

Savannah Bacon

Socratic Dialogue

Fuch's Critique of Participatory Culture and Social/Sociable media as ideology rather than political agency

[Fuchs=Socrates, Jenkins=main interlocutor]

Ref: Social Media: A Critical Introduction, Ch. 3, 5

Fuchs: Participatory culture is contingent upon the consumerist mentalities of the slaves to free market ideology, a mere piece of the larger wheel of exploitation.

Jenkins: How is that so? If I voluntarily choose to participate, spreading the information, actively shaping how society is exposed to certain issues, how is that a detriment to anything? How is encouraging one to participate and contribute a flaw to our system?

Fuchs: Your reductionism isn't plausible in this scenario, Jenkins. You're picking and choosing what aspects of this issue to highlight and extrapolate upon it and ignoring other vital pieces to this issue. It's understandable, though. You're not the only one who thinks this way.

Jenkins: How do you mean?

Fuchs: Think of participatory culture as a train. How does the train move?

Jenkins: It moves on the tracks, obviously.

Fuchs: Right. But that's only one element, Jenkins. Think of the railroad engineer that operates that train, the workers that slaved away building those tracks, the people who pay to ride said train, those that decided how and where the tracks would be laid.. there is so much more to a system than its constituents.

Jenkins: Ahhh, I'm beginning to see. How do you suppose that applies to participatory culture then?

Fuchs: You see, it's easy to accentuate the beauty of creativity, and I'm not arguing that that aspect isn't still relative. It is. But choosing to only vocalize this view ignores the system of domination inherent to the culture in which this participation exists. Creativity provides the grounds for commodification. This creativity is exploited into yet another means of achieving profit margins, abusing and manipulating the perceptions of artistry to control the subsequent projects and data they produce.

Jenkins: I suppose I understand how this is potentially problematic, but I still hesitate to completely commit to the idea of systematic exploitation at the level to which it seems you're suggesting.

Fuchs: Understandably so. Let me expand: consider search engines and internet spaces tailor their adverts to users, creating specialized profiles. Sure, they may be more popular, but the companies themselves have more resources to use to their advantage in the pursuit of attention and profit by user streams on any media. The popular Youtube site, while I realize it is a favorite of yours, is controlled by the shareholders of Google. There is, as I mentioned before, a system of oppression omnipresent, whether recognized or neglected. Ownership dictates popularity within this participatory culture. Money and profit and resources dictate to whom the power of the media and economy lie with.

Jenkins: Power dictated by money, position, and resources? What an innovative idea.

Fuchs: You jest, but this ties into both political economy and ideology. Inherent to this term “participatory” culture is a denoted sense of democracy theory, tying in ideas of grassroots decision-making authority focused on the vast majority of the population. The problem with this connotation is the supposition that all players in this game of consumerism and advantage are on level playing fields. Participatory culture, in your sense of the word, intensely ignore the platforms of control within these industries and their accompanying political, economic, and cultural dimensions.

Jenkins: Are you supposing I have a ‘soft’ view of this culture? Why are you unable to see the benefits of community-building within this realm?

Fuchs: You’re only seeing one aspect of the grand mechanism! You must see that the products of internet users are influenced by those that control the media, that possess the money and power and perform the exploitation. You are not participating, but rather being *excluded* from a system in which you will probably never have significant leverage, will never be able to truly “participate.” The bourgeois ‘participate.’ The proletariat merely delude themselves into believing they do, to distract themselves from the problematic thought of subliminal exploitation and depression.

Jenkins: Well that’s a rather depressing thought, to be quite frank.

Fuchs: It’s not meant to depress, but to rather make aware the futile efforts of a culture founded on the notion of ‘low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement,’ to start with. How exactly can anyone completely agree with this notion? It’s a bit primitive, wouldn’t you say, to agree that everyone is granted equal opportunity for achievement?

Jenkins: The American Dream...

Fuchs: Is one in which the Marxist systems of oppression are subjugated in favor of the destruction of human industry as a means of capital making men equal in power and access. We must abolish all sense of a political, cultural, and economic hierarchy in order to have your fair

and true “participatory culture.” Destruct commodification, economic abuse. Perhaps then your flowery culture will flourish.

Jenkins: ...I may have my work cut out for me.