

Democracy as the Genius's Kiss: Art and Democracy in Thomas Mann's
Essayistic Works

Tom van de Wijgert

S4648838

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Evert van der Zweerde

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Radboud University Nijmegen

I hereby declare and assure that I, Tom van de Wijgert, have drafted this thesis independently, that no other sources and/or means other than those mentioned have been used and that the passages of which the text content or meaning originates in other works – including electronic media – have been identified and the sources clearly stated.

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ABSTRACT

In his essays, Thomas Mann proposed contrasting ideas on democracy, art, and politics. At times, Mann's conceptions of art, and democracy even contradict one another. The hypothesis of this article, however, is that there is a transcending conception of democracy in Mann's thought. By interpreting and assessing Mann's essays on democracy this core conception is extrapolated. Fundamental for his conception of democracy, I believe, is his position as an artist. In discussing Mann's reflections on his role as an artist, I will show that it is specifically the democratic idea of cultural elevation by means of education [*Bildung*] which defines his artistry and, consequently, his conception of democracy.

(108 words)

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“Literature is through and through democratic and civilized; more precisely: it is the *same* as democracy and civilization.”*¹

In *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Thomas Mann presents literature as democratic, and democracy, according to the self-proclaimed Unpolitical, represents the greatest danger for German culture and for humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].² Consequently, this also indicates that he believes his own literary works are suspicious and a danger for German culture. Democracy threatens the spiritual [*geistige*] side of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] in its one-sided focus on rationality, progress, and science.

Although the *Betrachtungen* are greatly influenced by the predominant background of World War I, this quotation shows, in hindsight, a marvelous sense of self-knowledge. As I will argue in this article, literature, hence Mann as a writer, ultimately has a democratic quality. While “democracy” in the *Betrachtungen* was perceived as something horrendous, later Mann characterizes the relation between the artist and the political as something positive, namely, as a culturally educating and elevating relation. Still, the presumed democratic or political quality of literature remains suspicious. It threatens the intellectual quality of literature and might reduce literature to mere banality.

It is not easy to define Mann’s conception of democracy. The fact that Mann was an artist and not a political theorist, philosopher, or legal scholar, frequently leads to a lack of conceptual clarity, barely defined concepts, and sometimes even a contradictory use of concepts in his essays. Mann was not interested in a legal or constitutional account of democracy, but rather in democracy as a complex socio-political phenomenon. Therefore, democracy in a Mannian sense is not equal to general elections, parliamentarism or majority rule, nevertheless it also does not necessarily exclude these phenomena.

Secondary literature on Mann’s political essays often lacks a rigorous definition of important concepts, such as: democracy, politics, or republic. This is due to the fact that Mann’s thought is interpreted mostly by literary and cultural critics, who pay less attention to his conceptual framework. One exception is

Fechner, who in *Thomas Mann und die Demokratie*,³ analyses Mann's conception of democracy from a legal perspective by putting virtually all sentences about democracy in Mann's oeuvre in the context of a legal concept of democracy. In my opinion, however, such a legal conception of democracy does neither justice to democracy itself, nor to Mann's conception of it.

Despite the conceptual ambiguity, however, I believe there is a core conception of democracy in Mann's thought. The hypothesis of this article is, therefore, that although Mann uses different conceptions of democracy and related concepts such as art, politics, and humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], there is a transcending idea of democracy in Mann's thought. In order to prove this hypothesis, first, the various historical directions of Mann's political ideas are discussed, namely: his antipolitical thought in the period surrounding World War I; his turn to the republic in the 1920s; and his call for a militant democracy from his forced exile in 1933 onwards to the end of World War II. Secondly, Mann's conception of democracy is examined hermeneutically by assessing his conceptions of art, politics, and humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].

The development that comes to light in the discussion of Mann's political ideas is, first of all, historical. It is not my intention to present this development as an ongoing process of learning, or as a necessary course of development. Rather, it is historical because the political circumstances play an important role in the construction of Mann's conceptions. The historical development, and the conceptions of democracy presented, serve as a conceptual framework for the rest of this article, in which Mann's conception of democracy is examined from the perspective of his artistry.

The fact that Mann is an artist and not a philosopher is important for an understanding of the significance of his conception of democracy. As an artist, Mann actively intervened in public debate on a broad variety of topics, ranging from his embracement of the Weimar Republic to his plea for a unified Germany after World War II. He is an archetype of what we would now call a public intellectual.⁴ Nevertheless, the fact that Mann engaged himself in political and polemical debate is not self-evident. Instead of investing himself in political debates, Mann could

have focused on the work for which he was praised and admired, that is, writing novels.

Hermann Kurzke distinguishes no less than seven reasons for Mann's "astonishing" politicization in his biography *Das Leben als Kunstwerk*.⁵ These reasons range from respect for his father via a defense against patriarchy and irrationality, and a predisposition for polemics, to the benefits his engagement provided in the Weimar Republic. Although these reasons give an insight in why Mann would be bothered with political matters in the first place, they do not necessarily explain the peculiar nature of his engagement. I suggest that Mann's conception of democracy is closely connected to his ideas about the artist's involvement in the political domain, and that his engagement is, in the end, an expression of his conception of democracy.

What makes the question of Mann's engagement relevant is not so much the motivation or psychology behind it, but rather the philosophical and political consequences. First of all, the fact that Mann was politically engaged already presupposes an implicit idea about the relation between art and politics. This is present in the fact that he wrote and presented essays to propose his political ideas. The essay, as opposed to the novel, is never merely aesthetic, but has an inherently public or even political character. By writing essays, he makes explicit the ambiguous relation between the artist and the bourgeois – the relation between art and politics.⁶

In order to complement the historical development of Mann's conception of democracy, this article also hermeneutically examines the conception of democracy in the light of the relation between art, politics, and humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Significant attention is paid to the concept of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], because other concepts such as democracy, politics, and art strongly rely on it. This article proposes a distinction between democracy as the political, and art as the aesthetic expression of humanity, whereas humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] itself represents a moral category. Democracy, then, is the political expression of humanity or, as Mann writes in 'Vom kommenden Sieg der Demokratie:' democracy is that form

of politics which “is inspired above every other with the feeling and consciousness of the dignity of man.”⁷

What, in the end, connects Mann’s position as an artist to his conception of democracy is the idea of cultural elevation [*Bildung*]. Democracy, if it really takes man’s dignity to heart, should culturally educate the people in an attempt to prevent the forming of a mob – as opposed to the people – and consequently becoming a demagogy. It is the artist’s duty to culturally educate the people by means of his work. However, education is not the artist’s main motive, rather it is humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] which inspires the artist. Mann’s practice as an artist, then, possesses a democratic quality in attempting to culturally educate the people.

1. Historical development of Mann’s conception of democracy

In the following part, the historical development of Mann’s conception of democracy is examined. The first conception discussed is Mann’s “unpolitical” and “antidemocratic” attitude which he presented in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* in 1918. Subsequently, Mann’s “turn to the republic” is elaborated on. With the conception of republic, democracy becomes connected to politics. Finally, Mann adds the adjective “social” to democracy in the 1930s. His conception of social democracy, I will demonstrate, is inherently aristocratic.

Before elaborating on these three conceptions I will introduce a preliminary concept of democracy for the sake of conceptual clarity. This preliminary concept does not refer to a form of state, but to a method or quality of decision making: “...democracy refers very generally to a method of group decision making characterized by a kind of equality among the participants at an essential stage of the collective decision making.”⁸

This concept does not limit democracy to states or governments, but can apply to a range of social entities such as families, firms and other institutions. That is, however, not to say that democracy cannot be connected to the government or political parties; these too can be democratic, but are not necessarily so. Moreover, the equality in this concept is not defined, which creates the possibility of a more democratic or less democratic procedure of decision making depending on how

equality is understood. For instance, democracy may, on the one hand, refer to a formal one-person one-vote in the election of representatives, or, on the other hand, to the direct involvement of citizens in legislation. Furthermore, democracy in this definition is intended not to carry normative weight, meaning that being more equal or more democratic is not necessarily morally better, or even desirable.

The unpolitical artist

In *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Mann proposes an intrinsic connection between what he designates as politics and democracy: “One is not a democratic or conservative politician, either one is a politician or one isn’t. And when one is, one is a democrat.”⁹ To be political, then, is to be democratic. To be unpolitical, then, is to be an artist, or put differently, to be on the side of spirit and intellect. In the political perspective, all societal phenomena are made political by subjecting them to “democratic,” public evaluation based on rational values. There is no room left for unpolitical phenomena such as art, or an intellectual [*geistig*] idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Politics, and thereby democracy, has an inherent tendency to totalize itself by making all other values depend on it, states Mann.

It is, however, not democracy as such – neither as a form of state or in the preliminary definition I gave – that Mann rejects in the *Betrachtungen*. Rather it is a caricature of democracy that emerges from his brother Heinrich’s essay *Zola* and the heated polemics between the two brothers that followed the publication of that essay.¹⁰ Thomas Mann sees “democracy” as a threat to the German empire. The so-called “*Zivilisationsliteraten*,” the democratic and international bourgeois to which Heinrich Mann and, for example, Romain Rolland belonged, wanted to impose their political conception of democracy on Germany, thereby ruining the unpolitical character of German culture.¹¹

The falseness of that political conception resides in the politicization of societal phenomena including the idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. People are not treated as spiritual [*geistige*] beings by the “*Zivilisationsliteraten*,” but solely as rational, instrumental agents. Consequently, equality becomes a matter of voting rights. This is not what equality should be according to Mann; by reducing one’s

humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] to voting rights, the spiritual side of humankind [*Menschheit*] is neglected. In *Der Zauberberg*,¹² the figure of Settembrini adequately represents this rhetoric of the “*Zivilisationsliteraten*,” by consistently uttering ideas about progress, rationality, and humanity in light of art and literature, yet, without ever truly engaging with or participating in the realization of these ideas.

Mann tries to counter this corrosive and false idea of democracy by offering an alternative to the political norm of rationalization and instrumentalization, namely, morality. In the *Betrachtungen*, morality, like art, is unpolitical. Morality is not subjected to reason [*Vernunft*] and efficiency, instead it answers to feeling and spirit [*Geist*]. Hence the title of the work: *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. The *Betrachtungen* are an unpolitical work of art, which, by means of irony denounces the radical democratization of the “*Zivilisationsliteraten*.” Rather than instrumental rationality, humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] should be the core of true democracy:

“Democracy should become what it was before the onset of politics in the world of God: fraternity over all differences under formal preservation of all differences. Democracy – but I always say the same – should be morality, not politics; it should be kindness from person to person, kindness from both sides!”¹³

True democracy should be moral and not political, it should respect the unique humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] of every individual, making sure individuality is preserved in collectivity.

This quotation is rather surprising in a work that is typically characterized as antidemocratic.¹⁴ Mann is, in my opinion, however, not so much antidemocratic as he is antipolitical here; as stated before, Mann equates politics to democracy. He concludes that the only way for democracy to be humane, is to be unpolitical. The political, for Mann, is inherently connected to the state and the question of the right communal order. Therefore, Mann’s conception of the political is in the end antipolitical: it strives for the abolishment of politics altogether.¹⁵ Moreover, in a

different chapter of the *Betrachtungen*, Mann acknowledges the fact that Germany will become democratic one way or another, a prophecy which the Weimar Republic fulfilled.¹⁶ Hence, it is first and foremost politics which Mann rejects, and not necessarily democracy.

Although it is a bit too far stretching to characterize the *Betrachtungen* as a “beautiful plea for democracy”¹⁷ on the basis of one quotation, I do think that it is justified to say that Mann expresses a positive conception of democracy in the *Betrachtungen*. This “unpolitical” conception expresses a fundamental attribute of his conception of democracy, namely that equality, or in this case fraternity, means respecting individual differences, and formally preserving these differences. The fact that Mann emphasizes the formal aspect of the preservation of differences seems to point towards some form of political institution, however, the political character of such institution would, then, differ from his conception of politics in the *Betrachtungen*. Furthermore, one can already recognize an aristocratic tendency in his conception of democracy, which is both a fear of “*Gleichschaltung*” and a fear of mob rule, which are both prominent in the lecture ‘Vom kommenden Sieg der Demokratie’ (discussed below).

Republican politics

Four years after the *Betrachtungen*, Mann defends democracy in the form of the Weimar Republic in his lecture ‘Von deutscher Republik.’ This republican turn signifies a new phase in his political engagement, nevertheless, his political ideas remain conservative.¹⁸ Mann himself stated that “although he might have changed his thoughts [*Gedanken*], he has not changed his mind [*Sinn*].”¹⁹ The idea that he did not change his mind continues to play a role in his developing political thought; it is not so much he who has changed his mind, rather the circumstances changed and with it his conception of democracy.

What is different, in 1922, from Mann’s conception of democracy in the *Betrachtungen*, is the fact that democracy is connected to a state in the form of the republic, which is “undoubtedly the highest stage of humanity [*des Menschlichen*]!”²⁰ It is because of the state that the unique individual is able to be

part of a collective humanity, without being repressed by this collective. There are strong Aristotelian and Hegelian traces in this conception. For Aristotle, it is because of the law of the state that mankind is able to transcend nature and become autonomous, therefore the state is the highest stage of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].²¹

The concept of republic, however, remains ambiguous. First of all, the concept is strongly connected to the state, to rule of law, and, as I will argue later, to the Weimar Republic. Nevertheless, Mann also sees republic as the synthesis between the political form of state and, cultural, or intellectual [*geistigen*] life. This synthesis is important, because it represents the adequate balance between power [*Macht*] and spirit [*Geist*]; the German Empire under e.g. Bismarck was unbalanced in favor of power, hence the spiritual and cultural side of Germany was repressed. The (Weimar) Republic, then, held the promise for a German form of politics as the synthesis between power [*Macht*] and spirit [*Geistig*], as the following quotation shows:²²

“[T]he human idea that encompasses the inner individual and the state, the aristocratic and the social [...], the union of freedom and equality, the ‘genuine harmony,’ or in a word: the republic.”²³

Republic signifies the synthesis between freedom and equality, between the spiritual and the political side of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Republic refers to a middle ground²⁴ between “... aesthetic isolationism and a degrading downfall of the individual into the general.”²⁵ What is important here, is the fact that the cultural and political side of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] become unified in national, that is German cultural, life.

Mann derives his conception of republic from both Walt Whitman and Novalis. Republic, as that form of state which is not a monarchy, creates the possibility of fraternity or communion. Whitman pours this into ideas of manly friendship or the “manly love of comrades.”²⁶ Republic represents this comradeship, together with ideas of virility and vitality, better than monarchy, which is initially focused on sickness and sympathy towards death. Although the argumentation is aesthetic and not embedded in political theory, the plea for

fraternity connects the republic lecture to the *Betrachtungen*, for fraternity over all differences under formal preservation of these differences is what I designated as Mann's conception of democracy in the *Betrachtungen*.

Nevertheless, it is not quite clear whether Mann's conception of republic corresponds to a republican form of state such as the Weimar republic, or to an abstract, mythical, idea. According to Opitz in *Literatur ist demokratisch*, the plea for the republic has nothing to do with the Weimar Republic, constitutional law or politics, rather it is a mythological republic which Mann defends. The mythological character resides, first of all, in the aesthetic argumentation. Furthermore, Opitz claims that republic is both a-temporal and unpolitical. It does not refer to a constitution, rather it is an "archetype of the eternal idea of humanity."²⁷

What is problematic about Opitz's interpretation is the fact that it, at the very least, denies that there is any connection to the institutional and political expression of republic, i.e. the Weimar Republic, in Mann's lecture. Republic, then, becomes almost synonymous to the conception of democracy, which also relies on the idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], and which in the *Betrachtungen* was unpolitical. I argue, however, that republic is not solely mythological or theoretical, but also refers to the explicit legal form of the Weimar Republic. Republic brings the political domain into Mann's formerly unpolitical conception of democracy. Democracy, in the form of the (Weimar) Republic, incorporates both the political and the cultural. This synthesis, then, is what Mann himself demonstrates by proclaiming himself, as an artist, an advocate of the Weimar Republic. The following quotation illustrates this point:

"We are paying homage to its explicit legal form, whose meaning and aim we have defined as the unification of political and national life, insofar as we flex our still unaccustomed tongues to the cry: 'Long live the Republic'!"²⁸

Opitz discards this explicit embracement as merely a rhetorical trick to persuade the youth to support the republic, while others, such as Zimmermann and Fechner, perceive this quotation as Mann's embracement of the Weimar Republic.²⁹ Pace

Opitz, I think that Mann's embracement is not a rhetorical trick, but a political proclamation.

What triggered the lecture in the first place and what explains the necessity of such proclamation, was the tense political climate in Germany at the beginning of the 1920s, which culminated in the murder of Walther Rathenau in 1922.³⁰ The murder was inspired by the far-right ideology of the *Konservative Revolution*, the ideology Mann had shared in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. The Republic lecture, for one thing, was meant to distance himself from this ideology, which he named "obscurantist."³¹ To do so, he embraced the Weimar Republic, which was heavily opposed by the far-right. Even when his argument for the republic remains aesthetic Mann politically stands on the side of the Weimar Republic.

This proclamation indicates his new position as an artist in the political domain. Rather than remaining on the sideline as an ironical-aesthete, an artist who by means of irony indirectly critiques society, Mann jumps into the political arena. This jump mirrors his theoretical conception of "republic" as the synthesis between state and culture, or between politics and aesthetics: by means of the republic, the political domain enters the formerly unpolitical idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] or democracy. Humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] is no longer only spiritual [*geistig*] and hence unpolitical, rather the political is fundamental in preserving humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Mann expresses this by positioning himself politically, thereby demonstrating the synthesis between the political and art.

The conception of republic is ultimately bound to the beginning of the Weimar Republic. If initially the most important political opposition was between monarchy and republic, later this opposition is replaced by the opposition between democracy and national socialism, hence the conception of republic becomes less important for Mann's conception of democracy.

Social democracy

In the 1930s, Mann adds the adjective social to his conception of democracy. He first uses the term social democracy in his confession to socialism in 1933.³² The conception of social democracy, however, does not coincide with the socio-political

ideology which in liberal democracies is often represented by the social democrats such as Labour in the UK, the SDAP (now PvdA) in the Netherlands, or the SPD in Germany. Rather it is a pleonasm in Mann's terminology, for his conception of democracy is already inherently social in its focus on humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].

In this article, I follow Zimmermann's suggestion to replace the adjective social by cultural to emphasize the importance of cultural elevation by means of elevation [*Bildung*] for Mann's conception of democracy.³³ Mann was suspicious of the rise of the people in the developing (mass) democracy in Germany. However, he did not oppose the rise of the people as such, rather he feared irritational and barbaric mob rule. In order to prevent the people from becoming mob – democracy, as a form of government, from becoming a demagogy – the people should be culturally educated and elevated. Mann is not exceptional in this regard, Aristotle already expressed a fear for democracy as a form of mob rule.³⁴

Democracy, according to Mann, wishes to bring culture into the people, thereby elevating the people by means of cultural participation and education [*Bildung*] in the name of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Education, here, opposes the idea of propaganda which the national socialists use to stultify the people. Mann described democracy as precisely "... that form of state which wishes to elevate and educate the people."³⁵

The focus on cultural education and elevation seems to have a strong aristocratic or elitist character. In 'Vom kommenden Sieg der Demokratie,' however, Mann explicitly states that although his idea of democracy seems aristocratic, this does not necessarily mean that it opposes democracy. The aristocratic tendency, he states, is due to the wish to elevate the people by means of cultural education, which indeed occurs by means of intellectual and spiritual distinction. This elevation is, however, nothing other than a democratic elevation, since its aim is to elevate the people in a general sense and hence does not oppose democracy.

It remains ambiguous whether democracy as cultural elevation [*Bildung*] is solely an intellectual concept, or rather also a "political" concept, a concept related to the question of the right communal order. One is urged to believe that democracy

is certainly political, since, as argued before, it is connected to a state. The democratic character of this state, however, does not so much depend on political institutions or structures, but rather on the intellectual domain, that is, education. Therefore, not only does the aristocratic tendency not necessarily oppose the democratic character of the state, it is, on the contrary, precisely the aristocratic character which forms the *democratic* character by means of education.

Moreover, because democracy is focused on cultural elevation [*Bildung*], that is, intellect, there is also room for a critical, negative, analysis of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. In short, education can be anti-humane when it undermines the unconditional dignity of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Mann here stumbles upon a paradox of democracy, namely: should democracy suppress antidemocratic voices, or, should democracy incorporate what wishes to destroy it? His answer to this question is unambiguous in ‘Vom kommenden Sieg der Demokratie:’

“What is needed is a humanity strong in will and firm in the determination to preserve itself. Freedom must discover its virility. It must learn to walk in armour and to defend itself against its deadly enemies.”³⁶

The opposition between national socialism and democracy forces democracy into a less tolerant position, in other words, freedom should not be unrestricted.

After World War II, Mann’s conception of democracy no longer opposes national socialism, but rather totalitarian ideas in general. Even democratic states such as the USA and the FRG are moving in the direction of totalitarianism, because they are suppressing communist and liberal ideas. Mann perceives such repression as a rigid extension of the political into the domain of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Since Mann had been communist friendly during World War II, he was perceived as a highly suspicious intellectual in the USA. Eventually, he felt forced to leave the tense political climate in the USA and moved back to Europe.

His plea for a cultural democracy, a democracy which is meant to serve humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] in both a cultural and political sense, no longer resonated with either the Western or the Socialist block at the beginning of the Cold

War. As Sontheimer describes in *Thomas Mann und die Deutschen*, he fell “between the stools.”³⁷

Several questions arise in the discussion of Mann’s conception of democracy. First of all, Mann establishes an explicit connection between democracy and humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Democracy is, so to speak, the political expression of humanity. Consequently, democracy is treated as a form of cultural participation while respecting and formally preserving individual differences. Democracy should be the recognition of a unique humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] in every individual, thereby creating a sense of fraternity. Under the influence of the political climate, Mann criticizes and adjusts his conception of democracy in its relation to equality (elitist or aristocratic character of democracy) and freedom (plea for a militant and less tolerant democracy), while holding on to the core idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].

Especially the aristocratic character is of importance for this research, since the connection between cultural elevation and the artist is crucial to understand Mann’s own position as an artist. Furthermore, democracy is inherently political, meaning that cultural participation and fraternity are to be achieved in a state. The form of rule, however, is secondary to the material content of the state. Likewise, general elections or other practices which are generally perceived as democratic nowadays, were not Mann’s primary interest.

When compared to the preliminary concept of democracy introduced in this article, several things come to mind. First of all, the preliminary concept of democracy is not bound to the domain of state politics. Rather, decision making procedures apply to many different groups which might be called democratic, such as: states, global organizations, families, and other social organizations. Mann’s conception, however, does belong to the political entity of the state, for it is in the state alone that there can be a synthesis between freedom and equality on the one hand, and culture and national life on the other hand.

Furthermore, Mann holds on to a distinction between the social and the political domain. Social phenomena such as art or the family, should remain

unpolitical in Mann's perspective. That does not mean that art and the family are not connected to humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], but rather that they have nothing to do with the political expression of humanity by means of democracy. Politics in the Mannian sense refers to "the action related to the state, which is defined by the question of the right communal order."³⁸ Politics, in the form of a demand for the right communal order, would cease to exist in the ideal order, which would be the true synthesis of freedom and equality; Mann's cultural democracy aspires to this ideal. This idea of politics can, therefore, be characterized as antipolitical in its aspiration to abolish the political as such. This does, however, not mean that the political is not important, on the contrary, cultural democracy as the political expression of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] is fundamental for Mann's concept of humanity. Nevertheless, the political always remains suspicious, because it tends to control all domains of life, subjecting them to the political rather than humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].

Moreover, whereas equality in the instrumental concept of democracy corresponds to the idea that everyone has a say in political decisions that affect them, equality for Mann first of all refers to the shared notion of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. We are equal, in so far that we all share our humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. A formal or institutional expression of equality in for example voting rights, or having a say is far from equality as Mann interprets it. If anything, his plea for cultural elevation [*Bildung*], which is part of his conception of democracy, is meant as a remedy against barbaric and irrational mob rule.

Democracy for Mann is inherently aristocratic in the sense that he believes that the state should be ruled by those who are most qualified for it.³⁹ Such an elite is constituted by means of cultural elevation and education [*Bildung und Erziehung*] regardless of social background. This opposes the preliminary concept of democracy, for the only criterion for exemption of participation is based on whether one is affected by the decision and whether this decision is binding for the participant.

To summarize, Mann's conception of democracy is political despite its appearance. Democracy is related to a form of state which serves humanity

[*Menschlichkeit*] through the unification of freedom and equality on the one hand, and culture and national life on the other hand. The political domain, however, has an inherent tendency to control the social domain to which, among other things, art belongs. To combat this tendency, democracy should elevate the people culturally by means of education. Cultural education and consequently participation safeguards democracy from becoming a barbaric demagogy, at the same time, however, it makes democracy inherently elitist or aristocratic. It is precisely this aristocratic tendency which, I think, connects Mann's position and practice as an artist to his concept of democracy, as is discussed below.

Mann's controversial political development

Mann's meandering conception of democracy is often the starting point for discussion on his political ideas, as Volkmar Hansen writes in *Thomas Mann*.⁴⁰ There are critics such as Anne Teichler and Georg Lukács, who believe that Mann changed his ideas on democracy, which is most apparent in the opposition between the antidemocratic *Betrachtungen* and the democracy-friendly republic lecture.⁴¹ On the other hand, there are critics such as Martin Flinker and Kurt Sontheimer, who perceive a continuity in thought regarding Mann's political ideas, stating that Mann's *Wandel* is only a reformulation of ideas which he, albeit under different circumstances, had already presented in the *Betrachtungen*. Flinker even states that the *Betrachtungen* are a "beautiful plea for democracy."⁴²

Others, such as Joachim Fest and Hans Wisskirchen argue that Mann's later essays on democracy still represent the very same conservative ideas of the *Betrachtungen* and that there is no development or conversion to be found at all.⁴³ There are also contrasting interpretations of Mann's political *Wandel*. Wilfried Opitz argues that Mann held liberal beliefs before he wrote the *Betrachtungen*, and that the "turn to the republic" was merely a return to these earlier beliefs. Mann's war writings, then, are only an unwelcome anomaly and are classified as a "fall from grace".⁴⁴ Hermann Kurzke describes Mann's development not so much as *Wandel*, but rather as a continuous tension between aesthetic conservatism and the political, or in different words, love and duty.⁴⁵

Lastly, Frank Fechner argues that Mann's *Wandel* might not be as profound when interpreted in a legal sense.⁴⁶ Mann's perception of democracy in the *Betrachtungen* did not coincide with democracy as practiced in the Weimar Republic, which means that the embracement of the republic was not at all shocking since his reservations did not apply to it in the first place. To characterize Mann's relation to democracy as it developed after 1922, Fechner makes use of the expression "*Dauer im Wechsel*."⁴⁷ Although Mann's allegiance to particular forms of state changed – think of the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, and the USA; monarchy, republic, and democracy –, this does not imply radical changes. As opposed to legal methodology, Mann believed that the material content of a state is more important than the formal exercise of power. In my opinion, the development of Mann's political ideas can indeed, as Fechner suggested, be summarized as a "*Dauer im Wechsel*," as is already expressed in the hypothesis of this article.

The diversity of interpretations of Mann's *Wandel* reflects the multitude of interpretations of his idea of democracy. At one point, however, these interpretations are in accordance with each other: one should not distinguish between Mann's literary works and his essayistic or political works. Just after World War II, this distinction caused great differences in the perception of Mann in the Western as well as the Socialist Block.⁴⁸ Where the Western Block focused on Mann's literary works and consequently disregarded his political essays as dilettantism and anomalies, the Socialist Block embraced the essayistic works due to their positive stance regarding communism.

Mann himself had helped to create this divergence in perception, as Dieter Adolphs describes in 'Thomas Mann's Einflußnahme auf die Rezeption seiner Werke in Amerika.'⁴⁹ Adolphs elaborates on how Mann opposed an English translation of *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* and other political essays before 'Von deutscher Republik,' in order to present himself as being and always having been a democrat. Mann did not want to be reminded of his earlier conservative beliefs, and therefore references to the *Betrachtungen* are excluded from several English translations of his essays. Furthermore, Mann himself strongly emphasized

the importance of his novels in America, specifically *Der Zauberberg* and later *Doktor Faustus*, and did not lay emphasis on his essays.

Nevertheless, most scholars make use of both the essayistic and the literary works of Mann, whereby they explicitly connect his artistry to his role as intellectual. This connection is, in my opinion, indeed fundamental for Mann's conception of democracy. Art and the political are two distinct branches which together constitute the idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. I think that Mann's *Wandel* cannot so much be perceived in his idea of democracy, but rather in his changing ideas about the relation between art and the political. In order to show these changing relations, the next part hermeneutically examines Mann's conceptions of art, the political, and humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].

2. Democracy in relation to art, the political, and humanity **[*Menschlichkeit*]**

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact meaning of Mann's conceptions of democracy, art, and humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Can democracy be equaled to humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], or is it rather political, artistic, or both? Mann himself is ambiguous in this regard, which gives rise to opposing and ambiguous interpretations of his idea of democracy in the secondary literature. The ambiguity can partly be explained by his diverging approaches such as: equating democracy to e.g. humanity or republic; the formation of opposing concepts e.g. democracy and monarchy, democracy and people's state [*Volksstaat*], or democracy and fascism; the addition of adjectives, e.g. social or militant democracy. With these diverging approaches Mann tried to grasp democracy in different political and historical contexts. In order to clarify Mann's conceptions of democracy, art, and humanity, I take a closer look at three quotations from 'Von deutscher Republik' where three different conceptions of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] are given.

*Humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] is democracy*

The first conception of humanity is the equation of democracy and humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], which Mann proclaims in 'Von deutscher Republik':

“I proclaimed the unity of humanity and democracy; when I recognized that humanity is but a classicizing and old-fashioned term for democracy...”⁵⁰

Inspired by the “democratic” poet Walt Whitman, Mann equates democracy to humanity. Whitman showed him the importance of a “democratic pathos;” which means that the democratic state must be embraced in the heart of the people. Merely rational arguments in favor of democracy, in this instance the Weimar Republic, are not enough to truly establish a democratic form of state. This is especially important for Germany, since the “German soul” heavily opposes politics and power.⁵¹

Whitman’s *Democratic Vistas* and poems, such as: ‘For you O Democracy’ and ‘I Sing the Body Electric’ showed Mann that it is love – in the context of Whitman this refers to homoeroticism – which is necessary to build a democratic humane state.⁵² Only when one loves the state as a destiny, when one truly loves and embraces the state as a destiny [*Amor Fati*],⁵³ then this state would be humane, hence democratic. The idea of (homoerotic) love as “*amor fati*” is a recurring theme in Mann’s early novels, e.g. *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Der Zauberberg*. In *Der Tod in Venedig* the protagonist, Gustav von Aschenbach, chooses to follow his love for Tadzio, thereby embracing love and vitality through his oncoming demise in the cholera-plagued city of Venice.⁵⁴ In 1922, the Germans must make a similar choice to embrace and love the Weimar Republic which is, in the end, their fate [*Schicksal*]. Ultimately, it is Mann’s aim to persuade his (youthful) listeners to, indeed, embrace the Weimar Republic.

The equation of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] with democracy can be interpreted as the political expression of humanity. As stated above, through Whitman’s works Mann perceives the fundamental connection between the state and humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Consequently, the political enters Mann’s conception of humanity, because Mann politically defends the concretely existing Weimar Republic and not a mythical or metaphorical republic. The precise relation between democracy and republic, however, remains ambiguous. In later lectures,

republic is replaced by the then prevalent political forms such as democracy. However, the concept of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] remains underdefined here, hence the relation between democracy and humanity is not yet clear.

Humanity as a moral category

The second quotation defines humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] as a higher norm:

“What, then, is humanity? [...] [I]t is something inmost and more essential; to use Novalis’s words, it is ‘the higher meaning of our planet, the star that connects this individual to the world above, that he turns up toward the sky’.”⁵⁵

Humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] refers to a higher meaning and signifies the connection between the individual and a universal or religious idea of humanity. Mann poses this idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] to the idea of humankind [*Menschheit*] as the “sum of all people now living or that of all who ever lived or will live.”⁵⁶ Humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] means something more than merely being human, it refers to higher religious or moral values which define our humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] and are present in e.g. Novalis’s poetry.

Opitz interprets Mann’s idea of humanity by distinguishing between two interpretations of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]: humanity in the tradition of German classical literature, where it is connected to an educational ideal [*Bildungsideal*] and Humanism as it developed in the era of the Renaissance.⁵⁷ Mann tries to stay away from a universal notion of Humanism, while at the same time detaching humanity from the specifically German tradition. The latter had been contaminated by the radical ideology of the *Konservative Revolution* and the chauvinistic and patriotic excesses of World War I – excesses in which Mann undoubtedly took part himself. This ultimately forces him to develop a qualitative notion of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].

Humanity as an aesthetic middle-ground

In order to mobilize the idea of humanity in praise and defense of the Weimar Republic, Mann uses an aesthetic argumentation to finally arrive at the idea of humanity as a synthesis, a German middle-ground. This is the third conception of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] in ‘Von deutscher Republik:’

“[H]umanity. That term represents a German middle-ground, the human-and-beautiful which our best intellectuals have dreamed of, mediating between aesthetic isolationism and a degrading downfall of the individual into the general; between mysticism and ethics, inwardness and the state; between a deathly negation of ethics and civic values and the all-too-easy ethics of philistine rationalism.”⁵⁸

In this quotation, one can see an early formulation of Mann’s later idea that both the political, the problem surrounding the individual and the general, and the domain of art, are part of a single question of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Humanity is a synthesis between the individual and the general, and signifies the delicate balance between the political and art. Moreover, he stresses the importance of the intellectual for the idea of humanity. Intellect and spirit are connected to art and “our best intellectuals” should strive for humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] in an aesthetic sense. This also means that an artist should not solely occupy himself with art, that is, *l’art pour l’art*. An artist who is aesthetically involved with humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] already stands in relation to the political, as I will demonstrate later.

In these three quotations, Mann describes the concept of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] in three ways, namely, politically (humanity is democracy), morally (humanity is the higher meaning of our stars and planet), and aesthetically (humanity is the middle ground between aesthetic isolation and the general). The distinction between these three expressions, in my opinion, explains not only Mann’s ambiguous use of conceptions, but also makes it possible to define the relation between democracy and humanity. Democracy cannot be entirely equaled

to humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], for democracy is only a political expression of humanity, whereas humanity itself is a moral category.

I claim that this distinction is often overlooked in the existing secondary literature on Mann's conception of democracy. Scholars often do not explicitly define their conception of democracy or humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], leaving it open for interpretation or simply repeating Mann's equation of democracy with humanity.

Teichler, for example, seeks to answer the question whether Thomas Mann was a democratic writer. However, what "democratic" means is left implicit and must be extrapolated from statements such as:

"Whereas a democrat was called upon to discuss his political opinion and thus opening it to the public in writing, the conservative poet remained imprisoned in his artistic sphere."⁵⁹

A democrat should discuss his or her political opinion in public, whereas a conservative poet remains solely in the artistic domain. Later, Teichler connects the distinction between the public political sphere and the private artistic sphere to the distinction between a writer and a poet, whereas "democrat" only designates a person who supports a democratic regime. Furthermore, the relation between Mann's conception of democracy and Teichler's implicit conception is not elaborated upon. This ultimately leads to a mishmash of concepts and an unsatisfying answer to the question whether Mann was a democratic writer or not.

Teichler is not an exception in this respect. Others, such as Flinker and Sontheimer, also lack a rigorous definition of democracy, making it nearly impossible to distinguish between Mann's conception, and implicit associations with democracy such as general elections, a particular form of state, etc. Opitz and Fechner take a different approach. At the beginning of his research, Opitz gives the following definition of democracy: "... the democratic worth of a community is determined by the measure of individual autonomy of the people and the chance of their cooperation in the state."⁶⁰ Although the title of Opitz work, *Literatur ist*

demokratisch, does refer to one of Mann's conceptions of democracy, Opitz never indicates any relation between his definition and any of Mann's conceptions.

The legal scholar Fechner adopts a different approach. His research is entirely devoted to contextualizing Mann's political ideas, relating nearly all statements about democracy or forms of state to various legal accounts of democracy. This legal account, however, does neither justice to democracy nor to Mann's conception of it. For, as Fechner himself rightly states:

"Whereas the attitude towards forms of state undoubtedly changed, there are certain core ideas on the state which Mann continuously held. Contrary to legal methodology, these are not bound to any particular terminology. Primary for Mann was the material content of a state, secondary the form of government, the formal exercise of power."⁶¹

Hence, it is insufficient to merely compare Mann's conceptions of democracy to legal definitions of democracy. In my opinion, the proposed distinction between the moral category of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], and the political or aesthetic expression of this category, does justice to both democracy and to Mann's conception of it. To support this claim, the relation between the political, in the form of democracy, and aesthetics, in the person of the artist, are elaborated upon by referring to several lectures of Thomas Mann. For if anything marks the significance of Mann's conception of democracy, it is the fact that Mann as an artist felt the unmistakable moral obligation to engage himself in the political domain.

2.1 The artist and the political

This artistic moral obligation was already present in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. In the preface, Mann designates these *Betrachtungen* as considerations by an artist who is plagued by a penetrating irritability and nervousness in the face of the prevailing "*Zeitgeist*." These circumstances created the situation in which he, as an artist, felt the obligation to share his intellectual ideas with a larger audience. Mann describes this obligation as a form of artistic

necessity [*Not*] which was more compelling than continuing to work on the manuscript of *Der Zauberberg*.

However, what Mann actually did in the *Betrachtungen* was, according to the self-proclaimed Unpolitical, solely artistic or intellectual. Although he is right to state that the *Betrachtungen* are unpolitical according to the conception of “political” proposed in that work, the *Betrachtungen* can also be perceived as political when taking Mann’s later conception of the political into account. For, if anything, the *Betrachtungen* do deal with the question of the right communal order by denouncing that order, democracy, which is definitely not the right one. Furthermore, to proclaim oneself “unpolitical” is in itself a political act. Mann acknowledges this ambiguity, however, he still holds on to the possibility of being unpolitical.⁶²

Twenty years after the *Betrachtungen*, in ‘Vom kommenden Sieg der Demokratie,’ Mann regrets his former unpolitical attitude and the fact that he did not yet acknowledge the importance of both the political and art for the question of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].⁶³ Nevertheless, his artistic motivation in the *Betrachtungen* serves as an archetype to designate his further essays, which Sontheimer describes as contributions of an intellectual [*Geistiger*]:

“The intellectual could no longer be satisfied with a sole dedication to art, he had to, in times of spiritual and intellectual need, face the pressing questions and take a stand. This intellectual task reached into the political domain and the intellectual [...] endorsed this task on a personal level, throughout his whole life. Thomas Mann did so in an exemplary fashion.”⁶⁴

It is important to once again emphasize the fact that the intellectual obligation reached into the political domain. Although Mann’s essays often concern literature and aesthetics, as is also the case for the *Betrachtungen* and the republic lecture, they are also strongly political, since they reflect on the question about the right form of community.

Furthermore, this political character also refers to the simple fact that Mann deliberately chose the form of an essay to express his ideas. The essay, as opposed to the novel, has an inherently public character and already encompasses an idea about the relation between art on the one hand, and the political on the other. This does not imply that there is an intrinsic relation between the essay, art, and the political, or that an essayist is necessarily political or artistic. The opposite might be the case, as Mann demonstrated in the *Betrachtungen*, where he thoroughly defends the claim that art is and should be unpolitical according to his conception of the political.

Moreover, the fact that Mann did not merely publish his essays, but on numerous occasions also orally presented his essays in lecture form, expresses the political character of these essays. Hence, it seems evident that Mann presupposes a relation between art and the political in the form of an artistic obligation to address socio-political issues. However, this presupposition is more complicated and perhaps even paradoxical. To show this, I will elaborate on Mann's 1952 essay: 'Der Künstler und die Gesellschaft,'⁶⁵ in which he problematizes the relation between art, the political, and morality, and subsequently applies this ambiguous relation to his own career as an artist and intellectual.

The artist and society

In that essay, Mann focusses on the role of critique in art. Art is moral insofar as it critiques society. This characteristic is, however, problematic, for art is first of all aesthetic instead of moral. The artist should improve the world by confirming the world in image, thought, and form; the artist "shows" the world so to speak. This is what Mann designates as spirit [*Geist*]. From this observation, Mann extrapolates a certain description of the relation between art and morality, to speak with Goethe: "It is quite possible that a work of art has moral consequences, but to demand moral intentions and purpose from the artist, is to spoil his craft."⁶⁶ This description does not only demonstrate, according to Mann, a problematic aspect of totalitarianism – namely, the fact that the political domain influences and even controls the sphere of art –, but also that art in itself should not aim for moral consequences.

Nevertheless, Mann does acknowledge the fact that good art most often has moral consequences. The prime example of this, according to Mann, is Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, in which morality, aesthetics, and the political together show and constitute the question of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. In good literature, the artist crosses the boundary of art and aesthetics by causing moral and political consequences. The artist who all too bluntly propagates humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], however, runs the risk of moralizing and consequently, of losing himself in banality.

Hence, the artist is torn between his profession and the way of practicing it. Ultimately, Mann states that it is precisely this paradox which possesses a high intellectual [*geistiges*] potential and which safeguards the writer from falling into mere banality. In the case of Mann's artistry, he specifically mentions his own *Buddenbrooks* as a work of art which unintentionally had socio-political and moral consequences. However, when thinking of the reconciliation of art and politics in the name of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], *Doktor Faustus* and *Der Zauberberg* are more telling examples.⁶⁷

The writer's paradox gets even more pressing when one only takes Mann's essayistic works into account. The hesitant, but clearly present, political allusions in 'Von deutscher Republik' might be hidden behind a veil of aesthetics, but in later essays he is upfront discussing socio-political issues. In 'Deutsche Ansprache: Ein Appell an die Vernunft,' Mann seems to have put aside his unpolitical and aesthetic attitude and he makes explicit connections between the political circumstances of the 1920s and his idea of a transcending German soul.⁶⁸ The fact that this lecture was brutally disturbed by a gang of SA-men clearly illustrates the political significance of the lecture.

During World War II, Mann's essays and lectures openly condemned Nazism, which made him into the representative of the Germans in exile par excellence. He expressed his disgust of Nazism in, among other things, fifty-five radio speeches for the BBC which were broadcasted under the title: 'Deutsche Hörer!' Again, Mann engaged in these politically themed expressions out of a sense of artistic necessity [*Not*].⁶⁹ In 'Der Künstler und die Gesellschaft,' Mann writes

that he is well aware of the fact that his political role in the 1930s and 40s is, indeed, somewhat odd or even funny. However, the political circumstances – particularly Nazism – forced him to become more and more politically engaged, specifically, it drove him to the left side of the political spectrum. Nazism, ultimately, made him into a kind of *Wanderredner* of democracy.⁷⁰

The democratic writer

The narrative of artistic necessity can be complemented, I think, by referring to Mann's conception of democracy. The role he adapted as intellectual is in accordance with his conception of democracy. To demonstrate this, I engage in an analysis of several statements by Mann on the role of the artist. In the following letter, the relation between the artist and the people, the public, is described:

“[T]hat [my silence] would enable me to preserve something dear to my heart – the contact with my public within Germany. [...] They are – these books of mine – the product of a mutually nourishing bond between nation and author, and depend on conditions which I myself have helped to create in Germany. Such bonds as these are delicate and of high importance; they ought not to be rudely sundered by politics.”⁷¹

The translation by Agnes E. Meyer uses the word “nourishing” to characterize the relation between the artist and the public. However, to my mind, educational is more fitting, not only because the original German mentions “*erzieherischen*,” but also since cultural education and elevation is what Mann seeks in his art. The sentence would then be: “... the product of a mutually *educational* bond between nation and author...” By designating the relation between the artist and the public as educational, and by defining democracy as that form of state which wishes to elevate the people by means of cultural education [*Bildung*], it seems logical to qualify Mann as a democratic writer.

The following citation from Mann's essay ‘Schicksal und Aufgabe’ explicitly shows the connection between the artist and democracy:

“I understand democracy not so much as a demand for equality from below, but as goodness, justice and empathy from above. I do not consider it democratic when Mr. Smith or Little Mr. Johnson taps Beethoven on his shoulder and cries out: ‘How are you old man!’ That is not democracy, but tactlessness and a lack of a sense of distance. But when Beethoven sings: ‘Be embraced, millions, this kiss is for the whole world!’, that is democracy. For he could have said, ‘I am a great genius and something special, while people are mob; I am much too delicate to embrace them.’ Instead, he calls them all his brothers and the children of a father in the heavens whose son he is as well. That is democracy in its highest form.”⁷²

Democracy in its highest form is found in the genius’s kiss and embrace of the mass. Here, democracy does not refer to a radical form of equality, but rather to a specific form of equality since we all share our humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Furthermore, equality should leave the possibility of genius intact, in other words, it should respect and protect the unique individuality, in this quotation embodied by Beethoven. The artist must embrace the mob, kiss them; the natural way for an artist to shape such an embrace is, of course, through their work: through art. The quotation itself, “Seid umschlungen Millionen,” which is a reference to Schiller’s ode, ‘An die Freude,’ in Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*, already defines the nature of the embrace as aesthetic.

In the case of Mann, his novels and essays can be perceived as such an embrace. An embrace which tries to educate and elevate the people by means of art. Although there certainly is an elitist or aristocratic tendency in this quotation, this does not subvert the notion of equality as argued before. Hence, what Mann shows by means of the genius’s kiss to the world is not an elitist and aristocratic attitude, but a democratic attitude in its highest form.

It is unclear whether the idea of democracy as the genius’s kiss is exclusively reserved for artists, or if it also applies to other public figures such as politicians, labor union leaders, or athletes. For Mann, the democratic quality of the

kiss originates from two specific aspects, namely, the intellectual distinction of the individual, and his or her willingness to share this. Both attributes are not exclusively reserved for artists. Hence, Mann's conception of democracy does not seem to exclude non-artists.

Furthermore, the idea of democracy as the genius's kiss to the world seems to be unrelated to the state. Mann himself is ambiguous in this regard. In 'Vom kommenden Sieg der Demokratie' Mann first gives "democracy a very broad meaning, a much broader one than the merely political sense of this word would suggest."⁷³ Mann connects democracy to the absolute, "the inalienable dignity of mankind."⁷⁴ Furthermore, a literal translation of "*demos*" and "*kratein*" as the rule of the people, comes much closer to rule of the mob, that is, demagoguery and fascism, than to Mann's conception of democracy. However, Mann subsequently defines democracy as "that form of government and of society which is inspired above every other with the feeling and consciousness of the dignity of man."⁷⁵ This dignity is preserved and expressed by cultural elevation and education [*Bildung*], as Mann states later in the same lecture.

Mann's conception of democracy, then, is broader than only an institutional account of democracy since it is related to humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] as a moral category. Nevertheless, as the political expression of humanity, it also applies to a form of state as a means to do justice to humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], which in this case is to be achieved through cultural elevation [*Bildung*].

Conclusion

What, now, can be stated about the presumed transcending conception of democracy in Mann's thought? I claim that there is indeed such a conception, nevertheless, there is also a certain development in his ideas to be perceived. The transcending conception, I think, can be summarized by referring to Mann's positive conception of democracy in the *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. There, he described democracy as fraternity over all differences under formal preservation of these differences, or, democracy should be the recognition of a unique individuality, that is, humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], in every individual.⁷⁶

Although Mann explicitly posited this conception as being unpolitical, “before the onset of politics,”⁷⁷ I believe that it is not so much unpolitical, but rather antipolitical. Politics in the Mannian sense is ultimately antipolitical, that is, the purpose of the question of the right communal order is the abolishment of politics altogether. Nevertheless, Mann acknowledges the fact that it is simply impossible to deny the political domain as an artist, something Mann had experienced firsthand by means of his expatriation. In my opinion, the reassessment of politics can already be perceived in ‘Von deutscher Republik,’ where Mann explicitly positions himself in the political arena as an advocate of the concretely existing Weimar Republic.

The importance of the political, then, is what distinguishes Mann’s conception of democracy as fraternity from humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Democracy is the political expression of the moral category of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Although democracy does not refer to a specific form of rule or government, it does refer to the rule of law in the form of a state. On the other hand, Mann’s conception of democracy cannot be reduced to a form of state. As stated before, democracy “... aims at education.”⁷⁸

In Mann’s ideas about the role of art, however, a certain development can be perceived, which is, in turn, strongly connected to his conception of democracy. In the expression of democracy as the “genius’s kiss and embrace of the mob,” Mann explicitly connects the artist to democracy by means of cultural elevation [*Bildung*]. Here, it becomes clear that democracy cannot be reduced to solely a form of state, because it is also connected to cultural education.

What Mann proposes is a certain middle ground. A middle ground between an only formal and institutional account of democracy – which he in the *Betrachtungen* would designate as “voting rights” – and an idea of art which would isolate itself in the aesthetical domain, that is, *l’art pour l’art*. Cultural elevation by means of education, then, is what ultimately connects democracy and art to the idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].

Mann himself embodied such a middle ground by engaging himself in the political domain by means of his work. This attitude, I claim, can be qualified as democratic. By engaging with the political domain, a democratic writer is

distinguished from writers or artist who only engage themselves with aesthetics. A democratic writer, then, is a writer who is endeavoring to educate and elevate his public, the people, by means of art. At the same time, it is problematic for a writer to be democratic, since the writer runs the risk of losing his or her intellectual quality, hence to become banal. Despite these reservations, Mann extensively engaged himself in the political domain, which makes him, in the end, a democratic writer.

NOTES

* Frequently cited works are referred to by the following abbreviations:

- GKFA 1 Mann, Thomas, *Buddenbrooks*, Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe, ed. E. Heftrich and S. Stachorski, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2002).
- GKFA 2 —, *Frühe Erzählungen (1893-1912)*, Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe, ed. T. J. Reed and M. Herwig, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2004).
- GKFA 4 —, *Königliche Hoheit*, Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe, ed. H. Detering, vol. 4 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2004).
- GKFA 5 —, *Der Zauberberg*, Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe, ed. M. Naumann, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2002).
- GKFA 10 —, *Doktor Faustus*, Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe, ed. R. Wimmer, vol. 10 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2007).
- GKFA 13 —, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe, ed. H. Kurzke, vol. 13 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2013).
- Essays I —, *Frühlingssturm*, ed. H. Kurzke and S. Stachorski (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1993).
- Essays II —, *Für das neue Deutschland*, ed. H. Kurzke and S. Stachorski (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1994).
- Essays III —, *Ein Appell an die Vernunft*, ed. H. Kurzke and S. Stachorski (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1993).
- Essays IV —, *Achtung, Europa!*, H. Kurzke and S. Stachorski (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1995).
- Essays V —, *Deutschland und die Deutschen*, ed. H. Kurzke and S. Stachorski (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1996).
- Essays VI —, *Meine Zeit*, ed. H. Kurzke and S. Stachorski (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1997).
- OGR —, “On the German Republic,” trans. Lawrence Rainey, *Modernism/Modernity* 14, no.1 (2007): 109-132.
- CVD —, *The Coming Victory of Democracy*, trans. Agnes E. Meyer (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938).

¹ “Literatur ist demokratisch und zivilisatorisch von Grund aus; richtiger noch: sie ist *dasselbe* wie Demokratie und Zivilisation” (GKFA 13, 45). All translations are author’s, unless specified otherwise.

² Thomas Mann uses two different concepts which are both translated with humanity, namely *Menschlichkeit* and *Menschheit*. To avoid confusion, the original German is added throughout the text.

³ Frank Fechner, *Thomas Mann und die Demokratie* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1990).

⁴ Odile Heynders, *Writers as Public Intellectuals* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 6, specifically mentions Thomas Mann, among others, as a public intellectual *avant la lettre*.

⁵ Hermann Kurzke, *Das Leben als Kunstwerk* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999), 358-360.

⁶ The idea that the essay is inherently public and has a political quality is, e.g., emphasized by writer and essayist Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 110.

⁷ (CVD, 22), “...welche vor jeder anderen inspiriert ist von dem Gefühl und Bewußtsein der Würde des Menschen” (Essays IV, 202).

⁸ Tom Christiano, “Democracy,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2015 (Spring).

⁹ “Man ist nicht ein ‘demokratischer’ oder etwa ein ‘konservativer’ Politiker. Man ist Politiker oder man ist es nicht. Und ist man es, so ist man Demokrat” (GKFA 13, 32).

¹⁰ Heinrich Mann, *Zola* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1962).

¹¹ Specifically the chapters ‘Der Protest’ and ‘Das unliterarische Land’ of the *Betrachtungen* engage with the theme of Germany as an unpolitical country (GKFA 13, 42-52).

¹² (GKFA 5).

¹³ “Demokratie sollte wieder sein, was sie vor Einbruch der Politik in die Gotteswelt einmal war: Brüderlichkeit über allen Unterschieden und unter formaler Wahrung alle Unterschieden. Demokratie – aber ich sage immer dasselbe – sollte Moral sein, nicht Politik; sie sollte Güte sein von Mensch zu Mensch, Güte von Beiden Seiten!” (GKFA 13, 528).

¹⁴ Anne Teichler, *Appell an die Vernunft. Thomas Mann - ein politischer Schriftsteller?* (Kassel: Universität Kassel, 2004), 80, describes how Hübscher, a contemporary of Mann, wrote fierce criticism on a revised edition of *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* in which he claims Mann had tried to downplay the antidemocratic character of the work. For a discussion of the antidemocratic character of the *Betrachtungen* see Nadia Urbinati, “Unpolitical Democracy,” *Political Theory* 38, no. 1 (2010): 65-92.

¹⁵ Kurt Sontheimer, *Thomas Mann und die Deutschen* (München: Langen Müller, 2002), 6.

¹⁶ “Was zum Beispiel die Demokratie in Deutschland betrifft, so glaube ich durchaus an ihre Verwirklichung: darin besteht mein Pessimismus. Denn die Demokratie ist es, und nicht ihre Verwirklichung, an die ich nicht glaube” (GKFA 13, 537-538).

¹⁷ Martin Flinker, *Thomas Mann's Politische Betrachtungen im Lichte der heutigen Zeit* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1959), 20-22.

¹⁸ Although Mann publicly declares his loyalty to the Weimar Republic, critics such as Kurzke, *Leben*, 358-360, Teichler, *Appell*, 66-78, Flinker, *Betrachtungen*, 20-21, and Sontheimer, *Deutschen*, 63-84, interpret this republican turn as a mere continuation of Mann's antidemocratic and antipolitical conservatism as expressed in the *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (GKFA 13). Wilfried Opitz, *Literatur ist demokratisch, Kontinuität und Wandel im politischen Denken Thomas Manns* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 2008), 177-178 on the other hand, interprets 'Von deutscher Republik' as a reconciliation with Mann's early liberal ideas, as expressed in *Königliche Hoheit* (GKFA 4), *Buddenbrooks* (GKFA 1), and *Fiorenza* (GKFA 2).

¹⁹ (OGR, 133). The concepts of "Sinn" and "Gedanken" are derived from Schopenhauer, as Kurzke (Essays II, 343) explains.

²⁰ (OGR, 121), "Die unzweifelhaft höchste Stufe des Menschlichen – der Staat!" (Essays II, 145).

²¹ Opitz, *Literatur*, 227-230, elaborates on Mann's argumentation in 'Von deutscher Republik' and specifically mentions the influence of Aristotle on Novalis and Whitman, who Mann uses to advocate for the republic.

²² Léon Hanssen, "Thomas Mann, de genius van het midden. Conservatisme als geestelijke levensvorm," *Skript Historisch Tijdschrift* 5, no.1: 28.

²³ (OGR, 123), "[D]ie Idee der Humanität, die wir innerlich menschlich und staatlich, aristokratisch und sozial zugleich nannten [...] die Vereinigung von Freiheit und Gleichheit, die 'echte Harmonie' mit einem Worte: die Republik" (Essays II, 149).

²⁴ Germany – here, the German Republic – as the empire of the middle is an influential idea in Mann's thinking which is founded in writings from both Hegel and Dostoevsky. Germany is open for influences from all geographical and ideological directions, making Germany the ideological battlefield of Europe. The intellectual oppositions are annulled in the "soul of Germany." See Hanssen, "Thomas Mann," 26.

²⁵ Paraphrase from 'Von deutscher Republik' (Essays II, 132).

²⁶ For a more precise account of Whitman's "homosexual republic" see Betsy Erkkilä, "Whitman and the Homosexual Republic," in *Walt Whitman: The Centennial Essays*, ed. Ed Folsom, (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1994). Furthermore, the focus on male and female is not so much focused on gender as such, but rather on attributes of femininity and masculinity. Femininity represents the motherly chthonic side of life, while masculinity represents virility. Nevertheless, it is by no means neutral to connect femininity to darkness and witchcraft, and virility to power and the state.

²⁷ Opitz, *Literatur*, 225.

²⁸ (OGR, 132), "Und wir huldigen ihrer positiven Rechtsform, als deren Sinn und Ziel wir die Einheit des politischen und des nationalen Lebens begriffen haben, indem wir unsere noch ungelenten Zungen zu dem Rufe schmeidigen: 'Es lebe die Republik!'" (Essays II, 166).

²⁹ Opitz, *Literatur*, 188. Fechner, *Demokratie*, 308. Rolf Zimmermann, *Ankommen in der Republik. Thomas Mann, Nietzsche und die Demokratie* (Filderstadt: Karl Aber, 2017), 332.

³⁰ Walther Rathenau was minister of foreign affairs in the Weimar Republic. His murder, inspired and executed by the far-right, was an attempt to destabilize the Republic which was meant to lead to a civil war and the downfall of the Republic. In a letter to Ernst Bertram Mann calls the deed a: “heavy shock,” see Manfred Görtemaker, *Thomas Mann und die Politik* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2005), 48-57.

³¹ Mann believes that his *Betrachtungen* delivered weapons – after the murders on Walther Rathenau and Matthias Erzberger the word “weapons” alludes to more than mere ideology – for the far-right in Germany which he calls obscurantist (Essays II, 132).

³² ‘Bekenntnis zum Sozialismus’ (Essays IV, 353-363)

³³ Zimmermann, *Ankommen*, 49.

³⁴ Aristotle was strongly against democracy understood as “rule of the mob.” However, that is not to say that Aristotle necessarily opposed all democratic forms of government. See specifically book six, chapters 1-5 of Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 175-182.

³⁵ Paraphrase from *CVD*, 22.

³⁶ (*CVD*, 72), “Was not tut, ist eine Humanität des Willens und der kämpferischen Entschlossenheit zur Selbsterhaltung. Die Freiheit muß ihre Männlichkeit entdecken, sie muß lernen, im Harnisch zu gehen und sich gegen ihre Todfeinde zu wehren” (Essays IV, 241).

³⁷ Sontheimer, *Deutschen*, 188.

³⁸ “[D]em auf das Gemeinwesen bezogenen Handeln, das von der Frage nach der rechten gemeinschaftlichen Ordnung bestimmt wird” in Sontheimer, *Deutschen*, 6.

³⁹ Fechner, *Demokratie*, 315-326, devotes one chapter to elitist and monocratic elements in democracy, connecting aristocratic elements in Mann’s conception of democracy to a more general discussion on legal democratic theory.

⁴⁰ Volkmar Hansen, *Thomas Mann* (J.B. Metzler: Stuttgart, 1984), 116.

⁴¹ Teichler, *Appell*, 141-150; Georg Lukács, *Thomas Mann* (London: Merlin Press, 1953), 28.

⁴² Flinker, *Betrachtungen*, 127; Sontheimer, *Deutschen*, 62.

⁴³ Joachim Fest, *Die unwissenden Magier. Über Thomas und Heinrich Mann* (Berlin: btb, 1985), 20-25; Hans Wisskirchen, “Zeitgeschichte im Roman. Zu Thomas Manns Zauberberg und Doktor Faustus” *Thomas-Mann-Studien* no. 6, 132-140.

⁴⁴ Opitz, *Literatur*, 261-265.

⁴⁵ Kurzke, *Leben*, 346-365.

⁴⁶ Fechner, *Demokratie*, 296.

⁴⁷ Fechner, *Demokratie*, 297. Uses the expression “*Dauer im Wechsel*” which is the title of one of Goethe’s poems, because Mann was a great admirer of Goethe and wrote about the poet at great length.

⁴⁸ Sontheimer, *Deutschen*, p.83.

⁴⁹ Dieter W. Adolphs, "Thomas Manns Einflußnahme auf die Rezeption seiner Werke in Amerika," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 64, no.3: 560-582.

⁵⁰ (OGR, 121), "[Die] Einerleiheit von Humanität und Demokratie proklamierte; da ich feststellte, das erste sei nur ein klassizistisch altmodischer Name für das Zweite" (Essays II, 145).

⁵¹ Mann understands Germany as the unpolitical realm of spirit [*Geist*], which opposes the concept of power [*Macht*], hence politics as a whole. It is therefore difficult to defend a German form of politics, which Mann tries to do in the republic lecture. See Hanssen, "Thomas Mann", 28.

⁵² Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Complete Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982).

⁵³ *Amor fati* [love of destiny/love of one's destiny] is an important concept in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Mann's ideas have been greatly influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy.

⁵⁴ (GKFA 2).

⁵⁵ (OGR, 127), "[S]ie ist 'höhere Sinn unseres Planeten, der Stern, der dieses Glied mit der oberen Welt verknüpft, das Auge, das er gen Himmel hebt' " (Essays II, 154).

⁵⁶ (OGR, 127).

⁵⁷ Opitz, *Literatur*, 261.

⁵⁸ (OGR, 132), "Humanität: Zwischen ästhetizistischer Vereinzelung und würdelosem Untergange des Individuums im Allgemeinen; zwischen Mystik und Ethik, Innerlichkeit und Staatlichkeit; zwischen todverbundener Verneinung des Ethischen, Bürgerlichen, des Wertes und einer nichts als wasserklar-ethischen Vernunft-philisterei ist sie in Wahrheit die deutsche Mitte, das Schön-Menschliche, wovon unsere Besten träumten" (Essays II, 165-166).

⁵⁹ "Während ein Demokrat dazu berufen war, seine politische Meinung zu diskutieren und somit auch schriftlich in die Öffentlichkeit zu bringen, blieb der konservative Dichter in seiner künstlerischen Sphäre verhaftet," Teichler, *Appell*, 7.

⁶⁰ Opitz, *Literatur*, 12.

⁶¹ "Bei zweifellos wechselnder Haltung zu den Staatsformen sind es gewisse Grundvorstellungen Manns, die er durchgehend von einem Staatswesen hatte. Sie sind, im Widerspruch zu juristischer Methodik, bei ihm nicht an eine bestimmte Begrifflichkeit gebunden. Primär war für Mann der materiale Inhalt eines Staates, sekundär die Staatsform, die formelle Herrschaftsausübung." Fechner, *Demokratie*, 297.

⁶² (GKFA 13, 359, 564).

⁶³ "I must regretfully own that in my younger years I shared the dangerous German habit of thought which regards life and intellect, arts and politics as totally separate worlds. In those days we were all of us inclined to view political and social matters as non-essential that might as well be entrusted to politicians" (CVD, 79).

⁶⁴ “Der geistige Mensch konnte sich nicht länger mit der bloßen Hingabe an die Kunst zufriedengeben, er mußte in der Not der Zeit, die auch eine geistige Notsituation war, sich den bedrängenden Fragen stellen und seinen Standort bekennen. Dieser Auftrag des Geistes reichte ins Politische und der geistige Mensch [...] hat diesen Auftrag fürs Ganze des Lebens gutgeheißen und persönlich ernst genommen. Thomas Mann tat es in exemplarischer Weise.” Sontheimer, *Deutschen*, 151.

⁶⁵ (Essays VI, 222-236; 522-528).

⁶⁶ “Es ist wohl möglich, daß ein Kunstwerk moralische Folgen habe, aber vom Künstler moralische Absichten und Zwecke verlangen, heißt, ihm sein Handwerk verderben” (Essays VI, 223).

⁶⁷ (GKFA 10; 5).

⁶⁸ (Essays III).

⁶⁹ (Essays V, 145-282, 350-449).

⁷⁰ (Essays VI, 233).

⁷¹ (CVD, 92), “[D]as [mein Schweigen] mir ermöglichen wurde, etwas mir herzlich Wichtiges, den Kontakt mit meinem innerdeutschen Publikum aufrecht zu erhalten. [...] Sie sind, diese Bücher, das Produkt einer wechselzeitigen erzieherischen Verbundenheit von Nation und Autor und rechnen mit Voraussetzungen, die ich selber erst in Deutschland habe schaffen helfen. Das sind zarte und hütenswerte Beziehungen, die plump zu zerreißen man der Politik nicht erlauben soll” (Essays IV, 185-186).

⁷² “Ich verstehe Demokratie nicht hauptsächlich als einen Anspruch und ein Sich-gleich-stellen von unten, sondern als Güte, Gerechtigkeit und Sympathie von oben. Ich finde es nicht demokratisch, wenn Mr. Smith oder little Mr. Johnson Beethoven auf die Schulter schlägt und ruft: ‘How are you, old man!’ Das ist nicht Demokratie, sondern Taktlosigkeit und Mangel an Sinn für Distanz. Wenn aber Beethoven singt: ‘Seid umschlungen, Millionen, diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!’, das ist Demokratie. Denn er könnte sagen: ‘Ich bin ein großer Genius und etwas ganz Besonderes, die Menschen aber sind *mob*; ich bin viel zu heikel, sie zu umarmen.’ Statt dessen nennt er sie alle Brüder und Kinder eines Vaters im Himmel, der auch der seine ist. Das ist Demokratie in ihrer höchsten Form.” (Essays, V, 233) in Mark Clark, *Beyond Catastrophe. German Intellectuals and Cultural Renewal After World War II*, trans. Mark Clark (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington, 2006), 88.

⁷³ (CVD, 20).

⁷⁴ (CVD, 20).

⁷⁵ (CVD, 22).

⁷⁶ (GKFA 13, 528).

⁷⁷ “...vor Einbruch der Politik” (GKFA 13, 528).

⁷⁸ (CVD, 30), “...sie ist auf Erziehung aus” (Essays IV, 204).

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Research proposal

1. Title of the research:

The Intellectual and Democracy: Thomas Mann and Menno ter Braak as (Un)Political Democrats.

2. Summary of theme and aim of the project:

Democracy is normatively dominant and is generally perceived as something positive. Yet, longstanding democracies are contested by the rise of populist parties and an increasingly polarized and disrupted public debate. This has led various intellectuals to call for a new engagement. Intellectuals should take a stand in public debate to defend, revitalize, or constructively oppose democracy. However, the political position of the intellectual is not self-evident. The proposed project will reassess the position of the intellectual vis-à-vis the political, democracy, and public debate by critically engaging with the works of Thomas Mann and Menno ter Braak.

Both intellectuals initially positioned themselves as unpolitical or impartial. Nevertheless, they let go of this attitude to defend democracy at a time when democracy was anything but self-evident. Their engagement was an expression of their ongoing struggle with the political and democracy. By taking a stand, they redefined the relation between the intellectual and the political. Through critical assessment of their works and positions as intellectuals, the role of intellectuals in society can be redefined. Therefore, the main question is: what can the works of Thomas Mann and Menno ter Braak tell us about the relation between the intellectual, democracy, and the political?

(199 words)

3. Description of proposed research:

3.1 Research aim

Democracy has gained global popularity and became normatively dominant after World War II (Van der Zweerde 2011, 9). At the same time, democracy is contested by feelings of disappointment, resentment, or even hatred (Mudde and Kaltwasser

2012; Rancière 2007, 2017). To counter these feelings, intellectuals are called upon to involve themselves in public debate in order to deliver constructive opposition or take part in processes of *redemocratization* (Brown 2011; Clark 2006; During 2012; Furedi 2006; Mouffe 2008; Rosanvallon 2008; Solnit 2018; Van Reybrouck 2016).

The relation between democracy and intellectuals, however, is itself problematic. On the one hand, the democratic idea that everyone has a (relatively) equal “say” in political decisions that affect them challenges the intellectual authority of intellectuals (Christiano 2015; Rancière 1991). On the other hand, intellectuals often actively distance themselves from the political domain to preserve an idea of intellectual authority or cultural autonomy (Baert and Booth 2012; Heynders 2016, 12; Urbinati 2010, 2014).

This raises questions concerning the relation between intellectuals and democracy on the one hand, and intellectuals and the political on the other. How to position oneself as an intellectual, academic philosophers included, in relation to democracy? And, what does such a position mean for public debate? The proposed research will reassess the position of the intellectual vis-à-vis democracy and, the position of the intellectual in the political domain.

This reassessment will be executed by critically engaging with the works of two intellectuals, namely: Thomas Mann and Menno ter Braak (Mann 1993-1997, 2002–; Ter Braak 1949-1951, 1980). Despite, or precisely because of their struggle with democracy and the political, they took a stand in public debate and fiercely defended democracy at a time when democracy was anything but self-evident. Both intellectuals let go of their initial “unpolitical” or “impartial” position to praise and defend democracy, thereby redefining the relation between the intellectual and the political.

By critical assessment of their works and positioning in the political domain, the relation between the intellectual and the political can be redefined. Consequently, we can come to a new understanding of the political or democratic role of intellectuals in society. Therefore, the main question is: what can the works

of Thomas Mann and Menno ter Braak tell us about the relation between the intellectual, democracy, and the political?

3.2 Research description.

The concept of the intellectual stems from the Dreyfus affair in France at the end of the nineteenth century. The affair revolved around the Jewish military officer Alfred Dreyfus who was suspected of treason and therefore sentenced to lifelong imprisonment. A group of writers, journalists, artists, and professors intervened in this political matter by publicly proclaiming the innocence of Dreyfus and addressing the antisemitism that strongly influenced his arrest (Baert and Morgan 2017; Baker 2016; Heynders 2016). Nowadays, the adjective “public,” is added to emphasize the fact that intellectuals have to actively “translate” or “popularize” their work to reach an audience outside of their area of expertise (Baert and Booth 2012; Di Leo and Hitchcock, 2016; Heynders 2016, 14).

The political position of the intellectual is not self-evident. Melzer (Melzer, Weinberger and Zinman 2004, 4) defines the intellectual’s position as “detached attachment,” writing that although the intellectual is attached to a general idea of “progress,” he is detached from the political domain as such. Being alienated, then, is essential for the intellectual’s position. Heynders (2016, 3) defines the intellectual’s intervention in public debate as coming from a “sideline position.” However, an intervention already implies that the intellectual takes a stand and thereby positions himself politically (Baert and Booth 2012; Said 1992, 110).

Intellectuals often present themselves as “uninvolved” or “unpolitical,” thereby distancing themselves from the political domain (Couperus 1981; Mann 2002–, vol. 13; Ter Braak 1949-1951, vol.3). Although intellectuals do acknowledge the political character of presenting oneself as “apolitical,” there remains to be a distance between them and the political. Rebecca Solnit, for example, ascribes this distance to her profession as writer, whereas Michel Houellebecq uses a satirical and ironical style to preserve his distance to the political domain (Baker 2016; Chrisafis 2016; Cohen 2009; Cooke 2017; Houellebecq 2016; Solnit 2017, 2018; Weijts 2015).

The presupposition, here, is that an intellectual should be unpolitical in order to critically examine society from his or her intellectual perspective. This impartial or neutral position gives the intellectual a certain authority to speak about a topic which is not necessarily his or her prime interest or specialization (Baert and Booth 2012; Urbinati 2010, 2014).

Yet, intellectuals are often urged to take a stand in public debate. They are called upon to denounce injustice in name of freedom and truth (Kellner 1995, 432), or to defend democracy against a restriction of free speech, or the opposite, against racism and discrimination (Solnit 2018). What, now, is the possible role of the intellectual in public debate (Arendt 1977; Furedi 2006; Urbinati 2014)? Or, how to position oneself as an intellectual in relation to politics on the one hand, and democracy on the other?

The proposed project will examine the relation between the intellectual, democracy, and politics by taking a closer look at two intellectuals who initially declared themselves to be uninvolved in the “vulgar” domain of politics. Either by naming oneself “unpolitical,” Mann’s *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (*Reflections of a non-Political Man*; Mann 2002–, vol.13) Or by declaring oneself “without interest,” Ter Braak’s *Politicus zonder partij* (Politician without Party; Ter Braak 1949-1951, vol.3).

Over the course of their lives, the political circumstances changed in such a way that they felt obliged to speak out on political matters. Their political engagement expresses an ongoing struggle with the political, democracy, and their own “intellectuality.” Despite their reservations about the political and democracy, they took a stand. They positioned themselves in public debate by defending their conceptions of democracy and thereby redefining the relation between the intellectual, democracy, and the political.

What makes Mann and Ter Braak remarkable is that they do not only theoretically discuss their conceptions of politics and democracy, but that they also propagate them in person. For Mann, to be an intellectual ultimately means to be politically engaged in order to culturally educate and elevate the people out of a democratic idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Ter Braak’s conception of being an

intellectual and critic is ultimately aimed at demasking lies and presuppositions, which applies to fascism, but also to “intellectuality” as such.

Critical assessment of Mann’ and Ter Braak’s works and positions as intellectuals can help us to redefine the political or democratic role of the intellectual in society. Subsequently, it can help us to reflect upon our own position as intellectuals in public debate.

Thomas Mann

Thomas Mann stood at the center of public debate from 1918 onwards to his death in 1955. The importance of his public position was strengthened by his support of the Weimar Republic and the awarding of the Nobel Prize for literature in respectively 1922 and 1929. During his exile from Germany in the 1930s and -40s, Mann’s outspoken critique on Nazi Germany made him into one of the most prominent figures of the exiled German intellectuals (Adolphs 2010, 565).

There are three main positions to discern from Mann’s political beliefs (Hansen and Heine 1983; Fest 1985). First, his unpolitical attitude in the period surrounding World War I, which is expressed in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Mann 2002–, vol.13; Mann 2017). The second position is the “republican turn” in 1922. By defending the Weimar Republic, Mann takes a clear political stand and consequently the political becomes part of his conception of “humanity” [*Menschlichkeit*].

In the 1930s Mann’s political beliefs are no longer fixated on the republic, but rather on an idea of “social democracy” or “cultural democracy.” The proposed project will refer to “cultural democracy,” because Mann’s conception is focused on cultural elevation by means of education [*Bildung*], rather than on the social aspect, which is also already presupposed in the conception of “democracy” (Zimmermann 2017). Cultural democracy should educate and elevate the people to prevent the people from becoming mob. Mann’s conception of cultural democracy, then, is strongly aristocratic and antitotalitarian.

Mann scholars are divided on whether Mann changed his political beliefs over time. Teichler (2004, 141-150) and Lukács (1953, 28) state that there is a

difference between the antipolitical and antidemocratic thought in the *Betrachtungen*, and the democrat friendly republic lecture. Fest (1985, 20-25) and Wisskirchen (1986, 132-140) say Mann's conception of "cultural democracy" represents the same conservative ideas proposed in the *Betrachtungen*. Sontheimer (2002, 62) and Flinker (1959, 127) state that Mann's later ideas are only a reformulation of these conservative ideas.

Opitz (2008, 261-265) interprets Mann's "war writings" as an anomaly, and respectively sees traces of liberal ideas before the *Betrachtungen* and a return to these ideas in the 1920s. On the other hand, Zimmermann (2017, 43) devalues the importance of the *Betrachtungen* by stating that the ideas present in that work are premature and are fully developed after 1918. According to Fechner (1990, 296), Mann's political beliefs did not fundamentally change over time when interpreted in a legal sense, because Mann considered the material content of a state more important than the formal exercise of power.

Rather than suggesting a radical change in Mann's political beliefs, the proposed project holds on to the idea of a "*Dauer im Wechsel*," (Fechner 1990, 297). Although Mann's position regarding the political has changed – from unpolitical to politically engaged – his political beliefs remained virtually the same. From 1918 onwards, Mann proposed and defended a conception of democracy which is: antipolitical, aristocratic, and focused on protecting an idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].

The proposed project seeks to connect Mann's position as an intellectual to his conception of democracy. By combining Mann's theoretical conception of democracy and his ideas on the relation between art and politics, to his actual position in public debate, a new interpretation of Thomas Mann as intellectual is provided. The question that pertains to this part on Thomas Mann is: how does Mann's conception of democracy relate to his position as intellectual?

Menno ter Braak

Menno ter Braak was one of the most influential Dutch intellectuals in the interbellum. He published novels and numerous essays on art, aesthetics,

(European) culture, film, and politics. In addition, Ter Braak was a literary editor for the newspaper *Het Vaderland* [The Nation], and co-founder of several organizations, such as: the Dutch *Filmliga* [Film league], literary magazine *Forum*, and *Het comité der waakzaamheid* [the Committee for Vigilance]. After his suicide in 1940, Ter Braak's influence did not fade. In particular, Ter Braak's ideas on politics as expressed in "Het nationaal-socialisme als rancuneleer" (National socialism as the doctrine of rancor) remain influential in the debate on the rise of "New Right" [*Nieuw Rechts*] or the "populist right" (Oudenampsen 2014, 2018, 252-261; Riemen 2010).

Ter Braak's political position developed from "impartial" Nietzschean nihilism to "opportunistic democratic Humanism" (Beekman 1968; Berndsen 2006; Bullhof 2008). The former is characterized by a strong aversion of authority – from poets, artist, and intellectuals alike – and a focus on "personality" or "individuality." The latter, although strongly connected to the political, is characterized by an opportunistic and provisory democratic and humanist characteristic. Because Ter Braak believes that taking a stance is in itself problematic, his position remains to be opportunistic and conditional (Nieuwstadt 1997; Oudvorst 1980).

The first position relies strongly on Ter Braak's early writings, namely: *Het carnaval der burgers* (The burghers' carnival, Ter Braak 1949-1951, 1: 5-160), *Démasqué der schoonheid* (The unmasking of beauty, Ter Braak 1949-1951, 2: 559-646), and *Politicus zonder partij* (Ter Braak 1949-1951, 3: 3-190). The second on "Het nationaal-socialisme als rancuneleer" (Ter Braak 1949-1951, 3: 571-94) and newspaper articles such as "Het verraad der vlaggen" (The treason of the flags, Ter Braak 1949-1951, 4: 652-56).

In addition to Ter Braak's essays, the proposed research also takes his positioning as an intellectual into account (Hanssen 2008a, 2008b). Ter Braak's practice as literary editor and film critic entails a specific attitude which characterizes his political engagement (Beekman 1968). Specifically his essays on film, "Cinema militans" (Ter Braak 1949-1951, 2:433-520), and "De absolute film" (The absolute film, Ter Braak 1949-1951, 2:523-57), are important in this regard. They reflect his "personal" ideas on a subject which was not yet dominated by

conventions in form and style (Bullhof 2008). Hence, his position as a critic is most explicit in those essays.

The proposed project seeks to connect Ter Braak's position as a critic to his political engagement. His initial "anti-intellectuality" and "impartiality" determine his opportunistic and provisional political engagement which one could define as "antipolitical." The question that pertains to this part is: how does Ter Braak's position as intellectual shape his political engagement?

3.3 Methodology

Mann scholars generally do not adequately take his conceptual framework into account, whereas Ter Braak scholars do not connect Ter Braak's position in public debate to his conceptual framework. The former results in a mishmash of conceptions of "democracy" and "humanity" which regularly oppose one another. The latter neglects a fundamental aspect of Ter Braak's political position which results in a one-sided interpretation of his engagement.

The proposed project will combine conceptual, textual, and literary analysis, and will make use of positioning theory (Baert 2012; Baert and Booth 2012; Baert and Morgan 2017). It will pay specific attention to the genre and style both intellectuals use to express their ideas and present themselves to the public (Baumgart 1964; Berndsen 2006). That is on the one hand novels, essays, lectures, and radio speeches, and, on the other hand, polemics, irony, and authority.

The first part is devoted to the relation between Mann's conception of democracy and his position as intellectual. The second part is focused on Ter Braak's position as an anti-intellectual critic and his opportunistic democratic engagement. The third will connect both positions to redefine the relation between the intellectual, democracy, and the political.

Hence, the first two parts aim to critically reevaluate Mann's and Ter Braak's positions as intellectuals. This is executed by means of a joint approach of textual, conceptual, and literary analysis, and by making use of positioning theory to assess how Mann and Ter Braak position themselves in text, lectures and

speeches. The third part aims at creating a new framework to understand the relation between the intellectual, democracy, and the political.

3.4 *Scientific and societal relevance*

The proposed project will provide new perspectives on both Mann’s and Ter Braak’s ambiguous political engagement. By combining conceptual and literary analysis with positioning theory, a more comprehensive theory of both Mann and Ter Braak’s political engagement will be provided. A theory which is not blind for the conceptual framework of both intellectuals, or for their actual positioning in public debate.

Subsequently, this new perspective redefines the relation between the intellectual, democracy, and the political. It can help us, academics, to reimagine our relation to democracy and public debate. The proposed research, then, not only shows the possible role of intellectuals in democracy or public debate, but it displays the consequences and possibilities of actually taking up such a role.

(2500 words)

4. Key words

Intellectual, democracy, Thomas Mann, Menno ter Braak, the political, public debate.

5. Timetable

| Year | Research | Output |
|---------------|--|--|
| Year 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and summarize Thomas Mann’s essayistic and literary works and relevant secondary literature. • Read and summarize relevant texts on the topic of intellectuals and politics. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a draft for the first part on Thomas Mann • Publish article “Thomas Mann: the Genius Democrat.” |
| Year 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and summarize Menno ter Braak’s essayistic works and relevant secondary literature. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a draft for the second part on Menno ter Braak |

| | | |
|---------------|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for additional literature on democracy, politics, and art | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish the first part on Thomas Mann • Organize workshop for non-specialists on Thomas Mann and politics. |
| Year 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and summarize relevant literature on democracy, politics, and art. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish the part on Menno ter Braak. • Rework the second part on Ter Braak into an article. • Publish a piece on Ter Braak in a newspaper or non-academic journal. • Write a draft of the third part on the relation between the public intellectual and the political. |
| Year 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect the project to contemporary public intellectuals and their practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish third part on the public intellectual and the political. • Rework the third part into an article • Revise and synthesize chapters when needed and finish the dissertation. • Present results at a conference. |

6. Summary for non-specialists

We live in a world in which democracy is normatively dominant and is generally perceived as something positive. Even a strict dictatorship such as North Korea claims to be democratic by explicitly including *People's Democratic* in their name. Still, longstanding democracies are challenged by the rise of populist parties and a more and more polarized and disrupted public debate. Over the past years, various intellectuals have warned for the dangers of these challenges and consequently, called for a new form of engagement by intellectuals. They believe that intellectuals should take a stand and defend, revitalize, or constructively oppose democracy.

The relation between intellectuals, democracy, and the political is, however, problematic. First of all, although intellectuals regularly comment on or intervene in political affairs, they often believe they are not politically involved due to the style or genre they use, for example, irony or novels. They believe that it is necessary for an intellectual to be apolitical in order to autonomously judge and critique political affairs. Second, intellectual authority is challenged by the democratic idea that everyone has a (relatively) equal “say” in decisions that affect them. From a democratic perspective, intellectual distinction is no legitimation to have a more important say in political matters. To call for a new form of engagement by intellectuals, then, raises questions concerning the position of the intellectual vis-à-vis democracy and the political. What is the role of intellectuals, academic philosophers included, in public debate?

The proposed research will reassess the democratic or political position of the intellectual by investigating the works of two remarkable intellectuals, namely: Thomas Mann and Menno ter Braak. To define his relation to the political, Mann uses the expression “unpolitical” [*Unpolitischen*], whereas Ter Braak names himself “impartial” [*zonder partij*]. Still, both Mann and Ter Braak eventually let go of their unpolitical or impartial attitude and became politically engaged.

Their engagement is remarkable, because they not only theoretically discuss what it means for an intellectual to be involved in the political domain, they also propagate their ideas in person. For Thomas Mann, to be an intellectual ultimately means to be politically engaged. The political domain is simply “too

important to leave solely in the hands of politicians,” (Mann 1938, 80) he states in his lecture *The Coming Victory of Democracy*. An intellectual should culturally educate and elevate the people out of a democratic idea of humanity [*Menschlichkeit*]. Ter Braak claims it is the duty of an intellectual to demask lies and false presuppositions which blind us for false idols such as fascism.

By assessing the works and position in public debate of Mann and Ter Braak, the relation between the intellectual, democracy, and the political is redefined. The proposed research can help us, intellectuals, to reimagine our position in public debate. Not only will this research show the possibilities of political or democratic engagement, it will also show the actual consequences and practice of such engagement.

(486 words)

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