Book Reviews

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Collaborative Media, Production, Consumption, and Design Interventions by Jonas Löwgren and Bo Reimer (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), ISBN 978-0-262-01976-7, 208 pages, Illustrated, hardcover ($35).

Collaborative platforms are everywhere in digital media. From emoticons to selfies, Drupal to Minecraft mods, the dominant form of interaction with digital systems involves some element of participation and adaptation. This principle has far-reaching consequences. For example, the Belgian police force builds its regional web presence entirely on an open source software stack—one open to modification by users. The implications for the structural application of collaborative media throughout society are significant. In this book, Bo Reimer and Jonas Löwgren, both professors at Malmö University in Sweden, make the case for a culturally dynamic design landscape that is alive to the social benefits of digital collaborative media. These benefits include the idea that academics in this field act as agents of transformation and as catalysts, deploying what they call a "design-oriented mode of knowledge production."

The definition of collaborative media, characterized here as consisting of design, production, and consumption, turns on two main points. First, collaborative media feature massively distributed production. Instead of centralized production facilities, such as television stations or newspapers with a national reach, collaborative media are open to a trans-global network of intermediaries. Collaborative media infrastructure, at its most fundamental level, is designed in a way that encourages, and often depends on, public intercession. Open application program interfaces for urban data are one obvious example, and the authors cite the example of how Twitter users invented the hashtag. This example shifts the emphasis away from technology and toward the social affordances of distributed machine intelligence. The actions people can perform with collaborative media become more important than control over language or throughput. Second, the emergence of new forms and their associated cultural

practices implies new kinds of knowledge and new collaborative media authors, consumers, and partners. Reimer and Löwgren argue here for an artistic, or creative, turn to practice-based research activity in media studies, somewhat contradicting their positioning of the interdisciplinary nature of collaborative media practice. The way the authors choose to investigate their topic is through novel forms of collaborative design-oriented practice, although in many cases the model followed is an orthodox participative design or co-creation process.

The main body of the book is devoted to recounting ten case studies explored in some depth in the central three chapters. These studies were carried out over the past 15 years in the context of the School of Arts and Communication and the MEDEA Collaborative Media Initiative at Malmö University. This coverage is intended to give depth to the broad theoretical definitions, to present the supporting data for those theories, and to embody actionable knowledge for designers interested in working in this field. As a body of research, it is an impressive collection, featuring projects from community television production to the development of Arduino as an open hardware platform. Case studies are divided into three categories: collaborative media and society, collaborative media and institutions, and collaborative media and tribes. The first provides leverage for a view of media practice engaged at the grassroots community level. The projects here operate at various scales. For example, Parapolis was a project carried out in 2009 as part of an initiative eliciting responses from inhabitants to hyper-local planning issues. An augmented digital viewing device, the Parascope, was placed in a public square. Taking the familiar form of sightseeing binoculars, the Parascope overlaid the actual view with possible future scenarios submitted by participants. On a larger scale, Bambuser was a trans-national, mobile video-sharing platform. Set up initially as a way of democratizing access to video broadcasting and oriented explicitly toward social activism, Bambuser was notably used by participants in the Tahrir Square protests in Egypt in 2011. The platform has since become an important tool, enabling digital collaborative authoring and producing material used by CNN, Al Jazeera, and the BBC, among others.

These case studies show some innovative approaches to research partnerships in real-world situations. For example, the Bambuser settings include a way for users to share footage with the Associated Press, which undertakes to fully credit the authors. The collaborative media and institutions section establishes a set of practices to be carried out by researchers in partnership with existing media organizations, challenging them to adapt their "essential production/consumption asymmetry." This section is revealing in that the four reported projects sometimes expose the limitations of prioritizing university research paradigms when universities interface with large organizations. Finally, the third category, collaborative media and tribes, explores design interventions through the lens of social structure. Observing that collaborative digital media often attract highly specialized, tight-knit groups of users, the authors make a convincing case for a reading of community in collaborative media practice that centers on clearly identifiable social circles and social practices. They explore this perspective through an account of the development of the open hardware platform, Arduino. The authors identify the roots of the physical computing movement in digital hobbyist and electronics enthusiast circles.

The final eight chapters of this book ask the question: What is collaborative media for? How should it be shaped and positioned in research? What forms of practice are synthesized in the various case studies presented? Central to Reimer and Löwgren's thesis is practice—the doing of design, the collaborative production of media experiences, the positioning of collaborative media activity at the heart of citizen empowerment. They make an impassioned and well-reasoned argument for how collaborative media are oriented toward action. In addition, the relationship between content and the software that runs it is described as mediating between infrastructure and text. This point, familiar in media studies, could be explored in more detail within this context. The examples used are taken from the authors' professional lives at Malmö University and represent a particular way of exploring collaborative media that draws on the rich tradition of Scandinavian participative design. Other researchers and readers are encouraged to take

the structures proposed here and apply them beyond the walls of the academy. In this way, definitions of collaborative media could expand to include very different cultures of practice and research.

In conclusion, this book is an important contribution to the field, illustrated by a diverse set of case studies that bridge traditional disciplinary boundaries between design research, human–computer interaction, and media studies in ways that prioritize the doing of design. The focus is on practice, and the definition of collaborative media the authors suggest is oriented toward social action. *Collaborative Media* will prove to be useful to researchers, and practitioners in any of the areas described, particularly the ones motivated by the deployment of design research in real-world contexts.

Gideon Kossoff

Autonomy: The Cover Designs of Anarchy 1961–1970, edited by Daniel Poyner (London: Hyphen Press, 2012), ISBN: 9780907259466, 304 pages, illustrated, paperback ($38.69/£25).

The monthly journal *Anarchy* was one of most significant of the various journals and magazines that emerged during the social, cultural, and political upheaval that was the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. *Anarchy* was not as well known, nor as widely distributed, as other publications, such as *Oz* or the *International Times,* but it shared their animus toward authoritarianism and hierarchy and toward the institutionalization of these power relationships in bureaucracies and technocracies. But whereas *Oz* and the *International Times* had a close affinity with hippie culture, psychedelia, and some of the more indulgent features of the era, *Anarchy* was sober and scholarly, and a little middle-aged.

Anarchy was published in London's East End by Freedom Press, a venerable institution founded in the 1880s by, among others, the so called "Anachist Prince," the Russian geographer and scientist Peter Kropotkin. In the 1960s the anti-authoritarian ethos that Freedom Press had always espoused surfaced in a historically unprecedented way, and *Anarchy,* edited by the architect–planner Colin Ward, sought

to inform this upsurge with the well considered and endlessly debated ruminations of generations of anarchists.

One of the most remarkable features of this journal was its covers—all 118 of which are reproduced in *Autonomy: The Cover Designs of Anarchy 1961–1970*. The covers were mostly designed and illustrated by Rufus Segar, a somewhat unacknowledged talent of the period, and a "fellow traveler" and friend of Colin Ward. Segar trained as an illustrator but says that he was "much more interested in techniques like aquatinting, etching, engraving, lithography, block-making, tone and line process work…. I did all of those things. I gave myself a brief of roving about what other people did. I went off to poetry and went off to theatre design, to textiles, and just roved."[1] Anarchy's covers are a testament to the value of a broad, flexible, self-determined, and adventurous design education.

Anarchy represented a practical attempt to apply anarchist theory to contemporary issues—mutualistic cooperation as an alternative to competitive individualism; confederalism as an alternative to centralized nation-states; self-organization and direct action as alternatives to top-down management; community ownership and management of resources as an alternative to state or corporate control of such resources. *Anarchy* looked for possibilities for social change that could be found in the everyday lives of ordinary people, rather than through grandiose and imposed schemes. Colin Ward summarized the journal's position as advocating a society in which "the principle of authority is superseded by that of voluntary cooperation."[2]

Although a marginal publication, *Anarchy* expressed the spirit of the 1960s far more effectively than did the more traditional elements of the left-wing, which were often authoritarian and vanguardist, and which saw centralized government as the instrument through which social change could best be achieved. Although *Anarchy* definitely had its limitations (e.g., barely acknowledging the rise of feminism, and its disdainful attitude toward many elements of the 1960s counterculture), it was an important achievement: The historian Raphael Samuel argued that "it represented better than any other publication the cultural revolution of the 1960s."[3] In many respects it was ahead of its time: It anticipated contemporary ventures in self-organization, direct democracy, networking, and cooperation—concepts that have now become well integrated into left-wing discourse and grassroots activism and are now, paradoxically, edging their way into mainstream thought and organizations.

Befitting the activist cerebralism of its contributors, *Anarchy* was produced in pamphlet format. Not only could *Anarchy* be kept on bookshelves (as Colin Ward says), giving it a longer lifespan than if it were in magazine racks or on coffee tables, but the pamphlet form connected it to a lineage of radical pamphleteering that has frequently been an important feature of politically and socially turbulent periods. The front and back of the covers of these pamphlets were usually created as a single composition and illustrated the particular theme of each issue (e.g., no. 41, "The Land"; no. 47, "Towards Freedom in Work"; no. 35, "House and Home"; no. 97, "Architects and People"; no. 78, "Towards a Liberatory Technology").

Anarchy's covers arguably amount, over the course of its nine-year existence, to one of the most impressive series of pamphlet graphic design ever created. They are some of the few examples in the modern era of politically and socially committed graphic designs that are of high quality and consistently inventive. (Other examples include the work of William Morris and the Futurists.) They are works that compare favorably with any series of printed or recorded publications, such as that of Reid Miles's *Blue Note* record covers, in which the style of artwork and typography at once express the spirit of the subject matter and reveal something important about the time and place of publication.

While Reid Miles somehow managed to express the spirit of "cool" as it pertained to the jazz music of the 1950s and 1960s, without being particularly interested in the music itself,[4] Segar and *Anarchy's* other designers were strongly committed to the principles the journal espoused. Most of the covers are line drawings integrated with inventive and varied typographic forms, although some use photo-montage and some typography alone. They capture the feel of the mostly urban dissent of 1960s Britain where, according to the historian Raphael Samuel, it was produced "around the kitchen table,"[5] no doubt in an

unglamorous, terraced backstreet. The covers are not overdesigned, but are somewhat raw and roughly hewn, which gives them a sense of urgency, informality, experimentalism, and spontaneity that helps convey the journal's message.

The covers do a lot with limited resources. Some of the power of these covers derives from their palette of not more than two or three muted colors. They were usually printed on yellow, off-white, or brown cover stock, and many of the covers feature high contrast, intentionally low-resolution photographs, conveying the impression that the journal is not an academic exercise but a commentary on current events. Their design and production reflected the technological transition from letterpress and metal typesetting to offset lithography and phototypesetting that was under way in the 1960s. The covers of *Anarchy,* as Richard Hollis points out in an essay in the book,[6] used the full spectrum of technology, which contributed to their variety and vitality. Like the artisanal, small-scale, workshop-based society that the journal (and the anarchist tradition) aspires to, *Anarchy's* covers have a quality of "hand" in which their making is evident. Ironically, the new technologies, in liberating graphic designers from the rigid constraints of letterpress and in increasing their control over the production process, heralded the demise of much of the craftsmanship associated with printing.

Autonomy is very well produced and comes with several informative background articles, including an interview with Rufus Segar and a short essay on "Utopian Sociology" by Raphael Samuel. The only reservation one might have, given the lusterless style of the originals, is that the covers are reproduced on coated paper rather than uncoated matte.

Whereas historical political posters have been well documented in the annals of design/visual communication history, political pamphlets have not been, thus belying their important role in contributing to social and political change. *Autonomy,* in salvaging some of the most inspired graphic design of the 1960s, represents an important contribution to this neglected field.

1   Erika Esau, *Images of the Pacific Rim: Australia and California, 1850–1935* (Sydney, Australia: Power Institute Foundation for Art and Visual Culture Publications, 2010), 15.

2   Ibid., 32.

3   See Peter McNeil, "The Domestic Environment," in *Glorious Times,* ed. Michelle Hetherington (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2013).

4   Richard Cook, *Blue Note Records: The Biography* (Boston: Justin, Charles, and Co., 2003), 88.

5   Samuel, "Utopian Sociology," 258.

6   Richard Hollis, "Anarchy and the 1960s," in *Autonomy: The Cover Designs of Anarchy 1961–1970,* ed. Daniel Poyner (London: Hyphen, 2012), 285–92.

Tom Lee

You Must Change Your Life by Peter Sloterdijk, Trans by Wieland Hoban (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2013), ISBN: 9780745649214, 500 pages, hardcover ($23).).

In his recently translated *You Must Change Your Life,* the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk seeks to look afresh at anthropological history through the lens of the practicing human. The scope of the book is typically ambitious: Like much of his work, it is as much philosophy as "civilizational analysis,"[1] with Sloterdijk in this instance trying to cobble together a system of propositions in which religion, sport, philosophy, and the arts all make sense according to roughly synonymous imperatives. The creation of what he terms "symbolic immune systems and ritual shells"[2] allow for the simultaneous preservation of the human who practices and the ideas and practices themselves.

With these ambitions—articulated in a manner that at times has the force of a manifesto or grand narrative—Sloterdijk in some sense joins the particularly fecund field of "practice theory," which treats practices, rather than mental, discursive, or material entities, as the basic building blocks of society and sociological analysis.[3] Sloterdijk doesn't cite any contemporaries working in this field (e.g., Giddens, Reckwitz, Schatzki, Shove, and Warde), but he does make use of strikingly similar antecedents in the work of Bourdieu, Heidegger, Nietzsche, late Wittgenstein, and late Foucault.

Clear similarities emerge between Sloterdijk's conception of the human as a carrier and creator of exercises or practices, and what we see in the work of

Elizabeth Shove, for example, on do-it-yourself (DIY) and the relationship between consumption, things, competence, and practices.[4] In both cases the new insight of the analysis is to a large degree the result of an imperative to see the human and its world as "repertoires of doing" that exist in a dynamic relationship with things and mental entities.[5]

Despite these broad disciplinary correspondences, subtle, and at times not so subtle, differences remain between Sloterdijk's conception and analysis of practice and the conceptions used in practice theory. Sloterdijk defines a practice as, "any operation that provides or improves the actor's qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared practice or not."[6] Meanwhile, Andreas Reckwitz (to take a paradigmatic example from practice theory) defines a practice as "a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion, and motivational knowledge."[7] Sloterdijk's analysis, and the philosophy by which it is underpinned, emphasizes the notion of self-improvement, something that is implicit, although seemingly not central, in the definition offered by Reckwitz and sociologists such as Shove. This element is variously theorized by Sloterdijk throughout *You Must Change Your Life* as relating to the "vertical tensions" that command humans to improve, progress, or simply to persist in conditions of *improbability*.[8] In a characteristic bit of punning, Sloterdijk riffs on the title of Richard Dawkins's book, *Climbing Mount Improbable* (1996), throughout, claiming that "through the opera glasses of evolutionary theory, the thing we call life is nothing other than a vaudeville with an immeasurable wealth of forms in which every branch of artistry, that is to say every species, attempts to perform the feat of all feats: survival."[9] Concerning this evolutionary question of survival, the work that the concept of practice ought to do is in "overcoming the gap, supposedly unbridgeable by methodological means, between biological and cultural phenomena of immunity—that is, between natural processes on the one hand and actions on the other."[10] In this sense, athletes, artists, and monks all share the common goal of protecting themselves and their way of life through various forms of repetition, whether named as habit, routine, ritual, production, technique, or exercise.

The value of Sloterdijk's work to practice theory lies in his ability to make sense of the ancient and the modern, nature and culture, the religious and the secular, according to the same philosophical system, or—what is perhaps a better description in Sloterdijk's case—according to the same philosophical story. Through his work we can see the broader ambitions and consequences of the more specific studies of practice. What's more, his work is free from nostalgic hopes for emancipation that characterize social critique. Instead, Sloterdijk aims to construct a positive, and to some extent moral, anthropology that accounts for the pious, self-shaping, giving, virtuous, masochistic standards to which human beings sometimes hold themselves. Like a good novel, the book presents a story that is illuminating, at times disturbing, and which in the end leaves one feeling that a new character or new idea has emerged that makes sense of humans, things, and places without explaining away more than it adds.

1   Steven Connor, review of *Terror From the Air,* by Peter Sloterdijk, trans. Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran; *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation,* by Sloterdijk, trans. Mario Wenning; and *God's Zeal: The Battle of the Three Monotheisms*, by Sloterdijk, trans. Wieland Hoban, *Critical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2011): 109.

2   Peter Sloterdijk, trans. Wieland Hoban, *You Must Change Your Life* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 3.

3   Andreas Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorising," *European Journal of Social Theory* 52, no. 2 (2002): 243–63.

4   Elizabeth Shove, Matthew Watson, Martin Hand, and Jack Ingram, *The Design of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2007): 43–67.

5   Ibid., 35.

6   Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, 4.

7   Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practice," 249.

8   Sloterdijk, 12, 19–28, 111–30.

9   Ibid., 117.

10 Ibid., 10.