



# The Participator

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Final Project proposal

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## **How can collaborative projects with a nonhierarchical structure affect the engagement and expectations of the participant(s)?**

The proposal for my final project is based on my fascination with collaborative and participatory exchange within a nonhierarchical structure. For my final project I want to experiment with rules that structure the way people participate and collaborate. I am planning to research this by doing a series of projects involving creating events, a fanzine and vinyl record.

“Artists have increasingly sought to create situations and events that invite spectators to become an active participant, in dialogue both with their context and with each other. This aspect of contribution is visible engaging the viewer as a consumer and a producer, giving the viewer the power to kill or sustain/feed a project.”  
(Claire Bishop, 2006, PARTICIPATION, back cover)

Participation is defined and used in many different ways. Participation is described in the dictionary ([freedictionary.com](http://freedictionary.com)) as the act of sharing in the activities of a group. Different elements can trigger or influence the way people participate. Sharing the successes and challenges and the feeling of being co-owner can stimulate the involvement of the participants.

Past events and projects in which I was involved in the process of decision-making were structured nonhierarchical. There was no vertical structure of power, decision-making and responsibility was distributed in a horizontal matter. This structure is needed because the focus is on sharing, exchange and a collective experience.

Being part of the artist collective “Jong Autonom” I already experienced an organization with a nonhierarchical structure. I had an insight into the positive and negative aspects of this structure while organizing concerts, exhibitions and workshops.

An ongoing project of mine is the “Rotterdam is Hard” fanzine. This publication is an open participation medium for artwork, drawings and photographs, in which every submission received is published. The trigger for participating is the given guarantee of the work being published and getting a hard copy of the fanzine. New participants are introduced to the project by word of mouth. The “Rotterdam is Hard” fanzine makes each participant a co-author of the fanzine, producing the content for the fanzine together. The participants who contributed to the project remain anonymous in the publication. They are anonymous for the fact that the work of the participant itself is more interesting than the author. Future participants need to be driven by the affinity with the collective outcome and not by the people who were involved.

The difficult parts of co-authorship can be the level of dedication and skills. Big difference in effort between the participants can result in frustration. Within the “Rotterdam is Hard” fanzine this difference in dedication and skills makes each issue of the fanzine unpredictable and surprising for the reader.

The fanzine is distributed during events and exhibitions. One issue of the fanzine is presented on the “Rotterdam = Hard” exhibition that I have organized at Wolfart

projectspaces.

During this exhibition visitors could interact with an installation presented in the showroom window. To engage the visitors of the exhibition I setup an installation called “Everyone can make a page” using a computer, webcam and printer. When motion is detected by the webcam from the person in front of the showroom, the printer provided real-time feedback through the printing process being visible in the shopping window. The computer is processing the data received from the webcam and sending the user generated image to the printer.



*Image 1:*

*Image 1: Collection of previous editions of the fanzines*



*Image 2:*

*Image 2: Setting up the installation “Everyone can make a page” in the shopping window at Wolfart projectspaces.*

The exhibition at Wolfart projectspaces is organized without management by an outside source. This self-organized structure is interesting because the artists who are involved don't have to compromise with anyone. The organization is achieved in a way that is parallel. The main focus is bringing people together to share the experience from performances and work of the participating artists.

Sharing information and results of research received from my projects is done through event based distribution. The self-organized events are of a temporary nature and involve publications, performances and generate experiences by the visitor. Evidence of the event will usually exist in the conception and planning evidence. The event-based works and performances are documented in the form of audio and video recordings.

For my final project the main focus within this research will be on the structure of participatory and collaborative projects throughout the history. Looking at mail art, Fluxus, and the history of zines. Looking into the way that other projects are working with predefined rules to stimulate communication and development. I want to learn

about the relationship between the authors and publishers, old and new structures.

With this research I can develop and tryout different rules for participation and collaboration. As already stated before contribution is visible by 'engaging the viewer being consumer and producer' (Claire Bishop, 2006, PARTICIPATION), giving the viewer the power to kill or sustain/feed a project. For example I can think of the accessibility of the project, the possibility of sharing own content or from others and connecting to other participants, the way people can look at the project. Setup what the focus will be on the project. If the participants can share, review, describe, reuse, and interact with each other and the way they can do this. These elements can be used different for each individual project to study in what way this influences it. I will define different rules of engagement and the result can make the participants strongly engaged.

For the series of projects I am going to experiment and test out these elements and rules. I want to organize two events, one event without a curator and theme with visitors who are actively participating and collaborating in the workshop. I want to see how much feedback the participants need during the workshop. The other event will be an exhibition with a theme and only passive viewers. With this exhibition I only want to focus on the artists showing their work. Both events I want to ask the visitors if it follows up their expectations and if they feel engaged by talking to them.

For the vinyl release I want to produce a record together with people who want to pay a fee for releasing the music and artwork on vinyl. I am curious about the impact the money will have on the level and quality of investment of music, design and final outcome of the vinyl record. The outcome can be that the amount of financial contribution of each participant for the record is displayed. This can be made visible in the length of the audio and the space on the record cover. It is similar to the way print size of the font is used on the cover of research papers in proportion to the contribution. I will interview the participating musicians and designers in the beginning of the project and at final state to learn about their experience.

The next issue of my ongoing "Rotterdam is Hard" fanzine will be integrated in the Networked Media graduation catalogue. I will send a "viral" mail out with an open call for participation for my space in the printed graduation catalogue. The amount of responses that reply on the request will display if people are interested and feel stimulated by fact that their submissions getting published in the Piet Zwart Institute Networked Media graduation catalogue.

During the project I will document my research through visual documentation of the process and outcome. Documentation from the events, sound files, photographs and received emails about the catalogue will be collected together with the rules that I setup for collaboration. With my projects and documentation I want to look critical at the idea by the artist Allan Kaprow (2006) that 'the object doesn't become the focus but the action does'.

## References

- Claire Bishop (2006) PARTICIPATION, Whitechapel, The MIT Press
- Annet Dekker (2010) Clickable art, or, what does online participation mean?
- Teal Triggs (2010) Fanzines, Chronicle Books
- Allan Kaprow (2006) 'Radical and restless artist determined to blur the boundaries between art and life' in [timeonline.co.uk](http://timeonline.co.uk)