IS PARTICIPATION WITHOUT POWER GOOD ENOUGH? Introduction to "Democracy Now: Ethnographies of Contemporary Participation"

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This introduction to the section *Democracy Now: Ethnographies of Contemporary Participation* sketches a contemporary enthusiasm for participation that reaches across business, education, popular culture, and politics. The article tries to account for what makes this enthusiasm new and begins to sketch its implications for what people want and expect from their political and economic institutions.

On a July day in 2002, 4,500 New Yorkers and I gathered in a giant convention center to deliberate over what to build on the site of the former World Trade Center. Few of us had any expertise on land use planning or architecture. But we were devastated by the terrorist attack and wanted to help heal the wounds of 9/11 by helping to rebuild the neighborhood that had been destroyed. "Listening to the City," as the forum was called, allowed us to do that. Seated at tables of 10 with a volunteer facilitator at each, we reviewed plans for the site, discussed options for housing and transportation, and tried to reach consensus on recommendations for rebuilding authorities. Periodically, we registered our preferences on digital voting pads, which tallied the results on giant Jumbotron screens. When the screen revealed that most of us disliked all the official proposals for the site, we cheered.

Observers hailed this "21st-century town meeting" as an exercise in people-powered democracy. "At each table, they debated in a sober, thoughtful, civil way," *New York Daily News* columnist Pete Hamill marveled. "We have a word for what they were doing. The word is democracy" (Hamill 2002:8). Hamill's enthusiasm has been shared by observers of similar exercises in "public deliberation," in which ordinary citizens meet to make recommendations on issues ranging from local police–community relations to the federal deficit (Nabatchi et al. 2012). And the enthusiasm goes further. In fields as diverse as education, business, advocacy, and local governance, there is a new confidence in the ability of ordinary people to help make the decisions that matter.

There is another view of public deliberative forums, however, and of contemporary forms of participation more broadly. In the case of Listening to the City, the dissenting view was voiced by Michael Sorkin (2002), an architectural critic who also participated in the event. He was not enthusiastic. As the day wore on, he wrote later, he increasingly

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felt like a delegate in a "1950s Soviet Party Congress" (Sorkin 2002:67). The options for how to develop the site had been determined in advance and they were basically identical. When the master of ceremonies for the event gave a "brief pep talk on how the meeting was democratic as all get out because 'in democracy, the people have a chance to speak!'" Sorkin had had enough. He stood up and yelled, "Buuuuuullllllshiiiiiiit! Democracy means the people have the power to choose!" His "tiny act of insurrection went completely unnoticed" (Sorkin 2002:67), he commented ruefully. And, in fact, we did not end up really choosing. The designs that we so disliked were shelved, and new ones were drawn up. But the new ones still had the huge amount of commercial space and relatively little housing that we had objected to. Then the governor ended up deciding which design to choose, and then the site's leaseholder overruled his choice (Polletta and Wood 2005).

Critics like Sorkin ask whether public deliberative forums really count as democracy. The people get to speak, but they have no control over the final decisions that are made. Indeed, critics argue, grand spectacles of public participation may make it that much easier for backroom decision making to carry on as usual, unscrutinized and unchallenged. Just as so-called flat management in business ends up putting workers in the position of monitoring each other's performance, in a constant Panopticon-like state of surveillance, so participatory democratic exercises in governance have been charged with allowing people to "choose" just which cost-cutting measure will be imposed on them. Again, participation comes in lieu of power (Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker 2014).

Certainly, democracy, especially in its participatory forms, is an idea that is as manipulable as it is meaningful. Consider the 2008 Obama Internet campaign, widely celebrated as a grand experiment in bottom-up democracy. As Daniel Kreiss's (2012) behind-the-scenes study of the campaign makes clear, the Obama "brand" was about the transformative possibilities of grassroots participation. The Obama campaign was not. Centrally and hierarchically organized, relentlessly focused on "money, message, and mobilization" (Kreiss 2012:4), the campaign's Internet division figured out how to persuade supporters to donate millions of dollars and thousands of hours of volunteer time while supplying the ever more precise data that allowed campaign operatives to target their fund-raising appeals. A staffer who was in charge of writing engaging profiles of Obama's supporters was deliberately kept insulated from the rest of the campaign. Getting "too close to the sausage making," his boss told him, would make the ring of people power in his posts seem less authentic (Kreiss 2012:137).

Grassroots lobbying, to give another example, now involves a vast industry dedicated to getting ordinary people to send prewritten e-mails and letters to congressional representatives in support of corporation-friendly policies (Walker 2009). Grassroots, indeed. But I wonder whether the people who are sending those e-mails think they are participating in a bottom-up democracy. What do people want and expect of participation? If their expectations are stunted, why is that the case? Is participation without power seen as good, or is it seen as better than nothing? And what about the people who put on the participatory spectacles, who launch team management initiatives,

organize deliberative forums, and work in empowerment projects? What do they expect and want of participatory initiatives?

The essays in this special issue tackle these questions. Each of the authors trains close ethnographic observation on a setting in which participation is valorized. Nina Eliasoph's (2014) setting is the world of empowerment projects: nonprofit programs that are funded by a mix of government, foundations, and corporations and are aimed at helping disadvantaged people by giving them the tools to transform their lives. Nina spent years observing and volunteering in several empowerment projects and she shows how much they draw on a participatory ethos. Organizers believed that they would develop leadership among the young people with whom they worked by treating them as leaders. Rejecting the rigid rules and roles of bureaucracy, their organizations would be "open and undefined and up to you to decide 'whatever' " (Eliasoph 2014: 467). Nina explores organizers' efforts to put those values into practice in a context of tight funding cycles and constant demands for measurable success.

The civic engagement specialists whom Caroline Lee (2014) studied saw themselves as carrying the participatory democratic values of the 1960s into a new era. Giving ordinary people the opportunity to weigh in on the decisions that matter would create better policies as well as more engaged citizens. Rejecting the "adversarialism" (Lee 2014) of their activist youths, civic engagement specialists valued the opportunity to bring deliberation into corporate settings as well as nonprofits and local governance. The ideological work that civic engagement specialists did to make those settings all seem the same is the focus of Caroline's article.

Alexandra Michel's (2014) investment bankers likely had no memory of the 1960s. When Alexandra began interviewing them, they were young, largely nonpolitical, and hard driving. When they talked about participation and autonomy, they were uninterested in those terms' political meanings. But they prized the way their work was set up: their freedom to set their own work schedules and the egalitarian ethos that substituted teams for workers and bosses. Even as they worked 120-hour weeks, they bragged about the freedom of their workplace. Alexandra unravels the puzzle of autonomy in that context, in part by tracing bankers' experiences of work over the course of 12 years.

Many of the people who staffed Obama's 2008 Internet campaign came from the technology industry of Silicon Valley. They were entrepreneurial and impatient; they prized informality and good ideas. They saw in the Internet campaign an opportunity to harness the tremendous energy of Obama supporters and they gave supporters responsibilities that campaigns before had always reserved for paid staff. Daniel Kreiss (2014) explores the relationship, sometimes fraught, but more often cooperative, between supporters and campaign staffers.

People in all these settings valorized participation, equality, informality, personal relationships, and individual autonomy. Bureaucracy was the enemy. It prevented things from getting done, stifled creativity, created cogs in an organizational machine, ignored the value of local knowledge and initiative. To be sure, in none of these settings did people actually have control of the decisions that mattered. Corporate and

municipal decision makers could ignore the recommendations that came out of the public forums Caroline describes. Investment bank directors could fire underperforming analysts. The young people who joined empowerment programs had no input into whom the programs targeted for funding or what staff did with the funding. The Obama supporters who contributed time and money did not have a say, really, in any decisions campaign staffers made. Participatory democracy was more a style or sensibility, an aspiration that was pursued alongside a recognition of the limits to giving people full control of decision making. The authors ask, then, about this aspiration or style. Where did it come from? What consequences did it have? And what limits did it come up against?

DEMOCRACY NOW

Before I underline a few themes in the answers that the authors give to these questions, I want to provide some additional historical context for the participatory sensibility the authors describe. It is, in important respects, profoundly new.

Bureaucracy and the things that go with it such as expertise, formal rules and procedures, and hierarchical and centralized decision making have periodically gotten a bad name. This is not just among radical activists committed to enacting a radically free, caring, and egalitarian society in the here and now: radical pacifists in the 1950s, new leftists in the 1960s, feminist and antinuclear activists in the 1970s, and most recently, Occupy activists (see, e.g., Leach 2013). Dissatisfaction with bureaucracy has extended much further. During the Progressive Era, a movement of intellectuals and activists who eventually won support from Congress and the White House developed deliberative forums around the country. Ordinary people, many of them newly arrived immigrants, met evenings in public schools to discuss issues ranging from local budget decisions to national immigration policy, sometimes directly with local officials and candidates (Mattson 1998). In another participatory moment, when federal planners devised new antipoverty initiatives in the 1960s, the notion that the poor would not be involved in the initiatives' administration was unthinkable. As observers wrote at the time, "the days when poor people would passively accept what they were given were numbered everywhere" (quoted in Sirianni and Friedland 2001:37).

Antibureaucratic animus periodically has swept business as well as government. In the 1960s, at the very time that new leftists were scathing in their denunciation of gray-suited and conformist corporate "organization men," those same organization men were touting the virtues of radical democracy. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1964, management guru Warren Bennis (with sociologist Philip Slater) argued that democracy had become a "functional necessity," and that the most hidebound companies were now trying to "humaniz[e] and democratize large-scale bureaucracies" by encouraging emotional expression, an indifference to rank, and a faith in "consensus" rather than coercion or compromise as a way to deal with conflicts (Slater and Bennis 1964:52). By the 1990s, facing the pressures of just-in-time production and impressed by Japanese firms' collaborative style, many American businesses adopted participatory

forms of work organization (Vallas 2006). Indeed, in 1992, somewhere between 10 and 20 percent of private sector employees were members of work teams (Osterman 1994).

So, enthusiasms for more participatory, egalitarian, and informal modes of administration have been a periodic feature of American political and economic institutions. There is a certain pendulum-like character to those enthusiasms. The Progressive Era movement I described above collapsed when politicians decided that, in the run-up to World War I, public opinion had to be manufactured, not nurtured. By the end of the war, amidst new enthusiasm for using propaganda techniques in peacetime, the notion of a participatory citizenship had lost favor (Mattson 1998). In international development, to give another example, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) began funding cooperative institutions in the 1960s, then abandoned those initiatives in favor of large-scale investments in industry and agriculture in the 1970s when it became clear that the cooperatives were not working and government reform was difficult to sustain. In the 1990s, USAID re-embraced ideas of participatory development, partly in response to criticisms of its earlier efforts as top-down and disempowering (Mansuri and Rao 2013). There have been similar back-and-forths in other fields. Whether they reflect collective learning (Sirianni and Friedland 2001) or a reinvention of the wheel remains an open question.

Still, there are several features of the contemporary zeal for participation that are new. One is its sheer scope. In art, appreciation for the lone creator and a sniffy distaste for collaboration have yielded to celebrations of participatory culture and "prosumers" (consumers who are also producers) (Jenkins 2009; Kester 2011). Crowdsourcing has become a favored strategy in business, policymaking, and science (Wexler 2011). Participatory budgeting, once synonymous with the single city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, has spread to thousands of municipalities around the world (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014). Briefs for "collective intelligence" are made in education, video gaming, and financial investing (Bonabeau 2009). Books like *The Wisdom of Crowds* (Surowiecki 2005) are best sellers.

One might say that the late 1960s were similarly marked by a widespread enthusiasm for participation. But participatory institutions then were seen as firmly outside the establishment. Today, they are the establishment. The arguments then for participation were principled. Today, they are practical. Anything but doctrinaire, today's radical democrats prize flexibility, experimentalism, and measurable results. Promoting citizens' input makes for better policies, they say; promoting workers' input makes for better performance. In an important sense, participatory democracy has gone mainstream.

The Internet looms large in today's landscape of participatory initiatives. There were participatory democratic movement groups, businesses, and political initiatives before the Internet, of course. In culture, just to give one example, there was the DIY (Do It Yourself) ethos of punk rock production and zines (Delwiche 2012). Still, it is undeniable that new digital technologies dramatically lowered the costs of joining, forming, and coordinating groups (Shirky 2008). They made it possible to combat the

problems of scale that have long dogged briefs for participatory democracy. In addition, however, digital democracies have produced new modes of cooperation, and new ideas about what democratic cooperation is. Activists in the global justice movement, for instance, have sought to create organizations in which autonomous spheres or publics are linked in multiple ways along the lines of a virtual network. The democracy they practice would seem strange to a 1960s participatory democrat. They talk about autonomy more than equality; about self-management more than leaderlessness; about diversity more than unity (Juris 2008; see Nielsen 2013 on the Occupy movement). They prefigure a different kind of democracy than 1960s activists did. Cooperative institutions used to require that everyone shoulder an equal burden of the work. Today, cooperative institutions like Wikipedia have dispensed with that requirement: so little work is required that any one person can do a lot of it without feeling put upon (Shirky 2008).

A third feature of today's participatory landscape bears note, and it is one to which several authors in this special issue draw attention. Participatory initiatives today take place in the context of reduced government support for social programs. The connection, however, is complicated. In international development, observers say that lenders' new dedication to participation reflects a "post-Washington consensus" that the burdens of structural adjustment fell mainly on the poor. The solution was to support the poverty-fighting capacities of decentralized states and civil society actors. At the same time, however, participatory development is still constrained by disciplinary financial policies (Craig and Porter 2006). In Britain, David Cameron's "Big Society" programs involved devolving power "from the élites in Whitehall to the man and woman on the street," as Cameron put it (Collins 2010:38). But the emphasis on local initiatives was combined with deep cuts in social spending.

In some cases, then, a compensation for the effects of a neoliberal agenda, new participatory initiatives also share with neoliberalism an emphasis on nimble, flexible organizations, entrepreneurialism, and a practical, nonpartisan style (see Whitehead 2011 on the neoliberal discourse used by same-sex marriage advocates). The neoliberal context is evident in Alexandra's essay in the prestige awarded to Wall Street bankers' ways of organizing work, which spread to smaller investment banks and even outside of investment banks. It is evident in Caroline's public deliberation projects, which were advertised to corporate executives as a way to secure employees' support for downsizing and mergers. And it is evident in Nina's empowerment projects, whose proliferation in the last 30 years owes in part to the erosion of government programs providing social services.

Critics would say that participation in this context is a scam. It is a way to make people feel better about themselves while things are taken away from them: labor power, job security, public assistance. Spectacles of participation substitute for mechanisms of genuine accountability. And the much-vaunted freedom to choose ends up being a more sophisticated form of control. But the articles by Caroline, Alexandra, Nina, and Daniel complicate this picture, in thought-provoking ways. They reveal the obstacles that the people who are sponsoring the participation and the people who are

participating are up against. And they reveal the undeniable appeal of participation, even when it comes without power.

AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES OF DEMOCRACY

Caroline complicates the picture of participation as manipulative by showing just how sensitive civic engagement practitioners were to their own capacities for manipulation. They worked hard to ensure that they did not push their own beliefs, or those of their sponsors, in the talk they facilitated. They described deliberation as an antidote to the ethos of the market that had turned citizens into self-interested and passive consumers. They truly believed that civic engagement, properly organized and facilitated, could be transformative.

So how, then, did practitioners reconcile this view of civic engagement with the fact that they often worked for for-profit companies? How did they justify advertising their services to corporate executives as a way to gain employee "alignment" (Lee 2014) with policies that might lose employees their jobs, cut benefits, or otherwise require that they make do with less? How did practitioners reconcile a democratizing logic, which emphasized people's capacity to make their own decisions, with a rationalizing logic, which emphasized standardized practices made to serve the interests of those who paid for them?

They did so, Caroline shows, by shifting their focus from the purposes of democratic facilitation to its quality. Practitioners perfected techniques for ensuring that people with higher status did not monopolize talk, for arriving at conclusions that captured common ground while not precluding disagreement, for helping people to connect to their own feelings and fears. In their own gatherings, practitioners insisted on using their techniques as a way to demonstrate the value of the techniques and their indispensability to meaningful group talk. The same techniques for fostering collaboration, they insisted, could be used in any setting: corporate or civic, in settings where participants were peers or where some participants employed others.

In homogenizing the techniques of facilitated talk though, practitioners also homogenized its purposes. Deliberation aimed at getting people to accept cuts in workplace benefits was assimilated to deliberation aimed at soliciting public input into the design of a new downtown and to deliberation aimed at resolving a conflict between organized stakeholders. Practitioners did not broach the possibility that those settings might require different kinds of talk in order to be democratic. They did not broach the possibility that sometimes participants might not be well served by deliberation, even if sponsors were.

Practitioners' concern with their own capacity for manipulation thus missed the point, Caroline argues. Making themselves into truly neutral moderators, "custodians of independent process" (Lee 2014), did not solve the problem of the ends to which the process was put. Practitioners may have been successful in creating an authentic-feeling experience of democracy. But whether that should be the standard by which the process is measured is debatable.

AUTONOMY AS THE FREEDOM TO WORK HARD

Alexandra's bankers celebrated their autonomy. No one set their working hours or tracked their productivity or vacation time. No one managed them. And yet they worked up to 120 hours a week. They skipped weekends, they abandoned friends, family, and activities outside work. They pushed their bodies past the breaking point. Yet they said that this was their own choice. One told Alexandra, "I could not work for an organization that required me to come at 9 a.m. and leave at 5 p.m. I want to be in control of my schedule." She pressed him, "But you work a lot longer than 40-hour weeks." He answered, "Yes, but this is *my* choice. *I* decide when the work gets done" (Michel 2014:522).

This sounds like exploitation masquerading as freedom. But Alexandra complicates the picture by helping us to understand just why the bankers saw themselves as choosing to work so hard. They were driven, but not only by the fear that they would be stigmatized if they did not do so. It was also that they took satisfaction in their ability to work the long hours. They took pride in pushing themselves further than they thought was possible. They were in control of their bodies and, until their bodies broke down, they experienced a sense of potency. One analyst provided insight: "Even the people I meet randomly at the gym, they cannot appreciate my skills. It doesn't mean anything to them that I worked on deal X. But they do understand and have awe for hard work" (Michel 2014:528). The analogy is apt. Autonomy was like choosing to go for level 12 on the treadmill.

That explains too why the ethos spread beyond investment bankers. Alexandra describes bankers leaving their Wall Street firms when they realized that they could not keep up the pace. They moved to less competitive firms, or outside investment banking altogether, but they brought their work styles with them. A banker at a small firm in Boston gushed about a new Wall Street transplant, "He was the first Wall Street hire that we made and everyone looked at what he did because we just thought that he had it right and that whatever he did was what it took to be successful. I think we all stepped up our effort. No one forced us to. It was just a matter of self-respect" (Michel 2014:527).

What made the bankers' work style attractive was partly the prestige of Wall Street. But it was not only that. Alexandra quotes a temporary worker, a dancer, who had worked at a bank simply to earn enough to support her dance. "I have certain financial goals and once they are met, I want to spend every waking hour advancing my dancing," she explained. But when a former Wall Street banker joined the firm, she changed. "Now when I have earned what I wanted to and feel tired, instead of going home, I just challenge myself and see how much longer I can work. I have a completely new understanding about my capacity for work" (Michel 2014:527).

Challenging oneself felt good, at least for a time. Some of the bankers discovered, often after they suffered physical breakdowns, that they preferred to challenge themselves in ways that they more truly chose, taking up mountain climbing or marathon running or journalism or dressage. But for those who did not have that

realization, the freedom to choose remained firmly tethered to the demands of high production.

LEADERSHIP ON A JUST-IN-TIME PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Nina complicates a picture of participation as a way to get people to do more with less by exposing the constraints under which empowerment project staffers labored. Staffers truly wanted to have student volunteers learn skills by taking the reins of the organization. But the projects that students were supposed to come up with had to be submitted to funding agencies before the students had even joined the program. Staffers truly wanted to do the long, slow work of building leadership among their charges. But that was hard to do when they were under constant pressure to produce evidence of "measurable" outcomes to funding agencies: the number of hours volunteers had read to seniors, the number of "at-risk" youths they had helped to graduate from high school, and so on.

Empowerment project staffers worked in a world not of their own making. As much as they rejected the impersonalism and inflexibility of bureaucracy, they were still accountable to funding agencies that *were* bureaucracies. As much as the funding agencies themselves sang the praises of local knowledge and initiative, they also insisted on quantifiable results delivered on non-negotiable deadlines. Accordingly, organizers fell back time after time on the "no-brainer" projects that were unqualifiedly helpful, if not especially creative or engaging, and whose results were easily measured (for example, in pounds of donated merchandise collected for veterans). Or they focused volunteers' energies on raising funds to keep the organization going.

Nina's article makes clear the difficulties of sustaining islands of participatory democracy in a sea of bureaucracies. But Nina also notes that staffers forewent opportunities to school their charges in a different kind of leadership. They did not encourage the young people to begin to see the institutional world in which they existed as sending mixed messages about what counted as success. They did not encourage the young people to reflect on the merits of competing against organizations representing seniors or immigrants for a bigger cut of the limited pie of support.

The volunteers *did* learn, nevertheless. They learned to ignore organizers' declaration that everything was "open and undefined and up to you to decide 'whatever,' " and instead pick up on organizers' hints as to what they should be doing. They learned to talk about themselves as social problems ("I'm involved instead of being out on the streets or taking drugs or doing something illegal" [Eliasoph 2014:486]). They learned both to recognize hypocrisy and to accommodate it.

IN PRAISE OF BIG AND PARTISAN ORGANIZATIONS

Nina's organizers were unwilling to dwell on the contradictions of the institutional world they inhabited. Their can-do enthusiasm is surely another part of the mantra of today's participatory initiatives. But its flip side is a deep discomfort with political

conflict. Caroline's civic engagement practitioners, for example, proudly described their evolution away from adversarialism as maturity and cautioned each other against using words like "justice" or "empowerment" lest it alienate conservatives.

Daniel describes a much broader anti-partisan ethos, one that has become a taken-for-granted aspect of American politics. Journalists and pundits routinely rail against partisanship, as do party politicians. Indeed, even a delegate to the Democratic National Convention expressed that discomfort. She wanted to share her experiences of the convention on Facebook, she told Daniel, but she tried, she said, "not to get too political" (Kreiss 2014:539). If you cannot be political at a party convention . . . !

But party politics is all the things that contemporary participatory democratic talk is not. It is negative, indeed, sometimes uncivil. It unfolds in giant convention halls and hotel rooms. It has little of the intimacy of deliberative forums or the excitement of connecting with strangers across divisions of interest. Yet it is in and through party politics that ordinary people can have genuine impact on the policies that matter, Daniel points out. This is not only in the sense that there are real divisions between the parties and whether Democrats or Republicans win elections actually matters deeply to people's lives. It is also in the sense that parties are no longer single organizations. Rather, they are constellations of advocacy groups and civil society actors. Citizens' participation in these groups and networks shapes party platforms as well as parties' expectations of the candidates it nominates.

Daniel compares participation in party decision making with participation in the 2008 Obama Internet campaign. In some ways, the Obama campaign, unlike party conventions, embraced the participatory style of the moment. Freewheeling and informal, campaign staffers drew the line between volunteer and staff high on the organizational chart. Volunteers could access voter files; they organized canvassing events; and they were given free rein to stage fund-raisers. But this did not mean that supporters had anything like substantive input into campaign strategy. And Daniel argues that that was okay—for everyone involved.

Some staffers wanted to give supporters a longer leash than others did. And there were occasions when supporters demanded input that they did not get. But that was rare. Most of the time, supporters accepted that the bottom line was winning and that staffers knew better than they did what it took to win. It would have been manipulative to tell supporters otherwise, one staffer explained. The fact that the campaign rhetoric sometimes suggested otherwise—the talk, for example, about supporters' "ownership" of the campaign—may be evidence of differences among the staff. Or it may reflect the extent to which a participatory rhetoric has become so conventional that people are capable of distinguishing between participation with substantive input and participation without it, even when the words are the same.

Either way, Daniel argues, the problem is not that supporters did not control the Obama campaign. The problem is that contemporary ideas about what participation should look like—nonpartisan, short term, and satisfying in the moment—may discourage people from participating in the party politics where they can actually have an impact.

MULTI-YEAR AND MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHIES

Daniel's article, like the other three, relies on deep and sustained ethnographic immersion. Each author spent years in the field. Their research also took place in multiple sites as well as over long periods. I want to underscore how valuable this has been. Alexandra's longitudinal study allowed her to trace the long-term effects of flexible work practices and ideologies on workers, effects not only on their career choices and self-described levels of satisfaction but on their physical health. It also gave her unique access to the ways in which institutional logics diffuse: In this case, carried by investment bankers from investment banks to the places they went to work after they burned out in banking. Daniel's observations of participation in a Democratic national convention as well as in the online component of a presidential campaign allowed him to compare the modes and limits of participation in the two sites. (His current project, on Internet use in Republican campaigns, will give us even further insight into the extent to which understandings of participation are bounded, in this case by political party.)

Caroline's observations of civic engagement practitioners in multiple settings, interacting variously with potential clients, participants, and colleagues, permitted her a deep and empathetic understanding of how practitioners struggled, often creatively, to square competing institutional logics. But it also gave her insight into how practitioners sometimes minimized the conflicts between those logics. And following empowerment project staffers from project meetings to fundraising dinners and back again gave Nina access to the strikingly constrained character of empowerment talk. Ethnography allowed the authors not only to get at what participation means for today's knowledge workers, civic engagement practitioners, political operatives, and nonprofit staff, but also to see just how limits to participation are set.

DEMOCRACY NOW—AND LATER?

Where do these essays leave us with respect to the prospects for democracy now? One message, perhaps, is how far short of popular control today's participatory initiatives are. At the same time, I think we should take seriously Alexandra's bankers' insistence that they took pleasure in choosing to push themselves to work hard. And Daniel's argument that Obama supporters did not want to own the campaign, campaign rhetoric aside. And the fact that people really liked participating in the deliberative forums that Caroline's specialists organized.

You can call it false consciousness. But I think it makes more sense to acknowledge that there is satisfaction in working as a team, regardless of how much one can influence the team's strategy. There is satisfaction in talking about important issues with people who are different from you, however much the talk falls short of changing policy on the issues. And there is satisfaction in seeing how productive you can be. The question, though, is whether those experiences add up to democracy. To return to Michael Sorkin's correction of the Listening to the City master of ceremonies

about what democracy actually means, the interesting thing is that the emcee sold participation as democracy. And that no one but Sorkin seemed to mind.

Democracy is certainly a capacious term. But the articles in this section also ask us to think about which meanings of democracy come to dominate in a particular time and place. In our own era, has democracy, at least in its participatory versions, come to be understood primarily as an experience of openness, authentic connection, talk across difference? I am struck by the temporal boundedness of the episodes of participation the authors describe: the deliberation that ends when the specialists go home; the participation that ends when the candidate's campaign ends or when the grant funding for participation runs out; the autonomy that ends when the bankers just get too tired to keep going.

Compare, in this regard, the experience of participating in one of Caroline's forums or Daniel's Internet campaign or Nina's empowerment projects with the experience of participating in a political party. Daniel points out that parties accept deep and intractable conflict as a feature of politics, not as something that can be, or should be, overcome. But parties also have a different temporal horizon than these other exercises (Tavory and Eliasoph 2013). They have been around and will be around. One measures one's experience in the long term. Perhaps that also makes it possible to see one's participation as aimed at a larger and longer-term set of goals, and to assess one's participation in terms of advancing those goals. Certainly, political parties are an imperfect and incomplete model for what participatory democracy should be. But their orientation to the long-term contrasts with the time-bounded character of much of what passes today as participatory democratic. In this way and in others, the articles in this special section ask us to think about our contemporary common sense about participation and democracy—and to imagine alternatives.

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