PARTICIPATION IS RISKY. Approaches to joint creative processes

more on: www.socialspaces.be/projects/current-projects/participation-is-risky
Context: Necessity of developing design and art education/research in close collaboration with context and participants in it, but no environment and training context to do so => Social Spaces, book, training program TRADERS
Focus: This book project describes the negotiations that designers and artists engage in when setting up participatory projects with public and private, professional and amateur participants. These negotiations are defined as risky trade-offs, reflecting the uncertainty that artists, designers and participants experience in participatory contexts about e.g. their roles or the outcomes of these projects.
Context: Participation? (Image Pablo Calderon and David Huycke)

- Always takes place between a network of participants and objects (ANT): THING
- How the objects evolve and participants engage depends on type of participants and approach to the interaction: Strong maker statements, ‘User’ participants (approached as audience or participants)? Different disciplines (different viewpoints)? ‘Unknown ‘potential’ participants (e.g. street, online projects)?
Context: Participation can take place in different phases of the art and design research process: PROJECT (e.g. Calderon) and USE TIME (e.g. Huycke)
Input maker or participants in these phases can change the project in ways that are more or less unexpected, difficult to control,… (e.g. Market can become something that the maker was not imagining)
However, in balanced processes this **risk** benefits the interesting qualities of a design process (e.g. critiques on the granular structure, can allow Huycke to make next steps)
Project: mapping of 6 case studies in the design and art field, visualising 1. how a project is developed 2. how risky the (material) interactions are experienced, 3; how this “risk” benefits the art and design process.
Interesting participatory projects risk to use “material” as more or less hybrid zone
Hybridity: material with collage like and imperfect characteristics stimulates dialogue between expert – participant through making (e.g. Forma Fantasma ‘Baked’, Cohen and Van Balen ‘Rusty Knives’ and Calderon or co-design tools like MAP-it)
Interesting participatory projects risk to use “material” as more or less generative tool.
Generativity via modularity of material (Huycke granular modularity, Angelo Vermeulen, ‘Seeker’: work, life and technology, in collaboration with Mars simulation NASA)
Generativity via material allowing deviant uses (Outside project: Arduino – Lilypad – Freeduino; Inside project: Thomas Lommée)
Reflections:

• Approach to participation can vary in degree of hybridity and generativity of the “materials” used and type of risk (co-creation, versus confrontation with expert critique).

• Risking to engage in ongoing participation can have disadvantages (control over goals, ethical concerns,.., time management,…, see eg Arduino).

• However, this risk is inherent to and productive for participatory design projects, in both research/making (new inputs…) as distribution phase (engagement, continuity, critiques, alterations…).
Ongoing:

- Clay Analytics
- TRADERS training program [www.tr-aders.eu](http://www.tr-aders.eu)
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