Participatory art practices allow members of an audience to actively contribute to the creation of art. Annemarie Kok provides a detailed analysis and explanation of the use of participatory strategies in art in the so-called ›long sixties‹ (starting around 1958 and ending around 1974) in Western Europe. Drawing on extensive archival materials and with the help of the toolbox of the actor-network theory, she maps out the various actors of three case studies of participatory projects by John Dugger and David Medalla, Piotr Kowalski, and telewissen, all of which were part of documenta 5 (Kassel, 1972).

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Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... 9

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 11
  1.1 Nothing new under the sun ................................................................................. 11
  1.2 Three cases of participatory art .......................................................................... 15
  1.3 Research questions and aims .............................................................................. 16
  1.4 Structure of the book ......................................................................................... 17

2 It is all about co-creation. Where the history of participatory art and ANT link up ...... 19
  A Tracing participatory art
    A review of concepts and literature on participatory art ......................................... 19
    2.1 An 'open' definition of participatory art ......................................................... 19
    2.2 A genealogy of participatory art ...................................................................... 25
    2.3 The swinging sixties ...................................................................................... 35
    2.4 Mapping the field of research ......................................................................... 39
    2.5 Participation and the notions of freedom and control: a theoretical perspective .... 44
  B Tracing associations
    ANT as a toolbox for studying (participatory) art's history .................................... 68
    2.6 Thinking with actor-network theory .............................................................. 68
    2.7 The journey of ANT ...................................................................................... 82
    2.8 ANT and the study of art ................................................................................. 85
    2.9 Three steps towards a 'risky account' of participatory art ............................... 100
    2.10 The challenges and limitations of the ANT toolbox ....................................... 109
    2.11 In conclusion .............................................................................................. 111

3 Participation at documenta 5. Illusions, plans and reality ........................................... 113
  3.1 A fifth documenta and the appointment of Szeemann ......................................... 114
  3.2 The first concept plan ....................................................................................... 122
  3.3 The situation in the autumn of 1970 .................................................................. 134
  3.4 The second concept plan .................................................................................. 137
  3.5 Participatory art at d5 ...................................................................................... 170
4 “Please take off your shoes”. In and around Dugger and Medalla’s

**People's Participation Pavilion** ................................................................. 183
4.1 A pavilion in the garden ................................................................. 184
4.2 Two comrades ................................................................. 194
4.3 Harald Szeemann and the invitation to participate in *d5* ............................................. 196
4.4 The *d5* catalogue ................................................................. 200
4.5 Communism and “participatory Maoism” ........................................... 203
4.6 Artists Liberation Front ................................................................. 214
4.7 *Papa at Moma* ................................................................. 217
4.8 “The ‘Random’ show” ................................................................. 225
4.9 Kinetic connections ................................................................. 232
4.10 The Exploding Galaxy ................................................................. 241
4.11 Eastern philosophy and art ................................................................. 246
4.12 Travel ................................................................. 249
4.13 The institutional framework ................................................................. 252
4.14 In conclusion ................................................................. 255

5 Enlightening. Piotr Kowalski’s participatory tools for the people ................................................................. 259
5.1 Carrying light in Kassel ................................................................. 260
5.2 Fluorescent tubes in Paris, Amsterdam and Stockholm ................................................................. 267
5.3 A family of manipulators ................................................................. 274
5.4 The art scene in Paris in the long sixties ................................................................. 279
5.5 Science for the people ................................................................. 285
5.6 Learning by doing ................................................................. 294
5.7 Instruments in Florence ................................................................. 300
5.8 Energy and matter ................................................................. 306
5.9 Cybernetic principles ................................................................. 309
5.10 Making art burst ................................................................. 314
5.11 The spirit of 1968 ................................................................. 318
5.12 Fieldwork ................................................................. 328
5.13 In conclusion ................................................................. 332

6 Make your own ‘television’. On tour with the telewissen video bus ................................................................. 337
6.1 A red van in front of the Museum Fridericianum ................................................................. 339
6.2 A five-day film programme ................................................................. 348
6.3 A new participatory medium ................................................................. 352
6.4 The telewissen network ................................................................. 359
6.5 From viewing and presenting yourself, to sharing your opinion, to producing your own video: a trajectory of participation ................................................................. 364
6.6 Alternative media practice and theory ................................................................. 378
6.7 American media ‘freaks’ ................................................................. 390
6.8 Experimental music in Darmstadt ................................................................. 405
6.9 Do it yourself! ................................................................. 412
1 Introduction

1.1 Nothing new under the sun

“Participatory art seemed to be everywhere in 2017, with artists asking viewers to become chess pieces, stick stickers on walls, and rip hunks of clay out of [a] sculpture.” Thus begins an article entitled ‘The Year in Participation: Hands-on Art,’ published on the ARTnews website, which then goes on to list ten memorable moments in participatory art from 2017. One of the projects discussed is David Medalla’s *A Stitch in Time*, which was presented at the 2017 Venice Biennale. Editor Grace Halio writes:

> With Madella’s [sic] *A Stitch in Time*, embroidery enthusiasts and amateurs alike convened under spools of thread that hung above a long stretch of fabric. In stitching whatever their hearts desired, participants morphed a lifeless bolt of fabric into one that radiated with bright memories, like an archive of the lives of all who touched it.

What the article does not mention, however, is that this particular participatory work was first initiated in the late 1960s and has since been installed in many different locations, including at *documenta 5* in Kassel, Germany, in 1972. The project functions, therefore, as a *bridge in time* and indicates that participatory art has been (omni)present in the art world for quite some time.

Recent decades have seen the term ‘participation’ become something of a buzzword, not only in the art world but also beyond it. According to Boris Groys, art critic and con-

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3. With regard to the society at large, for instance, the chairman of the high-tech company Sun Microsystems, Scott McNealy referred to our age as a ‘Participation Age’. In 2005, he stated: ‘Advances
tributor to the 2008 exhibition catalogue The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now, a “tendency toward collaborative, participatory practice is undeniably one of the main characteristics of contemporary art.” Art historian Kathryn Brown, editor of the book Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice, stated in 2014 that “[a]udience participation has become a familiar and established aspect of aesthetic practice in the contemporary art-world.” Indeed, a significant number of contemporary artists around the globe, working in a variety of media and with different agendas, have now invited members of the audience to participate in processes of artistic creation. For instance, in 2009 the British artist Antony Gormley asked members of the public to stand on the Fourth Plinth in London’s Trafalgar Square for an hour, and execute a performance of their choosing. Over the course of 100 days, 2,400 people were able to participate in the project, titled One & Other. According to Gormley, the work was “about people coming together to do something extraordinary and unpredictable. It could be tragic but it could also be funny.” That same year, the South-African artist Nicola Grobler wheeled a mobile kiosk into a busy Metrorail station in Cape Town and invited passersby to write down a minor, though significant, achievement from their day, in return for a drinking mug trophy. This work, Small Victories, centered on its participants’ notes and drawings and was, according to Grobler, initiated “to encourage a positive framing of everyday events.” Meanwhile in 2015, the artist Carsten Höller, born in Brussels to German parents, attached two four-storey
Isomeric Slides to the outside wall of the Hayward Gallery in London. Visitors to the exhibition – which bore the subtitle Decision – could decide for themselves which of the two slides to take in order to exit the gallery. By going down one of the slides, the users not only ‘completed’ their visit to the exhibition, but also the interactive installation itself. The two slides – simultaneously functioning as practical devices, artworks and tools to play with – allow one not only “to experience a short moment of real madness” but also, as the artist explained, to “free yourself from the usual ways you have at your disposal to look at the world [...].”8 Also in 2015, the artists and researchers Karen Lancel and Hermen Maat (Lancel/Maat, based in Amsterdam) presented their performance-installation artwork Saving Face at the Beijing Culture and Art Center in China. The interactive sculpture was fitted with a camera and face-recognition technology connected to an urban screen. People standing in front of the work were invited to caress the skin of their own face, and in so doing they effectively ‘painted’ their portraits on the screen; these slowly merged with the portraits of previous participants, and consequently connected them with (online) others. In the words of the artists, this participatory work enabled a “small, intimate ritual to reflect on big socio-technological changes, for empathy in public spaces.”9 In 2018, the Argentina-born Tomás Saraceno installed a large weblike landscape of ropes, entitled Algo-r(h)i(y)thms, at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Visitors were invited to both inhabit the web, like spiders, and to play it by plucking or sliding their fingers up and down the strings, creating vibrating signals and sounds as they did so. On Saraceno’s website one reads that the work “opens up channels of communication and sociality that cross the borders between senses and species.”10

Although such participatory practices – initiated to connect, entertain, comfort, stimulate, confront, raise awareness, disrupt and much else besides – have become widely incorporated in contemporary art, drawing increasing attention in academic and non-academic circles in recent years and inspiring considerable levels of debate (particularly amongst practitioners, critics, scholars, curators and theorists), they are not new.11 As is the case with Medalla’s A Stitch in Time, several important (rhizomatic) roots of this particular art form can be traced back to the 1960s. In 1969, for example, the Brazil-born artist Lygia Clark, proposed the participatory work Estruturas Vivas (Living Structures),

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8 Ralph Rugoff, “Carsten Höller in conversation with Ralph Rugoff: Part Two: Spiritual Luxury,” in Carsten Höller: Decision, vol. 1, ed. Catherine Gaffney (London: Hayward Publishing, 2015), 98. Confronted with the recent critique “that pleasurable forms of participatory art have become a kind of mass entertainment, an art world equivalent to what has been called ‘the experience economy’,” Höller responds: “I am interested in trying to give entertainment a new value, to bring it out of this ‘dirty’ context, because I don’t think it belongs there.”


10 See the artist’s website, accessed June 22, 2022, https://studiotomassaraceno.org/algo-rhythms/.

inviting a group of participants to interact with thin elastic bands of varying lengths in order to connect parts of their bodies and form a dynamic, collective or, indeed, living structure. In 1962, the American artist Allan Kaprow created an environment within two rooms in New York’s Smolin Gallery, filling them randomly with texts from various sources such as poems, newspapers, comics and telephone books, either reproduced by hand on paper or stencilled on canvas. Visitors to the installation, entitled Words, were invited to remove and reposition parts of the texts, draw pictures and write messages with coloured chalk onto the dark blue walls of the smallest room, and to add words to pieces of blank paper hanging from the ceiling. Four years later, in 1966, the artists Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely and Per Olof Ultvedt – all based in Europe – jointly installed a giant construction in the form of a pregnant woman lying on her back at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Visitors to the museum could enter this female body, via the vagina, where they encountered, among other things, an aquarium full of goldfish, a bar with drinks, stairs and ladders that could be climbed along with a small cinema, and were encouraged to discover, play and interact. In the structure’s right leg, visitors could go down a slide, adding to the amusement park experience of the whole project, entitled HON – en Katedral (SHE – a Cathedral). At the Stachus square in Munich, in 1968, artist VALIE EXPORT (born in Austria) allowed members of the audience to sense and feel a film in her TAPP- und TASTKINO (TAP and TOUCH CINEMA). The spectator could put both hands into a curtained box strapped to the artist’s bare torso that functioned as a miniature cinema, in order to touch the ‘screen’ (i.e. EXPORT’s naked breasts).

The artist Yaacov Agam, born in Rishon-le-Zion (now Israel), also created artworks to be touched, such as for instance, his Tactile Sonore (Sonorous Tactile) of 1963, consisting of a wooden plate, an incorporated resonance box and polished metal elements connected to metal springs. When the metallic buttons of this manipulatable object are touched or played, different sound effects can be produced. These (deliberately chosen) examples demonstrate that already in the 1960s, artists were inviting and encouraging members of the audience to touch, play, make sounds, write words, perform, interact, connect and – in short – actively participate in the creation process of a work of art. Moreover, remarkable similarities can be discerned between the earlier, twentieth-century examples described above and more recent initia-

13 See also the website of Hauser & Wirth, the gallery that provides a home to the Allan Kaprow Estate, accessed June 22, 2022, https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/2917-allan-kaprow.
tives. These works, however, were born of completely historical contexts, indeed in completely different worlds (one only need think of the advent of Web 2.0 and its interactive, participatory affordances that many encounter on a daily basis) and as part of completely different practices. This raises questions about the early development of participatory art practices in the 1960s – of which the examples given here alone demonstrate great diversity. In what ways did those artists employ participatory strategies and why? What contributed to the emergence of their participatory art projects? What were the agendas, motives and aims behind these pioneering experiments with participation, and how did these come about? What ideas and concepts did those artists have of participation, and via what routes were these ideas arrived at? This book takes as its focus a crucial chapter in the history of participatory art, halfway through the twentieth century: the first wave of this particular art practice in the so-called ‘long sixties.’

1.2 Three cases of participatory art

In order to gain a better understanding of the development of this pioneering art practice in the long sixties (starting around 1958 and ending around 1974), this book will focus on three specific examples of participatory art, all of which were part of the fifth documenta, held in 1972 in Kassel. This show, curated by Harald Szeemann, is considered one of the most important international exhibitions of the twentieth century, and offered an early institutional platform for participatory projects. The first such project that will be the subject of in-depth discussion here is the People’s Participation Pavillion of John Dugger (1948–2023) and David Medalla (1942–2020). Born in, respectively, the United States of America and the Philippines, these two artists met in London in 1968 and together embarked upon a period of intensive collaboration. They developed as pioneers of ‘Part-art’ and created various projects that invited the participation of members of the audience, including their pavilion at documenta 5. Inside a large red wooden construction located in the garden of the Fridericianum Museum, visitors could interact with various pieces that were displayed for this very purpose, such as A Stitch in Time. The second project that I will examine is a participatory light piece entitled Mesures à Prendre. This work was installed on the top floor of the Fridericianum Museum by the artist Piotr Kowalski (1927–2004), then based in Paris. The installation allowed visitors to pick up fluorescent light tubes and, by interacting with six large plexiglass screens that functioned as antennae, bring forth light in the darkened room. The third and final participatory project selected for analysis is the work of the video group telewissen, documenta der Leute. From Darmstadt, the members of telewissen (including frontman Herbert Schuhmacher (1928–2016)), parked their red Volkswagen van in front of the Fridericianum Museum during documenta 5 and encouraged passersby to express themselves in front of a video camera, and contribute to


18 The ‘first wave’ of participatory art and a definition of the ‘long sixties’ will be further discussed in Chapter 2.
a public dialogue. Recorded images could be (dis)played and watched back straight away on a monitor in the back of the video bus.

Although these three specific projects all relied on the participation of the spectator and were connected to one another through their simultaneous presentation at documenta 5, their set-up along with the materials and tools they provided to the audience differed considerably. Moreover, the projects were initiated by creatives who were, at that time, based in different parts of Europe and had different backgrounds and aims. The case studies that form the core of this book will help to illuminate the diverse aspects that contributed to each project’s coming into being – conceptually and materially – over the course of the long sixties. Beginning with an analysis of these three projects, I will shed light on the early participatory practices of John Dugger and David Medalla, Piotr Kowalski and televissen respectively and, consequently, on the pioneering days of participatory art in the long sixties.

1.3 Research questions and aims

The main aim of this book is to provide a detailed analysis and explanation of the use of participatory strategies in art in the long sixties, and the particular ways of thinking that were attached to them. My aim is to examine how audience participation was actually thought and facilitated, and discuss the elements that affected these processes of thinking and doing, by focusing on the three case studies introduced above. With regard to (1) John Dugger and David Medalla’s participatory pavilion; (2) Piotr Kowalski’s participatory light installation; and (3) televissen’s participatory video project, the following questions will be answered: How were participatory strategies incorporated in these projects and what (f)actors contributed to the emergence of these early manifestations of participatory art? How were ideas and motives concerning audience participation able to develop, circulate and, eventually, come to fruition in practice? What connections can be discerned between these instances of first-wave participatory art and other circumstances and developments in the sixties?

Using these questions as a guide, this book intends to map out the various actors that, together, generated these three projects and the related participatory practices both materially and immaterially, while also providing insights into the interactions between art and other fields of practice and knowledge. Furthermore, this book aims to reveal the complex nature of participatory art practice in the 1960s, and challenge generalisations and taken-for-granted-assumptions regarding the topic. Moreover, it serves as a counterweight to the theoretical debate on participation that tends to overshadow the history of participatory art itself. In order to focus on three actual and heterogeneous cases of early participatory art, and to scrutinise the ways in which these came about over the course of the long sixties in Western Europe, I drew upon the theoretical and methodological toolbox of actor-network theory (ANT), an adequate and appropriate companion for the task. ANT also proved useful to my aim of avoiding generic or overarching answers and conclusions regarding participatory art, and has served instead to undergird a nuanced contribution to the understanding of what was in effect happening in this particular field in the long sixties. Moreover, it helped to forego haphazardly suggested connections between people, things, concepts, developments and other entities. The interplay between
freedom and control and the negotiations between artist(s) and participant(s) will receive particular attention in relation to the participatory practices under study.

1.4 Structure of the book

This short introduction is followed by a chapter in which participatory art, on the one hand, and actor-network theory, on the other, are introduced in greater depth. In the first part of Chapter 2 attention is paid to the definition of participatory art, the existing field of research on this topic and, in particular, the theoretical debate around the dynamics of freedom and control within participatory art. The second part of the chapter explains how and why I used the ANT toolbox, and introduces which landscapes this theoretical companion allowed me to travel and explore in the rest of the book. I also discuss my sources and methods. The second chapter provides additional insight into the what, how and why of this study and its relationship to existing research tendencies regarding participatory art, as well as to other ANT-inspired studies. Chapter 3 zooms in on documenta 5 and the development of the plans for this pioneering exhibition in Kassel. In the description of these developments and the actors involved, a particular emphasis is placed on (plans for) the presentation and realisation of participatory practices and the (changing) conceptualisation of audience participation in this regard. This third chapter then sets the stage and provides context for the three following chapters, which focus, respectively, on the three participatory documenta projects of Dugger and Medalla (Chapter 4), Kowalski (Chapter 5) and telewissen (Chapter 6). Each of these three chapters begins with an extensive description of the works as presented at documenta 5, before going on to reconstruct the network that effected these projects and the broader participatory practices related to them. The structure of each chapter resembles that of a patchwork or mosaic and reveals, bit by bit, the heterogeneous participants – in the broadest sense of the word – that were jointly involved in bringing participatory art into being in the long sixties. The concluding section of the book takes a bird’s eyes view, and considers the reconstructed actor-networks once again, in addition to highlighting the most important insights that these have yielded.
2 It is all about co-creation. Where the history of participatory art and ANT link up

This book sheds new light on participatory art as it developed in the so-called long sixties, and does so by drawing on actor-network theory (ANT). The purpose of this chapter, subdivided into two parts, is twofold. First, to position this study in relation to the existing research on participatory art and the related theoretical discourse around the notions of freedom and control – this will be explored in part A. Second, to explain how the repertoire of ANT has been of help to this particular study, and how this relates to the trend of other (art) scholars linking up with ANT – this will be done in part B. This chapter should, moreover, provide further insight into the book’s questions and aims, their background and the ways in which these aims were reached.

A Tracing participatory art
A review of concepts and literature on participatory art

2.1 An ‘open’ definition of participatory art

Although the term participatory art is commonly used in visual arts discourse, there does not seem to be much consensus about its specific definition or the range of art practices that it covers. According to the online Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the word ‘participation’ refers to the “action or fact of having or forming part of something; the sharing of something.”¹ Another definition of participation in the OED is as follows:

The process or fact of sharing in an action, sentiment, etc.; (now esp.) active involvement in a matter or event, esp. one in which the outcome directly affects those taking part. Frequently with in. Cf. audience participation n. [...].²

² OED Online, s.v. “participation, n.”
In short, participation can be defined as the act of taking part. The OED also makes clear that the term has evolved to signal forms of sharing, active involvement, partnership and multi-directional affect. The related adjective ‘participatory’ can, meanwhile, be used to describe something that is characterised by participation and “allows members of the general public to take part.” Indeed, specific reference is made to “a form of art or entertainment.” When the terms ‘participation’ or ‘participatory’ are used in relation to forms of art, they may thus refer to the active involvement of a member of the audience in some aspect of (the creation of) an artwork. According to Tate’s online glossary of art terms, participatory art is “a term that describes a form of art that directly engages the audience in the creative process so that they become participants in the event.” There are, however, many other definitions of participatory art in use. From the writings of art historian and critic Claire Bishop on participatory art, for instance, it becomes clear that for her, the term refers to “the involvement of many people,” and not to the participation and activation of only one person (the latter form of involvement being referred to by her as “interactivity”). Moreover, in Bishop’s view, participants can be members of the audience, but also include non-professionals or specialists that are hired (and paid) by the artist in order to participate. In the publication The Art of Participation, however, the term participatory art is used to define a genre of art that involves members of the audience (or viewers) as participants in the art-making process, who can operate either alone or together with (many) others.

In connection to the different definitions of participatory art currently used, the field of participatory art practices has been demarcated in a variety of ways in the scholarly literature on the topic. Some authors only speak of participatory art when a project allows for a particular level of involvement or control on the part of the participant. The art historian, critic and curator Christian Kravagna, for example, argues that participatory practices allow participants to fundamentally change or co-determine the structure of a work, mostly in group situations. He writes that participation is based “on a differentiation between producers and recipients, and focuses on the participation of the latter by turning over a substantial portion of the work to them, either at the point of

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4 OED Online, s.v. “participatory, adj.”
7 See in particular Chapter 8 on ‘delegated performance’ in Bishop, Artificial Hells, 219–239.
conception or at a later stage in the work.” Works that only allow for “one or more reactions to affect the work – usually in a monetary, reversible and repeatable manner – in its appearance,” are grouped by Kravagna as types of interactive practice (often addressing an individual). The art historian Janet Kraynak, however, refers to the reactive installations of Bruce Nauman, depending on the viewer’s interaction, as “participatory artworks.” She does not distinguish between participatory and interactive practice, as Kravagna does, and applies the category of participatory art to a much broader range of artworks. In some publications, the term participatory art is associated with a specific time period. Various authors use the term in connection with art projects that developed before the digital revolution, and opt for the term interactive art to refer to computer-based interactions between man and machine in the art of the period that followed (with early, pioneering works to be found in the 1970s). Art and media historian Söke Dinkla, for instance, contends that “audience participation is the essential criterion for the comparability of interactive art and [participatory] art of the sixties,” but argues that the two practices (for which she uses different terms) must be differentiated, in order to make detailed statements about the specific characteristics of (the younger and technology-based) interactive art. In her book *Pioniere Interaktiver Kunst von 1970 bis Heute* it becomes clear that for Dinkla, interactive art denotes computer-supported works in which an interaction takes place between a digital computer system and a user. The editors of the publication *Practicable: From Participation to Interaction in Contemporary Art*, Samuel Bianchini and Erik Verhagen, are also explicit about a chronological movement from participation to interaction. They explain: “While the concept of participation has been solidly anchored in the history of art since the late 1950s, it was not until the 1990s that interaction became a common term in art, sparked by its use in computer technology.”

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art practices from a more recent period. He states that his entry on “Participatory Art,” in the Encyclopedia of Aesthetics published in 2014, “takes as its subject not the history of participation in art but the recently designated genre of participatory art in the last three decades.” Such a variety of approaches to defining and demarcating participatory art would be worth an investigation of its own. For now, however, it is more important to elucidate what is considered participatory art within the framework of this book.

This publication examines participatory art practices that allow members of an audience (often referred to as viewers or spectators) to participate in the creation of art. These audience members are invited to contribute actively to the realisation of an artwork, which requires both mental and physical effort on their part. The work is initiated by an artist or artist group, but has an open, dynamic, unfinished structure, meant to be animated, changed or completed by one or more participants. These participants are thus enabled to manipulate or transform the form and content of the work, which can be an object or an event, executed with the help of a variety of materials, media and technologies. But not only can a participatory work take many forms (including an installation, an environment, a performance or a video piece), the type of participation that is facilitated can also vary and take place at different moments throughout the process of creation. A participant may, for instance, be involved in the conception of an artwork, or take part in a project’s execution phase, or simply operate or play with a work at an even later stage. Moreover, it should be noted that participatory art projects can take place in different places and contexts (ranging from museum galleries and living rooms to city squares and woodlands), each with its own circumstances, possibilities and rules for behaviour. Despite this variety, the common characteristic of the field of participatory art studied here is that it enables members of the audience to intervene (alone or together with others) in the process of creation and, consequently, to have an influence on the work. The initiative for these participatory practices always comes from a visual artist or artist group. This means that there is a distinction between the initiating party (i.e. the artist or artists) that invites others to participate and the invited party (i.e. members of the audience or people who can be referred to as museum visitors, citizens, community members, and so forth). Participatory art as defined here also transforms the (traditionally refers to information, whereas ‘interaction’ is more open-ended and not necessarily technology-mediated.


16 See for a broad understanding of participatory art, including participatory practices from the theatrical domain and the visual arts domain also Sruti Bala, The Gestures of Participatory Art (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1842614&site=ehost-live.

17 This is different from the situation in which a group of people decides to create an artwork together and where there is no clear differentiation among the members of this group; a practice that is often described as ‘collective’ (see Kravagna, “Community,” 241) or ‘collaborative’ (see also Beryl Graham, “What Kind of Participative System? Critical Vocabularies from New Media Art,” in The ‘Do-It-Yourself’ Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media, ed. Anna Dezeuze (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 293–294; Kathryn Brown, “Introduction,” in Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice, ed. Kathryn Brown (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 5. It
It is all about co-creation. Where the history of participatory art and ANT link up

tional) roles of and relations between artist, artwork and viewer, as I will further discuss below.

Further definition and demarcation of participatory art will be tactically avoided at this stage. Not only do participatory art practices demonstrate a large diversity, such that it seems impossible to formulate a (more) precise definition of this type of art, but this study is also particularly interested in this multiplicity.\(^\text{18}\) I want to examine the different approaches to participation in art, the various participatory strategies employed by artists, their diverse motivations to allow for audience participation, and the multifarious forms and contexts in which participatory projects are launched; all of this requires an open definition of participatory art. Additionally, the concepts of participation and participatory art are not considered to be static, but rather dynamic, open-ended and constantly changing. Participation – and this also counts for participatory art – only receives its specific realisation, form, meaning and definition within specific and local contexts – and thus transforms from year to year, from place to place and from practice to practice.\(^\text{19}\) It is difficult, therefore, and even undesirable, to further generalise about participation and participatory art, and posit absolute definitions. Moreover, as a scholar, I do not want to impose limiting definitions and frameworks on the material to be studied – in line with the principles of actor-network theory (ANT) as discussed below. Throughout this book the term, concept and phenomenon of participatory art will be further defined by the actors under study, with a focus on the specific contexts of the 1960s and Western Europe.

It should be noted that the participatory art practices examined in this book go by a variety of names in the art world, as well as in the (academic) literature on the topic.\(^\text{20}\) For example, the headings interactive art, relational art, do-it-yourself art, socially engaged art, community art, dialogical art, new genre public art, collaborative art or practicable art are all used to refer to the incorporation of participatory strategies in art. In some cases, these terms overlap or function as synonyms, whereas in others they are used to indicate the differences between specific categories or forms of participation in art. This becomes clear, for instance, in relation to the terms participatory art and interactive art (or, more broadly, participation and interactivity). Authors such as Janet Kraynak

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\(^{18}\) See on the complexity of participatory practices and locating a precise definition or understanding of it also Markus Miessen and David Goldenberg, “Re: Participation,” *Fillip*, no. 10 (Fall 2009), https://fillip.ca/content/re-participation; David Goldenberg and Patricia Reed, “What Is a Participatory Practice?” *Fillip*, no. 8 (Fall 2008), https://fillip.ca/content/what-is-a-participatory-practice.


\(^{20}\) See on this also Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 1; Finkelpearl, “Participatory Art.”
and Kathryn Brown use these terms (more or less) interchangeably, while others such as Claire Bishop and Söke Dinkla – as noted above – apply them to refer to distinct art forms. Moreover, some of the aforementioned names have been applied to fields of art that are broader than the range of practices studied here (socially engaged art, for instance), while others have been related to fields that are much smaller (such as relational art). Despite this great variety of headings, participatory art is primarily used in this book – because of its descriptive nature and, also, since it has been in use for quite some time. Gustaf Almenberg, visual artist and writer of the manifesto Notes on Participatory Art, states that he was one of the first to apply the term participatory art, on the occasion of his first solo exhibition in Stockholm in 1982. He writes: “To my knowledge no one else had used this term up till then.” There is, however, evidence that the terms participation art and participatory art had already been applied in the early 1970s. Moreover, terms such as participation and spectator participation were already used regularly in the 1960s, by people with some relation to the art world. The director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Willem Sandberg, for instance, writes in the catalogue to the 1962 exhibition Dylaby (short for dynamic labyrinth): “artists gathered from several countries/with the aim to let the public/participate in their work/to let you see, feel, cooperate with them.” Members of the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visual (GRAV) proclaimed in a tract entitled Assez de Mystifications, distributed on the occasion of the Paris Biennial in 1963: “We want them [the viewers] to participate. We want to place them in a situation that they activate and transform. We want them to be aware of their participation.” Lygia Clark – to provide a third example – states in a letter to her friend and colleague Hélio Oiticica, dated November 14, 1968: “True participation is open and we will never be able to know what we give to the spectator-author.” As will be discussed in the next section, experiments with participation in art date even further back than the 1960s or 1970s. The

21 See also Brown, “Introduction,” 1–14.
22 Although, again, it must me underscored that this may vary from user to user.
23 This does not mean that I disapprove of all the other mentioned terms or will not use them in the book. However, my preference goes out to the term ‘participatory art’ and when I use one of these other terms, it will function principally as a synonym.
24 Gustaf Almenberg, Notes on Participatory Art: Toward a Manifesto Differentiating it from Open Work, Interactive Art and Relational Art (Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse, 2010), xi.
25 For example, in 1971 the exhibition Pioneers of Part-Art was organised at MOMA Oxford, with ‘Part-Art’ being an abbreviation for ‘Participation Art’. Journalists and critics writing about the show also used the terms ‘participation art’ and ‘participatory art’. See, for instance, the newspaper articles to be found in the archives of the Modern Art Oxford (MAO), box ‘MOMA Press Cuttings 1970s’.
27 An English translation of this tract can be found on the personal website of the artist Julio Le Parc (founding member of GRAV), accessed March 5, 2021, http://www.julioleparc.org/phone/mystifications2.html.
concept of participatory art, therefore, existed long before the actual invention of the term.

### 2.2 A genealogy of participatory art

One could argue that all art is, in a sense, participatory. Every work of art presupposes a degree of mental and physical participation on the part of the viewer in the form of observation, interpretation and evaluation. On the active involvement of the spectator, the artist Marcel Duchamp once declared during a now famous talk, given in 1957:

All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.²⁹

For Duchamp, the viewer necessarily takes part in the creation of art by way of deciphering, interpreting and evaluating. Both the artist and the spectator are, in his view, needed for the completion of a work of art. Although Duchamp seems to stress a form of cognitive participation on the part of the viewer, it can also be argued that all artworks call for a degree of bodily participation. An artwork may, for instance, invite the viewer to stand in front of it, walk around it or even enter it – in order to perceive, experience, evaluate and, in a sense, complete the work. Members of the audience may be encouraged or pushed by a piece to crane their necks (to have a better view), to start moving (to observe or undergo a work in its entirety) or to physically respond by crying or laughing.³⁰ Even early stories and myths about artists and their artworks tell of forms of viewer activation. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, one reads how the sculptor Pygmalion fell in love with a statue that he had carved, kissing, touching and dressing his “ivory girl.”³¹ In his *Naturalis Historia*, Pliny the Elder recorded the legend of a competition between the rival painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius in ancient Greek. Zeuxis displayed a painting of grapes that was so realistic that birds flew towards the picture and attempted to eat the fruit. Parrhasius, for his turn, exhibited a curtain, again rendered with such exactitude that Zeuxis demanded that the curtain be drawn aside to reveal the picture behind. Zeuxis acknowledged his defeat, since he had only tricked the birds, whereas Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist.³² In later versions of the story, as recorded by the Dutch poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel, Zeuxis

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³⁰ See also Almenberg, *Participatory Art*, 16: “In all art, the intention is to elicit some kind of response from the spectator/participant, be it an emotional response like awe, admiration, or anger; or even some kind of physical response where the spectator positions him/herself to see better.”


himself raised his arms to lift (“oplichten”) the painted curtain (see fig. 2.1). In one way or another, then, a work of art always solicits the involvement of the viewer on a mental and physical level.

Figure 2.1: This anonymous engraving, which was printed in Joost van den Vondel’s Den Gulden Winckel der Konstlievende Nederlanders (1613), illustrates Pliny the Elder’s tale of the competition between the ancient Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius.

Photo: Amsterdam University Library / Digitisation project Google Books NL, books (originals).
