that “the intellect is also a process”: “this analysis uncovers the zone of small talk as the zone of language immediately prior to the intellect’s emergence, and the zone of conversation,
within which the intellect begins to become realized.” The distinction between (intelligent) conversation and (vulgar) small talk is of course a matter of a certain partaking of the sensible, established by those who claim to hold the knife of intelligence by the handle. One should read the frequent accusations of “narcissism,” “conspiracy” and exacerbated affectivity of digital exchanges as a (desperate?) attempt by the pre-Internet aristocracy to keep its hold on the legitimate forms of speech and authority within the “public sphere.”

Flusser’s subtle formulations allow us to take a step back in our characterization of what the Internet brings to our cultural participations and their jurisgenerativity. The Equator of Reality which divides the Flusserian globe does not cut out latitudes irremediably separated from each other. It should not be seen as a line of separation, but rather as a zone of emergence wherein we should learn to identify and locate these movements and becomings by which “this great conversation of which we participate and which is reality as a whole” can as well raise and sharpen our intelligence (indissociably personal and collective), as bring it down and inhibit it by placing it on the mechanical repetition of banalities. The intellect is characterized as “an emergence,” and not as a boundary drawn by a knife held by an aristocracy. There are always rules, laws, dominant partaking of the sensible. These rules, issues, topics, problems are constantly re-generated—this is the principle of jurisgenerativism—as long as their new shoots are not cut out by sovereign knives. The arrival and the extremely fast diffusion of the digital, on the anthropological scale, have established a unique and accelerated moment of re-generation. The stake of cultural participation is indeed, here too, to mobilize us, but all not movements are to be considered as equally welcome: the general intellect can find there an unprecedented occasion of common emergence. The globe is drawn to orient us by pointing a North Pole towards which we are all called to rise.

A second principle can be drawn from this: the value of the various forms of cultural participation lies in their capacity to raise the mechanical small talk of pseudo-intellects to the level of an informative conversational improvisation.

Poetic condensations and performative orations

It is by going up more to the North on the globe schematized by Lingua e realidade that we will glean the most suggestive—and the most surprising—proposition to understand the conditions to which our digital cultural participations can become jurisgenerative. Above the “conversation,” one finds the layer of poetry, which is “a mutation” of conversation consisting in “an internalization of the language,” constructed in four stages.

1° This mutation requires first of all a movement of isolation, of retreat on oneself, coming to interrupt temporarily the connections which feed the life of the intellect.

2° This gesture of withdrawal and shrinking of the intellect involves a process of condensation (Dichtung) and of “concentration of the language.”

3° The resulting increased density of the statements tends to confer to these statement a certain impenetrability.

4° This relative impermeability gives the language thus elaborated a very particular consistency, allowing it to reverse its usual functioning: whereas as simple speakers, we
are carried away by the ways in which the lexicon and the grammar structure our reality, as poets, we acquire a certain hold on the words and on the phrasings. This power to reclaim and “over-prehend” (over-take) our common language is described by Flusser as a matter of potentiation: “poetry is a place where language sucks in potentiality to produce reality.”

The dynamic relationship between poetry and conversation can therefore be summarized as follows:

Phylogenetically, poetry emerges from the conversation by gathering it, shrinking it, impermeabilizing it and overcoming it. Functionally, poetry is the creation of new language out of the nothingness that surrounds language on all sides, a language that is in itself incomprehensible intellectually, but made comprehensible after its dilution into conversation.

The real strength of the poetic process, which the four-step analysis highlights, clearly consists in its jurisgenerative capacity, which distinguishes it most strongly from what happens at the lower levels of conversation and small talk. If “the poet is he who has (and conveys into the conversation) new thoughts,” Flusser takes the trouble to specify that it is at the jurisgenerative level of the rules, and not at the combinatorial level of the sentences, that one should locate the invention proper to poetry. The novelty, he specifies indeed,

cannot only reside in a new recomposition of already existing elements, because this is the normal activity of the conversation. The novelty must lie in the imposition of new rules, according to which elements will be henceforth composed, and in the creation of new elements of language.

Poetry, understood less as a literary genre than in the broader sense of poïesis, is defined as that which creates possibilities external to the combinatorics already known, to the programs and protocols already in function. We are dealing in this case with cultural participation to the power of two: we are no longer satisfied with taking part in a current conversation already pursued according to pre-existing rules; we take part in the mutation of the rules which will structure our future conversations, and thus our realities still to come.

The deeper meaning of democracy elevates the people, not only to an object of polling procedures (where one is called to answer to questions already asked), but to the jurisgenerative agency of formulating new proposals put in debate on the agora—an agora which is becoming henceforth planetary. Hence a third principle: the quality of the cultural participation called forth by a certain protocol is measured to its ability to welcome poetic gestures that renew its vitality by their jurisgenerative power.

If we keep moving Northbound on the Flusserian globe supposed to represent “the physiology of the language,” we finally arrive at a last layer—even more enigmatic and disturbing—to which Flusser gave the name of oration (oração). We touch here on a mythical and ritual dimension of communication (insofar as communication involves communion), a dimension where prayer and imprecation, blessing (thumbs up) and curse (insults, harassment) become the most common forms of expression. If putting poetry at the heart of the dynamics capable of renewing cultural participation in the age of platformization certainly takes us by surprise, the oratory dimension corresponds more immediately our common ideas about networked digitality. Flusser distinguishes two sub-categories within oratory. On the one hand, he evokes “perorations,” where we can recognize the mode of intervention of certain YouTubers, whose preaching, self-help advice, or face-to-face fatwas have a remarkable power of
affective traction. We can also see in these perorations the collective fervor that carries some Facebook groups into “sectarian” drifts, in the sense that the discussion in relatively closed and homophilic circles favors a kind of secession that restructures its reality around a system of shared values, interpretations and episodic hallucinations.

The other sub-category of oration, that of “adoration,” may at first appear to be the symmetrical counterpart of the first, with adoring fans imitating the gestures of their influencer or singing the praises of their idol from the fragility of their intimate space. It is also a form of magical ritual, of meditation and prayer that the ASMR videos perform, whispering sweet nothings in the ear of the Internet user, while caressing his or her face through the proxy of the screen edges. And it is undoubtedly a space of confessional that opens the multiplication of blogs and vlogs where our erotic dreams as well as our political depressions and our sentimental discomforts are spread out.

Here again, few analysts resist the temptation to disqualify all these oratorical gestures as ridiculous or pathological, relegating them to the great purgatory that Flusser locates in the Southern hemisphere of his Eurocentric globe. Instead of cultivating poetry, isn’t the web saturated with “word salads” (salada de palavras), marked by dilution, distraction, facility and mimicry, much more than by condensation, concentration, hermeticism and originality? Instead of singing prayers, isn’t the soundtrack of the web mostly chanted by “babbling” (balbuciar) and other pornographic ramblings of horny old men and young girls pretending to have an orgasm?

Far from considering these quasi-religious dimensions of our digital communions solely in terms of deception, danger, drift, manipulation or fanatization—and without denying the reality of such risks, of course—Flusser invites us to see them as the highest degree of cultural participation pushed to the limit. A fourth and final principle could be drawn from this: the dominant role played by platforms in our networked electronic socialities is reflected in an unprecedented performative intensity, whereby semiotic productions conjure into being what they talk about—as expected from a successful prayer to the Almighty. In line with Flusser’s 1974 anticipation of the “generalized politicization” brought about by the smartphone, the agency of the prayer would thus reveal the truth of a cultural participation where the means of communication allow anyone (in principle, i.e., virtually) to directly condition the use of our common forces by publishing an intervention on the planetary agora.

The whole point of 1963 graph is to show these different functional strata in two directions, in order to invite us to measure their elevating powers, and not only their insufficiencies or failures. The manufacture of cultural participation, such as it has been installed for some years on a few enormous platforms with intercontinental dimensions, appears as a ground of struggle, where different orations enter in competition to be fulfilled by the (quasi-divine) power of the common. This struggle is not only to be situated, as the first sections of this article suggested, in an opposition between top-down solicitations and bottom-up demands. It is above all internal to the dynamics proper to each concrete form of cultural participation.

Certain devices lower us towards small talk, salad of words or babbling, as it is the case with reality shows, 24/7 news channels, and the usual pornography (which goes well beyond the sphere of sexual frolics). Other devices, on the contrary, raise us towards collective compositions of intellects, jurisgenerative poetics, even communions of bewitchments that can be put at the service of the best as well as of the worst of causes.
As Flusser showed in 1963, it is indeed our reality (of tomorrow) we outline in the ways in which we arrange our cultural participations in the great conversation of today. And it is the challenge of this issue of Hybrid to study in detail some of the concrete forms these arrangements take in the era of platform capitalism.

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**NOTES**

This article starts by wondering what are the pressures currently pushing cultural institutions to depend upon spectators’ participation. Two types of pressures are identified, in the commodification of our attentions and in a certain idea of democracy. The notion of (black) study and the principle of jurisgenerativism are then borrowed from Fred Moten in order to reassess the stakes and values of cultural participation. In conclusion, Vilém Flusser’s first book provides a theory of conversation that helps us understand what are the core components of practices of study, as well as of our digital communications.

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**Keywords:** cultural participation, study, attention economy, conversation, Vilém Flusser, Fred Moten, jurisgenerativism

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