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ABSTRACT

Over the last decades, curator Nicolas Bourriaud has drawn significant inspiration for his writings on contemporary art from the theories of the Situationist International (SI), an avant-garde group in existence from 1957 until 1972. Mischaracterizing the SI's concepts of the situation, *détournement*, and the *dérive*, Bourriaud claims to update these concepts with concepts of his own: relational aesthetics, *detourage*, and radican aesthetics. This article identifies such misrepresentations and highlights the differences between Bourriaud's paradigms and those of the SI. This contextual restitution also provides an opportunity to examine Bourriaud's general methodology of substituting conceptual formalism for art historical theory. Bourriaud's publications repeatedly claim a historical materialist perspective on aesthetics, only to eventually eliminate this perspective; his use and abuse of Situationist theory is the foundational example for this pattern. More than the artworks showcased in Bourriaud's exhibitions and referenced in his publications, his artistic paradigms describe and delineate his own philosophical sleight of hand.

KEYWORDS

Guy Debord, Nicolas Bourriaud, relational aesthetics, Situationist International,
Walter Benjamin

The Paradigms of Nicolas Bourriaud: Situationists as Vanishing Point

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Bourriaud is back. A much-discussed curator, art critic and formalist theoretician, Nicolas Bourriaud is one of several influential cultural figures who framed the global reception of contemporary art in the late 1990s and early 2000s. After his curatorship at the Tate Modern and a brief administrative stint in the French Ministry of Culture, Bourriaud has most recently assumed the directorship of the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. *L'ange de l'Histoire / The Angel of History* is his most recent exhibition, mounted in the spring of 2013 at the Palais des Beaux Arts. Along with the text he contributed to its catalogue, this exhibition marks the resumption of his curatorial activities and the continuation of his philosophical trajectory, which he has laid out in five books to date: *Formes de vie: L'art moderne et l'invention de soi* (1999), *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (2002), *The Radicant* (2009), and now *L'ange de L'histoire* (2013).

Bourriaud's presentation of contemporary art over these last two decades has hinged on the concept of service. This is most explicit in his hotly debated *Relational Aesthetics*, of which the 2002 English translation introduced global audiences to Bourriaud's writing. According to this collection of essays, artists like Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Carsten Höller and others render "little services"¹ by creating

"moments of sociability," "objects of sociability," and the entire "relational context" these moments or objects entail.² If the constellation of artists on which Bourriaud focuses has changed somewhat since the early 2000s, his notion of "service" as a load-bearing ideological structure has remained fundamentally the same. Unsurprisingly, "art as service" has therefore been the prime target for critics of his curatorial and conceptual designs. In "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," Claire Bishop contests Bourriaud's claim that the art he calls "relational" offers a viable alternative to capitalist economic models.³ She and Stewart Martin suggest that like "the commodified friendship of customer services" found in big-box stores, the services offered by relational aesthetics merely compliment and reinforce conventional transactions based on supply and demand.⁴

Nonetheless, what Bourriaud presents in *Relational Aesthetics* is considered one of the defining aesthetic debates of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Bishop writes that Bourriaud's book helped "render discursive and dialogic projects more amenable to museums and galleries," and indeed, Bourriaud launched the careers of many artists who have since been the subjects of museum retrospectives and scholarly publications.⁵ Taught in contemporary art seminars worldwide, often juxtaposed with its rejoinders, *Relational Aesthetics* has contributed to the institutionalization of participatory art in the form of MFA programs and artists' prizes, and provoked "a more critically informed discussion" of the practice.⁶

Given such canonization of relational aesthetics and relational art, this article argues that it is crucial to examine the origins, composition and implications of these concepts. Relational aesthetics must be contextualized alongside the paradigms, neologisms and vocabularies that Bourriaud has subsequently developed for the discourse surrounding contemporary artistic creation. Readers and viewers of Bourriaud's work should understand that regardless of the artists he situates in these evolving, interrelated, conceptual frameworks, he is his own best and most prototypical aesthetic "service provider." He views his paradigms as creative interventions – "theoretical tools" and "kick starts" for art makers, viewers and philosophers.⁷ If what Bourriaud calls his "theory of form" is now serving in an art historical context, it is essential to situate his publications in a historical discursive tradition, and to understand the tradition in which Bourriaud would situate himself.⁸

Bourriaud's paradigms have evolved to a large extent from the crucial tune-ups he has given to the theory and history of the Situationist International (SI), a postwar avant-garde group in existence from 1957 until 1972. A composite of three smaller avant-garde groups, the SI described itself as a "workers' union of an advanced cultural sector."⁹ The group called for the replacement of traditional forms of art and politics with communal councils, self-governance, and the direct and constant friction of unexpected encounters. This revolutionary social life would defy capitalism's standard system of weights and measure. Unbound from the arbitrary and obsessive calculations of value required by financial and temporal transactions, life would be lived in unquantifiable, atmospheric and emotional units called "situations." The SI was adamant that the social life they envisioned was not a nostalgic reconstruction, but could in fact be glimpsed every day in the present, underneath capitalism's colonizing of the social. Until that ulterior present could be fully unearthed, the Situationists – chief among them Guy Debord – were committed to exposing in their writings and actions the experiential poverty of contemporary society, especially the increasing intensity with which images were arbitrating or replacing human interrelations.

Owen Hatherley argues that Bourriaud's writings and curation constitute "a depoliticized version of Situationist attempts to disrupt consumption and spectacle," and that they actively obscure the project from which they have drawn inspiration.¹⁰ Bourriaud's depoliticization of the Situationists is also a dehistoricization: his texts service this postwar avant-garde group in the same way one might have a vehicle serviced (replacing older parts under the hood with newer ones) or a building restored (gutting the building's interior while maintaining the historical façade). Whether this is strategic or naïve, it is clear that, as Tom McDonough remarks, Bourriaud's writings establish a "seamless continuity" between contemporary artists and the SI.¹¹ Yet this continuity does not provide a basis for historical comparison; it is rather a pretext for a series of artificial discontinuities. In other words, smoothing over the contextual rupture between the SI and relational art practice enables Bourriaud to naturalize false contrasts that are necessary to his paradigm construction, and to his promotion of contemporary artists.

Several art historians have already addressed Bourriaud's failure to acknowledge public, collective, improvisational, and participatory artworks that were created before 1990.¹² The present article takes a different critical approach, tracing a series of mis-acknowledgments evident in Bourriaud's work and arguing that the concepts of relational aesthetics,

postproduction, and radican art are proffered as "new and improved" versions of the Situationist raw material from which they have been assembled: the situation, *détournement*, and the *dérive*. In Bourriaud's theoretical writing, these concepts constitute a methodology founded upon a logic of "before" and "after," where events and practices in between the points of comparison are elided.

I • From Perspective to Vanishing point: *Formes de Vie*

In his 1999 book, *Formes de Vie / Life Forms*, Bourriaud first explicitly declares his intention to borrow from and amend the Situationists. He goes on to recommend the same activity to his readership. "Alas," he writes:

if Situationist theories profoundly nourish contemporary art, they have today become a historical reference, even an item of nostalgia. Their critique of the art object as "star merchandise," their salutary call for the radical surpassing of artistic specialization deserve better: they deserve to be used.¹³

The French idiom here is worth particular attention, as the nuance of precipitated ownership it conveys gets lost in the English translation: "*elles méritent qu'on s'en serve*," he writes – "they [Situationist theories] deserve that one helps oneself to them."¹⁴ Relational art is then one manifestation of the way in which contemporary artists help themselves to Situationist thought. According to the conclusion of *Relational Aesthetics*, such art "updates Situationism and reconciles it, as far as it is possible, with the art world."¹⁵

Here, another telling word choice highlights Bourriaud's own hand in this process of updating: his use of the term "Situationism" signals his interest in transforming the SI's project into a clearly delineated and allocable ideology. The Situationists themselves repeatedly rejected the suffix throughout the 1960s in order to avoid just this sort of semantic limitation. They considered "Situationism" to be a wildly inaccurate – even antipodal – descriptor for their diverse collective activities.¹⁶ Most readers of *Relational Aesthetics* will miss the sentence's anachronism and with it

an important detail of the SI's self-identification. More seriously, Bourriaud's rhetoric of updating and reconciliation assumes an obsolescence of Situationist theory without corroboration of that assumption. It begs the misleading question of Situationist efficacy, falsely implying that the Situationists themselves wished to reconcile their project with the art world but did not manage to do so. The sort of historical and theoretical intervention taking place in this key sentence – one which grandly but too vaguely signals its ambition, an ambition that is neither precisely stated or substantiated – is symptomatic of Bourriaud's treatment of art's history and art history.

Bourriaud's main thesis in *Formes de Vie* is that the fundamental concern of twentieth-century creation was effectively self-centered: the imperative to "make your life a work of art."¹⁷ He emphasizes neither the collective life-work of each avant-garde group, nor the attempts by individual artists to address past, present, and future socio-cultural conditions or supersede the circumstances of a past avant-garde. Instead, he pairs or clusters artists according to modernist "domains of reference," such as dandyism or alchemy.¹⁸ In this way, diverse creative figures (some from pre- and postwar avant-gardes, some contemporary artists) are arbitrarily matched according to imaginary categories, regardless of their procedural or philosophical differences. Using the dandy as an aesthetic archetype, for example, Bourriaud proposes that the blue of Yves Klein, the stripes of Daniel Buren, André Cadere's rods, and the felt and coyote of Joseph Beuys, in his performance *I like America and America likes me* (1974), are all "visual tools" that produce unexpected sensual experiences, like the flourish of a dandy's cravat.¹⁹ Yet who amongst the group above would not protest that by zeroing in on the compositional elements in their artworks, Bourriaud overlooks their choice of exhibition environment and the social conditions in each?

This neglect has repercussive effects as Bourriaud moves on to address modern art through a Marxist lens. Modern artists, he writes, extended the concept of production in the modern economic sphere to include their own "transformation of nature and consequently transformations of the self."²⁰ In this way, the Marxist concept of the division of labor "corresponds point for point to the program of artistic modernity as dandyism would announce it and as the avant-gardes from Dada to Situationism would carry it out."²¹ It is likely that Bourriaud's thinking here has been influenced by a reading of the first two "Theses on Cultural Revolution" that the Situationists published in the first issue of their eponymous journal in 1958:

Situationists consider cultural activity ... as an experimental method for constructing daily life that can be permanently developed with the extension of leisure and the disappearance of the division of labor (beginning with the division of artistic labor). Art can cease to be a report on sensations and become a direct organization of higher sensations. It is a matter of producing ourselves, and not things that enslave us.²²

Here, then, is another instance of art historical comparison, contrast, and backdating extrapolated from a misreading of the theory of the SI. As the quote illustrates, the division of artistic labor was a parenthetical issue for the Situationists, a first step towards a larger project of liberating daily life. Likewise, the ideal transformation of self brought about through the construction of situations was *neither* "making your life a work of art" *nor* making works of art into life, but rather seizing control of the means of living, regardless of aesthetic substrate.²³ This constitutes another separation of an even more radical order between the Situationists and the artists whom Bourriaud sweepingly identifies as sharing their "domain of reference" in the modern project.²⁴

In *Formes de Vie* and subsequent writings, Bourriaud accompanies his inversion of form and formalism with an inversion of a historical materialist perspective. He claims that the transformation of historical understanding into "a vanishing point or element of suspense" is a fundamental characteristic of contemporary art, but more compelling evidence exists that this inversion is a fundamental characteristic of his own writing and curation.²⁵ Above and beyond the description or display of artists' creative works, his texts and exhibitions are themselves creative works that either knowingly or unknowingly reverse the directionality of communication and interpretation without signaling explicitly that such reversals are part of Bourriaud's theoretical agenda.

To transform history from a perspectival infrastructure into a vanishing point is logically impossible, Guy Debord has argued. Long after the dissolution of the Situationist International, he revisited and amended his *Society of the Spectacle* from 1967. The result was his own "update" of Situationist theory, one that Bourriaud does not take into consideration. 1988's *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle* holds that texts like Bourriaud's no longer communicate in the most basic sense of the word because they lack a historical perspective that establishes the shared horizon necessary for discourse.²⁶ For example, although his grouping of the artists Yves Klein, Daniel Buren, André Cadere and Joseph Beuys is

situated within the broader art historical parameters of European visual culture, this grouping ignores both extant differences in postwar national milieux and the rapid changes those environments experienced during the nineteen sixties. The service Bourriaud offers as critic and curator is to situate both his own thinking and the projects of contemporary artists in lineage with these and other artists, but this gesture remains gestural, with no sort of historical control variable (language, philosophy, time span, material, process) that could establish the actual line in his proposed lineage.

Texts that forego a historical perspective relate laterally to their subject matter. Their authors explicitly address neither the circumstances of the issue they are treating nor the circumstances in which they are writing. Without these parameters of historical analysis, such texts cannot *reason*. In their analytical impotence, Debord charged, "they resemble the *facsimile* of a famed weapon where only the firing pin is missing."²⁷ As with many of Debord's denunciations, this one may initially strike us as too severe; after all, texts that address their subject matter obliquely are often rich in creative tangents, associations, and novel displacements of categorical thought. Yet an oblique perspective is still quite different than a vanished one, which fails to adequately sustain parallels, contrasts or comparisons between its initial subject and other subjects introduced. It is this latter kind of writing that Debord identified as "lateral critique."²⁸ Texts that skim their subject matter without fixing an origin, describing their rationale for such a beginning, or mapping a conceptual route for others to follow provide a limited service indeed: they make it very easy for their readership to wholly adopt, append or reject the ideas they contain, but very difficult to debate, subtract or amend them.²⁹ The result in *Formes de Vie* is neither a real comparison nor a real contrast but a parade, a *Die Welt ist schön / The World Is Beautiful* of avant-gardism.³⁰

II • Before and After the Situation in *Relational Aesthetics*

Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* directly followed *Formes de Vie*, first appearing in French in 1998. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud continued to rely on the Situationist International to produce what Debord would call a lateral critique in the service of contemporary art. *Relational Aesthetics* posits relational art as a non-revolutionary equivalent of "situations," the experimental relationships between individuals and their

environment that the Situationists believed must supercede art and its increasingly meaningless, commodified context. Bourriaud negatively compares the SI's rejection of the art world in favor of the construction of situations to his own belief that one can indeed "generate relationships with the world" from within the realm of representation.³¹ He assumes that Debord viewed the art world as a mere "reservoir of examples of what had to be tangibly 'achieved' in day-to-day life."³²

From the numerous texts that Debord and other Situationists contributed to the SI's eponymous journal, published between 1958 and 1969, it is clear that this is not true. Their complaint with the art world went well beyond any discontentment with artistic underperformance or the hope that art's reservoir contained unrealized potential latent in it. In their view, art's formal and moral reservoir was utterly and irreparably empty due to the "total ideological decomposition" of both bourgeois and Marxist thought in the 1950s.³³ Like the avant-garde group of artists known as CoBrA, two members of which went on to join the Situationists, Debord felt artistic creation should be collective, its wellspring located in the common.³⁴ Because Debord no longer felt artworks were capable of stimulating interpersonal connection or collective renewal, he didn't see within them any social achievements waiting to be transposed, as Bourriaud contends. Rather, as a result of social and political revolution, the SI proposed that art should be restored to a continuum with other everyday activities.³⁵ "One could say," Debord wrote in 1957, "that in a society without classes, there will no longer be painters, but Situationists who, among other things, will paint."³⁶ Debord's ideal is founded on no aesthetic servants and no aesthetic masters, therefore starkly contrasts with Bourriaud's fixation on aesthetic service.

The SI concluded in 1961 that, until this society was achieved, Situationists must resolutely prioritize activism over art making. As SI member Attila Kotányi put it:

We are against the reigning conditions of artistic inauthenticity. I don't want to say that anyone must stop painting, writing, et cetera. I don't want to say that those things have no value. I don't want to say that we could continue to exist without doing those things. But at the same time, we know all of that will be invaded by society, to be used against us.³⁷

Not long after taking this ambivalent stance, the SI began to exclude members who were principally artists and architects, a process completed

by 1964. Despite these exclusions, the group remained seriously invested in various kinds of image making as well as in the contemporary discourse on artistic production.³⁸

Bourriaud skirts the question of this complex relationship between art and the everyday, instead arguing in favor of relational art's superiority by criticizing the Situationist concept of a constructed situation. One of the bases of the SI's revolutionary program, a constructed situation was described in their articles as a collective, somewhat organized, somewhat spontaneous, ephemeral, non-commemorated experience of no particular duration.³⁹ Bourriaud finds that in comparison to relational art, the concept of a situation is lacking in what he calls conviviality:

The fact is, the idea of situation does not necessarily imply a co-existence with my fellow men ... does not necessarily involve a relationship with the Other ... [and] does not necessarily correspond to a *relational world*.⁴⁰

Yet several Situationist texts clearly state that constructed situations realized in a post-revolutionary moment, as well as provisional, pre-revolutionary situations, are founded upon the co-existence and cooperation of individuals.⁴¹ If Situationist situations did not correspond to or resemble a relational world, it was because the utopian notion of situations was fundamentally at odds with the abstract concept of "resemblance." Situations were intended to be *of* the relational world itself, arising from it, not distinct from and merely similar to it. Furthermore, the SI never intended to "decode" or "outline" situations, tasks that Bourriaud explicitly assigns himself in regard to relational art.⁴² What it meant to participate in a situation, and how subjective and collective power might manifest in it were complex issues that ultimately remained queries rather than dictates.⁴³

If the SI left the definition of situations quite open-ended, they were adamant that the interactions taking place within them were concrete but not discrete – in other words, they were not symbolic or symptomatic of any experience outside of themselves and they had the potential to continue evolving indefinitely. In contrast, relational art is always an allegory of the interactions that compose it; no event that takes place as relational art can ever pry itself loose from its representative frame and form. The reluctance or the inability to distinguish between experience and

its allegory in Bourriaud's text forms the basis for the most contentious assertion in *Relational Aesthetics*: that relational art generates modest forms of resistance to inauthenticity and alienation – modest, and yet purportedly more successful than those hoped for by the Situationists themselves. Bourriaud writes that the spectacle “can only be analyzed and fought through the production of new types of relationships between people,” a fact that Situationist theory “overlooks,” but the group never “overlooked” the situation as a tactic for resisting spectacle; they simply didn't believe that it could or should be.⁴⁴ Instead, constructed situations were positioned as the result of a series of more concrete resistances – strikes that sought to disrupt regulated labor, or distributional freezes on the circulation of money and goods.⁴⁵ If Debord's 1967 book describes spectacle's formidable powers of replacing human relationships with images, *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle* suggests that the spectacle's mediation has advanced to a point where it can hardly be countered at all. “[T]he agora, the general community no longer exists,” he wrote, “no place where the debate on truths concerning those things could in any lasting way break through the crushing presence of media discourse and the different forces organized to relay it.”⁴⁶ Although *Relational Aesthetics* is well-intentioned promotional material for art of counterculture – again, more countercultural in rhetoric than many of the artworks it references – it does not begin to delve into the complexity of embodied sociality and embodied aesthetic experience in a quotidian saturated by medial flows from the late 1990s onwards. Bourriaud's subsequent publication, which treats the subject of new media, art and the relational, likely resulted from his having come to the same conclusion.

III. • *Détournement* and Reprogramming in *Postproduction*

Although he never discusses the term in *Relational Aesthetics*, the concept of *détournement* suffuses Bourriaud's 2001 publication, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. *Détournement* is a kind of updating and reconciling that, contrary to Bourriaud's methods, has the ambition of revealing both the historical system which governs it and its own attempts to subvert, invert or suspend this system at the same time. If situations were not the resistant tactics that the Situationists deemed essential to revolutionary strategy, the practice of *détournement* – the creative use of expression against its original or conventionally intended use – was. Although they didn't invent the concept, the

Situationists were great advocates of its use, especially in its most radical form.

As Debord explained it in 1956's "User's Guide to *Détournement*," co-authored with his friend and fellow avant-gardist Gil J. Wolman, *détournement* could range from "minor" to "excessive."⁴⁷ A random element of undetermined meaning set into a specific context and thereby given a fixed meaning constitutes "minor" *détournement*. In "excessive" *détournement*, an element with a strong connotative meaning is forcibly stripped of its original context and a new connotation formed.⁴⁸ In *Postproduction*, Bourriaud characterizes *détournement* as a supposedly outmoded precursor to the various forms of appropriation he identifies in contemporary art. He introduces a counter-term, *detourage*, that designates the transplanting, grafting, and decontextualizing of forms and ideas after *détournement*'s supposed obsolescence.⁴⁹

Detourage is billed as an evolution in appropriation: it is liberating because it blurs the distinction between producers and consumers and even "tends to abolish the ownership of forms, or in any case to shake up the old jurisprudence."⁵⁰ However, this notion that artists can "shake up the old jurisprudence" of the ownership of forms in a highly speculative art market under global capitalism is as absurd as Bourriaud's earlier notions that clustering artists together by artistic sympathies is art historical theory or that allegorized conviviality is resistance to spectacle. Whether or not Bourriaud's exemplary artists are all really practicing this *detourage* is unclear; many of those heralded as relational aestheticians are now positioned as artist-DJs in *Postproduction*. What is certain, however, is that Bourriaud's own methodological approach to art's conceptualization and curation is the penultimate example of the selective rewriting of history, which he refers to as using culture as screenplay, postproduction or reprogramming.⁵¹

As in *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud opens *Postproduction* by likening contemporary artists to service providers: the "little services rendered" by postproductive art compliment relational art on a virtual plane, matching database to social base.⁵² Like the editors and enhancers who alter recorded material in the postproduction stage of television shows and films, the work of artists in the twenty-first century is principally to re-fashion the artworks of others as well as the information and products of popular culture. Bourriaud suggests that in their reliance on appropriation, their creative process is akin to "the set of activities linked to the service industry and recycling" rather than "the production of

raw materials.”⁵³ In contrast to the world of play the Situationists envisioned, Bourriaud suggests that appropriation as reprogramming allows these artists to “play the world.”⁵⁴

According to Bourriaud, the Situationists employed *détournement* with the goal of stripping meaning out of a work of art and “impassioning everyday life.”⁵⁵ This account is selective at best and disingenuous at worst; with it, Bourriaud once again rewrites history, using a Situationist concept as a vanishing point for his narrative of contemporary art instead of placing contemporary art in historical perspective. Bourriaud makes no mention of *détournement*’s programmatic application and its end goals. For the SI, the passion *détournement* brings to everyday experience was not its destruction of conventional meaning per se, but its discovery of conventional meaning’s ulterior use on the part of both appropriator and audience. *Détournement* is a way of thinking strategically and systemically at the same time, and moreover, it can also be a way of acting upon this strategic and systemic thought.

Bourriaud repeatedly frames *détournement* as a uniquely artistic application, but this is only one of numerous ways that *détournement* can translate into action. From Debord and Wolman’s 1956 “User’s Guide” to the celebration of Paris’s May 1968 social revolt in the 1969 issue of the *Situationist International*, members of the SI wrote of *détournement*’s utility in a wide range of non-artistic circumstances.⁵⁶ “[A]ll elements, taken from anywhere” are fair game for the practice, as are all media – the spoken word, painting, newspaper collage, or even physical acts, such as wildcat strikes, distributional freezes, and institutional occupations.⁵⁷ Bourriaud claims that contemporary reprogramming updates *détournement* because this appropriative practice amongst his select contemporary artists is a “neutral, zero-sum process” not intended to “devalorize the work of art but to utilize it.”⁵⁸ Again, he bases his characterization of contemporary art on a mischaracterization of the Situationists, who actually believed that devalorization of words or images produced the same result as “neutral” or “zero-sum” appropriation. Situationist *détournement* in text and image, on flyers, posters, postcards and in graffiti was in contrast motivated by a dialectic of devalorization and revalorization: it teaches that every homage has the potential to be an insult, and every theft a gift.⁵⁹

Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe’s project, *No Ghost, Just a Shell* (2000) is an oft-cited example of *detourage* or reprogramming that explores the very ambiguities of the practice self-reflexively instead of

employing the appropriation to subvert or contest its subject material. The project consists of a series of short animated videos featuring a minor manga character named Annlee; having purchased the rights to her story and image, Parreno and Huyghe make her muse upon her liberated but unfree condition as an avatar without qualities. They subsequently offered her up for other artists' use. Tom McDonough has summarized that which Bourriaud termed Parreno's and Huyghe's "zero-sum process" thusly: "*No Ghost, Just a Shell* does not appropriate the figure of Annlee as a means, but through a process of purification (of what Sartre called 'décrassage') places it before us as an end in itself, strangely autonomous and independent of human will."⁶⁰

Bourriaud claims that that the novelty in the 1990s and 2000s of "neutral" appropriation, or reprogramming, lay in its "problematics of the use of cultural artifacts."⁶¹ If this means that artists today are willing and able to share material more extensively than ever, Bourriaud has a valid point. Yet this point would be strengthened were he to acknowledge and discuss the SI's juxtaposition of *détournement* to appropriative strategies in contemporary art and film that were philosophically and ideologically ambivalent in 1966. In an article called "On Alienation: An Analysis of Several Concrete Aspects: The Role of Godard," the SI skewered the filmmaking of Jean-Luc Godard as a "combinatory use of neutral and indefinitely interchangeable elements," then added their own venomous assessment that his film artistry was "devoid of negation, devoid of affirmation, devoid of quality."⁶² In this sense, the real difference to highlight is that in 1966, the Situationists condemned self-reflexive, zero-sum processes at the heart of reprogramming in visual culture, whereas in 2002 Bourriaud promotes it.

Curiously, Bourriaud never directly addresses the technologies, processes or possible ontology of the digital, although many of the artworks he discusses employ it as a medium, and although the endlessly dovetailing "network of contiguous forms" that he hails as a feature of contemporary practice seems to be founded upon its material logic.⁶³ If reprogramming is unique to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in degree only, the use of digital technology as an artistic medium is a genuine novelty of this period. Because digital media is relatively inexpensive to produce and can be accessed, transcoded and distributed with relative ease, it invites and facilitates reprogramming. Likewise, digital artworks may at first seem ill-suited to *détournement* because their sounds and appearances can be manipulated easily and non-visibly, complicating their communication of whatever interventions have

been performed upon their material – a communication that all *détournement* requires. The fact that digital media facilitates reprogramming cannot be mistaken for an obligation, however. Neither reprogramming nor *détournement* are medium-specific, and both approaches are only as meaningful as their audience's reception. In any medium, *détournement* requires a belief on the part of its creators that anything undesirable contains in part the key to its own makeover, and its practice will only increase in relation to a desire to engage with overwhelming social complexity in a manner that goes beyond illustration. This desire for social engagement allows one to struggle, as Giorgio Agamben has written, with "*one's own impotentiality*, to be in relation to one's own privation."⁶⁴ If indeed contemporary artists and contemporary art critics like Bourriaud want to serve their audiences, the most substantive way to do so would not be to create workarounds for this struggle, making it into an artwork's constitutive "element of suspense," but rather to evidence past struggles with individual and collective impotentialities in a new and compelling fashion.⁶⁵

IV. • The *Dérive* in Altermodernism and *The Radicant*

Bourriaud's most recent curatorial paradigms have been markedly more ambitious than those put forward in *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction*. They propose a model not only for how contemporary art navigates cultural ecosystems around the world, but also how this global navigation in composition and form might still be relevant to the philosophical goals of the modernist era. Bourriaud's exhibition catalogue for the fourth Tate Triennial at the Tate Britain in 2009, his booklet, *The Radicant*, published the same year, and his 2013 exhibition and catalogue for L'École des Beaux-Arts entitled *L'ange de l'Histoire / The Angel of History* equip readers with a whole new set of neologisms for their cultural *detourage*. Inspired by the mash-up of modernism and post-colonialist theory that he perceives in contemporary art,⁶⁶ Bourriaud has extended his ideas on the relational and the reprogrammable to include a "radicant"⁶⁷ aesthetic of alterity and renewed modernism: "altermodernism."⁶⁸

Contemporary artists, he claims, catapult themselves "out of the postmodern period and the (essentialist) multicultural model from which it is indivisible,"⁶⁹ and into motion as radicants – organisms that do not root

themselves in one spot but rather advance across a surface, constantly growing new root systems and adapting to the terrain crossed.⁷⁰ The artworks they create “unravel themselves along receding lines of perspective,” and the line they create “is more important than the points along its length,” including the vanishing point to which the historic avant-garde has been relegated.⁷¹ They synthesize modernism and post-colonialism, postmodernism and nomadism and weave out of temporality “a complex network stripped of a centre.”⁷² In a remarkably even-handed review of *Altermodern*, David Cunningham writes: “The branding is inevitably somewhat stronger than the product it has to sell.”⁷³ He concludes that the exhibition’s problem is “not the ‘theory’ per se, but the failure of such theory in this instance to come even close to meeting the demands made by the forms of cultural analysis that Bourriaud seems determined now to pursue.”⁷⁴

On the contrary, the problem is very much Bourriaud’s “theory,” and the quotation marks around it speak volumes, exposing its minor cheats and major obfuscations. *The Radicant*, for example, models the restless offshooting of its namesake: the text offers metaphor on top of metaphor for a rambling creative subjectivity. Artists are described as “*semionauts*, inventors of pathways within the cultural landscape, nomadic sign gatherers;”⁷⁵ “the surveyors of a hypertext world that is no longer the classical flat space but a network infinite in time as well as space;”⁷⁶ “the prototype of the contemporary traveler, *homo viator*;”⁷⁷ “the figure of the *exote*.”⁷⁸ Markedly absent amidst these invocations of wandering, journeying and nomadism is a kind of drifting called the *dérive* that the Situationist International cultivated as a specific experiential practice. This omission reveals itself as an important parapraxis. Bourriaud is quite familiar with the *dérive* and discusses it in *Postproduction*; it seems that this SI practice is the history he turned into a vanishing point in order to repostulate trajectory as an aesthetic form in *The Radicant*.⁷⁹

The Situationists and the smaller avant-gardes from which they were constituted published multiple accounts of *dérives*: willfully unresolved pilgrimages taking place mainly in urban environments.⁸⁰ The *dérive* can be characterized as a nomadism of one, that may acquire a community of fellow drifters and random acquaintances as it goes along.⁸¹ Debord intended the *dérive* to become an integral part of every imaginable human interaction; when this was achieved, he suggested, situations would no longer be isolated exceptions to conventional existence, but could become collective and continuous.⁸² Predictably, this is not the service that drifting provides in Bourriaud’s account. Trajectories in altermodernist

art purge the embodiment from movement.⁸³ Their importance lies in the shapes that they ultimately suggest and in their substrates, not in the sensory experiences that they proffer. What matters is not the terrain, encounters and ambiances, but the “journey-forms” that remain.⁸⁴ The displacement constitutive to what once was the *dérive* has become in Bourriaud’s conceptualization “a method of depiction.”⁸⁵ He identifies the “journey-form” in *Tabernas Desert Run* (2004), a conceptual artwork in which Simon Starling painted a watercolor from the engine water of a moped he had ridden around southeastern Spain, and in the series of walks or *paseos* undertaken in cities since 1991 by Francis Alÿs.⁸⁶ Gabriel Orozco is another “artist of the precarious world,” according to Bourriaud, who “regards the urban environment as a container from which to separate fragments,” snapping photographs of global lunch eaters in an ongoing series entitled *Middle of the Day*.⁸⁷

Bourriaud claims that when artworks that either are or were trajectories are exhibited, they give their audience “a positive vision of chaos and complexity” and a “positive experience of disorientation” encapsulated in a trip to a museum or gallery.⁸⁸ The complexity to which Bourriaud here refers is never qualified or quantified. Yet if, as Owen Hatherley reports, the focal point of Bourriaud’s curation remains the objects and installations on gallery or museum surfaces, then neither the art buyer nor the art maker, neither the indigenous community nor the country of exile, neither the artist nor the curator himself are set in complex relation to one another.⁸⁹ Rather, all are set in relation to an art commodity, an orderly and time-honored transaction. Without locally produced dialogue, without an exhibition’s critique of its own institutionality, “chaos, complexity and disorientation” on the global scale have little chance for “positive” articulation in the art world or beyond. Therefore the complexity invoked here is drastically different from the kind that sets humans in relation to their own privation – the complexity referenced earlier and outlined by Agamben.

When the Situationist International finally surfaces in *The Radicant*, the group is yet again the *démodé* counter-example. Describing them as “radicals” rather than radicants, Bourriaud explains that the SI is hopelessly affixed in the modernist past because of their nostalgia for earlier forms of art production and their ideological purity.⁹⁰ As he develops his argument, however, it becomes clear that the distinction between the SI as radicals and contemporary creators as radicants is not a question of dynamism in the present or fixity in the past, but rather of conformism to dominant geo-political and social conventions. “The

radicant develops in accord with its host soil," Bourriaud writes. "It translates itself into the terms of the space in which it moves."⁹¹ This is indeed a marked contrast to the Situationists, who aimed to be unyielding to their era. Despite this resistance, they were engaged with the cultural and political debates surrounding them, analyzing them meticulously in order to propose alternatives in images, words and actions to the geo-political and social conventions that they judged unsound and unjust.

The thoroughness of the analysis that the SI performed on culture is missing in Bourriaud's analysis of contemporary art he considers "a mode of resistance against the generalized imposition of formats and a kind of formal guerilla warfare."⁹² Artists who conform to and extend the gestures of artifice and precarity instantiated by capitalist society are in no way freedom fighters – conceptually or formally. Rather, they are counterfeiters, creating forms and images from within conventional society that adhere to its conventions while at the same time exploiting their difference from it.⁹³ Counterfeiters attempt to turn a profit by introducing an artificial, unauthorized replicant into a system of artificial, authorized exchange.

Counterfeiting undoubtedly has potential subversive effect; in this sense, Bourriaud is not wrong to suggest that radicant art might accommodate a countercultural ethic. Perhaps counterfeit money has the potential to speed inflation and do serious damage to an economy; perhaps art that does not explicitly oppose the globalized capitalism which surrounds it, choosing instead to match that system's artificiality with its own, could likewise do damage. On the other hand, as is the case with fake luxury items, counterfeiting may simply strengthen the hierarchies of money and power already in place in worldwide society, speeding the diversification of alienated labor and alienated sociality.

Toward the end of *The Radicant*, Bourriaud himself realizes that of all his mixed metaphors for radicant art and radicant artists, the most apt would have been currency.⁹⁴ He admits in a tortured formulation that radicant subjectivity is indeed "the spitting image of the ultimate objective of global capitalism."⁹⁵ It remains to be seen whether artworks that construct "alternative maps of the contemporary world and processes of filtration" can manifest themselves as something other than markers, memorials and facilitators of global capitalist transactions – something other than counterfeit currency, or other than gambling tokens in the game of art fair roulette, than stock market shares in the global exchange of

auction houses and private sales, or other than storefronts behind which money is surreptitiously laundered.⁹⁶

Charging the SI with a teleological attitude, Bourriaud paints the group with far too broad a brush, prematurely declaring their political modernist obsolescence and himself creating a false teleology where the “old” is proved to be an aftereffect of a prognosticated “new.” This unfortunate disregard for the particulars of an important twentieth-century discourse on politics and aesthetics exacerbates the non-relation of politics and formalism in Bourriaud’s writing. His argumentation is transcoded, flickering and blurred, like the characteristics of the precarious aesthetics that he enumerates, but this blurring is of little service to his readership.⁹⁷

V. • Vanished Dialectics in *L’ange de l’Histoire*

L’ange de l’Histoire, Bourriaud’s most recent critical and curatorial project, derives further from the *dérive*, this time with historical thought itself as the ground for “journey-forms.” Here, the “spitting image” of radican subjectivity is located in Paul Klee’s 1920 watercolor and etching, *Angelus Novus*.⁹⁸ As interpreted by Walter Benjamin in his collected theses from 1940, “On the Concept of History,” the heraldic image of the exhibition is a staring, open-mouthed witness of history, blown helplessly toward the present by progress. To Benjamin’s Angel of History, the past appears as “one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet.”⁹⁹ Bourriaud adapts this reading to his own needs: he positions contemporary artists as angels and the omnipresent motif of global history in their artworks as the ruins before them.¹⁰⁰ He writes:

If we assume rubble to be the mental form where today’s artists develop, grappling with general overproduction, cultural and historical globalization, the absence of a positive vision of the future, then the fragile appearance of the Angel of History becomes a model: rubble implies a special *approach* [*démarche*], one necessitating detours, non-linear trajectories, uncertain steps.¹⁰¹

Playing on the multivalent meaning of *démarche* ("gait" as well as "approach" or "procedure") in his essay, Bourriaud overlooks the fact that Klee's and Benjamin's Angel of History flies rather than walks. This is only a minor modification in the telling of Benjamin's historical materialist theory, yet Bourriaud also perpetrates major misrepresentations of Benjamin's theory by incompletely explaining the concept of the "dialectical image," lumping this concept together with the theories of other modernist intellectuals and presenting the result as the postdated rubble heap amidst which contemporary artistic practice develops. In other words, he once again vanishes the historical perspective of his subject at hand and creates from its absence a new paradigm for discussing artistic production that most reliably serves as a descriptor for his own approach to art historical theory.

Benjamin's contributions to historical materialism emphasize that the creation and explication of "dialectical images" trouble the smooth surface of history that dominant cultural and political regimes have established.¹⁰² "Dialectical images" are found and made when a viewer is able to grasp in a representation "the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one."¹⁰³ *Angelus Novus* is exemplary here; in it, Klee has combined the themes and formal vocabulary from a series of satirical drawings he had made of Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm with images he had seen in Hans Prinzenhorn's collection of artworks by the mentally ill. Through this combination and the tragic irony of his chosen title, Klee critiques the mad, militaristic frenzy Kaiser Wilhelm had helped to stir across Europe that led to the First World War.¹⁰⁴

Further enriching the image's meaning, Hal Foster argues that the figure in Klee's watercolor is monstrous because of the horrific vision of modernity it represents, yet is also a figure of monstrosity: in other words, a vessel that channels and enhances spiritual vision in a way resonant with the opulent monstrosities used for centuries in Roman Catholic ritual.¹⁰⁵ Benjamin's reading of the watercolor takes this dialectical relation of themes and time periods even further. Juxtaposing the catastrophe of the Second World War to that represented by the First, he suggests that the artwork's spiritual intensity be understood as a desire to "make whole what has been smashed," a desire thwarted by the terrible storm of what passes for progress in capitalist society.¹⁰⁶ Klee's *Angelus Novus* accommodates all of these meanings and, just as importantly, solicits others.

Bourriaud's catalogue essay for *L'ange de l'Histoire* argues that this building block of historical materialist history – Benjamin's "dialectical image" – is in fact continuous with George Kubler's theory of signals across time in art history, which in turn is identical to Aby Warburg's theory of the dynamogram and emblemized by W. G. Sebald's use of uncaptioned images amidst text.¹⁰⁷ The reader is swiftly and unhelpfully tangled in all of this unexplained connectivity, which Bourriaud bases on a jointly held belief that imagistic knowledge is delivered by "sparks" or "illuminations."¹⁰⁸ In fact, Benjamin was primarily concerned with the *structure* of transmissions of culture, power and knowledge across time, unlike Kubler, whose unconventional theory focused on the transmissions of artistic *form* across cultures and eras.¹⁰⁹ Benjamin's historical materialist approach had neither the degree of intimacy, nostalgia or postmodern remove that typifies the novelist, essayist, and poet W. G. Sebald's treatment of images, nor art historian Aby Warburg's emphasis on the ritualistic, regenerative nature of emotive formulas over time.¹¹⁰ The writers are therefore grouped together to our and their disservice, in the aim of locating historicity in contemporary art.

Bourriaud claims that artworks are "dialectical images" *par excellence*, and that all the contemporary artworks in *L'ange de l'Histoire* create these conceptual sparks by reformulating, reflecting and redistributing the past.¹¹¹ Yet he also asserts that artists have now become "search engines" rather than savants in their creative process, and this characterization directly conflicts with Benjamin's definition of dialectical images, which hinges on an increasingly masterful knowledge of the interaction of historical periods.¹¹² Whether or not Bourriaud's assertion applies to the artists in the exhibition must be considered on a case-by-case basis; for example, Haris Epaminonda's statement on her untitled, framed, found photographs organized in wall groupings certainly aligns with Bourriaud's paradigm of artist search engines. In her artistic project, she explains, she seeks to reestablish our link to existing objects and images by emptying them of "knowledge and historical information on their origins."¹¹³

Decidedly, however, the exhibition as a whole misses its opportunity to create dialectical sparks in kind. Its parts are spatially discrete, with all contemporary artworks on the main floor of the exhibition space, selected paintings of Brazilian artist Glauco Rodrigues on one wing of the second floor, and prints, paintings and architectural models from the Beaux Arts' archives on the other. More disappointingly, the exhibition introduces artworks to viewers in the limited parameters of

similarity, atemporality and the *picturesque* instead of giving some sense of their diverse socio-aesthetic and institutional context. Army photographs of places of worship destroyed in the Great War, photographs by Jean Jules Andrieu of Paris in ruins after the suppression of the Commune in 1871, and Albrecht Dürer woodcuts damaged in a fire during the last days of the Commune are amongst the works on view from the school's collections. Benjamin's theory makes it clear that the ultimate dialectical image doesn't belong to any visual or experiential order, per se: it is made in the moments of revolution which mark the spirit of class struggle, moments that could have been foregrounded with the aid of these archival documents.¹¹⁴

Nowhere in the catalogue or the wall text of the exhibition does Bourriaud or his curatorial team create a space for viewers to ask the questions that any dialectical image would provoke: what are the different ways in which these images testify to revolution, to utopia? Where might the logic of their narrative and composition compliment and contradict one another? Whose history do they tell? Where can we see the present in these images? Where do we experience that which they communicate in our present? This confirms that, unlike the analysis Benjamin performs on Klee's *Angelus Novus*, *L'ange de l'Histoire* does not recognize the present day of which it is a part as implicated in any of the images it exhibits. Benjamin wrote that this ignorance aids the disappearance and irretrievability of historical images, a troubling consequence for an exhibition that originates within a historical materialist trope, and that does not seem to realize the extent of its departure from that trope.¹¹⁵ Benjamin would assert that Bourriaud "pokes about in the past as if rummaging in a storeroom of examples and analogies,"¹¹⁶ and that if the paradigm put forward in *L'ange de l'Histoire* is invested in a still undefined future, it displays no understanding of how the future is historically determined, "no inkling of how much in a given moment depends on [the given moment] being made present."¹¹⁷

Collecting together cultural figures, critical theory, a painting retrospective, archival holdings and contemporary art is not enough for an exhibition which takes history, its ruins and its angels as a theme – above all within an institution of higher learning. Such a project necessitates a methodology for art history and art theory that historicizes and theorizes in relation to the present, rather than simply providing the paradigm for its own description. Bourriaud could begin by filling in the blanks in his exhibition catalogue: it opens with a double-page spread of portraits of Benjamin and other white, Western cultural figures whom Bourriaud

considers to be angels of history: Marcel Duchamp, Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Smithson, Jürgen Habermas and others. Guy Debord is pictured on the right, as a sort of avatar for the Situationist International in general. Bourriaud has helped himself plentifully to his and their theory, but the black lines which connect Debord to the other thinkers and to Klee's *Angelus Novus* betray no system or directionality, and therefore cannot suggest any relation except a lateral one.

Bourriaud has provided significant inspiration for a postmodern generation of artists trying to revive a tradition of participatory art, but how much more significant it would be if he were to truly contextualize the many ideas upon which he has relied – in particular, the ideas of the Situationists. Bourriaud is now a “key thinker” in contemporary art,¹¹⁸ one whose writing is anthologized alongside the writings of the Situationist International, which he has updated and turned into a vanishing point.¹¹⁹ His contribution to the debates surrounding contemporary art must be contextualized with the Situationists' concepts of the situation, *détournement* and the *dérive* if his project's professed adherence to and departure from historical materialism is to be fully comprehended.

Envoi

Two concurrent exhibitions at Paris's Palais de Tokyo and Centre Pompidou are a fitting epilogue to this examination of Bourriaud's ongoing project. Held in the winter of 2013–2014, these are solo shows dedicated to Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe respectively, two Frenchmen whom Bourriaud has championed as archetypal relational artists, reprogrammers, and altermodernists. Both chose to use the institutional space accorded to them as a porous connective tissue for artworks. Parreno's exhibition is called “Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world,” and the blinking neon lights he has installed throughout the Palais de Tokyo (*56 Flickering Lights*, 2013) draw visitors' attention to the cavernous art venue, built in 1937 for Paris's International Exhibition of Art and Technology in Modern Life. The explicit incorporation of architecture into the exhibition is further emphasized by electronic tablets that are used as informational wall labeling for nearby artworks, but that also sporadically display other musings, several on the nature of the building and the environment it cultivates (*Flickering Labels*, 2013). Huyghe's eponymous show in the Centre Pompidou's south gallery is displayed amidst the disused decor of the Mike Kelley exhibition that had previously been installed in the space.

The messy undergirdings of art display – scuffed partitions, floor tape and empty socles – highlight the exhibition’s impermanence.

A residue of relational aestheticism is still evident in both retrospectives, albeit in the form of mingled virtual and non-virtual realities. For example, Parreno pairs his video *Anywhere Out of the World* (2000) with Tino Seghal’s performance artwork *Annlee* (2011). Both artworks make use of aforementioned manga character Annlee, which Parreno and Huyghe bought in 1999 for their ongoing art project, *No Ghost, Just a Shell*. In Parreno’s video, a virtual Annlee addresses the audience and asks them to think through her strange existential plight. In between showings, Seghal’s performance work *Annlee* features young women who enter the video projection space to question spectators about their over-scheduled existence: “Are you always busy? Would you rather have too much to do or too little to do?” the affectless performer-as-Annlee asked during my visit. At the Pompidou, people costumed as characters from Huyghe’s videos, performances and photographic series (*La Toison d’Or* [1993], *The Host and the Cloud* [2010]), mingle silently with exhibition-goers in the south gallery. These performers-turned-mascots are the only people who manage to pet the painted dog darting nervously through the galleries as a part of the installation, *Untilled* (2011–2012), that Huyghe debuted at Documenta 13.

This relationality is of the most dissociated variety, as sporadic as the flickering LED marquees of *Danny La Rue* (2013) that Parreno exhibits. Museum-goers perambulate as noncommittally as they would in any number of large, anonymous recreation centers, waiting for things to flash, play music or move. The shows are extraordinary in their unhesitating pursuit of a non-positivist artistic trajectory. They give us radicate ecosystems and art as compost (Huyghe’s *Zoodram* aquarium artworks from 2010 and 2011), automated pianos (invited artist Liam Gillick’s 2007 *Factories in the snow*), and angels of history who have lost their agency (Huyghe’s *Blanche Neige Lucie* from 1997). In this manner, Parreno’s and Huyghe’s exhibitions represent hallucinations of the contemporary that, compared to the mildly-worded daydreaming about contemporary art in Bourriaud’s publications, are potent and deeply unsettling.

In a 2006 interview with George Baker, Huyghe plowed through a series of metaphors for his work in a manner similar to Bourriaud’s writing: he explained that his creations were scores, screenplays, *ritournelles* and time-scores.¹²⁰ Eventually, Huyghe accepted Baker’s suggestion that he

had created a situation in the Situationist vein with *Streamside Day Follies* (2003) but then quickly reframed his works as representing “the fold of a situation”¹²¹ and then a “hologram image of a situation.”¹²² Finally, he settled on the declaration that the point of the art he practices is “to take spectacle as a format, and to use it if the need presents itself.”¹²³ Huyghe and Parreno are now vital avant-gardists of spectacle as format, using their retrospectives as a laboratory phase for the kind of sociality and sensory experiences that will soon be constructed and standardized by the systems of global media and markets that shape our everyday lives. If this is not yet the language in which the artists would describe their installations, we need only wait expectantly for this particular metaphor to appear in the descriptive chain they will create for us.

Were Bourriaud to reverse his self-proclaimed alignment with historical materialism and its legacy, and explicitly affirm the ways in which his *oeuvre* performs a series of creative half-*détournements* of such theories, his interventions would surely attain the significance and controversy of Huyghe’s and Parreno’s. Taking him at his word, however, it would be more accurate to speak of his texts and exhibitions as keys to thinking rather than the work of a key thinker; each should be taken as the impetus for a critical and even praxis-based response to contemporary artistic theory’s fungible discourse. Of course viewers and readers must serve themselves to the past in visual culture, but not to the disservice of the past, present or future. As an alternative to servicing, historical materialism proposes an ethic of explicit gift and theft, one it shares with *détournement*.

The university might be a good place to restart. It is, after all, the site that Bourriaud has himself selected for future paradigmatic intervention. In a commentary on *Art Review’s* 2013 “Power 100” list of art world figures, he declares, “the art school can become a major player in the international artworld, on the condition that it moves towards the model of the art centre, placing art and artists at its heart, by opening itself up further.”¹²⁴ Might his transformation of the École des Beaux-Arts into “an art complex oriented towards education” mirror the kind of pedagogical platforms that were institutionalized after Okwui Enwezor’s curation of Documenta 11 in 2001? Inspired by the work of artists like Theaster Gates, might Beaux Arts students spearhead a transformation of collective educational space? Might the changes to which Bourriaud alludes signal instead that the Beaux Arts will become a business complex “oriented towards education” as many institutions of higher learning in the United States are debating?¹²⁵ We’ll find out with the next “little service.”¹²⁶

Notes •

¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland. (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2002), 36. My thanks to Jenni Wu for the initial introduction to Bourriaud's work and the lively discussion of its implications.

² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 33.

³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴ Stewart Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," *Third Text*, vol. 21, Issue 4 (July 2007), 379.

⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. (New York: Verso, 2012), 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction, Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. Translated by Jeanine Herman. (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2002), 7, 4.

⁸ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 19.

⁹ Guy Debord, "Message de l'Internationale Situationniste," (1959). *Œuvres*. Edited and annotated by Jean-Louis Rançon in collaboration with Alice Debord. (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 469.

¹⁰ Owen Hatherley, "Post-Postmodernism?" *New Left Review*, Issue 59 (September-October 2009), 154. My thanks to John MacKay for bringing this article to my attention.

¹¹ Tom McDonough, "No Ghost," *October* 110 (Fall 2004), 122.

¹² For texts which examine this Bourriaudian problematic, see amongst others Anna Dezeuze, "Everyday Life, 'Relational Aesthetics' and the 'Transfiguration of the Commonplace,'" *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 5:3 (2006) 143-152; Martin Patrick, "Unfinished Filliou: On the Fluxus Ethos and the Origins of Relational Aesthetics," *Art Journal* 69:1 (Spring/Summer 2010), 45-61; Gillian Sneed, "From Happenings to Conversations: Allan Kaprow's Legacy in Contemporary 'Relational' Art Practices," *Art Criticism* 25:1 (2010), 73-89; Judith Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011) and Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. (New York: Verso, 2012).

¹³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Formes de vie: L'art moderne et l'invention de soi*. (Paris : Denoël, 1999), 81. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Relational Aesthetics*, 85.

¹⁶ See "Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes," *Potlatch* (June 29, 1957). Reprinted in Guy Debord, *Œuvres*. Established and annotated by Jean-Louis Rançon in collaboration with Alice Debord. (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 349; "Définitions," *Internationale Situationniste*, June 1958. Reprinted in *Internationale Situationniste, Édition augmentée*. (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1997), 13.

¹⁷ *Formes de Vie*, 17.

¹⁸ *Formes de Vie*, 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Guy Debord, "Thèses sur la révolution culturelle," *Internationale Situationniste* 1 (June 1958). Reprinted in *Internationale Situationniste : Édition augmentée*. (Paris : Librairie

Arthème Fayard, 1997), 20-21. Translation accessed at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theses.html>.

²³ *Formes de Vie*, 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶ Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* (1988). Reprinted in *Œuvres*, 1638.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Debord's italics.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Die Welt ist schön*, Albert Renger-Patzsch's photographic compilation from 1928 presents collections of industrial, natural, and domestic objects together in a common mythology of aesthetic perfection and harmony. Differences in accessibility, meaning, and use are repressed to the advantage of formal likeness.

³¹ *Relational Aesthetics*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Guy Debord, "Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale" (1957) *Œuvres*, 316.

³⁴ "Ce que sont les amis de 'CoBrA' et ce qu'ils représentent" *Internationale Situationniste 1* (June 1958). Reprinted in *Internationale Situationniste, Édition augmentée*, 37-38.

³⁵ "Thèses sur la révolution culturelle," *Internationale Situationniste 1* (June 1958), *Internationale Situationniste, Édition augmentée*, 20.

³⁶ Debord, "Rapport sur la construction des situations," 327.

³⁷ "La cinquième conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg," *Internationale Situationniste 6* (August 1961). Reprinted in *Internationale Situationniste, Édition augmentée*, 267.

³⁸ For example, Debord's publication of *Contre le Cinéma* in 1964, René Viénet's influential article, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action Against Politics and Art" in 1967, the numerous *détourned* comic strips and postcards the group produced in 1966, 1967 and 1968, and of course the ongoing graphic design of *The Situationist International*.

³⁹ "Rapport sur la construction des situations," 326-327.

⁴⁰ *Relational Aesthetics*, 85. Bourriaud's italics.

⁴¹ See, for example, "The constructed situation is necessarily collective in its preparation and its sequence of events," "Problèmes préliminaires à la construction d'une situation" *Internationale Situationniste 1* (June 1958). Reprinted in *Internationale Situationniste, Édition augmentée*, 12.

⁴² *Relational Aesthetics*, 7, 9.

⁴³ See the question posed concerning spontaneity and artifice in situations in "Théorie des moments et construction des situations," *Internationale Situationniste 4* (June 1960). Reprinted in *Internationale Situationniste, Édition augmentée*, 119. Translation accessed at : <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/moments.html>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁵ See the descriptions of May 1968 that were discussed in terms strikingly similar to a situation in "Le commencement d'une époque," *Internationale Situationniste 12* (September 1969), *Internationale Situationniste, Édition augmentée*, 571-602.

⁴⁶ Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle*, 1604.

⁴⁷ Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, "Mode d'emploi du détournement," *Les Levres Nues* no. 8 (May 1956). Reprinted in *Œuvres*, 223-224.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Postproduction*, 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

- ⁵¹ Ibid, 46.
- ⁵² *Relational Aesthetics*, 36.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 13.
- ⁵⁴ *Postproduction, Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, 69.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 36.
- ⁵⁶ This occurs again in Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, 150.
- ⁵⁷ Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, “Mode d’emploi du détournement,” 222.
- ⁵⁸ *Postproduction*, 37.
- ⁵⁹ “De l’aliénation: examen de plusieurs aspects concrets : Le rôle de Godard,” *Internationale Situationniste* no. 10 (March 1966), *Internationale Situationniste, Édition augmentée*, 471.
- ⁶⁰ McDonough, 116.
- ⁶¹ *Postproduction*, 9.
- ⁶² “De l’aliénation: examen de plusieurs aspects concrets : Le rôle de Godard,” 471.
- ⁶³ *Postproduction*, 20.
- ⁶⁴ Giorgio Agamben, “On Potentiality” (1986), *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Translated and with an introduction by Daniel Heller-Roazen. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 183. Agamben’s italics.
- ⁶⁵ *Formes de Vie*, 17.
- ⁶⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, ed., *Altermodern* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2009), 12.
- ⁶⁷ *The Radicant*, 22.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 19.
- ⁶⁹ *Altermodern*, 12-13.
- ⁷⁰ Bourriaud is crucially influenced in *The Radicant* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s philosophical model of the rhizome; see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Bourriaud explains that a radicant differs from a rhizome in that it is not a multiplicity but rather “movement that ultimately permits the formation of an identity” *The Radicant*, 55.
- ⁷¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Altermodern*. (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 13, 14.
- ⁷² Ibid., 12.
- ⁷³ David Cunningham, “Returns of the Modern,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 9:1 (2010), 124.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 129.
- ⁷⁵ *The Radicant*, 39. Bourriaud’s italics.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 184.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 113. Bourriaud’s italics.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., 21. Bourriaud’s italics.
- ⁷⁹ *Postproduction*, 36.
- ⁸⁰ The Lettrist International (1952-1957) and the London Psychogeographical Association (1957).
- ⁸¹ See, for example, “36 rue des Morillons,” *Potlatch*, August 10, 1954, reprinted in *Potlatch 1954-1957*, 60-61 ; Jacques Fillon, “Description Raisonnée de Paris : Itinéraire pour une nouvelle agence de voyages,” *Les Levres Nues* no. 7 (December 1955), 39 ; Guy Debord, “Deux Comptes Rendus de Dérive,” and “Position du Continent Contrescarpe,” *Les Levres Nues* no. 9 (November 1956), 10-13 and 38-40.
- ⁸² Guy Debord, “Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l’organisation et de l’action de la tendance Situationniste Internationale” (1957), reprinted in Guy Debord, *Œuvres*, 325.
- ⁸³ *Altermodern*, 13.
- ⁸⁴ *The Radicant*, 22.

- ⁸⁵ *Altermodern*, 14.
- ⁸⁶ *The Radicant*, 96, 126.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-96.
- ⁸⁸ *Altermodern*, 13.
- ⁸⁹ Hatherley, 158-159.
- ⁹⁰ *The Radicant*, 46.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ⁹² *The Radicant*, 131.
- ⁹³ George Baker focuses on the other end of this “fraudulence,” in relational aesthetics, suggesting provocatively to Huyghe that his open artworks should be understood as symbolic tax shelters. George Baker, “An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,” *October* 1:10 (Fall 2004), 94.
- ⁹⁴ This is the same metaphor Peter Osborne proposed for cultural production as a panelist for “Global Modernities” event held in conjunction with the *Altermodern* exhibition at the Tate Modern. See Cunningham, 128.
- ⁹⁵ *The Radicant*, 125.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁷ Nicolas Bourriaud, “Precarious Constructions: Answer to Jacques Rancière on Art and Politics,” *Open* No. 17, 2009, 33.
- ⁹⁸ *The Radicant*, 122.
- ⁹⁹ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History” [1940], *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4*. Edited by Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392.
- ¹⁰⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, “L’ange et le signal: fragments historiques et pieces à conviction dans l’art du XXI^e siècle,” *L’ange de l’Histoire*. Edited by Nicolas Bourriaud. (Paris: Palais des Beaux-Arts Editions, 2013), 16-17.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 21. Bourriaud’s italics.
- ¹⁰² Walter Benjamin, “Paralipomena to “On the Concept of History” [1940], *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4*. Edited by Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 403.
- ¹⁰³ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 397.
- ¹⁰⁴ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 226.
- ¹⁰⁵ Hal Foster, “Blinded Insights: On the Modernist Reception of the Art of the Mentally Ill,” *October* (Issue 97, Summer 2001), 12.
- ¹⁰⁶ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 22, 24, 26, 28.
- ¹⁰⁷ Nicolas Bourriaud, “L’ange et le signal: fragments historiques et pieces à conviction dans l’art du XXI^e siècle,” 26.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁹ See George Kubler, *The Shape of Time*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.
- ¹¹⁰ See Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance (Texts & Documents)*. Edited by David Britt and Kurt W. Forster. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999 and W. G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*. Translated by Michael Hulse. New York: New Directions, 1997.
- ¹¹¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, Kathy Alliou and Armelle Pradalier, “L’ange de l’Histoire 2.0,” *L’ange de l’Histoire*, 42-43, 45, 49.
- ¹¹² “L’ange et le signal: fragments historiques et pieces à conviction dans l’art du XXI^e siècle,” 22. Bourriaud’s italics.
- ¹¹³ Haris Epaminonda, “Interview with Léa Bismuth,” *L’ange de l’Histoire*, 56, 60.
- ¹¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 395.

¹¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 391.

¹¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, "Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History," 405.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ See Bourriaud's profile in *Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers*. Edited by Diarmuid Costello and Jonathan Vickery. New York: Berg, 2007.

¹¹⁹ See *Participation*. Edited by Claire Bishop. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

¹²⁰ Baker, 84.

¹²¹ Ibid., 92.

¹²² Ibid., 97.

¹²³ Ibid., 104.

¹²⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud, "An Anatomy of Power," *Art Review* November 2013. Accessed at http://artreview.com/features/november_2013_feature_an_anatomy_of_power_by_nicolas_bourriaud/

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ *Relational Aesthetics*, 36.

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