

PASCAL GIELEN

THE ART OF DEMOCRACY

Krisis, 2011, Issue 3

www.krisis.eu

'as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics.'

– Walter Benjamin (2003: 256-257)

In the afterword of *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin links cultural mass production with the aestheticization of politics and with fascism. Beside his main thesis that art has lost its aura through technical reproduction, Benjamin thus initiates – in his renowned essay – another interesting train of thought, one that assumes there is a specific relationship between art and society or, more specifically, between cultural production and political regimes. Earlier in his essay, Benjamin had already mentioned in passing that in the future, when its ritual function has evaporated, art will be founded in politics. This line of thinking arouses curiosity. It sets in motion a train of thought that has become highly topical nowadays. Would there also be a direct connection between a kind of art and a kind of political regime that dominates the western hemisphere? Is there a link between modern art and the democracies in which it is embedded? Is there a specific art of de-

mocracy, which consequently can only survive in democracies? But also: what is the art of realizing and maintaining a political democracy? The phrase *The art of democracy* can be interpreted in two ways: that of which art facilitates democracy *and* of which conditions should a political regime meet to be defined as democratic nowadays? These questions make it necessary to first re-examine some basic concepts, such as: What actually is democracy and, perhaps even more difficult: what is the definition of modern art?

The basic formula of democracy

Although democracy harks back to principles from the year 508 B.C., it was only at the end of the eighteenth century that modern democracy was firmly outlined. In the United States, this happened with the Declaration of Independence, while Europe had to wait for the French Revolution. Remember that the *polis* in Athens did not include slaves, immigrants or women. Classic democracy applied to a small segment of the population only. 'Thus, whether we can legitimately refer to Athens as a democracy at all is a question that at least has to be posed.' (Held, 2006: 19)

It is important to realize that democracy is a relatively young form of government, for which, and other reasons, it is still rather fragile and vulnerable. Quite a few politicians and citizens regard it all too easily as something obvious, however. On the other hand, some political philosophers, such as Oliver Marchart, doubt whether the current liberal-capitalist regimes meet the criteria for democracy (Marchart, 2007: 158). In many cases democracy still needs to be established and in those political regimes where it already exists it requires constant maintenance. Surveying the world in a wider sense quickly reveals that not only are there still sovereign dictatorships, but also theocracies and even capitalist communist regimes. Both China and Russia demonstrate how not-very-democratic regimes are maybe even more in line with the capitalist market imperative than the democracy we are so accustomed to. According to the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, the Chinese brand of communism may herald a fundamental development in the 21st century: the transition to an auth-

oritarian capitalist world system (Sloterdijk, 2004: 193). This system ‘implies the project of including all forms of labour, desire and expression of the people caught within the system in the immanence of spending power’ (Sloterdijk, 2004: 195). So, democracy is no more than one of many possible political regimes. But then, what exactly is democracy?

Just as there are many different forms of government, there are, of course, different interpretations of democracy. The political scientist David Held, for instance, distinguishes four basic forms: the classic Athenian model, Republicanism, the liberal model and forms of direct democracy. From these, several other forms have been derived during the twentieth century (Held, 2006). This multiplicity does not, however, mean that we cannot trace every modern democracy back to a concise basic formula. Putting it simply, the bottom line of any democratic regime consists of two fundamental principles. Firstly, the assurance that the power of the *demos* is represented by a majority and, secondly, the guarantee of a legal framework that at least protects minorities (Lukacs, 2005: 5). At best, such a framework also supports, encourages and emancipates minorities. So, paradoxically, within a democracy the majority creates or protects the possibility of the minority becoming the majority and assuming power. This is why the political philosopher Claude Lefort says that the seat of power within a democratic form of government is in principle *empty* (Lefort, 1988: 17). More concretely, it can *de jure* always be declared vacant. Whoever occupies the seat of power must accept that there may come a time when they will have to surrender it. Not only that, but within a radical democracy the majority will even encourage this process, constantly preparing, in fact, for its own abdication. It is important to note that democracy has no fixed foundation. We can only articulate legitimizations or provide good arguments as to why democracy would be a better political regime than any other. Neither God, ideology nor scientific positivism can provide democracy with a steady foundation. And yet this form of political government is not bottomless. Its grounding lies in the very emptiness in which the foundation must be rediscovered time and again. This is why Marchart does not speak of anti-fundamental politics, but of post-fundamental politics: ‘Democracy is to be defined as a regime that seeks, precisely, to come to terms with the ultimate failure of grounding rather than simply repressing or foreclosing it.’ (Marchart, 2007: 157-158)

Neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism

The formula outlined above also defines when democracy starts to fail. As soon as politicians fail to design and pass legislation to protect minorities, democracy dwindles. There are subtle mechanisms to keep the weaker elements from coming to power. For instance, barriers to good education can be made so high that the lower social classes or less affluent migrants find it hard to get access to it. Or a government may fail to facilitate things like child care, making it harder for women to gain positions of authority in society. It can also cause the cultural and media landscape to become intellectually impoverished, so that citizens are misinformed and any critical voice is nipped in the bud by light entertainment. Establishing or maintaining obstacles to upward cultural, intellectual and social mobility reduces the opportunities for civil participation. This is why collective mechanisms of solidarity between social classes, between generations, between men and women, between immigrants and natives and even between regions or continents are essential to democracy. Ideologies or political regimes such as neo-liberalism, which argue for dismantling such collective responsibilities by placing as much as possible back on the shoulders of the individual (through private insurance and pensions, by giving out student loans rather than scholarships, et cetera), over time easily slide into a timocracy, in which the power to rule lies, if not *de jure* but *de facto*, with those better situated in society.

But political programmes that only wish to ensure democratic guarantees within the borders of the nation state in fact also risk taking an undemocratic attitude towards all those outside their own political territory. Such a political stance, underwritten by all forms of nationalism, is indefensible in a globalized world. That is, as long as one still subscribes to the rules of democracy. After all, many national decisions will either directly or indirectly have an impact on the environment outside the territory of the sovereign decision-maker, according to Held quoted above (2006). Just like real or virtual viruses and nuclear fallout, cultural movements and media-scapes cannot be stopped at the gates of the nation state. Therefore, some unilateral decisions can be undemocratic for the outside world, which has no say in them. In short, in a globalized world in which large parts of the world population are networked with each other and every-

thing is connected to everything else on a worldwide scale, both neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism are unable to provide satisfactory answers for the demands of democracy. When neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism cover for each other, their undemocratic tendency is even strengthened. Unlike nationalism, its predecessor, neo-nationalism practices a self-reflexive pragmatism that uses all information about globalization, including neo-liberalism, to obtain national privileges. In doing so, it no longer appeals to the heavy-handed blood-and-soil model, but rather to cultural diversity to legitimize and maintain economic advantages for its 'own' culture.

Neo-nationalism and neo-liberalism interact in a particular way here. Take the European Union, for instance. Neo-liberals have argued for the free movement of money, goods and people within the Union, whereas neo-nationalists try to obstruct transnational (and transregional) structures of solidarity wherever possible. The free flow of money, for instance, is encouraged within the European domain, but as soon as a member state runs into financial difficulties, this domain is no more than a collection of nation states in conflict. People are free to move within the European Union, until Fortress Europe is overrun by refugees. Then all of a sudden only the country where these refugees first arrive bears the full responsibility. Where neo-liberalism in some cases benefits from neo-nationalism because the latter selectively applies the freedom and rights propagated by the former, neo-nationalism can benefit from neo-liberalism by continuing to reap its benefits outside the nation state. Neo-nationalism has no qualms about international trade and even turns a blind eye towards immigration in those cases where it is good for the national economy. Neo-nationalism, or the 'political folklore of territorialism' as Sloterdijk (2004: 160) calls it, also happily makes use of neo-liberal principles such as marketing strategies and branding to construct a national and cultural identity. Moreover, cultural essentialism is commonly used to gain economic benefits and to protect standards of living. Or economic arguments are presented harshly as cultural ones: 'They are lazy while we are a hard-working nation' and 'they live on our pocket while we have to scrape and save'. Within neo-nationalism, economic achievements are translated culturally and are 'essentialized' as, for example, the only Dutch culture or *the* American way of life. In this way neo-nationalism cleverly hitches a

ride on the wagon of neo-liberalism. And when the cross-border traffic of money and especially people gets 'out of hand' and undermines neo-liberalism's urge for accumulation, neo-nationalism comes in handy in helping to maintain a selective policy as to freedom. At least we can say that neo-nationalism and neo-liberalism can play a clever game in which the rules of a true global democracy do not apply.

Finally, according to Held, the faulty forms of democratic government have everything to do with the obsolete model on which most regimes in the Western world have based themselves historically, namely, liberal, representative democracy. This model reduces democracy too much to the individual responsibility of citizens, who can only realize their democratic momentum once every few years, in elections. In other words, the model neglects its duty to 'nourish' the civil domain. According to Held, 'The structures of civil society (including forms of productive and financial property, sexual and racial inequalities) – misunderstood or endorsed by liberal democratic models – do not create conditions for equal votes, effective participation and deliberation, proper political understanding and equal control of the political agenda; while the structures of the liberal democratic state (including large, frequently unaccountable bureaucratic apparatuses, institutional dependence on the imperatives of private capital accumulation, political representatives preoccupied with their own re-election) do not create an organizational force which can adequately regulate "civil" power centres.' (Held, 2006: 275)

So Held sees liberal representative democracy as a democracy of the majority that finds it difficult to organize citizenship. But civil initiatives in which minorities can also have a voice presuppose serious social and cultural programmes for the emancipation of citizens, enabling them to learn how to use their political voice. A democracy does, however, need a social programme to offer weaker groups every opportunity to obtain participatory power, and it needs a cultural and educational programme to generate the necessary conceptual frameworks and reflection that can produce alternative forms of government and power over and over again. This last element is necessary to safeguard the 'emptiness' in a democracy outlined above by always filling it only temporarily. Both neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism ignore this post-fundamental condition by suggest-

ing that there actually is a foundation. Neo-nationalism sees the individuality of a cultural identity as the ultimate basis, while neo-liberalism elevates the laws of the free market to a transcendental level. In doing so, both philosophies harden their external legitimization into a kind of second nature. For neo-nationalism, nationality acquires the quality of an unchanging culture, while neo-liberalism practices the metaphysics of finance within a Darwinist model. As such, both political movements suggest that the reasons for political actions lie outside of the political realm and is therefore very hard to influence. To them, good politics are much more a matter of ‘tuning into’ the laws of external reality. In agreement with the political philosopher Chantal Mouffe (2005), we could therefore label these movements as ‘post-political’. Among other things, Mouffe applies the term to political movements that no longer legitimize their policy by referring to an ideology but by referring to external or seemingly non-political social factors, such as ‘the market’, ‘the economic climate’, or ‘cultural identity’. In such a framework politicians give the impression of being ‘forced’ to take certain decisions, while relegating their ideological and active freedom of choice to the background. But how do these political issues relate to art?

The singular ‘dismeasure’

Articulating a definition of art is a tricky undertaking at best. Historically, art has covered many fields and taken on many different shapes. Benjamin, for instance, refers to the ritual function that artistic artefacts once had, but he also talks about how the perception of art is transmuted by technological developments (2003: 261-262). When speaking of modern art here, it’s important to point out that the word is used for art that lost its aura, as Benjamin has described. This art will be mentioned in this essay as ‘post-auratic’, to point at art that has its origins in modernity or in the historical avant-garde – not coincidentally the same period in which photography and film came to flourish. So although this may include art that is created in unique shapes and in authentic fashion, it is art that is created – in Benjamin’s words – with an eye to its reproducibility (Benjamin, 2003: 256). Benjamin’s distinction between auratic and non-auratic art is also

clearly postulated in his 1931 essay *A Small History of Photography*, in which he lucidly explains how the auratic work pretends to exist outside of history. It therefore denies its own transitoriness, or at least its potential transformation. This is why Benjamin calls it monumental art (1999: 169). The post-auratic artefact, on the contrary, emancipated itself from the aura. Among other things, this means that it is open to the future and to the transformations that may befall it there (1999: 157). In short, post-auratic art is contingent. The French art sociologist Nathalie Heinich adds that this post-auratic art aims at transgression, ever since the demise of the academic system (the Académie française) and its rules (Heinich, 1991). This is why today we may speak of not only post-auratic art but also of post-academic art. The philosopher Paolo Virno has coined this principle of transgression as ‘dismeasure’ (Paolo Virno, in Gielen and Lavaert, 2009). According to him, modern art introduces a ‘dismeasure’ inside the general measure or common sense of a culture. This dismeasure is not necessarily only aesthetic or formal in nature. It can also be political or – as Virno suggests – cognitive and affective in nature. When, for instance, the Belgian artist Jan Fabre binds the hands of his dancers to their ballet shoes and makes them dance ‘un-virtuoso’, he introduces a dismeasure into the idiom of classical ballet. In doing so, Fabre produced a formal or aesthetical dismeasure. The Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletti takes this even one step further by proclaiming his organization ‘Cittadellarte’ – in which scientists and businesses develop and implement practical new economic methods of productions and production relationships (Gielen, 2009: 207-237) – to be a work of art. In doing so, Pistoletto in any case makes an attempt to install a different measure outside of art as well.

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann’s view on art enables us to better frame the views of Benjamin, Heinich and Virno in a sociological sense. When he asks himself what role art plays in contemporary society – art that is often regarded by society as ‘useless’ and therefore without function – Luhmann concludes that art creates a ‘sense of possibilities’ (*Möglichkeitssinn*). ‘Nothing is either necessary or impossible’ or ‘Everything that is, can also always be otherwise’, is the message that art brings to contemporary society (Luhmann, 1995). With this functional definition of modern art Luhmann also makes room for ‘dismeasure’ as one of the possibilities of art. Moreover, when the measure is defined by everything

that exists or by everything that is regarded as culturally obvious, then something can only be labelled as art if it deviates from this standard and thereby introduces a dismeasure. Within the dominant measure there's always the chance of dismeasure occurring. Whether this dismeasure will be recognized as art, however, depends on its historic and cultural context. And this is exactly where the connection lies between post-auratic and post-academic art, between Benjamin and Luhmann. Both views on art share the notion that the modern artwork is contingent.

This constant possibility of dismeasure is why confrontations with modern artistic expressions often lead to debate and dissent. It is precisely this debate that has been at the core of the artistic ever since modernity: the principle of contingency makes it necessary to argue that other visions, opinions and interpretations are always possible. The point is not so much whether this alternate vision is more beautiful or more interesting or comes closer to the truth, but rather that there is always another way of looking at things. Just like democracy, modern art is also polyphonic and post-fundamental. Artists always propose other possibilities, which then have to be grounded each time again. After all, when neither religious or political representation nor virtuoso craftsmanship or the rules of the Académie française apply any longer, art loses the ground beneath its feet. This leads some populist voices to conclude that 'anything goes' and that modern art is therefore anti-fundamental. However, the post-fundamental interpretation of modern art realises that the only way for artists to get credit within the art world is by postulating a dismeasure based on their own singular gesture. In other words, they must take the risk of making their own artistic gesture and in doing so they make their own position as artists the subject of debate. It should be noted that, following Heinich (1991), I have deliberately chosen to use the notion of 'singularity' here, rather than that of 'individual' art, as the latter is associated too much with the idea of the isolated talent, personal genius or psyche from which the work of art originates. It carries a notion that is also echoed in political philosophy: 'The difference lies in the fact that the individual is modelled upon the self-sufficient modern subject which, in its monadic existence, does not rely on other individuals, it does not *relate*, it does not *compare* and it does not *share*. Singularities, on the other hand, are exposed to the in-between through their relation of sharing.' (Mar-

chart, 2007: 73-74) Finally, it should be noted that according to Heinich a collective can also defend a unique and singular position (Heinich, 2000 and 2002). It is not the artist who has to be individual, but the artistic gesture – the work of art – must be singular, whether it is proposed by an individual or a collective.

At the core of modern art lies the movement from non-art to art that offers the singular position a place within a (sometimes limited) collectivity. The post-fundamental nature of post-auratic art lies in this grounding movement that has to be performed time and again from a position of singularity. This is precisely why anyone who is even slightly familiar with the current professional art world knows that definitely not anything goes. To be on the left side of the dichotomy art/non-art, artists often have to make their own difficult, lonesome and argumentative way to find their footing. When art is no longer embedded in religion or rituals and therefore is post-auratic and contingent, in the words of Benjamin, it has to be argued from every idiosyncratic artistic position. This is perhaps most evident in the visual arts, where nowadays craftsmanship or artistic skills are not necessarily required to make a work of art. Artists must then first and foremost find a social base for their artistic gesture and the only way to do this is by 'publicizing' their work and by providing arguments as to why the things they make – or, in the case of ready-mades, select – should be accepted as art. It is only when others are convinced of this artistic gesture that the proposed artefact or idea may enter the realm of 'art' in the dichotomy of art/non-art. And precisely this movement from the singular, idiosyncratic position to a collective base is a quest for a foundation which has to be undertaken with every new work of art. Art would be anti-fundamental if 'anything goes' and if, for instance, the individual intention of the artist would suffice to call something a work of art. This, however, is not the case. All artists also have to find a collective base for their intentions by searching for a foundation that can legitimize their art. Art would be fundamental if there were fixed rules that would decide beforehand the distinction of art/non-art. Such was the case with the Académie française, that had clearly defined rules with which, for instance, a landscape or a genre piece had to comply. Within post-fundamental art such rules do not exist. On the contrary, artists have to reinvent or make them themselves time and again *and* find a collective

basis through public argumentation. This is necessary because the mother work of art is fundamentally undecided or contingent.

The art of democracy: modern art is only possible in a democracy

Precisely because it seeks a dismeasure in both the art world and society, modern art always occupies the position of the minority or heterodoxy, in the words of cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977). Those who confront society with something 'different' or 'possibly otherwise' find themselves alone, especially in the beginning. The dismeasure may become more acceptable over time or even come to belong to the orthodoxy within the artistic field, but the dynamic within the modern art world is only guaranteed by the constant arrival of new dismeasures. And it is precisely this law of transgression that leads to so much discussion, debate and writing in the art world. After all, those who cross the line constantly have to legitimize their actions in public, while those who excel within the rules do not. Therefore, art needs a civil framework for discussion, argumentation and debate. Without arguments and the room for counter-arguments to decide the distinction between art and non-art, there can be no modern art. This is why post-auratic art can only survive socially by leaning on politics, as suggested by Benjamin (2003: 257). However, politics can become aestheticized themselves, as in fascism. What Benjamin means is that fascism presents itself, like the auratic work of art, as monumental or timeless. So, in an artificial way, fascism tries to re-install aura and does so by using technical means of reproduction such as mass media. The answer of communism to that is via an opposite movement, especially the politicization of art. Communism affirms the mobility of identities and a permanent transformation of experience, whereas fascism, according to Benjamin, tries to fixate and monumentalize identities (Caygill, 1998: 103). By now, 75 years on, we know the results of communism. It is highly disputable whether the political art of, for instance, the former Soviet Union produced openness and contingency. But perhaps Benjamin envisioned a communism that was different from the bureaucratic and technocratic variation that eventually became the historic reality. The openness and sense of contingency that Benjamin ascribes to

communism are nowadays perhaps more easily found in the ideal of democracy. This is why I state here that the post-auratic and post-academic or modern art – which came into being after and outside of the standardized rules for works of art of the Académie française and similar institutes in, mostly, Europe – can only be supported by democratic politics. Not only because democracy allows for contingency but also because art as dismeasure occupies the position of a minority within wider society and it will only stand a chance within a political system offering guarantees, as noted before. Artists who constantly remind society of what could be 'possibly otherwise' will always go against common sense. Consequently, those who choose to make art opt for a minority position in society, even if that minority is dismissed as 'elitist'. For that matter, an elite can also be part of a minority and a cultural elite is therefore not necessarily a political or economic elite, as Bourdieu tells us (1979). Elitist or not, post-auratic and post-academic art can only survive by the grace of democracy.

The art of democracy: the modern art world as a model for a minority democracy

But modern art also demonstrates quite a few parallels with political democracy, such as its post-fundamental nature noted earlier. That doesn't make art into politics, but it does belong to the domain of 'the political', especially if we see this notion, as Jacques Rancière puts it, as 'expressing living together in form' (2000). Interventions by artists and activities by art institutes also mould social interaction. If on top of that we characterize modern art as the provider of a dismeasure, it does not have to be limited to so-called 'high' culture. When standard formats are deserted or molested, dismeasure can also be detected in popular cultural expressions such as film or pop music. In this respect, the direct impact of art as a shaping force of society may be bigger than we think. As post-auratic art's rationale is that it points out that things can always also be otherwise, the modern art world has even more things in common with politics. To conquer a position each time again by providing arguments from the singularity proposition presupposes a polemic domain of many voices, all competing for a place for their own singular work. Those visiting an art

biennial or a theatre festival can easily observe how contradictory artistic styles and voices often go side-by-side. In this sense, the modern art world cultivates an ‘agonistic’ way of (at least temporary) togetherness, as within art scenes, and even within one exhibition, we often see a multitude of contradictions, diverging cultures and conflicting visions co-existing without their constantly denying each other’s rationale or legitimacy (Gielen 2009). Artists may fight against any compromise from their singular position, and relationships within the art world can often be irreconcilable, but they are rarely hostile. According to the Belgian political philosopher Chantal Mouffe – who gave the term ‘agony’ a political-philosophical twist – this attitude is only possible when ‘we see each other as taking part in a shared symbolic space that contains the conflict’ (Mouffe, 2005: 26). Just as in a democratic political domain, antagonism in the art world is sublimated into an agonistic way of co-existence. The singular minority position within this domain is, however, only accepted on the basis of the arguments that support it.

Argumentation here refers to the activity by which one tries to obtain public support (however limited) from the singular artistic gesture. Such arguments may be rational, theoretical, emotional, or aesthetic, but they can also reside within the artistic gesture itself. The agonistic democratic space is always constructed from a multitude of such singular argumentation activities, which mostly come from a minority position. In that sense, the modern art domain is very much different from the liberal representative (majority) democracy outlined earlier. The latter, after all, is not grounded on the voiced argumentation of the voters but on an anonymized act in a polling booth that is not publicly substantiated. In liberal representative democracy only the numbers count. All voters can vote without ever having to defend their vote in public. Within the agonistic space of the artistic domain, however, people are allergic to democratically ‘elected’ works of art, because any dismeasure that is preferred by the majority ceases to be a dismeasure and becomes measure. Within the democracy of the art world, the only way to convincingly obtain a position for dismeasure is by means of argumentation or ‘publicizing’ the singular artistic gesture. This is why we could also speak of a minority democracy, in contrast to the liberal democracy of the majority. Within a minority model one can only gain a position or obtain a broader social basis by

means of argumentation. One only gains a voice by making one’s choices public, not by anonymously checking a box in a polling booth. If one seeks one’s way by argumentation, however, a confrontation with other minorities who are also claiming a position is inevitable. In other words, a minority democracy is agonistic. Because it is continuously confronted with always changing possible minorities it does, however, acknowledge its modest place in the world. Because of this confrontation with the always possibly otherwise, a minority democracy is much more a continuous, self-reflexive search for democratic forms than a consolidation of power by a majority. Minority democracies do not see democracy as an entitlement but as goal worth striving for.

Perhaps this minority democracy does offer some handles for a future political democracy. If we are to believe Held, not a single classical, republican, liberal or direct democracy would survive in a globalized world. Only a *democratic autonomous* model would have any chance of success, according to this political scientist (Held, 2006). Held is referring to a democracy that stimulates and organizes a multitude of singular civil voices; a formula that experiments on a large scale with self-government by individuals, businesses, civil initiatives, organizations and all sorts of collectives. In other words, a democratic autonomy is a form of government that constantly promotes and facilitates the autonomous economic, social and cultural development of a range of minorities. This multitude of singular initiatives in turn makes every effort to reach democratic self-rule. And it is precisely this multitude of diverging initiatives that brings them into an ever more symmetrical negotiating position with states, transnational governments, local authorities, civil initiatives, et cetera. The state or supranational governing bodies are just democratic decision-making systems like so many others. In the future, democracy can only maintain its legitimacy if it makes the transformation of inequalities the core of its politics, according to Held. Among other things, this means that it must declare the minority as the focal point of its policies.

To conclude: modern art as a test for democracy?

Regardless of this second speculative idea of *the art of democracy* in which it is suggested that an art world could provide handles for a future agonistic democracy, the first thesis of *the art of democracy* still holds true that the post-auratic and post-academic art of dismeasure can only survive by the grace of democracy. Neo-nationalism will always suppress this type of art because it undermines the alleged foundation of a stable national culture from within, which it tries to monumentalize. This is why modern art may appear as even more threatening to neo-nationalists than the migrant who brings a 'possibly otherwise' culture from the outside. Neo-liberalism, in turn, is not quite sure how to deal with the art of dismeasure because this art can hardly be legitimized through the power of measure or numbers, regardless of whether those numbers represent money, audiences, or opinion polls. The numeric democracy of neo-liberalism is also at odds with an argumentative democracy, as it still assumes a fixed and therefore not arguable foundation outside of politics, especially that of the laws of the free market. Within this neo-national and neo-liberal context of fundamentalisms, post-auratic and post-academic art may well prove to be a test for democracy. In any case, modern art is one of the domains in which the post-fundamental idea of contingency *that anything that is, can also always be otherwise* is very much alive.

Pascal Gielen (1970) is director of the research center Arts in Society at the Groningen University where he is associate Professor of sociology of art. He also leads the research group and book series 'Arts in Society' (Fontys College for the Arts, Tilburg). Gielen has written several books on contemporary art, cultural heritage and cultural politics. In 2009 Gielen edited together with Paul De Bruyne the book *Being an Artist in Post-Fordist Times* (NAi) and he published his new monograph *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude. Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism* (Valiz). In 2011 De Bruyne and Gielen edited the book *Community Art. The Politics of Trespassing* and in January 2012 their new book *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm. Realism versus Cynicism* will be launched.

Bibliography

Benjamin, W. (1999) *Selected Writings. Volume 2 – 1927-193*. Harvard: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, W. (2003) *Selected Writings. Volume 4 – 1938-1940*. Harvard: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) 'La production de la croyance: contribution à une économie de biens symboliques', in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 13.

Bourdieu, P. (1979) *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.

Caygill, H. (1998) *Walter Benjamin. The Colour of Experience*. London and New York: Routledge.

Danto, A. (1986) *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. New York: Columbia University Press.

De Duve, T. (1998) *Kant after Duchamp*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Gielen, P. (2003) *Kunst in netwerken. Artistieke selecties in de hedendaagse dans en de beeldende kunst (Art in Networks. Artistic Selections in Contemporary Dance and Visual Art)*. Leuven: Lannoo Campus.

Gielen, P. (2009) *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude. Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

Gielen, P. and S. Lavaert (2009) 'The Dismasure of Art. An interview with Paulo Virno', in: P. Gielen and P. De Bruyne (eds.) *Being an Artist in Post-Fordist Times*. Rotterdam: NAi-Publishers, 17-44.

Heinich, N. (1991) *La Gloire de Van Gogh. Essai d'anthropologie de l'admiration*. Paris: Editions de Minuit.

Krisis

Journal for contemporary philosophy

Pascal Gielen – The art of democracy

Heinich, N. (2000) 'What is an artistic event? A new approach to sociological discourse', in: *Boekmancahier* 12 (44), 159-168.

Heinich, N. (2002) 'Let us try to understand each other. Reply to Crane, Laermans, Marontate and Schinkel', in: *Boekmancahier* 14 (52), 200-207.

Held, D. (2006) *Models of Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Laclau, E. (1996), *Emancipation(s)*. London and New York: Verso.

Laermans, R. (2011) 'De democratie van de kunst (The Democracy of Art)', in: L. Van Heteren, Q. Van der Hogen, And P. Gielen (eds.) *A Fight for the Arts*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (in press).

Lefort, C. (1988) *Democracy and Political Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Luhmann, N. (1995) *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Lukacs, J. (2005) *Democracy and Populism. Fear and Hatred*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Marchart, O. (2007) *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mouffe, C. (2005) *On the Political*. London and New York: Routledge.

Rancière, J. (2000) *Le partage de sensible. Esthétique et politique*. Paris: Editions La fabrique.

Sloterdijk, P. (2004) *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals. Für eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

© This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License (Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0). See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nl/deed.en> for more information.