

RESEARCH ESSAY

Invited, Directed, or Used: Audience Participation and Artistic Authorship

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Audience participation is often announced as an invitation, but invitations can conceal direction, data extraction, social pressure, and the artist's power to decide what counts as a meaningful response. When do collaborators share authorship, and when are they used as responsive material inside someone else's work? Participatory authorship should be judged by influence, informed refusal, credit, and control over the afterlife of contributions. A useful account must keep formal detail beside social consequence. Here, instructions, consent language, resolution records, compensation, credit, editing rights, and options for withdrawal disclose the link between discernible participation and actual intervention power as a process rather than a fixed attribute.

A theater piece asks spectators to submit a memory that performers immediately reshape on stage. The exchange feels intimate, yet collaborators do not know that recordings will later enter a touring production. What appears incidental in the finished object is central to its history of use. The case exposes how the interdependence between open to view participation and actual selection power depends on timing, placement, and practical judgment. It also warns against converting one contributor's later explanation into the settled meaning of an earlier event.

Scale is part of the explanation. At the level of a single encounter, instructions, consent language, resolution records, compensation, credit, editing rights, and options for withdrawal may support the alignment between discernible participation and actual judgment power; across an institution or repeated undertaking, the same arrangement can distribute varied burdens. The account therefore tests whether members can change outcomes and understand the results of taking part in both immediate and extended settings and treats any divergence as a reason to

narrow the contention.

The proposed strategy is governance account that follows a contribution from invitation through reuse and institutional promotion. It begins with a descriptive pass that postpones motive and records variations before grouping them. A second pass asks which variation changes access, sequence, or authority. The final juxtaposition uses whether respondents can change outcomes and understand the effects of taking part as a discriminating test, so account cannot expand merely by collecting attractive examples.

A neighborhood project begins with artist-designed workshops but gives residents authority over site, budget, imagery, and final presentation. The professional artist remains influential without owning every intervention. Placed beside the first instance, this case alters the interpretation's scale. The relevant difference is not medium alone but the distribution of choice. It demonstrates that the relation between legible participation and actual choice power cannot be inferred from appearance; it must be traced through the impacts of participation and the limits placed on revision.

The framework treats mediation as substantive evidence. Through governance analysis that follows a contribution from invitation through reuse and institutional promotion, choices that might otherwise appear technical become part of the account of the link between legible participation and actual commitment power. This does not mean that every minor judgment carries equal weight; it means weight must be demonstrated by showing a plausible pathway from choice to experienced or documented implication.

Demanding equal control in every project can deny the artist's responsibility for form and make coherent authorship impossible. Answering this concern requires more than adding a warning to the conclusion. It changes source selection, since evidence of burden, refusal,

and exclusion must be gathered alongside evidence of creative success. The governing test remains whether respondents can change outcomes and understand the aftereffects of taking part, applied from more than one position.

Projects should name degrees of participation accurately, separate consent to join from consent to archive, and create proportionate credit, payment, and veto mechanisms. Adoption should not be measured by the presence of a policy alone. The relevant evidence is whether members can understand the process, alter it in time, and obtain a reasoned response. Regular review should include cases of refusal and failure, since those cases reveal limits that successful examples rarely disclose.

A larger corpus should be assembled by variation rather than convenience. Cases need to differ in institution, audience, duration, and degree of respondent control while remaining comparable through the alignment between visible participation and actual commitment power. Sampling only celebrated instances would confuse public visibility with evidentiary importance; including abandoned and routine cases reveals the ordinary work that makes the phenomenon possible.

No research design eliminates the scholar's authority to select and describe. Even governance examination that follows a contribution from invitation through reuse and institutional promotion frames some details as central and leaves others peripheral. Reflexive disclosure is therefore necessary but insufficient; accounts also need challenge from people represented in the evidence and a clear procedure for correction when whether people involved can change outcomes and understand the impacts of taking part is disputed.

A valuable extension would compare expert and nonexpert descriptions over time. Rather than asking which group hears or sees correctly, the study could

trace what each notices through instructions, consent language, judgment records, compensation, credit, editing rights, and options for withdrawal and when their vocabularies begin to influence one another. Such work would clarify whether the interdependence between perceptible participation and actual commitment power expands participation or merely teaches newcomers to reproduce

established judgments.

The stakes extend beyond this topic. Cultural work often gains authority by hiding the labor that organizes encounter. Making that labor legible does not dissolve expertise; it shows how expertise can become answerable to people who meet its aftereffects from divergent positions.

The central concept remains useful only because the analysis also identifies its failure conditions. Participation becomes ethically artistic when its social associations are part of the composition rather than hidden production infrastructure. The crucial distinction is not between active and passive audiences, but between being welcomed into a process and being captured by it.

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