Conceptualising the Coming World, Rearming Collective Thought

Florian Gaité

Translator: Phoebe Clarke

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/27215>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.27215

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 21 November 2017

Number of pages: 151-155

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Florian Gaité, « *Conceptualising the Coming World, Rearming Collective Thought* », *Critique d'art* [Online], 49 | Automne/hiver 2017, Online since 21 November 2018, connection on 02 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/27215> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.27215

This text was automatically generated on 2 May 2019.

EN

Conceptualising the Coming World, Rearming Collective Thought

Florian Gaité

Translation : Phoebe Clarke

REFERENCES

McKenzie Wark, *General Intellects: Twenty-One Thinkers for the Twenty-First Century*, Londres : Verso, 2017

Reclaiming Art, Reshaping Democracy: The New Patrons & Participatory Art, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2017. Sous la dir. de Xavier Douroux, Estelle Zhong Mengual

- 1 In his analysis of Kant's "Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?", Michel Foucault defined modern criticism as a way of detecting a *difference* in history within one's own time, of being mindful of the plasticity of one's present. Two books expound on the capacity of intellectuals and artists to survey current events and "see what's coming", identifying what the times are pregnant with and what already pervades them. From the future of industrial societies within the newest forms of capitalism to the fate of democracies faced with neoliberal excesses, the present is addressed from the perspective of these high-risk changes that demand new collective action.
- 2 In his examination of the present times through the prism of the past, the sociologist McKenzie Wark draws on Marx's *Fragment on Machines* in order to test the validity of speculation on the future of industrialisation. Beyond the paradox it raises – an automated society at once promises emancipation for workers and threatens knowledge with alienation by technology – the author seeks to secure arguments for a theory that would be located neither on the side of technophobic rejection or technophile optimism. His critical introduction to the ideas of 21 thinkers active in the public debate presents a diachronic cross-view of the international intellectual landscape, revealing its salient features, situated at the intersection of post-marxist philosophy, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, speculative realism, political theory, communication studies and critical

epistemology. From the confrontation of these different kinds of knowledge emerges the shared notion of the crisis of the subject, attributed to “technological slavery” and the “decline of symbolism”, which, in the new dominant economic model (“semiocapitalism”, “cognitive” or “cultural” capitalism), reveals the market's inability to fulfil technology's promises of emancipation. Beyond their intrinsic divergences (post-structuralist linguistics versus materialist empiricism, cosmopolitanism versus agonistic democracy), the synthesis of these voices above all points to the difficulty of thinking in a world where information is monetised, and the necessity there is of doing so through resistance.

- 3 McKenzie Wark's theory is implicit throughout: he believes that the constitution of a technology-savvy creative class (hackers) could be the symptom of a repositioning of artists in relation to politics. The volume edited by Estelle Zong Mengual and Xavier Douroux supports this argument with its study of the appearance of new modes of collaboration through the analysis of an institutional initiative (the Fondation de France's “Les Nouveaux commanditaires” [New Patrons] project). By organising the mediation between artists, cultural agents, politicians and audiences, the program effectively is a micro-model of participative democracy, attesting to contemporary art's tendency to becoming a laboratory for communal forms, without this being a mere aestheticisation of politics. This pragmatic project, freed from the norms of the market, rests upon the need for pacified exchange in a consensual environment: from evaluating needs to the concerted making of an artwork, and the election of a project by a committee, it embodies an ethical, economic, social and cultural ideal, that exceeds the usual framework of public commissions.
- 4 “Les Nouveaux commanditaires” [New Patrons] programme thus revitalises the participative experimentalism of John Cage, Fluxus, George Brecht or the GRAV, along with the idea of shared authorship with the audience of conceptual art, in order to deconstruct the old hierarchies and redistribute relationships with artists. In this new regime of cohabitation, the mediator (galleries, curators...) becomes the operator of a social relationship, whereas the audience self-appoints itself as autonomous subject. At the heart of this “constellation”, the artwork becomes the catalyst for an encounter in the strongest sense, in which participation leads to an heightened consciousness of togetherness.
- 5 As discussions of individualism and ghettoisation have highjacked the public debate, these contemporary thinkers remind us how important it is to rearm our concept of collectivity, by drawing upon artistic strategies that reshape the idea of democracy. It is only through this inclusive pluralism that art can operate its shift from institutional critique to political action.

AUTHORS

FLORIAN GAITÉ

Florian Gaité holds a PhD in Philosophy, is a research fellow at the Institut ACTE (Sorbonne Paris 1 University- CNRS), a lecturer of Art theory (Paris VIII and Lille III universities), and a critic (a member of AICA-France, he collaborates with *Art press* and *France Culture*). He is also a dramaturgy consultant to dance companies, a curator and a debate organiser at the CDN-La Commune theatre in Aubervilliers. He is the coauthor of *Collaboration et co-création entre artistes : duos, groupes et collectifs en arts plastiques du début des années 1960 à nos jours* (Canopé, forthcoming (2017) and is currently co-directing *Créations, cerveaux, infinis* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, forthcoming (2018).