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The Emergence of the Documentary Real within Relational and Post-Relational Political Aesthetics

ROBERT GROSE BA (Hons) Fine Art, MA, RCA

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* This thesis is re-submitted with major modifications in accordance with the recommendations of my viva voce examination (9/7/12) and examination report dated July/August 2012.

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to conduct a post-relational reading of the programme of relational art and its influence upon current aesthetics. 'Post' is not used in the indicative sense here: it does not simply denote the passing of the high water mark of relational art's critical reception. Rather, it seeks to identify what remains symptomatically unresolved in relational art through a reading of its texts together with its critique. Amongst these unresolved problems certain questions endure. The question of this art's claim to autonomy and its problematic mode of appearance and materialism remain at large. Ironically it shares the same fate as the avant-garde it sought to distance itself from; the failure to unite art with the everyday. But it has nevertheless redefined the parameters of artistic production: this is its success. I argue that this is because relational art was internally riven from its outset by a contradiction between its micropolitical structures and the need to find a mode of representation that did not transgress its self-imposed taboo upon visual representation. I identify a number of strategies that relational art has used to address this problem: for example its transitive ethics and its separation of 'the visual' from formal representations of public space and of a liminal counter-public sphere. Above all, I argue that its principle of the productive mimesis and translation of social relations through art is the guarantor of this art's autonomy.

My thesis is premised upon the notion that one can learn much about new forms of critical art from the precepts and suppositions that informed relational aesthetics and its critical reception. Relational aesthetics, in fact, establishes the terms of engagement that inform new critical art. Above all, this is because the question of the 'relation of non-relation' is bigger than relational aesthetics. The 'relation of non-relation' does not denote the impossibility of relation between subjects. Rather, it is a category that identifies non-relation as the very source of productive relations. This can be applied to those liminal points of separation that

delineate the territory of critical art prior to relational aesthetics. For example, these instances of 'non-relation' appear in the separation of art from non-art; of representation from micropolitics and of the anti-relational opposition of the philosophical categories of the general and the particular. Overall, I seek to reclaim Bourriaud as instrumental to the re-thinking of these categories and as essential to a reading of current critical art discourse.

I identify a number of misreadings of relational aesthetics that result from a misrecognition or unwillingness to engage with Nicolas Bourriaud's direct influences: Serge Daney, Michel de Certeau, Gilles Deleuze and Louis Althusser are often overlooked in this respect. I argue that Bourriaud's critics tend to bring their own agendas to bear on his work, often seeking to remediate what is problematic. These critiques introduce existing aesthetic and political paradigms into his work in order to claim him as their own. So for example we encounter *antagonistic* relational aesthetics as the reinstatement of the avant-garde. Also, relational aesthetics as an immanent critique of the commodity form within a selective reading of Theodor Adorno. Also, we encounter dissensual relational aesthetics as 'communities of sense' that adopt site-specific methodologies whose mode of inhabitation of the socius is a reaction to relational aesthetics and is premised upon separatism. This diversification of relational art's critique does not address, however, its fundamental problems of autonomy and representation. Rather, in different ways, they sidestep these issues and duplicate their non-relationality in the form of an impasse.

My reading seeks to read the *relational programme* as a whole and to reclaim that which is symptomatically *post-relati*onal within it. I think that this is important because the critique of Bourriaud is presently unduly weighted towards the analysis of *Relational Aesthetics*[1], thus important developments within *Postproduction* (2002) and *The Radicant*

[1] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by S. Pleasance and F. Woods, (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002)

(2009) have gone overlooked. Specifically, Bourriaud's increased emphasis upon a topology of forms and an Althusserian 'aleatory materialism' demand that we ask whether relationality in art is ontological or epistemological in form. It also demands that we re-consider its claims to materialism and critical realism on its own terms.

Bourriaud's later works are important not simply because they set out how relational art might inhabit networks of electronic communication but because they begin to develop a more coherent thinking of new modes of relational representation. Bourriaud begins to address the aporia of micropolitics and representation in his later works. His notion of representation becomes increasingly a matter of spatio-temporal relation and the representational act becomes increasingly identified with the motility of the relational act as a performative presentation.

In the light of these developments, I argue that the thinking of relation that has thus far dictated the *philosophical* analysis of relationality and political aesthetics results in an acute anti-relationality or a 'relational anarchism'. This is why the philosophy of Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou respectively, are inadequate to the demands of current aesthetics. In fact they hinder its development. On this basis I turn to Rodolphe Gashé's re-thinking of relation. His thinking grants relation a minimal ontology that in fact excludes it from philosophy, but at the same time, plays a key role in the construction of singularities as new epistemological categories. Gashé suggests a unique epistemological value for relations and recognizes what is evental *within* them. These singularities find their modes of appearance within various forms of the encounter. Gashé's thought is helpful in that it identifies the non-relational of relation with its event.

Also, I argue that a theory of post-relational representation is necessary to address the 'weak manifestations of relational art', although not in a transgressive or messianistic form; also, that this thinking of representation, when combined with aleatory materialism, produces a

broad constituency of representational forms with which to construct a more robust critical art. This includes the documentary form. In order to address the objections of micropolitics I therefore advance Philip Auslander's notion of the performativity of the document as essential to relational aesthetics because it is an art form that in fact requires mediation by the visual. My argument is premised upon the ineliminability of representation from the aesthetic and moreover, that the artwork is constituted within a broad nexus of operations and acts of signification. This fragmentary construction is the source of the objectivity or critical realism of these practices. I argue that 'visual' documentation functions as a tool for presencing and connecting relations of exchange but is merely one of the forms of representation available to visual artists.

Introduction

In the mid- 1990s, relational art emerged as a form of practice at the same time that the notion of relation was becoming a focus for philosophy and political aesthetics. As an art student, and then as a practitioner, I was aware of an undercurrent of relational practice that appeared to draw upon the cognates of 1960s art, specifically performance and collaboration mixed in with later post-conceptual forms such as installation art. This art appeared also, to be driven and courted by art institutions. An artform that appeared to be modeled upon a site-specificity that had developed as a reaction to the gallery system in the 60s appeared to have found a discursive home within galleries and museums. This indicated some sort of change in the nature of art institutions. Its willingness to host these works seemed to indicate that 60s and 70s art had become legitimized. A concurrent trend for the re-enactment of seminal works of performance art seemed to confirm this.

All of this ultimately affected my own practice and in this I was very much influenced by Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*. The publication of this work in English drew an immediate and robust critical response, which appeared to have fizzled out by 2007. The critique largely ignored important aspects of the work that were better developed in Bourriaud's other books, *Postproduction* and *The Radicant*, leaving important questions unanswered. Principally this left unanswered the relationship between relational art and the art of the 1960s and 1970s. In particular it did not address the documentary forms of relational art, which as a practitioner I had to think about practically in terms of presenting my own work to an audience. Much of the relational artwork I discovered came to me through documentation, but this documentation seemed often very matter of fact and understated. Relational art is affecting in that it requires some form of documentation but it accepts this only reluctantly. This is not so much because it essentialises performance, but rather, because it is based upon an anti-representational micropolitics. The critique of early relational art failed to recognize the

importance of this paradox and its wider implications for an ethics of a new critical art and the representative forms it might take. This has implications for our notion of the 'realism' of documentary forms. I later found that other aspects of Bourriaud's thinking had been missed, for example his ideas on topology and the influence of aleatory materialism upon his aesthetics. These are themes that I explore in this thesis.

Certain of the unanswered questions of relational aesthetics – its modes of representation and its presentation of spatio-temporal relations – have persisted within debates around current critical art. I therefore set out to read the programme of relational art and its critique together in order to see whether relational art continues to exercise an influence over artistic production. In the early millennium the concerns of relational art appeared to migrate to the internet raising interesting questions about its relationship to early network theory. This was a theory whose legitimacy was still questioned in the late 1990s. Moreover, it raised questions about the mimetic use of forms within relational art and this new art's legitimacy as an autonomous artform.

In the early part of this century then, the focus of critical art moved towards an examination of artistic communities and networks. Relational art, or rather its critical tools appeared to be swept along with this and also with a renewed debate upon the potential forms of a rethinking of communism, or communisation. The principles of sharing and creative commons at large within relational art therefore became attached to a wider debate about art's sociable forms. And yet, the contradictions within relational modes of representation and autonomy have also migrated. These are questions that I will be examining within the rubric of post-relationality. If the lessons of relational aesthetics are fully embraced it may be that we can approach new forms of critical art upon a different footing and avoid the repetition of its arguments.

Within political aesthetics the emergence of relational art coincided, as I have said, with a return to the question of relation. This was largely

explored through the notion of ‘event’ as a principle of social transformation. Thus the examination of relational art is co-extensive with a re-thinking of the event. Both relational art and philosophical aesthetics seemed to share an overriding concern with generally reified relations and their resistance to new ways of thinking and existing. In this respect my research questions emerge from a productive engagement between art and philosophy that characterized the milieu of late nineties and early twenty-first century thought.

The overall aim of this thesis is not to present a defence of relational aesthetics but to explore its ideas as a working through of certain problems within political aesthetics. Bourriaud’s thought was a catalyst not so much for finding solutions to the problems of political aesthetics as for defining and clarifying them. In this respect it is worthy of our continued attention. I argue that even from its inception, relational aesthetics was already post-relational. This means that I view early relational aesthetics as expressing the conditions of its own impossibility within a culture stricken with generally reified relations. This is not to present it as a heroic failure. Its success, in fact, was to focus attention upon certain precepts or anti-relational norms that in fact threatened the success not only of relational art but its successors in communitarian, communist, protest and other forms of new critical art. These instances of non-relational norms can be seen in the thinking of artistic autonomy that relational art radically challenges. They can also be seen in the non-relation between politics and art presented as a literal demand for art’s critical efficacy and the demand for antagonistic forms of art that hark back to the transgressive forms of the avant-garde. It can be seen in the aporetic demand that relational art appear in its singularity, a problem that emerges from the inadequacy of philosophy and in the injunction that relational art ‘show itself’ in contradiction to the micropolitical prohibition upon ‘speaking for the other’. The non-relation of representation and micropolitics cannot simply be swept away with the demise of relational practice. It both persists beyond and predates relational aesthetics.

These aporetic instances of non-relation are conditions for the critical realism of relational and subsequent practice. Later relational practice devises methodologies that re-define these precepts within productive terms and a range of formal strategies and principles of construction that produce relation at the heart of their non-relation. All of these strategies evince an objectivity upon which I set their credentials as critical realism. Within this, strategies of topological construction, translation and scripting are important in that they address the problem of artistic autonomy by setting out a mode of inhabitation and the use of social forms. In addition relational aesthetics makes clear that the object of its program is the production of sites of encounter. The discursive sites it proposes are 'counter-public' realms that operate 'on the hoof'.

Bourriaud's aleatory materialism is also important to the realism of relational art. Its inductive methodology and anti-teleology are conducive to the production of singular constellations that ultimately require diverse modes of inscription in order to literally produce their reality. Overall, what I am proposing is that the sites of non-relation that are explored within relational aesthetics are capable of localization and articulation within the use of forms. As a consequence of this approach I identify Adorno's thinking as of central importance to the formulation of a language of critical art within the dynamics of globalization.

Research Questions

The Primary Research Question

How are the concepts of relation and representation conjoined within relational and post-relational political aesthetics and how are these concepts evolving within the rubric of a new critical realism, or the 'documentary real'?

The overall aim of this thesis is to examine Bourriaud's proposition that new forms of art can be produced through the linkage of social relations and by the manipulation of social forms. This may appear a straightforward proposition, one that ostensibly harks back to the conceptual art and performance art of the 1960s and 1970s. But the particular conjuncture within which this proposition arose in the mid 1990s differs radically from its forebears. The discourse of relational aesthetics is played out against the backdrop of globalisation and the need to develop a language, form and methodology for artistic practice within network culture. The conjuncture in which relation re-appears as form, is marked by an accelerated commodification of social relations and an attendant anxiety about the seeming stranglehold of an identitarian culture over social relations. It is also a reaction to postmodernism. Bourriaud claims that his work is a reaction to a redundancy or malaise within postmodern thought that contests 'meaning' all the way to its origin and yet he annexes postmodern thinking as a methodology for the production of new forms of artistic sociability. Thus the primary question might equally have been framed in the following terms: how might novel non-identical or singular forms of relation emerge and what is the mechanism for social transformation and artistic agency? It might be objected that this advances us no further than the sociable forms of art developed in the avant-garde. What is particular to the way relational practices set about this task is Bourriaud's assertion of relational aesthetics' materialism against its 'meaning'; its anti-idealist stance and its inhabitation and translation of the forms of non-art. Above

all, relational aesthetics aspires to 'represent' a form of realism through largely non-visual methodologies. The practice of documentation increasingly gives way to forms of relational construction and topology and this principle of nomination calls into question the very notion of representation itself. It is the exploration of these consequences of the basic proposition of relational form that furnish my additional research questions.

Why has the question of relation emerged as a problem for culture generally? Why does the discourse of relationality dominate political aesthetics and philosophy?

I identify the discourse of relation with the contestation of realism and forms of social representation and in particular with pessimism around the possibility of social transformation within the hegemonic forms of advanced capitalism. Although not a thinker of relation as such, Mark Fisher, for example, claims that what is being contested in our current milieu, is the hegemony of 'capitalist realism'. In his reflections upon 'capitalist realism', Fisher notes the maxim, 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism' which he attributes to both Slavoj Žižek and Fredric Jameson.[2] In short, change appears impossible. I call this condition 'relational hypostasis'.

Relational hypostasis is not a concept, far from it. It is a term that identifies a symptom within our particular conjuncture of globalized capital that has persisted and mutated over time. It is by no means new. It can be seen in Georg Lukács writings on class-consciousness and reification. I take from Lukács the notion that whenever general consciousness is unaware of the reification of social relations within the form of capital, this produces the conditions for either despair or opportunism. On the latter point, without a critical mass of

[2] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?* (Ropley, Hampshire: Zero Books, 2009), p.2.

consciousness, a minority of 'politically engaged artists' habitually resort to acts of idealism, committed art and literalism that betray the complexity of art's sociable forms of praxis. We might say that the critique of consciousness and reification are 'at large' within the critique of relational aesthetics *fidelity* to political goals, ethical efficacy and forms of representation.

The symptom of relational hypostasis can also be traced to Adorno's *Critique of Enlightenment.* Adorno's critique of identitarian thinking, and of thinking both with and against the concept is indicative of the paradox of relational hypostasis: that the negation of the concept entails not its disavowal but rather its critical suspension: this is the argument of 'The baby with the bathwater'.[3] Hypostatic relations are the hosts of critical thinking but theory can no longer be regarded as parasitic or directly critical. Critical thinking is seamless in its inhabitation of its host; it is a social morphology. This demands then that the critique of relational hypostasis be immanent in its methodology and inhabit the very forms that are its object.

The overall problem of relational hypostasis can be diagnosed in Alain Badiou's theoretical writing. Badiou's classicism, his tendency towards 'monumental constructions' in thought, produces a binary articulation of relational hypostasis as the absolute relation of non-relation between the particular and the singular. The nomenclature is not specific to Badiou. He echoes a general philosophical concern with the relationship between the universal and the particular, which produces anti-relational thought. What I take from Badiou in my understanding of relational hypostasis is this: firstly, any rethinking of the ontology of relation is impossible within a system that separates multiplicity from the finite. Such a system produces its own crisis of representation through its adherence to an ontological division between what is 'present' and that which 'appears'. Secondly I take from Badiou, and this is my understanding, that the

[3] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life,* trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p.43.

question of relation only becomes important for thought when a crisis of established relations occurs. This is to say that the question of relation comes to the fore only at the point that it is already *post-relational*. From my perspective, Badiou's logic and meta-ontology in *Being and Event* are symptomatic of the need to re-think relation within new terms: these terms are post-relational in the sense that they can no longer be thought within the rubric of the universal and the particular.

Jacques Rancière's thinking of relation is yet another component within my thinking of relational hypostasis. Rancière embraces relational encounter as a principle of social action, but his refusal of established institutions and social structures seems to endorse an opportunistic and committed art that fails to connect with the socius. What I take from Rancière is the crucial insight that the interrogation of relational hypostasis entails a re-thinking of representation that encompasses the forms of non-art and the systems of distribution and exchange that dictate appearance: thus the 'operations of the image' can be read within Bourriaud's 'operative realism'.

Why have relational and post-relational practices returned to the ontology of the event?

In *The Radicant*, Bourriaud claims that: 'the modern favors the event over monumental order, the ephemeral over an eternity writ in stone; it is a defense of fluidity against omnipresent reification.'[4] He is speaking here of a rejuvenated modernism or 'altermodernism' in which concrete material relations might be constructed by artists rather than any idealistic programme for social change that he associates with modernism's previous incarnation.

The importance of the 'event' in relational and post-relational art practice is linked to a desire to overcome 'omnipresent reification' or, relationally

[4] Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2002), p. 16.

hypostatic terms. Its emergence is linked to the need to imagine the possibility of social transformation. The ‘event’ thus becomes a conduit for the emergence of hitherto unimagined relational forms.

It must be emphasized that there are many ways in which the event is currently being thought. My thesis reflects this diversity and seeks to highlight some of the difficulties involved in reconciling them. For example, Bourriaud’s thinking of the event is influenced by Althusser’s aleatory materialism. I believe that Bourriaud takes up Althusser’s principle of the ‘necessity of contingency’ – that is, a belief that established facts are always contingent and can be made otherwise. This is fundamental to relational aesthetics’ programme of social change. In Bourriaud’s hands, this becomes the basis of a principle of artistic-social agency. What this entails, then, is a belief that events can be both anticipated and engineered. In this respect, his outlook is similar to Rancière. Rancière acknowledges that events are rare but grants artistic agency a similarly privileged position. However, this position is contestable on the basis that it is not a true reading of the event.

For Badiou, the appearance of events is posited as the (im)possible appearance of the singular within the particular. In addition, for the most part his writing has ruled out the possibility of producing events. This makes sense within Badiou’s overall system on the basis that a true singularity is by definition unthinkable. Notwithstanding his pronouncements upon sites of torsion and susceptibility as places of subjectivisation, it is fair to say that Badiou places agency within *post-evental fidelity*. That is, the event never appears as such but can be viewed *post hoc* in the fidelity demonstrated by its subjects. Badiou’s notion of the event is therefore implicative. A major part of my philosophical reflection will therefore be concerned with this problematic relationship between event and subjective agent. This paradox in fact demands the rethinking of relation as itself an evental movement, addressed through a reading of Gashé’s work in Chapter 4.

What is the relationship between relational and post-relational practice and the historical and neo-avant-gardes? How have the cognates of sociability within previous forms of 'socially engaged practice' translated into the rubric of relationality?

Bourriaud rejects the reading of relational aesthetics under the rubric of the avant-garde to the extent that he seeks to avoid placing his polemics within the teleology and idealism of modernism. Notwithstanding that he outlines a programme for a new modernism this is less a recommencement of modernism than it is a reaction against what he sees as the sterility of postmodernity. Rather he seeks to break with any historical or teleological reading of his project in order to assert its materialism against any idealistic reading. This is entirely consistent with his incorporation of Althusser's 'aleatory materialism' as a methodology for relational, postproductive and radicant practices. I suspect also that Bourriaud's disengagement with the avant-garde is a rhetorical device that allows him to underscore what is radically different within the conjuncture of relationality, namely the imperative for artists to inhabit and manipulate forms within globalised culture under what I term symptomatic conditions of 'relational hypostasis'. Bourriaud does acknowledge the importance of the avant-garde as a specific conjuncture within art and also the translation and re-enactment of its concepts and methodologies within contemporary practice. But his critical position is that of a re-invention of modernity as a utilitarian and materialist practice. I do not seek to go against the grain of Bourriaud's position by placing relational practice within the teleology of the historical or neo avant-gardes. However I feel that an overview of relational practice warrants some examination of the avant-garde in order to shed light on the importance of these inherited forms and methodologies. I am thinking in particular of the cognates of sociability: performance, participation and collaboration; and also, avant-garde methodologies of constructed forms: inorganicity, collage and montage, translated in the relational idiom to principles of the immediacy of social activism. In terms of the *critical reception* of relational aesthetics it is important to recognise that

misunderstandings have arisen because Bourriaud's interlocutors have adopted positions informed by theories of the avant-garde. This is crucial for example to understanding the dispute concerning the autonomy of relational art.

What are the consequences for the theory of artistic autonomy of relational and post-relational artistic practice? Can the theory of autonomy be maintained in the light of these practices? In other words, what gives these practices their distinctive character as art?

The broad critical response to the publication of *Relational Aesthetics* derives largely from a defence of artistic autonomy against Bourriaud's seemingly promiscuous adoption of the forms of non-art to relational practice. Whilst it is generally accepted amongst Bourriaud's interlocutors that there must be some form of connection between autonomous art and that which is heteronomous to it, the charge is that Bourriaud subsumes artistic autonomy beneath artistic heteronomy. Generally then, the criticism is that Bourriaud goes 'too far'. This thesis addresses the prepositions upon which this claim is founded. In particular it will be concerned with the nature of the point of separation between art and non-art and seek to re-define artistic autonomy within the rubric of relational art. This entails an exploration of the following question:

In what sense are relational and post-relational artists as 'tenants of culture' employing the use of forms mimetically?

Is it fair to say that 'mimetic' practices merely duplicate or parody the social forms they seek to inhabit? If this is correct, then the charge that relational practices are subsumed under forms that are heteronomous to art, (that relational art is no longer identifiable as 'art'), would appear to be justified. If, on the other hand, we look to Bourriaud's precise methodology of formal mimesis, that is, as acts of translation, re-temporalisation, scripting and topological nomination, the fear of artistic

heteronomy appears to be exaggerated. From this perspective what is produced in the act of mimesis is decidedly not ‘the same’.

From an Adornian perspective one might argue that the model of mimesis used in the critique of relational aesthetics, (the parodic or reductive imitation of forms) is tainted with identitarian rational thought. For Adorno, mimesis is the means by which we adapt to an environment. It occupies the realm of pre-rational knowing in the sense that it is an instinctive act that is overlooked and devalued by the abstraction and rationalism of enlightenment thought. My analysis will seek to construct a model of mimesis that is adequate to a faithful reading of Bourriaud and which I think will shed a different light on the nature of relational art’s claims to autonomy.

What is the nature of relational art’s engagement with archival practices and informational networks of expanded authorship within contemporary art practice?

This question arises in the context of the postproductive and radicant practices advanced in Bourriaud’s extension of relational art into the sphere of internet art. Bourriaud considers that electronic communication and its networks of exchange can be appropriated to the objectives of relational art. In other words, these forms can be re-used in the construction of novel topologies of relation. The legitimacy of internet art’s emancipatory potential has been questioned from its inception on the basis that it aligns itself too closely with the instrumental reason of advanced capital and its processes of de- and re-territorialising subjectivity and community. Bourriaud’s postproductive and radicant forms of relational art, thus place themselves within an acute reformulation and anxiety surrounding the continued status of artistic autonomy.

Relational artworks can take many forms including gallery-based works, online networks of expanded authorship and experimental communities.

Can we yet discern a new artistic form of post-relationality? What is the difference between relational and post-relational artistic practice?

My thesis posits an emergent form of post-relationality. This is not to suggest that we can or should ascribe to this the status of a concept, nor should it add another 'ism' to the canon of art history. 'Post-relationality' is used in this thesis as a term for a number of symptoms, often retrogade movements, in the thinking of relationality in art and philosophy. As such, I regard it as a dynamic principle that informs everything that follows. In order to demonstrate this I will set out the facets of post-relational thinking that inform the research question. I will set this out by way of a constellation.

If I were concerned to conceptualise the 'post-relational' I could find a convenient point of demarcation between Bourriaud's account of early gallery and institutionally based relational art practice and its subsequent inhabitation of informational networks and communities of sense. However, relational art develops unevenly and I wish to avoid historicizing its development. It is fair to say that post-relationality entails an extension of the use of forms, specifically as a means of employing forms as non-visual representation. It is the broadening of the search for non-visual communicative forms that marks the post-relational within the theories of post-representation.

Post-relationality can also be viewed as the symptomatic re-thinking of relation as aformal and intricate against the binarisms of classical thought that generally ascribe no quality to relation. On this basis, one could say that post-relationality entails the use of anti-philosophy in its opposition to the exclusion of relation from classical ontology. More broadly, we could say that post-relationality marks a moment in which heterological thinking enters aesthetics as a principle of construction for new knowledge, rather than its deconstruction and in which the specificity of relation is rescued and divorced from its ontological determination.

The financial crisis in 2008 precipitated the reinvention of relational aesthetics as a strain of communist-enclave thinking. The effect of this crisis upon consciousness was to impress upon us the extent to which relational hypostasis has taken hold. The crisis appears to have no solution and therefore the demand for 'better ways of living' now has a more populist appeal. Post-relationality is then the full appearance to consciousness of reified relations as relationally hypostatic. Relational art appears only because the hypostasis of relation has already passed its zenith. It is only when something begins to disappear that its concept becomes apparent.

Relational art was post-relational from its inception. I think that the post-relational attitude to relational art is to view it as a framing mechanism. It presented itself initially as an (im)possible programme for art in the light of generally reified relations.

Post-relationality is the formulation of modes of representation for micropolitics against its anti-visual paradigm. It relies upon a new conjuncture of aesthetics with topological presentation.

Post-relationality is a critique of finitude and of 'nature'. Once the aleatory materialist content of relational art is fully recognized it becomes aligned with the thinking of the necessity of contingency. This mode of thought reverses the 'capitalist realist' perspective in which change is seen as impossible or unlikely. It emphasizes the historical contingency of existing relations.

Given that relational aesthetics is founded upon a micropolitics that is inimical to representation and in particular, to 'visual representation', what would be an adequate model of the forms of representation proposed by relational and post-relational artistic practices? What are the various forms of representation implicated within relational art and what might a relational 'topology' offer in terms of beginning to speak of new forms of representation such as 'relational shapes' and matrices?

Relational aesthetics emerges from a distinctly anti-representational milieu. This can be traced back in part, although not exclusively, to Felix Guattari's micropolitics. Guattari proposes a micropolitics that works *against* representation and in particular its repressive and ideological function in the production of meaning.[5] All of this begs the question: what are artists to do in the face of this *de facto* prohibition of images? Moreover, what tools are available for political art in bringing a critique of capitalist forms of subjectivity into consciousness? A potential artistic reinvestment in representation does not simply entail an about turn: a rejection of micropolitics in favour of the political expediency of a 'committed art'. Rather the question entails a wholesale reconfiguration of representation within the conjunction of globalized artistic discourse identified by Bourriaud in *Postproduction* and *The Radicant*. What are the forms of representation adequate to a changed reality? It is fair to say that Bourriaud embraces the notion of representation as an act and that this is, in some part, because he understands the finitude and historically contingent nature of ideology.

The overall project of relational art is as a critique of 'the visual', a term that Bourriaud derives from Serge Daney's analysis. However, this is not to say that relational aesthetics does not advocate a form of representation of its own. Nor is representation considered a 'necessary evil', a recurrent tendency in accounts of the ontology of 'live art'. On my reading, what Bourriaud proposes is an expedient use of the various forms of representation at large within the socius which, through processes of translation, relocation and linkage constitute liminal matrices or constellations that might be read as singular representational forms. This singularity is, though, based upon a principle of *multiplication* rather than negation.

[5] Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics* (New York: Peregrine, 1984)

This notion of multiplication in Bourriaud's work requires some explication: I will begin by setting out some of the forms of representation that we find within relational art practice. Relational art is often read as hostile to the production of artistic objects of contemplation that might fit under the rubric of viewership we might apply to the plastic arts. (It is more accurate to say that these objects are regarded as particular forms rather than as ideological presentations.) Any critique of relational art that operates from a reading of its disavowal of the object is therefore prone to asserting that relational art produces nothing that one might term art and therefore demands of relational art that it demonstrate its utilitarian or ethical credentials. Bourriaud's critique of 'the visual' is certainly a cornerstone of relational aesthetics, but is simply one facet of his programme. I believe it is important to read Bourriaud with Rancière's critique of 'the future of the image' as an expansion of the image into the currency of its networks of circulation. In addition, to read Bourriaud with Auslander's critique of 'liveness' which both addresses the image as a mediator of the event but also re-temporalises and re-spatialises the operations of the image into an expanded field of viewership. However, a full reading of the representation of relation requires a consideration of numerous other representational forms: how then do relational artworks translate and re-territorialise the representative forms of democracy? In particular, how does the liminal site relate to the forms of the public and counter-public spheres? This requires some reading of relational aesthetics within the rubric of Jürgen Habermas' and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's writings. It requires in fact a critique of the forms of the 'misrepresentation' of the public realm. In addition, what are the representative forms of subjectivity proposed by relational aesthetics? How do these relate to the notion of subjective configurations and to the performative aspects of labour and general social technique within the informationalised sphere of production?

Where is the work? What is the ontology and function of the artistic document within the social system of relational art?

As I have indicated, the complexity of relational forms of representation has steered the critique of relational aesthetics towards an enquiry into the nature of its object(s). Relational and post-relational artworks commonly rely upon methodologies of performance or 'live art'. Thus like their predecessors they find an audience through the circulation and dissemination of documentary material. The tendency of relational works in particular to disappear invites the reactivation of debates around the ontology of performance art, which traditionally privileges the 'unmarked' nature of performance over its secondary documentation. Within the critique of relational aesthetics, the ontology of documentation takes on a renewed significance. The essentialist ontology of the unmarked performance has a political import in that unlike the still or moving image document, it lays claim to resisting commodification. Bourriaud regards the dissolution of such an ontological divide as 'established fact': the question 'where is the work' is subsumed by broader considerations about the nature of postproductive artistic technique and the nature of representation within globalised networks of exchange. The question, 'where is the work?' is, therefore, a corollary of the question of how relational forms should be represented, or rather articulated, within a matrix of relation. The question requires modification from an ontological enquiry towards an analysis of the function of documentation as an operation of 'critical realism'.

What might a model of the documentary real or more broadly critical realism look like? Can relational practice make a claim to critical realism? In particular, what can Bourriaud's notion of operational realism contribute to the renewed debate around realism within representation?

Relational art is generally available to its audience through its visual documentation, but it is an anti-visual aesthetics. Thus, there is a paradox

at the heart of relational aesthetics. If one simply ignores this, and some relational artists do, by embracing photographic documentation, then what is essential to relational aesthetics, its micropolitics, cannot be maintained. What is required is therefore some re-thinking of the ontology of artistic documentation as no longer a secondary material. That is, it might be thought of as performative in its own right. It both presences the work *and* is productive of arts sociable forms. My question is whether a notion of the documentary real as a singular presentation (in Adorno's terms, objective) can form the basis of a new critical realism. What are the strategies and operations within relational art's methodologies and forms that might constitute it as a form of critical realism? This requires not a thinking of realism in terms of the power of representations, but in terms of a matrix of relational forms that are *made to represent*.

Political aesthetics has been dominated in the early twenty-first century by the relational philosophy of Jacques Rancière and the anti-relational philosophy of Alain Badiou. Are their philosophical positions adequate to the analysis of relational and post-relational art?

In the past decade, the discourse of political aesthetics has been dominated by the theoretical positions of Badiou and Rancière. Rancière's work in particular has been well received by theorists and practitioners of relationality and post-relationality for two principal reasons. Firstly, Rancière embraces the notion of montage as a principle of social action and secondly, his stance on artistic autonomy, which entails a willingness to embrace hybrid forms of art and the relationship of imbrication between art and non-art, is homologous to the interdisciplinary forms of relational practice. Whilst Rancière is willing to accept that there is nothing 'proper to art', his unwillingness to entertain a version of relationality capable of inhabiting existing social structures and institutions is problematic. This is because one cannot be certain when and where new relations might 'take hold'. In other words,

his analysis lacks a materialist focus or topology for any lasting instantiation of new relations.

The strength of Badiou's analysis on the other hand is his emphasis upon topology as the site of subjective determination within a given configuration. In addition, his logic of appearing provides a compelling analysis of the persistence of structures of domination that preclude the appearance of singular or novel relations. Badiou's Maoist principle of cellular political organisation has found a sympathetic reception amongst post-relational practitioners in that it appears to provide a model for micropolitical structures of artistic collaboration. In addition, one might have expected Badiou's insistence that an artwork operates as a linking principle within a chain of other works, a model of configuration, to have struck a chord. On the whole there has been little take-up of Badiou's approach within the discussion of relational practice. Why is this? Firstly, Badiou's position is abstract and anti-relational to the core. He offers no example of the emergence of new relations through the sensible other than through the miraculous appearance of events. Whilst he is able to supply a brilliant logical analysis of the problem of relational hypostasis, he offers little by way of encouragement to artists who might look to him for a principle of social agency. Secondly, Badiou's insistence upon the separation of art from politics and his unwillingness to accept hybrid forms of art has also alienated him from the constituency of relational art.

The problem that this particular research question addresses is then a persistent binarism between a non-materialist relationality in Rancière and a materialist anti-relationality in Badiou. These approaches themselves constitute a relation of non-relation at the heart of political aesthetics. The deeper import of the question is whether a political aesthetics driven by the strictures of philosophy and *its objects* is in fact hindering a proper discussion of relationality.

The question then becomes whether relation can be re-thought in ways that might free its conceptualization from the constraints of the singular

and the sovereign: namely its presentation within the tropes of the particular and the universal through which philosophy conceptualizes its objects.

Can relational and post-relational art substantiate its claim to be a materialist aesthetics and if so, in what sense?

Bourriaud's 'random materialism' is essential to a faithful reading of relational art. A materialist aesthetics is for Bourriaud axiomatic to his thinking. He draws upon Althusser's philosophy of the encounter and notion of aleatory materialism. Althusser claims that a hidden strain or 'undercurrent' of materialist philosophy can be traced back to Epicurus. This is not in any way an idealist philosophy. Its basic tenet is that materialism, i.e. what appears as 'established fact', arises from random encounters and deviations within the Epicurian 'rain' of multiplicity or the purely heterogeneous. Thus within Althusser's materialism the appearance of things does not rely upon any *a priori* of the concept. Rather it is the product of a deviation and encounter within the rain of multiplicity that produces a pile up of atoms. This may sound fanciful and I will be examining aleatory materialism in detail in my first chapter. For present purposes this question arises from my conviction that what is incontestable is that Bourriaud's adoption of random materialism produces manifold consequences for any reading of his methodology and for an understanding of his approach to the question of sociability. In terms of methodology, Bourriaud's materialism entails a working against conceptualization and favours a principle of construction that always proceeds inductively from the fragment towards a network or matrix of forms. In this respect, he falls within a genealogy that can be traced back to Walter Benjamin. Bourriaud's cognates of sociability (collaboration, participation, encounter and event) can only be faithfully read within the rubric of his materialism. The importance of Althusser's influence upon Bourriaud's materialism is missed in much of the critical response to relational aesthetics. This is a central argument for this thesis. Moreover, if one fully appreciates the implications of Bourriaud's materialism the

discourse of material and immaterial labour can be seen as having exercised a disproportionate influence over the reception of relational art.

To return to the question: in what sense can Bourriaud's work lay claim to a materialist aesthetics? Bourriaud's materialism is crucial to my reading of relational and post-relational representation as a matrix of forms. This reading entails a development of Bourriaud's position through an exploration of the philosophy of relation itself. In particular, I will read the 'undercurrent' of aleatory materialism along side Gashé's re-thinking of relation. Gashé's analysis of the indeterminacy of relational ontology identifies relation as a minimal form of being or *ens minimum.* As both an influence upon thought but not a thing as such, relation occupies an acute relation of non-relation to the history of classical philosophy. The ontology of relation is therefore something of an undercurrent in its own right. My thinking of post-relational forms of representation reads aleatory materialism as contiguous with Gashé's notion of 'relational shape'. In addition, it seeks to place Bourriaud's thought within what I identify symptomatically as a heterological thinking of materialism that has emerged from the intellectual burnout of deconstructive thought.

Original Contributions to Knowledge

My thesis provides an original contribution to knowledge in that it examines systematically the reason for art's current subsumption beneath the rubric of relationality. It presents a review not only of the key polemics of relational art but a reading of its critical reception and developments that have occurred in the wake of this. Thus I investigate the conditions of *post-relational art* and in particular its emerging theories of representation and materialism.

The model of post-relational representation I propose is unique in that it links the recent defence of representation to symptomatic movements in Bourriaud's thought going back to *Relational Aesthetics*. Thus it

identifies the kernel of the current arguments within aporias that arise in the use of micropolitics within relational art that were present from the start.

My thesis' claim to originality also lies in addressing the anti-relational philosophy of Alain Badiou and the relational thought of Jacques Rancière not as the conclusion to the analysis of philosophical relation, as has previously been the case, but as a premise for a re-thinking of relation. This combines the philosophy of Gashé with the aleatory materialism of Althusser and Bourriaud. It combines the thinking of aformal *relational shape* advanced by Gashé with the modelling of formal matrices advanced by Bourriaud in order to arrive at a first statement of post-relational aesthetics.

In addition, I propose an original interpretation of the event in art. Rather than externalising the event as a providential or absent third term between the singular and the particular, it places the event at the heart of the 'minimal relation'. Gashé has proposed this on the basis that it represents a lost thinking of relation. Where I advance upon Gashé's position is that I place the event at the heart of Bourriaud's transitive ethics of encounter.

My methodology is original in that it productively combines what is homologous in Adorno and Bourriaud's methodologies without ignoring their differences. It is a methodology constructed out of the principles of their inductive thought and use of the fragment against conceptualisation, history or teleology. Bourriaud's critics have paid his methodology scant attention. Throughout this thesis, I point out where this produces a misreading of the programme of relational art.

Methodology

On Bourriaud's and Adorno's Homologous Methodologies

Adorno's 'The Essay as Form'[6] is, I think, a legitimate point of entry into Bourriaud's methodology in *Relational Aesthetics*. Adorno states, 'the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done.'[7] This seems to me homologous to the credo of *Postproduction* as the appropriation and use of pre-existing forms. It also reflects the tenor of Bourriaud's polemical methodology.

If Adorno is at all 'at large' in Bourriaud's aesthetics then his direct influence is acknowledged only obliquely or negatively. There is a reference to the 'completely administered world' within *Relational Aesthetics*[8], more or less a clarion call of Adorno's critique of identitarian thinking, but this is countered by another remark that Frankfurt School philosophy is a 'magnificent but ineffectual toy'.[9]

Bourriaud's rejection of the Frankfurt School is based upon his scepticism about its 'directly critical' approach and his preference for 'micro-utopian' strategies. He says, for example, that:

> Social utopias and revolutionary hopes have given way to everyday micro-utopias and imitative strategies, any stance that is 'directly' critical of society is futile, if based on the illusion of a marginality that is nowadays impossible, not to say regressive.[10]

This is, in fact, a reductive reading of Adorno's aesthetics because in essence, Adorno is anything but a political opportunist and in my view it

[6] Theodor W. Adorno 'The Essay as Form', in B. O'Connor *The Adorno Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000)
[7] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', pp. 91-111.
[8] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.76.
[9] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.31.
[10] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.31.

is in fact the indirectness of his criticality and his engagement with the concept through multiple and partial readings of the object that characterise his thought. The distinction between them perhaps lies in the fact that whereas Adorno presents aesthetics negatively as an *index falsi* of the world Bourriaud appears to present relational forms on an affirmative footing. However, even Adorno recognises what is positive in the negative dialectical method on the basis that it 'respects its object'. [11]

Any attempt to construct a genealogy of relational aesthetics can at times be a difficult task, much to the frustration of Bourriaud's critics. The caveat here is of course that Bourriaud's critics generally seek to force relational aesthetics into a genealogy that suits their own intellectual proclivities, rather than his. Any attempt to place Bourriaud's work within a linear teleology would be a disavowal of his materialist aesthetics. Rather than placing Bourriaud against Bourriaud, within the direct lineage of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, I intend to examine the *homologies* between these thinkers, to read them syncretically. In fidelity to the principles of relational thought I will place them within a diachronic relation. One of the essential features of Bourriaud's thought is his idea that new spatio-temporal relations produce new conditions for knowledge. On this basis I will be 'producing' a relation between Adorno and Bourriaud across time that strictly speaking is not there. I do this in order to arrive at a methodology that is adequate to a faithful reading of both thinkers.

What I propose to do then is to read Bourriaud through Adorno and vice versa. Specifically, there is a mutual commitment by both theorists to an inductive methodology, one that entails the arrangement of fragments into constellations, networks or matrices of meaning that proceed from an anti-teleological premise. This similarity in approach to the use of the 'fragment' gives to their writing a similar complexion. Both

[11] T W Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) pp. 144-146.

acknowledge, in fact, the influence upon their inductive methodologies of Walter Benjamin's thought.

I will be reading Adorno – who is the exemplary thinker and anticipator of post-modern method through the notion of *Darstellung* (a presentation that does not define its concept) and the essay as the praxis of *writing-form* – with Bourriaud, who rejects postmodernism in favour of an aleatory-materialist modernity. Fredric Jameson makes the case for a reading of Adorno as a thinker of the postmodern on the basis that his 'prophecies of the "total system"' finally came true, in wholly unexpected forms.'[12] He says that although Adorno's dialectics may have seemed unfashionable in the 1970's:

> there is some chance that he may turn out to have been the analyst of our own period, which he did not live to see, and in which late capitalism has all but succeeded in eliminating the final loopholes of nature and of the Unconscious, of subversion and the aesthetic, of individual and collective praxis alike, and, with a final fillip, in eliminating any memory trace of what thereby no longer existed in the henceforth postmodern landscape.[13]

If Adorno anticipates this state of affairs, variously in, for example, his reflections upon the poverty of philosophy, his critique of positivism and enlightenment rationalism and his better-known analysis, with Horkheimer, of the culture industry, then he anticipates also that the future will require a new formal working methodology. His response comes in his thinking on the form of the essay and its principle of *fragmentary construction as constellation*.

For his part, Bourriaud not only uses this kind of methodology in his own polemics, but extends the principle of the fragment into a form of social action: the construction of liminal sites of relation, and the post-production of forms. One of the best examples of Bourriaud's

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[12] Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, ThePersistence of the Dialectic* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), p.5.
[13] Jameson, *Late Marxism*, p.5.

methodology and I hope, for that matter, a vindication of my own syncretic methodology in reading him with Adorno, comes in a section of *Postproduction*: 'Deejaying and Contemporary Art: Similar Configurations'.[14] Bourriaud begins with the following description: 'When the crossfader of the mixing board is set in the middle, two samples are played simultaneously…' Bourriaud then seeks to contextualise the metaphor of mixing within the blurring of the distinction between consumption and production. He claims that, 'The *ecstatic consumer* of the eighties is fading out in favour of an intelligent and potentially subversive consumer: the user of forms'.[15] This, he says, will extend 'DIY' to all levels of cultural production. Significantly for me, he points out that:

> DJ culture denies the binary oppositions between the proposal of the transmitter and the participation of the receiver at the heart of many debates on modern art. The work of the DJ consists in conceiving linkages through which the works flow into each other, representing at once a product, a tool, and a medium. The producer is only a *transmitter* for the following producer, and each artist from now on evolves in a network of contiguous forms that dovetail endlessly.[16]

If indeed this model extends to all areas of cultural production then it would be disingenuous of me to ignore this within my own methodology. Therefore my syncretic reading and my structure reflect this. On the latter point, I do not analyse individual works of art or seek to place them within any taxonomy. Rather, I seek to read relational practice across questions of their social imbrication, technological determination, philosophical-aesthetic implications and representative capacities. This approach dictates the structure of this thesis. It is important to read post-relational aesthetics symptomatically and I emhasise that this cannot amount to a definitive account.

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[14] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprogrammes the World* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2002), p.39.
[15] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.39.
[16] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.40.

Reification and Relational Hypostasis

To return to Bourriaud's oblique references to Adorno: Bourriaud accepts the problem of the reified and 'completely administered world' as the premise for a thinking of a corrective relational aesthetics. He says, 'The space of current relations is…the space most affected by general reification.'[17] And yet Bourriaud's project appears to embrace and appropriate these reified relational forms appears, on the face of it, at odds with Adorno's model of art's 'relative' autonomy. Thus, Adorno's thinking of political aesthetics would appear too rigid to accommodate the fluidity of Bourriaud's thinking of the relationship between art and non-art. In other words, Bourriaud appears to take greater risks with artistic autonomy than does Adorno. However, I do not think this problem is insurmountable. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* contains many expositions of artistic autonomy and it would, I think, be hasty and reductive to 'nail down' a definitive statement of his position without taking into consideration both Adorno's overall methodology and the nature of the book itself: it is an aggregate of fragments and demands itself to be read as a constellation. I will deal with this problem in greater detail in my first chapter. For present purposes I will simply propose that my methodology accepts, with Bourriaud and Adorno, some level of imbrication between artistic autonomy and that which is heteronomous to it as essential to political art and aesthetics. Whether one regards this in terms of a new materialist aesthetics of use or of a negative dialectical presentation of 'truth' is a separate question.

Adorno and Bourriaud's *anti-teleological method* can be viewed as a commonality that is more fundamental than their differences of articulation. Just as Adorno addresses the relationally identitarian thinking that is the legacy of rationalism, Bourriaud's materialist relationality rejects positivist thinking or any preconception of the order

[17] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.1.

of things. Both Adorno and Bourriaud share a commitment to praxis: in both cases praxis involves a principle of construction premised upon the construction of relational forms. For Bourriaud this entails the recognition of a novel conjuncture (a situation, typically dictated by technology and globalization) that demands a response through the appropriation of forms: the production of liminal spaces of 'counter-subjectivity'. In Adorno's work, the nomenclature is that of 'constellation': the melding of fragments and multiple perspectives that allow the interrogation of the concept by the object. In both cases what is at stake is the *inductive* construction of relational matrices that take on the power of representations *without thereby submitting to statements of ideology.*

This anti-teleological commitment in both authors is complemented by their shared anti-Cartesianism. I think that this trait is essential in defining both as relational thinkers. Adorno identifies the Cartesian subject as one of the central problems of philosophy. In Bourriaud's thought the individual is taken as socially determined. He says, 'There is nothing less natural than subjectivity.'[18] In thinking, subjectivity as socially determined Bourriaud's methodological response introduces what he calls a thinking of *trans-individuality*. This notion recognises the materialism of 'the bonds' that link people together in 'social formations' as the 'essence of humankind'.[19] He recognises these bonds as historical facts, but the promise of trans-individual thought is that he views such bonds as nevertheless historically contingent. The issue here is the method of linkage, of conjunctures that comprise material relations as primary and the subject as merely its effect: This is not simply a critique of Cartesian subjectivity, but is the basis of a methodology of social transformation.

As I have said, both authors begin with the premise of the problem of general reification. This is why I link them through the term *relational*

[18] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.88.
[19] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.18.

hypostasis. For Adorno it is the separation of art that implores him to argue that in spite of the separation of art and science this opposition should not be hypostatised. For Adorno, reification is a by-product of rationalism and ultimately to the totalising *ratio* of the enlightenment and the principle of exchange within the commodity form. Significantly he regards this separation as *historically contingent* but no less 'real' for that. Thus Adorno accepts the factity of hypostasis as the object that produces his *negative dialectical method* axiomatically. This is the method by which one frames truth within untruth. For Bourriaud, the roots of hypostasis are also categorised within our milieu of capital and exchange. Thus I think that in Bourriaud's thinking there is a specific *re-enactment* of this critique of rationalism albeit within a radically different *conjuncture*: that of globalization and the network society. Again Bourriaud treats hypostasis as historically contingent but nevertheless as something that has acquired the status of fact. The impetus for Bourriaud's thinking is not dialectical, however, but *aleatory materialist*. Thus the impetus for Bourriaud is not to frame hypostasis but to propose different conjunctures in which the artwork becomes the demonstration of better forms of living. What they undoubtedly share I suggest is the desire to produce counter-subjects to capital.

Writing as a form of praxis: the 'enthusiastic fragment'

Both Adorno and Bourriaud *view their writing as a form of praxis* that seeks to overcome the limitations of rational discursive models. For Adorno, this is directed against the preponderance of the concept as the measure of its object that thereby distances the latter. Both Bourriaud and Adorno challenge the subject-object relation as imprinted in thought by the totalising impetus of what is 'rationally' conditioned by the commodity form of exchange, by hegemonic relation. What this means is that they share an approach in which the principle of a *relation of non-relation*, thus the appearance of reality as fragmented and aporetic, demands an appropriate *methodological response*. They develop similar approaches to writing in which fragments are constructively linked

according to the principle of a nexus or matrix. Adorno's methodology is that of the constellation;[20] Bourriaud's is that of the conjuncture and topology. In both cases they use the fragmentary nature of their writing to their own advantage. For Adorno the essay is 'weak' and for Bourriaud it is 'precarious'. They share a commitment towards acquiring the universal in a concrete but non-totalising sense. They explore the acute relation of non-relation between the universal and the particular that conditions 'reality' through multiple and partial readings. This is to say that they do not seek to 'determine' their object (reality) through the imposition of pre-existing concepts or categories: rather they construct a reality through multiple lattices of encounter. They arrive at their object through the accumulation of multiple perspectives whose motility is derived from the particularity of lived experience and in the case of Adorno, the monadic logic of a particular artwork. Thus:

> In the essay, concepts do not build a continuum of operations, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of this texture.[21]

What appears meandering and fragmentary in the essays and polemics of these theorists is in fact the demonstration of a methodology that is open and based upon a heterological perspective that is essential to a re-thinking of relationality. We might call it a methodology that is allergic to methodology. Thus Adorno says that: 'The essay simultaneously suspends the traditional concept of method.'[22] And also that,

> The usual reproach against the essay, that it is fragmentary and random, itself assumes the givenness of totality and thereby the identity of subject and object, and suggests that man is in control of totality. But the desire of the essay is not

[20] 'In the essay discreetly separated elements enter into a readable context; it erects no scaffolding, no edifice. Through their own movement the elements crystallize into a configuration. It is a force field, just as under the essay's glance every intellectual artefact must transform itself into a force field.' Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p.102.
[21] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p.101.
[22] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p.99.

> to seek and filter the eternal out of the transitory; it wants, rather, to make the transitory eternal. Its weakness testifies to the non-identity that it has to express, as well as to that excess of intention over its object, and thereby it points to that utopia which is blocked out by the classification of the world into the eternal and the transitory. In the emphatic essay, thought gets rid of the traditional idea of truth.[23]

'Art history' as the history of production

Both Adorno and Bourriaud share the conviction that 'art history' can only be written from the perspective of production rather than exclusively as a mode of reception. Bourriaud proposes that 'art history' is only notionally possible for him if it could be re-written as the history of the relations of artistic production. Thus he says that:

> the 'Art' network is porous, and it is the relations of this network with all the areas of production that determines its development. It would be possible, furthermore, to write a history of art that is the history of this production of relations with the world, by naively raising the issue of the nature of the external relations 'invented' by artworks.[24]

Again, their corresponding outlooks on this point convinces me of the possibility of a cross reading.

Artistic Subjectivity and Objectivity

Adorno seeks a form of objectivity in which objective reality is 'paradoxically' a form of extreme subjectivisation that precludes the free play necessary for the development of true, that is, subjective objectivity. Bourriaud looks for this within the production of liminal sites of non-alienated relational exchange. Both Bourriaud and Adorno reverse the subject-object relation in order to render the singularity of the artwork truly objective against a backdrop of objectively reified relations. For

[23] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form' p.99.
[24] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.27.

Adorno this is a negative presentation or a non-synthetic dialectic articulation of a 'wrong world'. For Bourriaud this takes the form of a concrete, however fleeting demonstration of a 'better' one.

Artistic Forms

Within both Bourriaud and Adorno's thinking, the notion of form is central to their methodological approaches. What is compelling within both is the necessity of viewing artistic form *as its content*.
Adorno states: 'The positivist tendency to set up every possible examinable object in rigid opposition to the knowing subject remains – in this as in every other instance – caught up with the rigid separation of form and content…'[25] Equally Bourriaud posits *Relational Aesthetics* not as a theory as such but as a methodology in which the use, appropriation and mimetic translation of social and artistic forms is the very subject of relational art itself.

Mimesis is not strictly speaking a methodology used by these thinkers but it is one of the objects of their enquiries. Both place a premium upon the use of mimetic procedures in art. Mimesis will be discussed at length in my first chapter but I raise it here, again, in order again to explain my decision to read these thinkers syncretically and also to point out an essential difference that might impact on my reading of the mimetic.

Dialectics as an Epistemological Category

There is a fundamental difference between Adorno and Bourriaud that cannot be dismissed lightly. This is the contrast between Bourriaud's use of aleatory materialism, which lacks ontological foundation and Adorno's reading of 'nature', which valorises the latter as an *a priori* category of the non-identical to be contrasted with the administered world. This is deeply problematic for my reading and generally my

[25] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p.94.

endorsement of Bourriaud's materialism. Steven Vogel has addressed this question, contrasting Lukács' appraisal of nature as a social category with Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of essential nature in opposition to its 'humanness'.[26] Adorno posits a 'wrong world' within his negative dialectic as the alienation of nature. Were I to follow his lead this would not only affect my reading of materialism but also the notion of mimesis, which I choose to read in non-essentialist terms. I read mimesis not as any structuralist-anthropological category but as a materialist endeavour based upon the investigation and inscription of forms.

The broader consequences of this decision are that this thesis treats the dialectic as an epistemological method rather than as an ontological enquiry. This theme is repeated throughout the work. Ontology in this thesis is treated as a category of normative relation: it is something imputed as a supplement to relational configurations and is generally treated as a form of illusion that serves the purpose of making that which is contingent appear necessary. On this basis I would say that my cross reading of Adorno and Bourriaud aims at a fully materialist dialectic.

[26] Steven Vogel, *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), p.69.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1: Relational Art as a Form of Sociability

My first chapter sets out the programme of relational aesthetics including elements of Bourriaud's thought that appear in *Postproduction* and *The Radicant*. Given the emphasis of previous discussions of Bourriaud's work upon his first book, *Relational Aesthetics*, I think that this is necessary to a proper overview. This has the benefit of emphasizing important elements of Bourriaud's thinking that have been missed. For example, the influence of Althusser's aleatory materialism and of relational art's propositions as to topological forms and matrices. The major theme of the first chapter is the problematic question of the autonomy of relational art. This arises from its 'mimetic use' of form and its micropolitical disavowal of the forms of visual representation. The terms of critical engagement of early relational art are premised upon the following charges: that it lacks aesthetic, utilitarian or critical efficacy, and that it merely reproduces reified relation rather than proposing a programme for their immanent critique. It is therefore criticised as an 'immaterial' artform rather than in terms of a concrete materialist aesthetics espoused by Bourriaud. The development of relational aesthetics' propositions as to the nature of 'liminal' spaces is also examined, in terms of their relation to theories of the counter-public sphere. In this chapter I consider the nature of utilitarianism in relational art. I argue that there is a strain of non-productive utilitarianism in relational art, which in fact frees it from a notion of utilitarian art that might be instrumentally rationalized. I also consider the paradoxical nature of relational art on the basis that it appears caught between the injunction to represent and to not represent. Relational art, like much critical art since the 1960s, is caught between the need to appear and the ethical injunction that prohibits 'speaking for the other'. I examine this from the perspective of the creative responses that such an aporia produces within relational art. Specifically, I address its invention of

nacent non-visual forms of representation as material constructions of time and space.

Overall, what I propose in this chapter is that there have been significant misreadings of Bourriaud's work and that in fact it evinces a theory of productive mimesis that establishes it as an autonomous artform.

Chapter 2: New Forms of Sociability: Archive and Network

In this chapter, I extend the readings of *Postproduction* and *The Radicant* in order to consider a shift in the emphasis of relational art towards modes of electronic informational production and communication. I place the narrative tendency in this form of relational art within an overall testamentary turn of the 'archival impulse' identified by Hal Foster. The questions of reductive mimesis and artistic autonomy persist within this form of relational art but they take on a different inflection. In this chapter, they are explored in terms of the relationship between the forms of artistic and non-artistic labour and the role of performativity in the production of informational value. In order to do this I examine the different facets of informational labour and the nature of informational 'value' in order to consider relational art as a form of silent production or 'non-productive' labour. Non-productive labour is not used in a classical Marxist sense of labour that does not produce 'value' but as a category of the appropriation of pre-existing forms to a creative commons. What emerges is something like the argument of chapter one around counter-publics, this time in the guise of differential networks. The autonomy/mimesis argument appears also in the form of a notion of the informational readymade: specifically whether the theory of the classical readymade can be used as a principle of translation and metamorphosis within informational networks. An important element of this chapter is to define informational materiality in performative terms, that is, as existing vicariously in the social relations that informational labour engenders. This is important in that it seeks to overcome the reductive distinction between material and immaterial forms of art that persists within the

discourses of critical art. What I propose is to open up the space of relation to the notion of topological inscription through performance – a sort of performative ontology. Whilst I reject ontology in its non-relational forms I argue that as a concept that is premised upon nomination. From an aleatory materialist perspective therefore, ontologies are produced inductively and are not necessarily a priori concepts that should inhibit relational performativity. We thereby create the possibility that new relations might be inscribed as a materially aleatory mode of the 'taking hold' of relations.

I consider the archaeological and the heterological models of the archive as models of particularity and singularity respectively. Thus, I begin to introduce the notion that post-relational thinking requires some heterology of thought in order to escape the positivistic strictures of difference and alterity. This is because, overall, informational networks are identified as sites of subjectivisation whose principles are fed precisely by positivistic logic. Within this totalizing system I examine the role of performative notions of labour in order to examine the potential spaces for artistic autonomy. What I find is that the transgressive model of performance that we would normally associate with the activities of the avant-garde has been subject to recuperation and that different models of performative efficacy require combination within art's mimetic presentation. The overarching theme of this chapter is that this resistance is in fact a defence of subjectivity that calls for the micropolitical strategies of relational art as the staging of events of relational and topological construction that are of a promissory and speculative nature. It recognizes this territory as a place of creative experimentation.

Chapter 3: The limits to art as a form of sociability within the political aesthetics of Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou

In Chapter 3, I consider the dominant philosophical discourses of philosophical aesthetics: the anti-relational thought of Badiou and the

relationally anarchistic thought of Rancière. I consider in particular their conceptualization of community and the ways in which their thought has been either used or rejected within recent commentaries upon the sociable forms of art. What emerges is that the thinking of relationality is problematic within classical philosophy because the latter adheres to the binarisms of the general and the particular. I propose that this is why the thinking of event is important to these thinkers. That it acts as a supplement to this mode of thought and that consequently it tends to be thought of as both rare and as a mode of non-appearance. If the event operates as an absent third term within the structure of the general and particular, I argue that the philosophy of relation in its current form hinders the emergence of new relations. This examination of the anti-relationality of philosophy asks whether it might be possible to found a separate, intuitionist logic of relation adequate to the appearance of the singularity of relational constellations. This is important in that a new language of relational discourse can be potentially founded upon this. The development of such a language appears imperative in the light of the need to arrive at a language of representation and realism adequate to contemporary critical art. This chapter paves the way for a re-thinking of relation and its critical modes of representation and documentary realism in chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Relational Form as Representation

In Chapter 4, my aim is to link new thinking around the defence of representation in critical art to the re-thinking of the philosophy of relation. They appear to me in fact to be different aspects of the same question: that is, the non-appearance of relational form. In order to do this I begin with an overview of the types of representational forms that are currently being debated. In addition to visual representation, these also include the forms or illusions of representative democracy protest and direct action. What unites this thinking is the notion that representation is an action by and upon consciousness. This serves as a new benchmark for a theory of representation that displaces a

semiological approach and, in particular, the reductive rejection of forms of visual representation as ideological categories of meaning rather than relational tools. In this respect I think we can see the ongoing influence of relational art. I propose that Gashé's thinking of the informal intricacy of relations in terms of relational shapes and the nuances of encounter, might provide a mode of thought adequate to the defence of representation. Moreover, drawing upon thinking about the matrices of art that arises around installation art, I propose that relation appears philosophically as a simple complex of relations. These relational constructions may evince only minimal being but they begin, through their presentation of the specificities of encounter, to grant us a formal lexicon with which to evaluate relational forms and appearances. I then return to the question of representation in relational art that seeks to establish the performative use of documentary images in conjunction with other non-visual forms of representation within formal matrices of exchange. I argue that this mediation is essential to the efficacy of relational art in establishing its credentials as a materialist aesthetics. This is because aleatory materialism is not simply a form that arises from a heterology as a combination of elements but also a form that requires some mode of inscription.

Chapter 1: Relational Art as a Form of Sociability

Introduction

The first part of this chapter will set out what I consider a faithful overview of Nicholas Bourriaud's *programme of relational aesthetics*. It will present a commentary upon Bourriaud's thought that seeks to re-define the terms of engagement for the critique of relational art practice. I believe that that there is an urgent requirement for such an exposition because the interlocutors of relational art have been tendentially drawn towards Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* at the expense of his later works on relational aesthetics: *Postproduction* and *The Radicant*. The programme of relational art requires a cross reading of these texts. The artist Liam Gillick, is the only commentator on relational art practice who recognised the radical import of Bourriaud's work in the mid-nineties: that is, the identification of relational art within the dynamic of globalization and the fact that what is inherently radical in this art is that it proceeds from its social determination within this dynamic. He has commented that the magnitude and the ferocity of critical reception to *Relational Aesthetics* (broadly this covers the period 2005-2007) was out of all proportion to the modesty of its intention: it was simply a polemic written in defence of 1990s artworks in which art's sociability assumed the *performative* mantle of artistic form.

Relational Aethetics was savaged by its critics and no doubt, Bourriaud's inflated rhetoric invited this. Bourriaud is promiscuous in his use of existing aesthetic terms and ideas. However, this is part of his methodology. In the United States, Grant Kester's dialogical aesthetics also proposed an art of concrete sociable formations but it did not draw the fervour of criticism that we associate with Bourriaud in Europe. In both Bourriaud and Kester's work, there was a rejection of savvy spectacular art and an explicit rejection of the avant-garde. So, why would an anti-avant-gardist, materialist aesthetics receive critical acclaim in North America but not so in Europe? This comes down, I think, to two

factors. The purported utility and efficacy of dialogical art was clearer than that expounded by relational aesthetics and this chimed with the demands placed upon fine art by its chief funding body in the United States, the National Endowment for the Arts. Secondly, Bourriaud's book, full of seemingly paradoxical disavowals and appropriations, was a provocation to a largely disenchanted European left, bound by entrenched positions and interests. His audience was, to paraphrase Bourriaud, too caught up in 'yesterday's concerns' to an extent that was less prevalent in North America.[27]

It is easy to forget that in the early-nineties the notion of art as a form of sociability had all but disappeared within the mainstream and the extent to which relational art went against the grain. Having said this, relational art was no innocent outsider: by the mid-nineties, it benefitted greatly from the proliferation of biennials, of publicly funded international residencies and cheap air travel. Moreover, it 'cashed in' on its avant-garde credentials whilst simultaneously distancing itself from any 'theory' or 'teleology' of the avant-garde, an assumption about the avant-garde, which it accepted as unproblematic. In its early stages relational aesthetics exploited its memorial credentials and the whole history of 1960s and 1970s 'socially engaged art' in order to get itself seen. As a highly mobile and adaptable art form it morphed remarkably well into the nomadic forms of 90s site-specific practice.

I came to relational aesthetics through an interest in site-specific practice and an interest in 'social sculpture' and its expanded field.[28] *Relational Aesthetics,* though, posed more pressing questions about art as a sociable form and the possibilities of a new artistic language of relation. As I have said, much of this was missed in its 'definitive' reading before the global

[27] 'Too often, people are happy drawing up an inventory of yesterday's concerns, the better to lament the fact of not getting any answers. But the very first question, as far as these new approaches are concerned, obviously has to do with the material forms of these works. How are these apparently elusive works to be decoded, be they *process-related* or behavioural by ceasing to take shelter behind the sixties art history?' Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* p.7.

[28] Roaslind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October,* 8 (1979), pp. 30-44.

economic crisis (2008). I believe that it must be re-read in the light of recent events, not least because since the 'crash' it has tended to be read as a strain within a broader communitarian paradigm and in particular the re-thinking of 'the idea of communism'. In other words, the radical conjuncture that Bourriaud premised in relational aesthetics has become self-evident in the 'event' of economic meltdown. Specifically, network culture and global circuits of exchange are more widely understood to have been a catalyst for the rapidity of the viral nature of this crisis. This forms part of the post-relational conjuncture.

There are many elements to the notion of post-relationality. I do not propose it as a concept. However, the events of 2008 changed the meaning of relational practice almost overnight. What persisted from the early critique of relational art within the post-relational milieu has been the question of this art's ability to mount a serious critique of capital as opposed to its being an instance of capital's mimetic duplication. In order to avoid the repetition of this line of argument I wish to examine the precepts that produce this contradiction. I wish to propose a reading of Bourriaud in which the importance of productive mimesis, random materialism and the nature of Bourriaud's notion of the 'public realm' are better developed and given greater emphasis.

I talk about the 'programme' of relational art in order to include within my exposition some of the important aspects of Bourriaud's thought that appear within *Postproduction* and *The Radicant*. A more detailed reading of those aspects of theses texts concerned with informational networks will follow in Chapter two but for present purposes I will read some of the fundamental tenets of relational aesthetics across his three major texts on the subject. Bourriaud has said that he believes there is a misunderstanding about the relationship between his books. He says that the common denominator is that the books and the works he examines 'deal with the 'interhuman sphere', 'relationships between people, communities, individuals, groups, social networks, interactivity, and so

on.'[29] Thus, *Relational Aesthetics* is merely one aspect of a more expansive programme of relational art.

What is Relational Art?

Relational aesthetics' main feature 'is to consider interhuman exchange an aesthetic object in and of itself.'[30]

Essentially, Bourriaud proposes that the encounters engendered by relational art are productive of new relations, which are in themselves aesthetic forms. Bourriaud states that relational aesthetics is not a theory of art but a theory of form.[31] For Bourriaud these forms emerge within socially interstitial configurations; they are micro-models of new forms of sociability.[32]

Relational aesthetics is primarily a proposition about social and artistic forms or *formations*. It is not a theory of art. Bourriaud is emphatic on the latter point. He adopts an anti-teleological position in order to free relational aesthetics from the charge of idealism and thus the implication that his aesthetics might be statements of 'origin or destination'. Bourriaud regards an artwork as merely one form within a subset in an overall series of existing forms. A form, he says, demonstrates the typical features of a world. We can see from this perspective how Bourriaud immediately raises questions about the relationship between the forms of art and non-art. At the same time we can see in his notion of form as demonstrative of the typical features of a world an example of his methodology of the fragment: forms in this sense relay the facets of a world, but not that world in its entirety. There are similarities here with Adorno's monadological reading of the artwork and the sense that it enacts an immanent logic, which is necessarily interior. These are questions I will return to when I consider the autonomy of relational art.

[29] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.7.
[30] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.33.
[31] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.19.
[32] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.45.

Bourriaud insists upon the 'instability and diversity of the concept of "form"'.[33] He views form as an extenuated notion that bears little relation to its use in the plastic arts. The notion of form must therefore be considered in relation to an increasing complexity of visual experience. The extenuation of artistic form means, he says, that the relations that 'glue' these forms together are less obvious and more diverse. He cites, for example, meetings, encounters, events and collaborations as relational-artistic forms. Bourriaud claims that these forms instantiate 'forms of sociability' and that these forms can be lasting: thus, form is a 'lasting encounter'. This form of materialism in Bourriaud's work is generally contested on the basis that in reality these forms fail to appear in concrete form. This lack of concretion is generally paired with the 'utilitarian' credentials of relational art, in order to criticise its efficacy. What then does Bourriaud propose about the *use* of forms?

Bourriaud derives his principle of the use of forms from Serge Daney. This principle of use contains the sense of 'making use' as an adaptation of form to our own needs. This is the underlying principle of *Postproduction*. Bourriaud proposes the after-use of pre-existing forms and artworks within communal matrices. He finds the internet an ideal vehicle for this sort of exchange. What he proposes then is a form of montage, which he claims is productive of new forms of sociability and offers a true critique of the contemporary forms of social life. This is the purported efficacy of relational art. However, it is easy to see why such a proposition can be read as a model, which subsumes art beneath the principle of de- and re-territorialisation that we associate with advanced, informationalised forms of capital. I will be addressing the informationalised form of relational aesthetics within the second chapter. What I emphasis here is that the critique of relational art's efficacy is repeated within every formal arena in which Bourriaud articulates his programme.

[33] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 20.

The conjuncture of globalization and network culture

As I said in my methodology, Bourriaud recognizes the problem of reification and the impossibility of any outside to the 'completely administered world'. He views globalization as our 'barbarism', against which it is the task of the artist to develop a truly worldwide culture that evinces its own logic.

It would be unfair to say that 'the conjuncture of globalization' is only developed in Bourriaud's later works in which its technological conditions are explored. Bourriaud is clear from the outset that this conjuncture forms the backdrop for early relational art, even those gallery based works that combine elements of installation and performance. This appears in *Relational Aesthetics'* call for a new language and the identification of a globalised artworld. However, his exposition of this conjuncture is more emphatic in the later works. He calls for an art of the use of forms in response to an increased annexation of artistic and social forms within the 'chaos' of global culture. In addition, he claims that the blurring of the distinction between the use and production of these forms produces 'new cartographies of knowledge'. I think this is a significant element of new relational thinking: it does not so much advocate the surrender of artistic autonomy to non-art as is generally assumed. Rather it identifies a shift in the precepts upon which a notion of artistic autonomy was founded within modernism.

What is compelling in Bourriaud's exposition of the globalised conjuncture of present day art is its identification of the new spatio-temporal relations that shape its aesthetics and artistic procedures. Firstly, Bourriaud emphasizes that: 'the modern favors the event over monumental order, the ephemeral over an eternity writ in stone; it is a defense of fluidity against omnipresent reification.'[34] As I indicated in

[34] Bourriaud, *The Radicant,* p.16.

my research questions the thinking of the event as a response to the hypostasis of relation seems to have gained currency not only within aesthetics but also within philosophy and politics. This thinking of the event has taken multiform incarnations. Certain accounts of the event rely upon the notion of its absolute singularity: that is the sense in which its appearance erupts within our midst. Within this (Badiouian) model, it is impossible to predict or engineer the appearance of events. They rarely occur. This provides no *a priori* role for political-aesthetic agency. Rather it is the event itself that subjectivises the agent *a posteriori*.

Bourriaud's thinking of the event is less a matter of ontological speculation than the thinking of event in its motility within the act of the trans-ethical use of forms. He recognizes within our conjuncture a new relation between, or entwinement of space and time. He says that: 'The major aesthetic phenomenon of our time is surely the intertwining of the properties of space and time, which turns the latter into a territory…'[35] and that 'today's art seems to negotiate the creation of new types of space by resorting to the geometry of translation: topology.'[36] He says that topology 'refers to movement, to the dynamism of forms, and characterizes reality as a conglomeration of transitory surfaces and forms that are potentially movable. In this sense it goes hand in hand with translation as well as with precariousness.'[37]

Granted, many other books will tell you the same thing but what is significant in Bourriaud's thought is, I think, that he fully integrates this in his thinking on materialism. In other words, this spatio-temporal model not only underwrites the territory of artistic praxis as an established fact; it also challenges the finitude of existing aesthetic and philosophical methodologies of relational construction. Specifically, this temporal relation opens hitherto non-relational binarisms between the singular and the particular; artistic autonomy and heteronomy;

[35] Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, p.79.
[36] Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, p.79.
[37] Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, p.79.

production and consumption; repetition and mimesis; the public and private. All of these categories appear to me to be 'out of joint' with Bourriaud's spatio-temporal conjuncture.

On this basis, it is unsurprising that Bourriaud rejects existing modernist aesthetics, preferring to make a clean break with previous theories of art.

Bourriaud's Altermodernity

Bourriaud rejects teleological theories of art in order to escape the temptations of idealism. However, he maintains that modernism is not dead, merely its ideological-teleological version. It has a role to play still within the modeling of the future, specifically in 'modeling possible universes'. To Bourriaud's critics this rhetoric appears suspiciously idealistic. Bourriaud's claim is that the aim of a new modernism is to 'learn to inhabit the world in a better way' rather than trying to conceive of the world in terms of social evolution. He proposes against the construction of utopias 'models of living' within existing reality. What he proposes then is the resuscitation of the artwork as a sociable form within a concrete and materialist paradigm. What then is the nature of Bourriaud's claim for relational art as a materialist aesthetics?

Bourriaud's Chance or 'Aleatory' Materialism

Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* clearly identifies the goal of relational art as the construction of 'concrete spaces'. In a rare admission of the genealogy of relational art, he identifies it with a 'materialistic tradition' and the importance of the 'undercurrent' of materialism in Louis Althusser's later writing. In particular, he cites Althusser's 'materialism of the encounter' as seminal for relational aesthetics. Althusser takes contingency as the necessary basis of all social formations and identifies a process by which the undifferentiated 'rain' of social relations might coagulate into concrete forms. This is based upon the production of such forms through aleatory or chance encounters that cause relations to pile

up. It is the *recognition* of such forms from precarious origins and their agglomeration into social formations as ‘established facts’ that informs Bourriaud’s advancement of relational aesthetics as a materialist aesthetics. The concretization of these forms as facts is what for both thinkers gives rise to history. However, this materialism does not take history as its starting point and neither does it predetermine idealistically any historical direction for these forms. I should note here that in accepting Bourriaud’s aleatory materialism I have to reject within my own dialectical methodology any place for an essentialist or prelapsarian reading of nature, after Adorno. To do otherwise would be to place an origin at the heart of this materialism.

There is an overriding sense in Bourriaud’s work that culture and social formations are encountered ‘on the hoof’. His aleatory materialism perhaps gives his thought this complexion. Moreover, this materialism is founded upon a principle of trans-individuality. That is, it is relations between people that are material and dictate subjective forms. Thus, Bourriaud adopts what is materialist in Marx, namely his ‘inversion’ of the subject-object relation.

In his adoption of precarity and contingency as the basis of social agency, he claims that communities are ‘organised and materialised’. This strain of materialist thought allows Bourriaud, at least notionally, to address the problem of reification on the basis that a ‘completely administered world’ is merely contingent. In this way, Bourriaud carves out a space for artistic-social agency that appears impossible from the pessimistic perspective of ‘capitalist realism’, that is the totalisation of all relations beneath the mantle of identity. Bourriaud it seems offers a potential way out of relational hypostasis. I will argue in my fourth chapter on relation and representation that this strain of thought is gaining currency within a re-thinking of the philosophy of relation in which it is the principle of linkage rather than the objects thereby linked that is emerging as a tool for the thinking of the appearance of singular relation. What I think is also evident here is an awareness on Bourriaud’s thought of the need to

adopt or perhaps translate the heterology of postmodern thought, and in particular Derrida's thought, not as an examination / deconstruction of origin but in Derrida's sense of 'the wager'. Although Bourriaud condemns deconstructive thought's tendency to legitimize models of 'pure alterity' he is also highly receptive to the intertextual use of forms. What is also evident in Bourriaud's materialism is that these sites of encounter found, for him, a principle of the realism of relational art. Realism is the product of this encounter; it is a product of negotiation between reality and fiction. Bourriaud also refers to 'operative realism': that is a negotiation of the artwork between the demands of contemplation and use. Again, I will address this question later in this thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, the question for Bourriaud's realism as it appears in the critique of relational aesthetics is whether this is sufficient to demonstrate some form of the efficacy of relational art without its having a theory of representation. It is the purported 'failure' of the avant-garde to demonstrate its efficacy that haunts (and of course utterly vindicates) the historical and neo-avant-gardes. How does Bourriaud view the avant-garde?

Relational Aesthetics and the Avant-Garde

Bourriaud claims that present-day art takes up the legacy of the avant-garde without being doctrinaire: that is without repeating its teleological or ideological premises.

Bourriaud distances relational art from the historical avant-garde on the basis, as I have said, that he distinguishes the concrete and material nature of the objectives of relational aesthetics from the idealism and teleology of modernism. Bourriaud is, however, sympathetic to the avant-garde and he regularly cites examples of avant-garde practice that have influenced his work. Particularly those formal cognates that have been translated into present-day-art (for example, performance, collaboration and site-specificity). In particular the principles of montage and collage appear to have influenced his understanding of the principle

of constructivism that underlies the postproduction of forms and the creation of relational matrices. In Bourriaud's hands the recombinant forms of the avant-garde, become principles of social action. Relational aesthetics is a theory of forms and one might readily identify comparisons here with Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.[38] One might add to this a favourable comparison with Bürger's methodology of the avant-garde. This is based upon the dialectical principle that an artistic enquiry is without origin but is, rather, the principle by which one arrives at or defines one's object through the exploration of artistic forms. This resonates with Bourriaud's methodology as 'without any origin nor destination'.

If the reader is getting the sense here that I am tempted to place relational aesthetics within the broader rubric of a recommencement of the avant-garde, they would be right. What is holding me back is based upon my observation of relational aesthetics' critical reception. In particular, I believe that if one shoehorns relational aesthetics back into art history in this way we thereby risk underestimating the radically different conjunction within which relational aesthetics arises. Moreover, we risk occluding Bourriaud's crucial (and rather Adornian) remarks that a history of art might legitimately be re-written as the history of the conditions of artistic production. Bürger and Adorno of course address their political aesthetics to this very question but the fact is, again, that within our present conjuncture we need a theory of artistic production adequate to global models of exchange and to the unprecedented blurring of consumption and production, art and culture. Moreover, who can blame Bourriaud for distancing himself from the avant-garde? It is an institution whose messengers are routinely shot. The paradox of the avant-garde is of course that its failure is the measure of its success. That is, its failure to unite art and the everyday is predestined in its very appearance. It is a reflection of the separation of art from other types of

[38] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, trans. By M Shaw, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)

discourse and in fact, it is the very embodiment of the oxymoronic category of 'socially engaged art'.

I will, however, allow myself to express my disappointment that Bourriaud does not refer to the neo-avant-garde, or to Hal Foster's influential essay on this.[39] What it seems to me Foster has to offer Bourriaud, is a theory of the avant-garde that is based upon a principle of experimentation. It may offer some indication as to the relationship between the interstitial artwork and its symbolic/real pairing and most importantly a diachronic analysis that offers the historical avant-garde as a series of tools to be rediscovered and reactivated. This bears comparison with Bourriaud's worldview: a stockpile of forms and gestures inviting re-use and recombination. It also echoes a major theme of relational aesthetics: its unique conception of the temporality of the artwork.

Bourriaud says himself that artistic praxis offers 'a rich loam for social experimentation'.[40] This would not look out of place in Foster's account. In spite of this, I will remain faithful to Bourriaud on the basis that he also seems to regard the end of the avant-garde as a necessary precursor for new modes of thinking. Specifically this thinking rejects what is transgressive and heroic in the (historical) avant-garde in favour of the positivization and remaking of uses.

Artistic autonomy and Social Mimesis

A crucial feature of relational aesthetics is its blurring of the distinction between the forms of art and non-art to a supposedly unprecedented extent. The historical avant-garde can offer ample evidence that this is incorrect. However, I link mimesis and autonomy in Bourriaud as categories that should be read together in order to understand the nature of artistic praxis he proposes. Bourriaud draws upon Michel de Certeau's

[39] Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, 110 (2004), pp. 3-22.
[40] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.9.

proposition that life can be lived as a 'tenant of culture'. What this entails is that art finds its place *within* hegemonic social and technological structures. Its criticality lies in its mission to turn these forms to its own ends. Relational art has been criticized on the basis of its apparently *reductive mimesis* of social forms, that it risks the notion of art itself through its willingness to engage with forms that are heteronomous to art. *Relational Aesthetics* caused a furor over the meaning and status of the principle of artistic autonomy. I agree with those who think this 'fear of heteronomy' has been overstated. I would add that it is misplaced because it fails to heed Bourriaud's analysis of the culture of globalization. What Bourriaud makes clear is that the possibility of existing outside of the structures and forms of globalization has all but disappeared. What I think his project proposes is then a new concept of artistic autonomy that must be embraced within the very particular conjuncture in which we find ourselves.

Prior to *Relational Aesthetics*, the notion of artistic autonomy within progressive art has generally been regarded as sitting somewhere along an axis of art and non-art. To varying degrees art is regarded as conditioned by the social and its means of production but also asocial to the extent that it sets itself apart. Bourriaud's position is as follows:

> All these artistic practices although formally heterogeneous, have in common the recourse to already produced forms. They testify to a willingness to inscribe the work of art within a network of signs and significations, instead of considering it an autonomous or original form.[41]

Adorno on the other hand states that: 'Art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it. The constitution of art's sphere corresponds to the constitution of an inward space of men as the space of their representation.'[42]

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[41] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, pp.15-16.
[42] Theodor W Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. and ed. by G. Adorno and R. Tiedemann (London: Athlone Press, 1997), p.8.

I do not find the statements irreconcilable provided one pays heed to the very specific form of inscription that Bourriaud proposes. Inscription here carries the sense of a translation of form that we see within Daney's notion of 'use', which I believe preserves the sense of interiority that Adorno suggests. The fear of artistic subsumption rests, I believe, upon a misreading of Bourriaud's meaning in his *use* and *translation* of heteronomous forms within art. Much has been made of the argument that relational art is 'merely mimetic' of heteronomous structures and forms and that it is at best only 'parodic'. This brings me to my next point. Relational art employs a notion of social mimesis that is more nuanced than its critics have been willing to accept. Bourriaud's notion of the use of social forms is consistent in its notion that the forms are appropriated and translated within artistic praxis. Furthermore, these forms are re-situated within different topologies and in relation to other forms. The form of mimesis advocated by Bourriaud bears comparison with Adorno's notion of the term. It exhibits a shamanistic quality, or in Bourriaud's terms, 'make-believe'. Bourriaud's use of the notion of 'screenplay' and 'scripted forms' is seldom remarked upon but I believe that it is key to understanding just how an artist is to inhabit the pre-existing (or co-exist) within the social forms she inherits. For Bourriaud mimesis as 'make-believe' is in fact contiguous with his project of realism.

Relational Aesthetics as Critical Realism

Relational aesthetics posits itself as a category of critical realism. Bourriaud describes the methodology of this critical realism as 'operative realism'. Operative realism is for him a kind of flirtation with the notion of artistic autonomy. I think that what my analysis of the categories of artistic autonomy, mimesis and critical realism demonstrates is that they are cognate terms. The following statement from Bourriaud, I think supports this connection:

> To denounce or 'critique' the world? One can denounce nothing from the outside; one must first inhabit the form of what one wants to criticize. Imitation is subversive, much more so than discourses of frontal opposition that make only formal gestures of subversion.[43]

Again, Bourriaud's methodology is clear and surprisingly Adornian. He rejects what is directly critical in favour of productive mimesis. This produces his critical model on the basis that he appropriates and translates aspects of a world. In spite of Bourriaud's rhetoric, I don't think that relational artworks abandon the principle of aesthetic autonomy. Rather, they re-define it through procedures that are precisely necessitated by the shrinking space of art's autonomous social relation.

Within Bourriaud's thought, the rejection of 'directly critical forms' is also symptomatic of his use of micropolitics. This gives rise to questions about the representative capacities of relational artworks. The search for a critical realism of relational art therefore entails propositions as to non-visual forms of representation. Broadly this entails the use of forms as a representative act.

The Influence of Micropolitics upon Relational Art

Relational aesthetics relies upon the concept of micropolitics as a methodology for resisting reified relations and dominant forms of signification. For Felix Guattari, whose 'micropolitics of desire' is a constituent of the genealogy of relational aesthetics, the micropolitical is expressly theorized *against* the identitarian nature of representation.[44] Guattari reasons the relation between micropolitics and signification as follows:

> All contents, before being structured by language or 'like a language', are structured at a multitude of micro-political levels. It is precisely this fact, which

[43] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.74.
[44] Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics.*

> justifies the fact that a micro-political revolutionary action makes it possible to relativize the 'dominant significations' and to neutralize the forms of indication and regulation put forward by the structuralists. Denying the function of power in representation implies a refusal to make a micro-political commitment wherever it may be needed, in other words, wherever there is a signification.[45]

For Guattari, the movement of desire is 'sterilized' by a relationship of representation. He urges us to abandon the distinction between content and form and 'to try to find connecting points, points of micro-political antagonism at every level.'[46] Between 'content and form' there is a relationship of 'stabilization and deterritorialization' – this forms 'the system of figures of expression and acts like the state in ordering and hierarchizing.'[47] For him, this constitutes an over-encoding of signification that can only be undone by the micropolitical.[48] Paradoxically, then, it is a challenge to the normative forms of relation that structure representation, its form/content structure as the embodiment of its power that founds relational aesthetics upon a *micropolitics of anti-visual representation.*

It is not necessary to disregard Bourriaud's micropolitics in order to find modes of representation adequate to relational art. Bourriaud recognises the need for a re-thinking of representational forms and, to this end, he makes a clear distinction between 'the visual' and other forms of representation. He recognises that one cannot universally identify all forms of signification as instances of 'over-encoding'. If all signification resulted in over-encoding then this would sever the link between the *a priori* of micropolitical structures to linguistic or representational forms, that Guattari sets out as a *relation* between (non-relational) micropolitics and forms of (relational) signification. In other words it would sever the relation of non-relation between the two. It would surrender micropolitics to irreducible singularity.

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[45] Guattari, p. 83.
[46] Guattari, p. 83.
[47] Guattari, p. 83.
[48] Guattari, p. 84.

There is no denying the value of micropolitics as a mode of the critique of the dominant forms of signification under the commodity form, and particularly the commodity form of subjectivity. Guattari aims to move out of the dominant forms of signification and 'get beyond the system of representation as such – since that system separates desiring production from production for exchange, and alienates it as prevailing production relations demand.'[49] The question is, then, for an immanent critique of the commodity form, and thus a fully-fledged politics of relational aesthetics, whether desiring production and production-for-exchange can find a form of representation adequate to their micropolitical/significatory antagonism that elides any immediate recuperation. The question remains as to what form of representation micropolitics assumes. This anticipates my analysis in chapter 4 where I will look at different forms of representation that might inform a critical realism in relational art. The critique of relational aesthetics rests in part upon the non-appearance of its objects. To this end I will set out Bourriaud's distinction between forms of visual and non-visual representational forms of encounter.

Representation and the 'visual'

Bourriaud addresses the problem in terms of the 'restoration of mediums of experience', thus he says that:

> When entire sections of our existence spiral into abstraction as a result of economic globalization, when the basic functions of our daily lives are slowly transformed into products of consumption (including human relations, which are becoming a full-fledged industrial concern), it seems highly logical that artists might seek to rematerialize these functions and processes, to give shape to what is disappearing before our eyes. Not as objects, which would be to fall into the trap of reification, but as mediums of experience: by striving to shatter the logic of the spectacle, art restores the world to as an experience to be lived. Since the economic system gradually deprives us of this experience, modes of

[49] Guattari, p. 100.

> representation must be invented for a reality that is becoming more abstract each day.[50]

More generally, Bourriaud makes clear the necessary task of constructing new modes of representation within the space formerly reserved by art for visual representation. He employs Serge Daney's pejorative notion of 'the visual' in order to separate it from other forms of relational representation.[51] Whilst the production of an image is the mere representation of desire, relational forms, in their reciprocity, can become their enactment. Thus according to Bourriaud, Daney,

> maintains that form, in an image, is nothing other than the representation of desire. Producing a form is to invent possible encounters; receiving a form is to create the conditions for an exchange, the way you return a service in a game of tennis. If we nudge Daney's reasoning a bit further, form is the *representative* of desire in the image. It is the horizon based on which the image may have a meaning, by pointing to a desired world, which the beholder thus becomes capable of discussing, and based on which his own desire can rebound.[52]

The use of forms against visual representation is tied to Bourriaud's notion of representational forms as the material linkages that produce subjectivity. What distinguishes this rethinking of relation is its clear connection to Bourriaud's transitive ethics: this is an ethical principle of the encounter that invites dialogue. Bourriaud states that:'when an artist shows us something he uses a transitive ethic which places his work *between* the 'look-at-me' and the 'look-at-that'.[53]

The production of relations between individuals and groups, between artist and the world, and, by way of transitivity, between the beholder and the world is specifically aimed at a non-authoritarian form of representation. In this respect he proposes something like a form of

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[50] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.32.
[51] Serge Daney, cited in *Relational Aesthetics*, p.24. No reference appears.
[52] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.23.
[53] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 24.

counter-publicity. Bourriaud says that whereas the pairing of 'Promote/receive' (Daney's definition of 'the Visual') is authoritarian, in Daney's thinking, *'all form is a face looking at me'*, in the sense that it is summoning me to a dialogue with it. There is an intertextual inflection to this transitive ethic: in fact it points towards the 'unfinished discursiveness' that seeks to avoid the over-encoding tendencies of visual representation.

As we will see in the critique of relational aesthetics, the crucial question here is whether Bourriaud proposes a model of encounter that posits relations of encounter *outside* of reified relations in a mode of refusal or whether they are capable of posing an immanent critique of reified relations. This tends to focus upon Bourriaud's appropriation of the 'liminal interstice', defined as a place of exception within Marxist theory. I do not think that Bourriaud's transitive ethic of encounter can be simply reduced to a proposition about the interior or exterior of reified relations. To recall, Bourriaud's methodology rejects the 'directly critical' stance that such binarisms tend to engender. Rather, I regard Bourriaud's programme of 'non-visual' representation through encounter as a form of *performative inscription*. This in turn raises the question of whether relational aesthetics is a theatrical artform based upon the dematerialisation of the art object and a 'fetishisation of the encounter'. I will contest these charges in the latter part of this chapter.

The democratic tendency within *Relational Aesthetics*

Bourriaud's articulation of the democratic impulse within relational art is perhaps one of the most perplexing aspects of his writing. Although I have set out to provide an overview of the project of relational aesthetics, I think that there is an identifiable shift in Bourriaud's conception of 'democracy' and the 'public realm' between *Relational Aesthetics* and his subsequent writing. Within *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud employs the rhetoric of consensus and specifically the 'reparation of social bonds'. This invites criticism. His early 'convivial' model of public discourse

precipitates a debate around the critical credentials of *Relational Aesthetics* and provides the impetus for a sub-categorisation of relational art into *antagonistic* relational aesthetics. The rudimentary nature of Bourriaud's early conception of a model of consensus is informed by his notion of materialism as something like a critical mass of agreement. But it delivers Bourriaud's texts into the hands of commentators who favour a 'directly critical' approach of reified relations that Bourriaud never intended and a reinterpretation of his thought in which antagonism becomes a benchmark for relational art's critical efficacy.

Bourriaud is rather vague in his use of the term 'democracy': it is not always clear whether he is talking about models of representative democracy or whether in fact he is speaking about a 'democracy of forms' and their utilitarian value within the principle of sharing and postproductive practice. So, for example, Bourriaud states that:

> What strikes us in the work of this generation is, first and foremost, the *democratic* concern that informs it. For art does not transcend everyday preoccupations, it confronts us with reality by way of the remarkable nature of any relationship to the world, through make-believe.'[54]

This refers to the sense in which the use of forms is a democratic methodology based on its appropriation and mimesis of existing social forms. However Bourriaud's claim that the alienation of individuals within a postmodern environment has broken the social bonds between them and that relational art's 'new models of sociability' might perform a reparative task goes beyond the question of a consensual/dissensual model of political aesthetics. This rhetoric opens questions about the nature of the 'public' that Bourriaud proposes and the role of the institution of art in the production of relational artworks.

[54] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.57.

The Public Realm and Interstitial Space

It is very important to identify the nature of 'publicness' that Bourriaud proposes. I suspect that the spatio-temporal configuration that Bourraud identifies along with the identification of modes of consumption and production dissolves the categories of public and private *tout court*. However, Bourriaud's early rhetoric of reparation has appeared inflammatory within the context of earlier theoretical accounts of the public sphere. I am referring here to the work of Jürgen Habermas and its critical evaluation in the work of Negt and Kluge. The problem is that any proposition as to the existence or potential of 'interstitial' public-discursive spaces inevitably becomes entangled within pre-existing discourses, in particular Habermas's account of the bourgeois public sphere and Negt and Kluge's proposition of the forms of the proletarian counter-public sphere. Essentially the problem is that an aesthetics whose goal is the critique of the reified relations of a completely administered world cannot unproblematically propose a counter-public discursive community as a remedial measure. The notion of the 'public sphere' as a democratically independent discursive space is contested by Negt and Kluge as an idealistic and ideological construct: it both occludes and legitimates the production of hegemonic relations within the logic of the commodity form of exchange. Equally, the possibility of a counter-public is contentious in the sense that it may merely reproduce the idealistic premises of the bourgeois public sphere within an oppositional stance. I will deal with this argument in full when I consider the critique of relational aesthetics. For present purposes I will set out what I think is Bourriaud's notion of the 'public' nature of relational art.

Bourriaud's methodology is to identify artistic form with its content. As an advocate of micro-communitarian practices the aim of relational art is thereby to simultaneously produce new relations *and their discursive spaces as their content*. In its early incarnations, the production of discursive spaces was reliant upon the gallery space and the 'new institutionalism' of publicly funded art institutions as 'readymade' sites

for relationally discursive artistic practice. This model of 'new institutionalism' was itself premised upon the acceptance of an idealised notion of the public realm as a model for the independent, publicly funded arts organizations of the 1990s. It was financially driven by the injunctions of inclusivity and pedagogy that guaranteed the public gallery's charitable status. In the early stages this facilitated the visibility relational art practice. However, relational practice has increasingly identified itself with the production of its own discursive space and the ethics of community in the early part of this century. Thus within the notion of post-relationality one can identify a break with the institutions of art. This is not a clear break and it by no means identifies or defines post-relationality. Relational art develops unevenly but there remains the sense that relational art is 'done' within the gallery system and that it articulates its own space now within a more diffuse topology.

Bourriaud's topologies no longer fit within any strict delineation of the public or private. He says, in fact, that: 'Any artwork might thus be defined as a relational object, like the geometric place of a negotiation with countless correspondents and recipients.'[55]

[55] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.26.

The Critique of Relational Aesthetics

The Critical Reception of Relational Aesthetics

In order to evaluate the radical claims of *Relational Aesthetics* I will set out the principle arguments that appeared in the wake of its critical reception following its first publication in English in 2002. The early critique of relational aesthetics focuses upon questions of relational art's efficacy, its 'non-representational' forms and mimetic character. Its primary concerns are, then, with the 'aesthetic autonomy' of relational art and its relationship to extra-artistic social forms. How can relational art legitimate itself *as art*? This analysis increasingly focuses upon relational art's efficacy as a critique of the commodity form of exchange. It questions also the nature of the public sphere that relational art proposes and seeks to 'concretise'.

On the whole the early critique of relational aesthetics concentrates upon Bourriaud's analysis of those gallery-based works, installations and performances that appear in *Relational Aesthetics*. In subsequent chapters I will chart the development of what is symptomatic in the first wave of critique into an emergent analysis of post-relational practice: that is, of the increasingly complex and technologised forms of relational art that are less grounded within art institutions. The discussion of post-relationality also turns increasingly towards a discussion of 'community' and 'networks of expanded authorship'. Post-relational critique is characterised by a more tolerant approach to the question of relational art's autonomy. I will argue that post-relational analysis has already digested the earlier critique to the extent that it recognises and accepts that the importance of *Relational Aesthetics* was its instrumental role in re-defining the artistic autonomy of artistic-social forms within the milieu of globalization.

I have said that this chapter will set out the relational programme of Bourriaud that includes elements of *Postproduction* and *The Radicant*. This is not only because Bourriaud intended them to be read together but also because a narrow focus upon *Relational Aesth*etics produces a rather lop-sided early critique.

Anthony Downey's 'Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics' presents an exemplary synopsis of the discourse of *Relational Aesthetics* and the works it discusses immediately after its publication in English, between 2002 and 2007. I will be drawing upon his analysis in particular because Downey anticipates the questions that establish the terms of engagement for later post-relational critique. He offers us a measured presentation of a debate that has otherwise tended to polarise opinion and has drawn responses from entrenched positions. To his credit, Downey's analysis is mindful of the polemical nature of *Relational Aesthetics*, that is, he accepts its fragmentary nature. He also renders a reading that is based upon some of those figures Bourriaud expressly acknowledges as having influenced his text: Serge Daney, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel de Certeau, and Gilles Deleuze. These are names that emerge infrequently, if at all, in the contributions of the respondents to the first critique. Those who have come to Bourriaud's defence are principally artists, but their defence has been generally emotive, and has given insufficient weight to the influence of these thinkers upon his project. Equally, Bourriaud's 'random materialism', based upon Althusser's 'aleatory materialism' is omitted from the first critique. This omission produces a distorted reading of Bourriaud, which persists in the second critique. This is a misreading I will seek to address.

The 'overarching' purpose of Downey's article is to 'clarify the ground for a substantive discussion of the politics of aesthetics in the context of contemporary art practices and art criticism.'[56] His assertion is that the first wave of criticism boils down to a reconsideration of artistic

[56] Anthony Downey, 'Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics', *Third Text*, 21.3 (2007), (267-275), p. 268.

autonomy within the relational model, and therefore how one might distinguish relational art forms from other forms of commodified social relations. He puts it as follows:

Comment [S1]: Aesthetic autonomy Adorno etc and CRF stuff – how relate to earlier account.

> If relational art practices are indeed reflecting, or utilizing, channels of inter-subjective relations, then there is a need to enquire into whether or not they are applying the already invasive practices of neo-liberalist commodification to both the so-called private realm and, subsequently, to the institutional relational space between art institutions and their public. The question that needs addressing, *in fine*, is relatively straightforward: do these works expose tensions within social relations or just epitomize them?[57]

Downey's article then identifies the charge of mimesis that informs the first wave of criticism, with a consideration of the commodity form, which initiates the second. He also identifies the problematic question of artistic *quality* as being coextensive with that of autonomy. In other words, what qualities do the works demonstrate in order to justify their recognition *as artworks?*

Comment [S2]: mimesis

Comment [S3]: artistic quality

<u>What are the Provocations of Relational Aesthetics?</u>

Downey states that:

> In a broad sense, relational art, for Bourriaud, engages in a form of practicable social interactiveness that co-opts collaboration, participation, intervention, research-led activities and community-based projects into both the form and content of the work. The emergence of these new formal strategies implies, in turn, that the 'criteria of aesthetic judgement' be yet again re-articulated.[58]

Comment [S4]: criteria of aesthetic judgement

Downey is right, in my view, to identify the overarching question of aesthetic judgement as the point of departure for the critique of relational aesthetics. This is because the question 'what constitutes a good relational artwork' is inevitably asked in the absence of any recognisable

[57] Downey, p. 271.
[58] Downey, p. 267.

production of artistic objects or any immediate *demonstration* of the political efficacy of novel relational forms. Thus, the demand for some 'aesthetic criteria' manifests itself as the search for some *artistically autonomous quality of relation*. However, Bourriaud is quite clear that the nature of the relational encounter moves beyond the relation of object-viewer: rather, the works facilitate 'an invitation to participate in better forms of living within the existing real'.[59]

Critique of Transitive Ethics

As I have said, Downey examines Bourriaud's work in the context of those he cites as influences, particularly Serge Daney and Emmanuel Levinas. Principally this is to identify the nature of Bourriaud's transitive ethics, which posits relational aesthetics as an exercise in *showing* and an invitation to exchange. He says that: 'Conceptualized as a reciprocal, if not strictly speaking interrogative gesture, the form of relational art – and the formative structures it engenders – effectively 'invent[s] possible encounters' and 'the conditions for an exchange''.[60]

Comment [S5]: transitive ethics

Bourriaud's use of Daney's notion that 'all form is a face looking at me' and Bourriaud's focus upon relations of 'exchange, social interplay and inter-subjective communication'[61] constitute, according to Downey, nodal points for reflection upon their potentially social transitivity.[62] He adds that:

> This, for Bourriaud, is a political activity insofar as relational art practices not only focus on the 'sphere of inter-human relations', *a realm that is an endemically political sphere to begin with*, but also give rise to the conditions within which unprecedented inter-human relations can be articulated. [My emphasis][63]

[59] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.13.
[60] Downey, p. 268.
[61] Downey, p. 268.
[62] Downey, p. 268.
[63] Downey, p. 268.

Downey correctly identifies that the politics of relational aesthetics concerns not its political content so much as *the politics of social formations*. But what the quotation foregrounds, is the concern that relational aesthetics' focus upon a purely *ethical* notion of the conditions of exchange, appears to impose limitations from the outset upon the extent to which it can pose a politically resistant critique of reified commodity relations. Downey suggests that the transitive ethic fails to address inter-human relations as themselves conditioned by, and experienced as, manifestations of exchange value, as expressions of a pervasive commodity form. For Downey it is in this sense that inter-human relations are endemically political for us? Whilst I agree with Downey in principle, I think that his criticism ignores crucial features of relational aesthetics – not least, Bourriaud's understanding that relations between people are dictated by forms of exchange.

Comment [S6]: transitive ethics read with materialism and comments on relations as material, and modes of subj and reification. TE is only one form used by NB and comments on exchange

The implication of this criticism is an extreme scepticism around Bourriaud's claim that unprecedented or (I will call them) radically singular relations are even possible and doubts about the mode of appearing of relational artworks. Bourriaud claims that relational art transcends the ambit of art and creates novel and concrete relations within the socio-political sphere, and it is on this claim that he needs to be judged. Downey is primarily concerned with the aesthetic criteria and efficacy of relational art. But he states that the 'open-endedness' of Bourriaud's thesis, and this art's inability to present its symbolic value leaves it open to numerous criticisms.[64] Downey attributes this in part to Bourriaud's reliance upon a rhizomatic conceptualization of the social, which he takes from Deleuze. Downey's says that his interest is in 'the practicalities' of relational art's position. He asks:

Comment [S7]: mimesis

> to what extent, for example, do relational art practices really operate 'beside or beneath beneath a real economic system' and thus avoid (and radically reconstitute) the service economy that underwrites our neo-liberal world order

[64] Downey, pp. 270-271.

> and the relationships formed within it? This is critical that we considered the degree to which relational art is proposed as a remediative to the socially de-personalising effects of the neo-liberal, post-industrial and increasingly globalised demands of the so-called Western world. [65]

For Bourriaud relational aesthetics has 'no prior example in art history'.[66] In Downey's terms: 'Bourriaud simply tends to disregard his own reliance on a degree of idealism that was largely associated with modernism'.[67] Significantly Downey connects this notion of unprecedented relational form to what is *reified* in relational aesthetics – this is an ethical abstraction predicated *as though* it had a relation to, or were in fact, a concrete political existence.[68] He is not dismissive of such art, but maintains that Bourriaud's claim that relational practices produce 'unprecedented' inter-human relations that advance us beyond the compromised relations of the neo-liberal world need substantiating.[69]

What is more, Downey's assessment is that the artist's purpose in such a realm [of transitive ethics] is to perform the role of 'social worker', tasked with gluing together breaches within contemporary social interrelations. [70] This model of relational aesthetics as 'social palliation' also appears in the work of other critics. Leaving aside for the moment the separate question of the nature of the relational public realm, this sort of criticism is based upon a reductive and binary reading of artistic autonomy and heteronomy. In particular it is symptomatic of paranoia about the disappearance of what is particular to art. This stems from a misunderstanding of the mimetic character of relational practice.

Comment [S8]: mimesis

In particular the question of 'cultural tenancy' merits further consideration. I read 'cultural tenancy' as identifiable with the mimetic tendency in relational art. To recount, relational aesthetics is often

Comment [S9]: cultural tenancy and mimesis

[65] Downey, p. 271.
[66] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 44.
[67] Downey, p. 273.
[68] Downey, p. 273.
[69] Downey, p. 273.
[70] Downey, p. 270.

criticized on the basis that it merely mimics existing social relations, or that it surrenders the artwork to its heteronomy *tout court*. If one reads 'cultural tenancy' as reductively mimetic of existing social relations then it is easy to see why it threatens the autonomy of art. But relational aesthetics has a more nuanced articulation when read in de Certeau's terms as 'cultural tenancy', that is, as a form of productive mimesis. Downey does not talk about alternative models of mimesis but he does observe that Bourriaud's thesis contains a 'crucial causative inflection' in the sense that relational art practices may *replicate without necessarily mirroring* the conditions of their production. Downey says that: 'this point is further complemented by the notion of a *co-existence criterion*: the idea that all works of art produce a model of sociability'; however, relational practices, significantly produce *new* models of sociability'. [my emphasis][71] The idea here is then that what Bourriaud proposes in 'cultural tenancy' is a principle of the co-existence of artistic forms. Moreover I would add that this co-existence does not necessarily entail subsumption beneath, or the reductive mimesis of, dominant social forms.

Downey's reading of Bourriaud through de Certeau, reveals the true nature of Bourriaud's sense of the social interstice. It should be read as a tactical space capable of inhabiting however fleetingly, the strategically determined and alienated socius. In this light, the accusation of glorified social work is grossly unfair. It ignores the very particular model of artistic autonomy, which Bourriaud adopts, based on de Certeau's model of tactical interventions and Althusser's aleatory materialism. My reading then tends to credit Bourriaud with a greater critical import than one can derive from an isolated analysis of his transitive ethic. Bourriaud is certainly a thinker of relational hypostasis but his response is not to seek artistic autonomy in the gestures of avant-gardism or transgressive opportunism. Rather he is a constructor of forms of encounter within productive mimesis

Comment [S10]: encounter Althusser

[71] Downey, p. 270.

Productive Mimesis in post-relational art

Comment [S11]: All stuff on mimesis here

If relational art is to overcome the charge that it is 'merely mimetic' of reified social relations then it must establish the legitimacy of its forms of productive mimesis. If it can do this, the charge that it lacks artistic autonomy would seem equally to be ill founded. In order to establish this I turn, here, to Adorno. Given the importance of this question I will quote from Adorno at length:

> The spirit of artworks is their objectivated mimetic comportment: It is opposed to mimesis and at the same time, the form that mimesis takes in art.
>
> As an aesthetic category, imitation cannot simply be accepted any more than it can simply be rejected. Art objectivates the mimetic impulse, holding it fast at the same time that it disposes of its immediacy and negates it. From this dialectic, the imitation of reality draws the fatal consequence. Objectivated reality is the correlative of objectivated mimesis. The reaction to what is not-I becomes the imitation of the not-I. Mimesis itself conforms to objectivation, vainly hoping to close the rupture between objectivated consciousness and the object. By wanting to make itself like the objectivated other, the artwork becomes unlike that other. But it is only by way of its self-alienation through imitation that the subject so strengthens itself that it is able to shake off the spell of imitation. That in which artworks over millennia knew themselves to be images of something reveals itself in the course of history, their critic, as being inessential to them. There would have been no Joyce without Proust, nor Proust without Flaubert, on whom Proust looked down. It was by way of imitation, not by avoiding it, that art achieved its autonomy; in it art acquired the means to its freedom.
>
> Art is not a replica any more than it is knowledge of an object; if it were it would be dragged down to the level of being a mere duplication, of which Husserl delivered such a stringent critique in the sphere of discursive knowledge. On the contrary, art reaches towards reality, only to recoil at the actual touch of it. The characters of its script are monuments to this movement. Their constellation in the artwork is a cryptogram of the historical essence of

> reality, not its copy. Such comportment is related to mimetic comportment. Even artworks that announce themselves as replicas are such only peripherally; by reacting to reality they become a second-order reality, subjective reflection, regardless whether the artists have reflected or not.[72]

In these terms, the reading of relational art has hitherto failed to recognise the dialectical nature of mimesis: that is, even at its most imitative, art becomes qualitatively other. None of Bourriaud's interlocutors read the mimesis of relational art as its productive self-alienation. Seen from this perspective it is the very mimetic nature of relational art that is the guarantee of its autonomy and legitimates its claim to be a critical-realist artform. What persists even with a corrective reading of mimesis is the sense that relational art continues to manifest itself only weakly as a form of representation and that it fails to identify its place of concrete appearance.

Relationality and the Public realm: New Institutionalism

Concerns about relational aesthetics reliance upon a vanguardism of curatorial practice and upon 'new institutionalism' are related, on the basis that they are symptomatic *and* productive of the conflation of the public and private realms. The charge is that relational aesthetics reflects the institution of art back upon itself, and as a result loses critical distance. Models of artistic autonomy and heteronomy cannot be read *simpliciter* when the operations of the culture industry redouble the question of artistic autonomy through the rapid assimilation of ideas and new relations into capital. Downey poses the question in the following terms:

> If relational art practices are indeed reflecting, or utilizing, channels of inter-subjective relations, then there is the need to enquire whether or not they are applying the already invasive practices of neo-liberalist commodification to

[72] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 285-286.

both the so-called private realm and, subsequently, to the interstitial relational space between institutions and their public. [73]

Downey's concern is that contemporary curatorial practices are developed within the context and mandate of market-led, publicly funded institutional priorities. Increasingly he views the institutional context of relational aesthetics as being in fact, the de-institutionalization of the art institution, and the migration of the public sphere into this institution as a forum for 'public' debate. He cites Catherine David who claims that 'the strategies that attempt to contrast institutional space with an 'outside' appear naïve or ridiculous [ignoring the transformation of the Habermasian model of public space, and] new modes of imaginary and symbolic investment of places by contemporary subjects'.[74] For Downey, relational aesthetics capitalise upon this migration to such an extent that it is unclear whether relational works can produce critical statements. He talks of an institutional context then, which *absorbs* 'the transitive power of critical statements'.[75] This presentation, I would suggest, is a reflection of a growing disillusionment in the 1990's with the promises of self-organising networks as potentially productive of new forms of democracy, and a realization that they in fact constitute no more than a morphology of the organisation of capital.[76] How can relational aesthetics respond to such a charge? In the following sections I will examine the 'public-ness' of relational art in detail, culminating in the question of whether relational practice might constitute a counter-public sphere and, moreover whether this is either possible or desirable.

[73] Downey, p. 271.
[74] Downey, pp. 271-272.
[75] Downey, p. 272.
[76] See for example Julian Stallabrass, *Internet Art: The Online Clash of Culture and Commerce* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003)

The Publicness of Relational Art

The Critique of 'Consensual' Relational Aesthetics and the Public Sphere

How do we account for the charge that relational aesthetics forms mimic the forms of neo-liberal democracy? The problem as it is generally presented, is that relational aesthetics lends itself to consensual models of sociability and is therefore neo-Kantian. The charge is that it sets out a model of public sphere that is founded upon consensus. I will set out Toni Ross's contribution to this question here.[77]

Ross attributes great significance to the assertion of 'a minimal difference between hegemonic culture and the aesthetic sphere, describing art as a 'social interstice', or gap within a larger relational system'.[78] She identifies this thinking of the interstitial, with the notion of *excess*. Whilst artistic practice is generally 'enmeshed' within networks of global capitalism, art creates free spaces of social experimentation that are 'partially protected'. Ross concludes that there is for Bourriaud, a transcendental dimension to art that 'exerts its pressure from within the very fabric of what currently passes for everyday life'.[79]

She contends that the notion of the aesthetic as a vehicle for resistance to the given realities of capitalist culture has been around for at least two hundred years, echoing Rancière's view of the aesthetic regime of art as the decoupling of meaning and referent. Bourriaud's asserts the unprecedented nature of relational aesthetics, but his use of 'interstitial' reasoning carries Marxist remnants into the discourse of relational

[77] Toni Ross, 'Aesthetic Autonomy and Interdisciplinarity: a Response to Nicolas Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics', *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 5.3 (2006), pp. 167-181.
[78] Ross, p. 168.
[79] Ross, p. 169.

aesthetics, in a way that for Ross is ironically dictated by the form of the transcendental synthetic philosophy of Kant. Ross identifies Bourriaud's ancestral relation to Kant as an assertion of aesthetic freedom that elides instrumental rationality and stimulates the free play of the mental faculties.[80] Bourriaud's remarks that a work of art, 'has no *a priori* useful function without being socially useless'.[81]

Ross contends that the democratic-consensual impetus of relational aesthetics is neo-Kantian. She claims that: 'a prominent feature of relational aesthetics is its cancellation of the avant-gardist value of dissent.' [82] She bases this upon Bourriaud's claim that whilst 'the imaginary of modernism was based on conflict, the imaginary of our day and age is concerned with negotiations, bonds and co-existences.'[83] She maintains that this ethical demand for harmonious cohabitation between people is 'perfectly in tune with the long-standing liberal conception of democracy'.[84]

In particular, she says that:

> According to political theorist John Rawls' influential thesis, liberal theories of democratic equality are based on the fraternal assumption of the 'symmetry of everyone's relation to each other'. [85] Relational aesthetics is articulated in precisely this way: artists and members of the public, or art and a plurality of disciplinary parts, come together on an equal footing to form a whole. More specifically, relational aesthetics echoes the central values of liberal consensus politics. Seeking to ameliorate social or political dissent, consensus politics assumes that every sector of society, along with their specific differences, can be incorporated and adjusted to the given political order. [86]

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[80] Ross, p. 170.
[81] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 42.
[82] Ross, p. 170.
[83] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 45.
[84] Ross, p. 170.
[85] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 93.
[86] Ross, p. 171.

This assessment of Bourriaud's reparative and consensual model within *Relational Aesthetics* appears valid. Bourriaud appears to valorize a bourgeois public sphere. I think that Bourriaud's construction of the public realm is less developed in his early work than it is in either *Postproduction* or *The Radicant*. In the later work, the spaces of relational art are more clearly linked to the production of topologies and matrices of form. This is an area that needs further enquiry. The rhetoric of consensus disappears in this later work.

The Relational Public Sphere

Relational art poses a number of questions about the nature of the public sphere and the forms of 'publicness' of the encounter. I will consider the developments in Bourriaud's thinking of relational space and ask what form, if at all, should the notion of the public sphere now take?

Comment [S12]: public sphere

Relational art purports to be reparative of the social bond but also to produce its own spaces of operation through its appropriation of social forms and its principle of co-existence. Yet the very existence of a public sphere is contentious. Even if it did exist, many would consider it an ideological construction. What is more, the blurring of the distinction between consumption and production makes the identification of a public realm problematic based on a lack of clear division between public and private interests. It accelerates what Habermas identifies as the origin of the public sphere's dissolution. What would a philosophy of art look like on the assumption that there is no way of distinguishing between the private and public realms? How could one define artistic autonomy under those conditions? Even de Certeau's distinction between strategic and tactical behaviours depends upon some distinction between the public and the private sphere as a necessary precondition for the emergence of a strategic-tactical site of torsion.

In *Postproduction* and *The Radicant*, I believe that there are significant developments in Bourriaud's thinking of the 'public sphere' towards a

Comment [S13]: all stuff on PS from PPR cribs

formation of networked relations that calls the producer/recipient into a dialogic encounter. I have said that Bourriaud's notion of publicness is initially ill defined and at times contradicts his later account. In what follows I will set out the 'terms of engagement' for a reading of the public sphere that I believe has conditioned Bourriaud's critical reception on this point. Broadly speaking, Bourriaud can be read in *Relational Aesthetics* as proposing a reparative programme that brings his thought within the critique of Habermas's view of the public sphere as an idealised realm. There are elements within *Relational Aesthetics'* proposal as to the modeling of possible universes within interstitial spaces that become more clearly articulated in the language of topology in the later writing. This brings Bourriaud's thought within the critique of the public sphere from the perspective of a counter-public that appears to suggest a micropolitical-communitarian model.

Habermas's Public Sphere

We have already encountered the argument that Bourriaud's notion of consensual relations is neo-Kantian. Habermas's bourgeois public sphere is similarly based upon a consensual Kantian model in which the public sphere presents a space of critical discourse in which private persons may openly discuss and bring practical reason to bear upon public affairs. Habermas's account of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962)[87] gives an account of its demise based upon internal tensions caused by its vastly expanded constituency; this popularization is at odds with the question of the 'quality' of its discourse. Yet, Habermas seeks to redeem what is 'valuable'; that is its emancipatory potential. What is problematic in this has been for Habermas's critics a seemingly blind faith in the efficacy of formal democracy and its attendant idealistic-rational legitimation of the inequalities perpetrated by the state. Moreover, it can appear an unrealistic theory given the lack of a

[87] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. by T. Bürger and F Lawrence (Harvard: MIT Press, 2001)

clear distinction between the public and private realms. As more private organizations assume public power and as the state increases its involvement in private affairs it can appear outdated and ineffectual. What is more, Habermas really provides no solution to the problem of exclusion from, and marginalization in relation to, any dominant bourgeois public sphere, relying instead upon a notion of 'communicative action' or communicative ethics as adequate to the demand for representative democracy. This ethical model of communicative action does look suspiciously similar to Bourriaud's transitive ethic. Crucially Habermas is criticized for failing to advance any counter public that might contest a bourgeois public realm that in fact tends towards elitism and exclusion. If Bourriaud perhaps unwittingly strays into this territory in *Relational Aesthetics* then he has paid a heavy price. Specifically I think that the persistent charge of reductive social mimesis must be read in the light of this. The discussion of convivial or consensual relations has tended to draw attention away from his counter-public and micropolitical articulations of the relational programme.

Reading Relational Art's Programme as a Counter-Public Sphere: Negt & Kluge's *Public Sphere and Experience*[88]

Comment [S14]: All stuff on new version of PS followed by N+K arguments. All Negt & Kluge & Habermas argument

Negt and Kluge's analysis of the public sphere examines the mechanisms by which the horizon of social experience is constituted from a Marxian perspective. Thus, they challenge any essentialist or ahistorical notion of the public sphere. Their analysis differs from that of Habermas in important respects. Thus the decline of the public sphere is not the result of emergent contradictions. These contradictions inhere in its very structure from its inception. They regard the public sphere as premised upon an abstract notion of generality that excludes the particular. They

[88] Oliver Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, Foreword By M. Hansen, trans. by P. Labanyi, J.O.Daniel and A. Oksilort (London and Minneapolois: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

regard any call for its re-institution as a value free and independent realm as dangerously misguided. Significantly, they examine the public sphere within the context of globalization of the media and as an aggregation of phenomena that present themselves in disparate and contradictory locations. Thus the global unification of the public sphere within electronic media and transnational networks of consumption and production entails a double movement between the diversification of constituencies and particularities, identified by Habermas as the source of the public sphere's dissolution, with an ever more direct hold upon the 'raw experience' of subjectivity. Bourriaud's thinking of the matrices and topologies of relation seems a good match for Negt and Kluge's attention to the changing spatial, temporal and geopolitical parameters of the experiential horizon. Negt and Kluge anticipate the ambivalent forms of the global and local that Bourriaud identifies in *The Radicant*. In other words, Negt and Kluge seem to share a notion of the 'territory' of relation that is attuned to the spatio-temporal changes that mark the 'radical conjunction' of relational aesthetics. They also share some of Bourriaud's optimism about the potential uses of the forms of globalization for the creation of particular counter-publics notwithstanding what they perceive to be a fetishisation of the global as a 'pseudo public sphere'. Key to Negt and Kluge's conception of a counter-public is the notion of the 'context of lived experience', that is *Erfharung*. This notion of 'experience' carries less of an empirical flavour than it does in English. It contains within it the notion of journey, from the German verb *fahren* and therefore temporalises experience in the sense of a wandering exploration that might bear comparison with the figure of Bourriaud's semionaut. There is then an emphatic notion of experience at work that includes memory, relation and the imagination that is at odds with a purely rational or empirical model that we find in Habermas. *Erfharung* is then a site for the mediation of experience, and might then be seen as a matrix within which consciousness and social horizons are explored. Again, comparisons with Bourriaud's thinking might be made on the basis that his topologies and matrices of appropriated forms are sites of translation and inhabitation aimed at

producing a consciousness of better ways of living or, we might advance, 'counter-subjects to capital'. Bourriaud's aleatory materialism, that emerges from the experience of the object without any predetermined origin or destination for thought might also acquire a sense of emerging 'publicness' when read with *Erfharung* as the primacy of lived experience. What I am proposing on this reading is that the 'public sphere' of relational aesthetics might be viewed not only as the site of multiple counter-publics but that it be viewed *less as a site than as a process*. Just as Bourriaud insists upon the instability and diversity of the concept of form, we might equally say that within Negt and Kluge's thinking of the unstable makeup of the public sphere, we arrive at a notion of the production of a counter-public sphere of relational art as a precarious and perilous task.

Utility or Contemplation? The Critique of Relational Aesthetics' Utilitarianism

In the search for a form of measure of the qualities of relational art Claire Bishop analyses its utilitarian credentials. She asks whether there is anything 'proper' to this art, *qua* art, within the traditional categories of aesthetic judgement, or, failing this, what is the *quality* of these relational forms that might make them aesthetic forms.[89] It is a familiar question, which arises within different configurations of the historical and neo-avant-gardes.[90] Bourriaud digests the problem of relational quality. His programme advances the utilization of social forms as a methodology for the concrete realization of social artworks.

Bishop's approach is premised upon the 'uselessness' of art as a guarantor of its autonomy, of its contemplative value against its utilitarianism. Art's uselessness is its badge of honour. But what exactly

[89] Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism & Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (2004), pp. 51-80.
[90] Rosalind Krauss makes a similar connection between the question of what constitutes a sculpture and a loss of place, resulting in the monument as a presentation of pure negativity producing a crisis in the teleology and historicism of artistic qualities. Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, 8. (1979), pp. 30-44.

does ‘useless’ mean and what is forgotten in this valorisation of uselessness? I suggest that what is forgotten is that within the logic of the commodity form it is productivity *as exchange value* that legitimises certain social practices and marginalises others. *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction* frame this as a question of the legitimacy of artistic labour, that is of ‘useless’ or ostensively ‘non-productive’ labour which in fact acquires its use value and therefore its utility through processes of non-commodifiable exchange.

This calls for a fuller diagnostic that reframes relational aesthetics within the question of utilitarianism. Historically, utilitarianism reflects a tension between individual and collective rights within the paradigms of liberalism. John Stuart Mill’s basic thesis is that relations are organised in order to maximise happiness for the greatest number. The striking difference between Mill’s formulation of utilitarianism and Bourriaud’s is that Mill works within a clearly defined distinction between the public and the private realms, whereas Bourriaud works within a notion of their conflation.

Classical utilitarianism, then, understood as the maximization of happiness for the greatest number, underwrites liberalism, but it is acutely distorted within our neo-liberal, experiential economy in which the public/private distinction has either collapsed or the abstraction of its illusion has become self-evident. Downey’s assessment of neo-liberalism is that it is,

> an order that is facilitated and maintained by the consumerist-driven commodification of both private and public sphere; the commercialization of the substance and form of social communications; and the privatization of inter-personal and professional relations. [91]

Downey accuses *Relational Aesthetics* of complicity with classical utilitarianism, in that Bourriaud states that it aims ‘to invent possible

[91] Downey, p. 272.

relations with our neighbours in the present and to bet on happier tomorrows'.[92] Downey likens this to 'a disconcerting corporate-speak'.[93]

Claire Bishop calls for some means of measuring or comparing the relations produced by a work of art when she claims that: 'The *quality* of the relationships in 'relational aesthetics' are never examined or called into question… If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?'[94]

Whilst Downey claims that relational art attempts to balance public with private interests, Bishop takes up the utilitarian argument on the basis that relational aesthetics privileges inter-subjective relations over art's production of objects of contemplation. She says that relational art ascribes a direct and self-evident democratic value to its model of participation. This masks the absence of any demonstration of the quality of relations in terms of either their political efficacy or content. In other words she advocates a *productive relational utilitarianism*. This is an empirical approach to relation. What then are the assumptions of *productive utilitarianism*, and how might I counter this with a model of relational aesthetics as *non-productive utilitarianism*?

The non-productive 'Utility' of Relational Art

What is Utilitarianism?

A reading of utilitarianism in which utility as usefulness enters into a binary opposition with the presumed uselessness of art, identifying the latter with objects of contemplation, is simply erroneous. It is worth reminding ourselves of how John Stuart Mill defines the concept. In the

[92] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 45.
[93] Downey, p. 272.
[94] Bishop, 'Antagonism & Relational Aesthetics', p. 65.

second chapter of his *Utilitarianism*, titled 'What Utilitarianism Is', he opens with the following statement:

> A passing remark is all that needs be given to the ignorant blunder of supposing that those who stand up for utility as the test of right and wrong use the term in that restricted and merely colloquial sense in which utility is opposed to pleasure.[95]

Mill expresses his frustration with those who denounce his theory 'as impracticably dry when the word 'utility' precedes the word 'pleasure', and as too practicably voluptuous when the word 'pleasure' precedes the word 'utility'.'[96] He adds that: 'Having caught up the word 'utilitarian', while knowing nothing whatever about it but its sound, they habitually express by it the rejection or the neglect of pleasure in some of its forms: of beauty, of ornament, or of amusement.'[97] Mill is clearly concerned that the sense and use of the word utilitarianism in his time is acquiring a distorted meaning, and goes on at some length to establish two essential tenets of utilitarianism which appear apposite in the light of the first critique of relational aesthetics. Mill asserts that utilitarianism is not simply a hedonistic pursuit, the maximisation of happiness but is concerned with the question of quality. He says that:

> It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise the fact that some kind of pleasures are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that, while in estimating all other things quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasure should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.[98]

In the fourth chapter of *Utilitarianism*, Mill asks the question, 'of what sort of proof the principle of utility is susceptible'? He gives the

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[95] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism and the 1868 Speech on Capital Punishment*, ed. by George Sher, 2nd edn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Indianapolis, 2001), p. 6.
[96] Mill, p. 6.
[97] Mill, p. 6.
[98] Mill, p. 8.

following answer: ‘The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as means to that end.’[99] And then continues:

> The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible is that people hear it; and so of the other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it… No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness.[100]

My point is this. The critique of relational aesthetics’ utilitarianism is based upon unexamined and misleading precepts. First amongst these is the notion that utility is opposed to pleasure. This critique therefore unsurprisingly demands of relational utilitarianism that it demonstrate the quality of its relational encounters, in terms of quantitative outcome. This reversal is not only attributable to a misunderstanding of utilitarianism, but demonstrates I think the logic of commodification itself. Mill is at great pains to point out that even a relatively small quantity of utility may produce greater happiness than a greater quantity, if the quality of the former is superior to the latter. It is quite consistent with Mill’s utilitarianism, that Bourriaud's interstitial and fleeting moments of non-alienated relation may produce greater satisfaction than commodified relations of an inexorably greater quantity. The evental nature of the relations that Bourriaud attests to, may well entail their disappearance, but that does not preclude our understanding, or indeed our speculating, that those relations were of a superior quality to those we habitually encounter.

A related point is this: the critique of relational aesthetics also demands that utilitarian relations demonstrate the *proof* of their utility. I have

[99] Mill, p. 35.
[100] Mill, p. 35.

demonstrated that this is an absurd question in the light of what Mill has to say on the question of the proof of happiness. However, reading the critique through Mill does shed light on the demands of political efficacy placed upon art. According to the critique of relational art's utility, relational artworks appear to present us with a clear choice: we can either invalidate them on the basis that they fail to represent or evidence their efficacy, or we can validate them as expressions of desire for, and testamentary presentations of, non-alienated relations in their promissory form. In other words, the restitution of 'utility' to its proper meaning also entails an expansion of the notion of 'ethical efficacy', beyond a model of productive utilitarianism or communicative transparency within 'instrumentalised relation'.

<u>If not utilitarian efficacy, then 'critical' efficacy</u>

Bishop is critical of relational aesthetics' convivial model of democracy as at times indistinguishable from the neoliberal milieu itself. I have already examined this claim. However unlike Ross's argument for 'disagreement' as constitutive of a public sphere, Bishop takes disagreement as the basis of a measure of the aesthetic criteria of relational art based upon its critical efficacy. To this end she distinguishes and endorses a strain of antagonistic relational aesthetics based upon her analysis of the works of Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn.[101]

Bishop's presentation of antagonistic relational aesthetics as a more convincing subcategory of relational artwork is premised upon its demonstration of a tangible degree of ethical efficacy. It therefore assumes that relational aesthetics stands and falls upon its ethical efficacy that can be measured. If it produces no object of contemplation (and is therefore non-utilitarian in Bishop's terms) then it ought to demonstrate a quantifiable or legible capacity for its ability to signifyits resistant

[101] Downey, pp. 274-275.

capacities. I view such a formulation of antagonistic relational aesthetics as an otiose category, which can be explained away through a detailed reading of utilitarianism, which permits the articulation of relational desire as both synonymous with utility, and commensurate with dissent.[102]

What is problematic in Claire Bishop's article 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' is the very particular way in which she formulates the notion of antagonism.[103] An argument ensued in *October* magazine between Bishop and Liam Gillick, over what he claims to have been Bishop's misuse of the concept. He claims that Bishop misrepresents Laclau and Mouffe's exposition within *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.[104] I wish to assert, here, the negative dialectical model of antagonism that informs this research, against Bishop's formulation, and also to shift the focus of Bishop's argument on to what is its overriding concern, that of the efficacy of the representational forms of relational and post-relational art practice.

Bishop's argument proceeds as follows: firstly, in an argument we have already encountered, Bishop points out that relational aesthetics lacks any object of contemplation, or even a proxy, in the form of a souvenir, what might be termed 'reliquary' documentation. For Bishop this problem calls for a formulation of a *measure* of its aesthetic value.[105] Having set this precept for her argument, Bishop then proposes a form of

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[102] In fact, Sierra's works certainly do not fit with the model of relational aesthetics put forward by Bourriaud, in the sense that they tend to shut the public out and do not elicit a relational encounter. I view them as already post-relational on the basis of their thwarted theatricality. This model maintains the distance between actors and audience, in a way that maintains its identity as theatre, rather than for example, the experimental theatre of Paolo Freire, which in fact relies upon abandoning this distance, and in fact its identity as theatre *tout court*. It is the enframing of the impossibility of encounter that renders them post-relational.

[103] Bishop, 'Antagonism & Relational Aesthetics', pp. 51-80.

[104] Liam Gillick, 'Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 115 (2006), pp. 95-107.

[105] 'rather than the *interpretations* of a work of art being open to continual reassessment, the work of art *itself* is argued to be in perpetual flux. There are many problems with this idea, not least of which is the difficulty of discerning a work whose identity is willfully unstable.' Bishop, 'Antagonism & Relational Aesthetics', p. 52.

aesthetic judgement adequate to the relational artwork, posited as an examination of the tangible quality of relations demonstrated in the work. In the third strand of Bishop's argument, she addresses this *quality* of relation as cognate with its antagonistic nature. In order to do this, she conflates Laclau and Mouffe's arguments concerning subjectivity as a form of self-differentiation of the subject within hegemonic forms of capitalism with a *dissensual* model, which relies upon Rancière's formulation. Finally, Bishop appears in my view, to meld this formulation of *qualitative antagonism* to a model of ethical immediacy and political efficacy, which is both consistent with her reading of *Relational Aesthetics* as *productive utilitarianism*, and adopts Rancière's critique of political efficacy and ethical immediacy within his analysis of the failures of critical art.[106] This fourth step in her analysis is crucially given much less attention than her analysis of antagonism:

> today, political, moral, and ethical judgements have come to fill the vacuum of aesthetic judgement in a way that was unthinkable forty years ago. This is partly because postmodernism has attacked the very notion of aesthetic judgment, and partly because contemporary art solicits the viewer's literal interaction in ever more elaborate ways. Yet the 'birth of the viewer' (and the ecstatic promises of emancipation that accompany it) has not halted appeals to higher criteria, which have simply returned in other guises.[107]

My difficulty with this final stage in Bishop's argument, is not only its reductive reading of art's ethics and politics as utilitarian, but also that it is fundamentally at odds with my reading of antagonism within negative dialectics as an *index falsi* of reality. This final stage of Bishop's argument is a hasty and opportunistic movement from antagonism as the source of the power of negation, into a fruitless search for democratic tendencies within relational aesthetics premised upon an ideological notion of antagonistic quality. In other words, it attempts to introduce

[106] Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009)
[107] Bishop, 'Antagonism & Relational Aesthetics', pp. 77-78.

some *reconciling element*.[108] I am in agreement with Liam Gillick's response here therefore in his rejoinder to Bishop's argument, that this approach simply reproduces a reductive binary relationship between hegemony and resistance. Gillick's assessment is as follows;

> Things get truly interesting when art goes beyond a reflection of the rejected choices of the dominant culture and attempts to address the actual processes that shape our contemporary environment. This is the true nature of Mouffe's plea for a more sophisticated understanding of the paradox of liberal democracy, which concerns the recognition of the antagonism suppressed within consensus-based models of social democracy, not merely a simple two-way relationship between the existing sociopolitical model and an enlightened demonstration of its failings.[109]

If antagonism and contradiction are categories of reflection produced not by the concept but by its object, then the presentation of antagonism is already immanent to relational and post-relational artworks all the way down. Therefore, the term 'antagonistic relational aesthetics' is tautologous. To recall, the relationship between negative dialectics and antagonism reflects necessarily, the irrationality of its object;

> For its part, negative dialectics aspires to display a fidelity to this antagonistic character of capitalist society: it is a dialectic modality of thought because society is antagonistic; negative because this antagonism cannot be overcome

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[108] Against the totalizing tendency it is rather more important to present what is unreconciled, so, 'The nonidentity of the antagonistic, a nonidentity it runs up against and laboriously pulls together, is the nonidentity of a whole that is not the true but the untrue, the absolute opposite of justice. But in reality this very nonidentity has the form of identity, an all-inclusiveness that is not governed by any third, reconciling element. This kind of deluded identity is the essence of ideology, of socially necessary illusion. Only through the process whereby the contradiction becomes absolute, and not through the contradiction becoming alleviated in the absolute, could it disintegrate and perhaps find its way to that reconciliation which must have misled Hegel because its real possibility was still concealed from him.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, (Cambridge: MA: MIT Press 1993) cited in A. R. Bonnet, 'Antagonism and Difference: Negative Dialectics and Post-structuralism in view of the Critique of Modern Capitalism', in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism* (eds.) (London: Pluto Press, 2009), pp.41-78 (p. 45.)

[109] Gillick, p. 100.

through thought; and certainly utopian, because it continues to hope for a reconciled reality. However, the abstract character of negative dialectics also points towards a determination of society, because its abstraction is not a subjective abstraction which belongs to the realm of thought, but an abstraction which is rooted in its object: society.[110]

In her appeal to political efficacy and ethical immediacy, Bishop dilutes the negative power of contradiction as the reflective thinking of a contradictory society into a search for 'genuine democracy'. To this extent, she is in agreement with Rancière's identification of aesthetics *with* politics. What is interesting to me in Bishop's argument is that in her skepticism about the open artwork, for example, or the democratic pretensions of the encounter, she ignores the power of negation within relational art as a site of immanent non-identity. What she does highlight is a separate issue, which is that of the weak representational manifestation of this negativity within certain relational art practices. In other words there is a distinction to be made between the presence of antagonism as an element within every artwork (because artworks are socially determined) and the degree to which that antagonism may appear or become manifest as negation. It is for this reason that relational art requires a re-thinking of its forms and methods of representation in terms, as Bourriaud has said, of the 'non-visual'. This is why Bishop bases her argument upon the work of Sierra and Hirschhorn. Both of their practices rely extensively upon photographic documentation as an explicit manifestation of their practices. Indeed Sierra goes so far as to admit that the objective in staging his works is to arrive at an exemplary photographic representation of it. Both Sierra and Hirschhorn have a strong iconography associated with their work.

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[110] A. R. Bonnet, 'Antagonism and Difference: Negative Dialectics and Post-Structuralism in View of the Critique of Modern Capitalism', in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, ed. by John Holloway, Fernando Metamoros and Sergio Tischler (London: Pluto Press, 2009) pp. 41-78 (p. 45).

Overall, then, my reading of Bishop's antagonistic model is that it contains a legitimate call for some thinking of the representational forms of relational and post-relational practice adequate to the formal presentation of the relational encounter.[111] But this does not call for literal demonstrations of the failings of social democracy. I will discuss some of the developments in thinking around post-relational representation my final chapter. I do not suggest that we should abandon the notion of artistic efficacy: rather, that we view it within the form of 'a restless movement of negation that does not lead necessarily to a happy ending.'[112] In Bishop's latest work, *Artificial Hells*, she expressly distances herself from her missives on relational art and focuses upon participatory art practices. She appears, now, to accept the need for non-visual forms of representation but this is couched in terms of the separation of the forms of artistic and 'actual' forms of democracy, whatever they might be. She remains beholden to the separation of the artistic and social critiques of capitalism as categorically different and proposes their productive reading within a principle of suspensive contradiction. Moreover, she continues to demand that art demonstrate its efficacy albeit in non-visual form. Ultimately the model of artistic autonomy in *Artificial Hells* remains unchanged and therefore out of step with the configuration of relational art practice. We can see in the following statement how Bourriaud suggests we evaluate a work of relational art:

> The first question we should ask when looking at a work of art is: - Does it give me a chance to exist in front of it, or, on the contrary, does it deny me as a subject, refusing to consider the Other in its structure? Does the space-time factor suggested or described by this work, together with the laws governing it, tally with my aspirations in real life? Does it criticise what is deemed

[111] In spite of this Bourriaud does acknowledge that, 'Today there is a quarrel over representation that sets art and the official image of reality against each other.' N Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprogrammes the World* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2002), p. 93.
[112] Bonnett, p. 45.

criticisable? Could I live in a space-time structure corresponding to it in reality?[113]

However, Bishop's objection that relational art is weak in its modes of appearance is justified. Indeed, this is where relational art needs to develop its own theory of representation. However, Bishop misses the political nature of relational art in the mode of its self-alienation as in fact a diagnosis of relational hypostasis. Therefore, for example we might read its disappearance in Adornian terms:

> Today it is conceivable and perhaps requisite that artworks immolate themselves through their temporal nucleus, devote their own life to the instant of the appearance of truth, and tracelessly vanish without thereby delimiting themselves in the slightest. The nobility of such comportment would not be unworthy of art now that its loftiness has decayed to attitude and ideology.[114]

Relational Aesthetics as an Incomplete Critique of the Commodity Form of Exchange

Downey's summary of the first wave of the critique of relational aesthetics is useful in that it brings to the boil the conflicting views of relational aesthetics as either productive of new artistic forms of sociability, or, as merely mimetic of existing reified forms of social relation. This forms the basis of an attempt to address the contradictions of relational aesthetics through a Marxist reading in which Bourriaud's programme is viewed as an incomplete but nevertheless legitimate attempt to produce an immanent critique of the commodity form of exchange.

The critique of relational aesthetics from the left is driven by a certain frustration with Bourriaud, not based on those he cites as influences, but

[113] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* p.57.
[114] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p.177.

on the basis of those he disavows or seemingly ignores.[115] Relational aesthetics has the flavour of a leftist critique, but it seems disingenuous at times in its refusal to reveal its ancestry. For example, Bourriaud's use of the 'social interstice' is derived from Marx; he acknowledges this but does not carry it forward, as one might expect into a full-blown Marxist critique of the objectification of relations. Perhaps this is because Bourriaud emerges from a distinctive Marxist tradition; Althusserianism. Bourriaud speaks of the problems of reification and the 'completely administered world', yet he distances himself from the Frankfurt School. He alludes to the gift economy in relation to Rikrit Tiravanija's work but makes no mention of Marcel Mauss. Put simply, the magnitude of the critical response to relational aesthetics seems to me to result inevitably from its provocations. Bourriaud's promiscuity with leftist thought elicits vehement responses but is generally not interpreted within his own aleatory materialist methodology; that is as a critique of entrenched orthodox historical materialism. In what follows I will set out the Marxist critique of relational aesthetics: that it namely represents a theatrical fetishisation of social relations. This is a partial Adornian critique of Bourriaud that I wish to counter with a more expansive reading of Adorno.

In Stewart Martin's 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics' he proposes a reading of relational aesthetics as a critique of the social relations of exchange under social transformations in the conditions of art production.[116] His reading is that *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction* identify new communication and information technologies as crucial to the development of new conditions of artistic

[115] This may explain the absence of any comparable critique of dialogic aesthetics in the United States, in spite of their similar emancipatory aspirations: the creation of 'concrete' social relations. Bourriaud's text is a particularly European provocation, whereas Kester's has a more pragmatic tone, and its emancipatory claims are more modestly stated. Moreover Kester's rhetoric is perhaps better attuned to the utilitarian demands placed upon art following the debacle of the NEA's cuts on the public funding of the arts.

[116] Stewart Martin,'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, 21.4 (2007) pp. 369-386. Also, by the same author 'The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity', *Radical Philosophy*, 146 (2007), pp. 15-25.

production and as fundamentally altering the sphere of human relations within globalisation. These works emphasise the anti-representational basis of relational aesthetics in subordinating art objects to the production of relations themselves. Accordingly, Martin cites Bourriaud's statement: 'what [the artist] produces, first and foremost, is relations between people and the world, by way of aesthetic objects.'[117] Martin proposes a 'modification' of relational aesthetics as follows: *'the idea of relational aesthetics is that art is a form of social exchange'*.[118]

Martin singles out Bourriaud's claims that relational aesthetics overcomes the utopianism of the historical avant-garde by realising it through the formation of alternative ways of living. He says that:

> This realised utopianism, as we might think of it, is described as a micro-political disengagement from capitalist exchange, definined as a 'social interstice' in Marx's sense of a 'trading communit[y] that elude[s] the capitalist economic context by being removed from the law of profit'.[119]

In its realisation of 'autonomous communes' he says, relational aesthetics can be read either as 'a manifesto for a new political art confronting the service economies of informational capitalism – an art of the multitude', or as 'a naive mimesis or aestheticisation of novel forms of capitalist exploitation.'[120] This is an argument as we have seen, dominates the first critique. For Martin, what is lacking is;

> a critique of the political economy of social exchange that is implicitly proposed by *Relational Aesthetics*; in other words, a consideration of how relational art produces a social exchange that disengages from capitalist exchange, and – at the heart of this issue – how the *form* of relational art relates to or opposes the commodity form or the value form.[121]

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[117] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 42.
[118] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 370.
[119] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 371, citing Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 16.
[120] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 371.
[121] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 371.

It is this lack of a critique of the commodity form that, in Martin's view, renders relational aesthetics 'helplessly reversible into an aestheticization of capitalist exchange'.[122] Thus, he seeks to reconstruct relational aesthetics along the lines of a dialectical theory of art and its commodification. His contentions are as follows: firstly, that relational aesthetics should be seen as a development in the dialectical relation of art and commodification that is constitutive of modernism. And moreover, that this dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy be read as the dialectic of fetishism and exchange. Secondly, that: '*Relational Aesthetics* effectively manifests an extreme heteronomous critique of art's autonomy and heteronomy'[123]; and thirdly, that relational art 'functions as an immanent critique of the commodity form' or the relational-political forms of subjection to it.[124] This critique evinces the same reductive reading of mimetics and the absence of any consideration of Bourriaud's aleatory materialism that produce the lop-sidedness of the early reception of his work. The claim that Bourriaud's notion of liminal relational forms are posited 'outside' of reified relations cannot be supported in the light of Bourriaud's account.

Comment [S15]: Insert stuff on exchange.

Martin begins his account of the 'Dialectic of Commodification and Art' with a recap of Karl Marx's account of commodification in *Capital* as revolving around the dialectic of subject and object, persons and things. He describes this as a 'dialectic of inversion' in which persons appear things and things appear persons'.[125] In Marx's words 'To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e., they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things.'[126] This dialectical inversion produces a struggle of subjection or subordination in commodification

[122] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 371.
[123] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 371.
[124] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', pp. 371-372.
[125] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 372.
[126] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 372.

and, by extension, in art. Martin claims that political theorists of the left often demonstrate a 'general indifference to the political form of the commodity and the commodity form of the political,' and he includes relational aesthetics within this tendency.[127] He adds that if we think of the political in terms of subjection to the commodity form, 'we can see art as politically formed to its innermost core. In a certain sense we can think of art as a primal scene of politics in capitalist culture.'[128]

Again it is unfair to Bourriaud to describe him as indifferent to this question. Bourriaud is clear that the project of relational aesthetics aims to address commodified relations on the basis of material relations between people produced through the commodity form of exchange. Historically, the question of art's commodification is articulated in the relationship between pure art and anti-art, which is to say that art is criticality determined on the basis of its autonomy within its heteronomous determination by the social. Martin's argument is that this opposition is a contradiction internal to the commodity form itself. I do not think that Bourriaud would disagree with this. But I think he would disagree with Martin's conclusion that this means that art's resistance to commodification is 'obliged to take the form of an immanent critique or self-criticism'.[129] Bourriaud's emphasis upon an aleatory materialism and the annexation of social forms makes him vulnerable to the charge that *Relational Aesthetics* attempts to step outside of this dialectic, rendering it 'the spontaneous theory of art's heteronomous determination by the social.'[130]

Comment [S16]: eg

Comment [S17]: exp

The overriding question for Martin is this: does relational aesthetics posit encounters or micro-communities as an exception to universal commodification? Or, is its refusal both of the art object and the dialectic of art and non-art rather a misunderstanding of the full import of Marx's dialectical reversal of subject and object, *including* potentially the

[127] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 372.
[128] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 372.
[129] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 372.
[130] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 373.

commodity form of the event? Whilst I can see why the objection to relational art might be the fleeting nature of its appearance, or for that matter its non-appearance, I do not think that Bourriaud's statements demonstrate naivety about the reified nature of relations or their entrapment within the principles of exchange. The point here I think is rather that Bourriaud accepts this as a fait accompli and seeks to translate these forms within topological frameworks. It is Bourriaud's attention to the form of the work that gives it an immanently critical edge. His use of productive mimesis as a means of re-deploying the notion of artistic autonomy within a principle of co-existence seems to me to pre-empt this kind of approach. We can see this lack of attention to Bourriaud's methodology in Martin's discussion of commodity fetishism.

The Absolute Relational Artwork?

Martin identifies in Adorno's aesthetic theory the notion that art's criticality appears when in Adorno's words 'the absolute artwork meets the absolute commodity'.[131] He says that:

> Autonomous art is conceived, by Adorno, as an intense form of commodity fetishism, which exposes the contradiction internal to the commodity form: namely, that the reduction of use-value to exchange-value is both *necessary* for exchange-value, and *impossible* for it, since it is ultimately uses – however frivolous or 'unnecessary' – that are exchanged, and the useless is, strictly speaking, rendered valueless. Pure exchange-value is a contradiction in terms.[132]

Thus the commodity fetishism that is inherent in the very mechanism of exchange value is intensified in the artwork to a position of *reductio ad absurdum*. Art thereby *refuses its social determination* and aspires to a condition of objectivity. This very objectivity depends upon its singular form. Singular in its resistance to exchange value or in Martin's terms

[131] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 374.
[132] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 374.

‘the autonomous artwork is a countersubject to capital’.[133] For Adorno, it is the creation of the illusion of artistic autonomy, which allows art to criticise that very illusion, it is ‘a self-conscious illusion mobilised to criticise another illusion’.[134]

Martin proposes that *Relational Aesthetics* can be read alongside Adorno's theory of art’s immanent critique of the commodity form of art, and considers whether it might be possible to reconcile this with relational aesthetics. This, of course, chimes with my methodology but I cannot agree with Martin’s suggestion that Bourriaud seeks within relational aesthetics the abandonment of clearly commodified artistic objects, in favour of relational forms that are somehow exempt from this. Martin claims that:

> Bourriaud interprets the social or non-object-oriented character of relational artworks as the simple negation of social relations between things, and the affirmation of social relations between persons, thereby rejecting Adorno’s whole strategy.[135]

The accusation that Bourriaud steps outside of the question of an immanent critique of the commodity form of exchange is inaccurate in my view. Martin contrasts Adorno’s enigmatical character of art as constitutive of its criticality against Bourriaud's emphasis on communication and transparency. He points out that Bourriaud does recognise, the necessity for some form of autonomy for relational art ‘as an autonomous art of the social’. However the model Martin identifies both within *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction* is of a somewhat simplistic insistence on social relations *against* any objectification.[136]

What Bourriaud misses, Martin asserts is Marx's insistence in *Capital* that,

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[133] Martin, ‘Critique of Relational Aesthetics’, p. 375.
[134] Martin, ‘Critique of Relational Aesthetics’, p. 375.
[135] Martin, ‘Critique of Relational Aesthetics’, p. 376.
[136] Martin, ‘Critique of Relational Aesthetics’, p. 377.

> …the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but a definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the phantasmagorical form of a relation between things.[137]

In other words Martin says:

> Capitalist exchange value is not constituted at the level of objects, but of social labour, as a measure of abstract labour. It is the commodification of labour that constitutes the value of 'objective' commodities. To think that the source of value is in the object-commodity is precisely the error that Marx calls fetishism. Bourriaud partakes of the common form of political fetishism, which thinks that the eradication of the 'objectivity' of the commodity eradicates capitalist exchange.[138]

Martin's assessment is that this is a form of Romantic anti-capitalism, based upon a misreading of reification, producing that which is unwittingly mimetic of what I will refer to as the 'experiential economy'.

For Martin, the question boils down then to a dialectic between Adorno's view of an art that is *fetishised against exchange*, and Bourriaud's radicalisation of *social exchange against fetishism*.[139] In other words, Bourriaud engages in a form of political fetishism, in the mistaken belief that the substitution of the relational encounter for the art object, eradicates the subjectivity of the commodity form and with it capitalist exchange. In so doing, Martin argues that what is eradicated is the objectivity of the artwork vis-à-vis its relation to art and anti-art.

Martin's critique is very important for this research, in that it calls for a reappraisal of the various ways art has attempted to 'dematerialise' the

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[137] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 378, citing Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol 1, p.165.*
[138] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 378..
[139] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 382.

art object. I do not agree that this is a strategy that influenced relational aesthetics, but it remains instructive to see how relational aesthetics differs from conceptual art. Martin also opens questions around the nature of the artistic event-encounter as a fetishised commodity form. This calls for an analysis of the theatricality of relational aesthetics certainly, but also some consideration of the documentation of relational aesthetics as potentially providing the immanent critique that Martin advocates, as a material re-presentation of art's objectivity, through a reassertion of its autonomy.

In a passage entitled 'The Problem of a Post-Conceptual Art of the Social', Martin reconsiders the 'covert genealogy' that shapes relational aesthetics. Focusing initially upon the controversies that surrounded Minimalism, Martin examines Michael Fried's seminal critique of Minimalism. Fried charged Minimalism with literalism and theatricality.[140] This is based upon minimal art's presentation of objects in a situation that included the viewer as a focus for the completion of the work. Fried's objections emphasised art's autonomy as synonymous with its need to withdraw from this literalness, principally through its opticality. This is the conventional reading of the dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy within minimalism. However Martin makes a further point, which relates back to Marx's subject-object inversion. He says that:

> We can interpret a critique of social heteronomy in Fried's critique of theatricality: art is not subjected to viewers as *their* object, but considered as if it were itself a subject, autonomous, which viewers are required to experience through absorption, that is, through their subjection to art. Fried's position would hereby correspond to the critique of art's subjection to its heteronomous determination by capitalist social exchange, with Minimalism rendered the agent of exchange value. But it bears no less of a correspondence to a fetishism of art, akin to fetishism of commodities, in which autonomous subjectivity is preserved for art, to which people/viewers are subjected/absorbed. The

[140] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p.382.

experience of art is revealed as an experience of subjection to the commodity form.[141]

In other words Minimalism's mutation of art into its objecthood operates as a critique of the ethical encounter with art as subject, a defence of artistic autonomy that nevertheless fails to escape art's subjection to the commodity form. Equally for Martin, by dissolving the artwork into its social relations, relational artworks dissolve their artistic autonomy resulting in 'social relations that have been instrumentalised'.[142] He states that: '*Relational Aesthetics* is a new theory of art's theatricality, affirming it and radicalising its consequences' because it not only incorporates the beholder but also reduces the art object to this incorporation itself. For Martin this constitutes a *politicisation of form* in which 'form is rendered a modality of subjection to capital.'[143]

Martin goes on to consider the practices of institutional critique within conceptual art as producing 'an autonomous art of the social in a critical but also negative form' presenting art's conditions of production within the ideological forms of the art institution.[144] This preserved the avant-garde's dissolution of art into the social as a presently unrealizable utopia. As with relational aesthetics this negative utopianism risks a certain reversal in which the taboo upon the avant-garde's dissolution of art into life simply mimics the art institutions alienation of social autonomy.[145] But it remains important in setting the stage for the anticipation of a social autonomy beyond art that informs relational aesthetics.

So, in Martin's view, Bourriaud's refusal of the axis of art and non-art subjects relational aesthetics to a theatricalisation of social heteronomy as the condition of the possibility of art. Within Martin's overall conclusion

[141] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 383.
[142] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 383.
[143] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 383.
[144] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 384.
[145] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 384.

he reflects upon the artistic document, by suggesting that art-photography might overcome the taboos of conceptual art and provide an alternative presentation of an autonomous art of the social. It is more or less a postscript to his article, but a significant one in my view. Discussing the work of Jeff Wall he says that,

> the self-critical reflection of photography in its use by Conceptual artists generated the reflexivity necessary for it to emerge as an autonomous form, but without excluding reference to the social in the way that modernist painting and sculpture tended to. 'Photography about photography' retains its representation of the social through its indexical exposure to the world outside it.[146]

He adds that 'Relational art and art-photography may well be setting the terms of debate over what form a critical art of the social can take today'.[147] My perspective draws upon this suggestion, but has a different inflection. My research question concerns the nature of the documentary real within relational and post-relational art practices, and is therefore directly concerned with the future of the image, specifically its capacity to operate as an immanent critique of the social relations of the commodity form. But, as I have said, the mode of visual representation is the least important in the proposition of the relational programme. Moreover, it is only within networks of exchange and postproduction that the image aspires to full representation because it is the form of its exchange, which becomes significant in relational art rather than its content as such.

A Response to Martin's Critique

The Extreme Heteronomy of Relational Art

Overall I think that Martin's reading of Adorno places a disproportionate emphasis on Adorno's analysis of the absolute artwork. What is missing

[146] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p.384.
[147] Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p.385.

in Martin's account of Adorno is the role played by mimesis in the determination of the contradictory nature of artistic autonomy. In other words it lacks Adorno's mimetic principle of 'resemblance without imitation'. On this point Adorno says that:

> Art is not to be reduced to the unquestionable polarity of the mimetic and the constructive, as if this were an invariant formula, for otherwise works of high quality would be obliged to strike a balance between the two principles. But what was fruitful in modern art was what gravitated toward one of the extremes, not what sought to mediate between them; those works that strove after both, in search of synthesis, were rewarded with a dubious consensus. The dialectic of these elements is similar to dialectical logic, in that each pole realizes itself only in the other, and not in some middle ground.[148]

What I regard as important in this statement is the idea that we might regard the extreme heteronomy of relational art as a 'gravitation towards' extreme mimesis. This gravitation towards the extreme by no means entails that relational art loses its constructive principle: that is an art of constructed encounters. Rather, to follow Adorno's logic, this art arrives at its dialectical relationship to a principle of construction precisely in its extreme mimetic comportment. To recall, for Adorno, mimesis contains a contradiction of its own. The objective and immanent logic of a work is achieved through the anti-mimetic impulse within mimesis.[149] This means that in its effort to resemble the other the artwork becomes qualitatively different: it unites the work as an interior. What is lopsided about Martin's analysis is I think that whilst he relies upon Adorno's assertion that the artwork is an absolute commodity and therefore immanently critical, relational art's extreme heteronomy is not a disavowal of this principle. Rather, extreme heteronomy is the mimetic comportment by which relational art takes this principle and manifests it within the fragmentary or composite form of an artwork that retains its

[148] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 44.

[149] 'Without its immanent necessity no work would gain objectivation; this necessity is art's anti-mimetic impulse, one borrowed externally, which unites the work as an interior. The logic of art, a paradox for extra-aesthetic logic, is a syllogism without concept or judgment.' Adorno, *Aesthetics*, p.136.

autonomy on the basis that the artwork remains critical of its own illusion. Bourriaud calls this 'make-believe'. Make believe is a very serious component of relational art's realist credentials rather than a romantic or escapist strategy.

Dematerialisation

Bourriaud emphatically rejects the situation of relational aesthetics within the teleology of Conceptual art's principle of dematerialisation. He says that:

> While the chaotic proliferation of production led Conceptual artists to the dematerialization of the work of art, it leads postproduction artists towards strategies of mixing and combining products. Overproduction is no longer seen as a problem, but as a cultural ecosystem.[150]

Elsewhere, Bourriaud talks about 'New Realism' in art in which the representation of consumption becomes its subject.[151] Not only does Bourriaud reject a reading of relational art as a strategic dematerialisation of the art object he repeatedly asserts the concrete and material nature of relational forms, against any notion of immateriality. For example, in the following passage he aims to pre-empt such a reading:

> To head off any polemic about a so-called return to 'conceptual' art, let us bear in mind that these [relational] works in no way celebrate immateriality. None of these [relational] artists has a preference for 'performances' or concept, words that no longer mean a whole lot here. In a word, the work process no longer has any supremacy over ways of rendering this work material (unlike Process Art and Conceptual Art, which, for their part, tended to fetishisize the mental process to the detriment of the object). In the worlds constructed by

[150] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.45.
[151] Bourriaud says that New Realists take the representation of consumption as their subject: 'the New Realists can be seen as the first landscape painters of consumption, the authors of the first still lifes of industrial society. The subject of simulationist art is marketing'. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.26.

> [relational] artists, on the contrary, objects are an intrinsic part of the language, with both regarded as vehicles of relations to the other. In a way, an object is every bit as immaterial as a phone call. And a work that consists in a dinner around a soup is every bit as *material* as a statue. This arbitrary division between the gesture and the forms it produces is here called into question, insofar as it is the very image of contemporary alienation: the cannily maintained illusion, even in art institutions, that objects excuse methods and that the *end* of art justifies the pettiness of the intellectual and ethical means. Objects and institutions, and the use of time and works, are at once the outcome of human relations – for they render social work concrete – and producers of relations – for, conversely, they organise types of sociability and regulate inter-human encounters.[152]

Martin's analysis relies upon a separation of object and encounter that is not a fair reflection of relational aesthetics. I think his analysis relies upon such a separation in order to found the claim that relational aesthetics posits an outside of relation: that it is a romanticised critique of capital. This relies in turn upon the notion that relational art misreads the Marxist inversion of subject-object. Again, I don't believe there are any grounds for this. Bourriaud is consistent in the assertion that the commodity form produces relations between subjects as material things (i.e. objects). This can be seen within not only the passage just cited but also from my earlier account of Bourriaud's transitive ethics. On the question of immateriality, he claims that; if we can speak of an immaterialism in nineties art this must take into consideration its spatio-temporal conjuncture. He says that the

> relative immateriality of the nineties art (which is more a sign of the priority given by these artists to time in relation to space than a desire not to produce objects) is motivated neither by an aesthetic militancy, nor by a mannerist refusal to create objects. They display and explore the process that leads to objects and meanings.[153]

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[152] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 47-48.
[153] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 53-54.

Fetishised Relation

I think that Bourriaud's interpretation of reification makes it clear that the possibility of relations that sit outside of universal commodification and spaces of 'relative autonomy' have all but disappeared. On that basis I do not think that he fetishises encounters. If anything he recognises, with Adorno, the objective nature of the fetish character inherent within all exchangeable commodities. Simply because relational artists model 'possible universes' they do not do this from an escapist perspective. Rather they 'expose' their art directly to the commodity form; again as 'landscape painters of consumption'. Take the following passage:

> An exhibition will give rise to a specific 'arena of exchange' [that] 'must be judged on the basis of aesthetic criteria, in other words by analysing the coherence of its form, and then the symbolic value of the 'world' it suggests to us…Within this social interstice, the artist must assume the symbolic models he shows. All representation (though contemporary art *models* more than it represents, and fits into the social fabric more than it draws inspiration therefrom) refers to values that can be transposed onto society. As a human activity based on commerce, art is at once the object and subject of an ethic. And this all the more so because, unlike other activities, *its sole function is to be exposed to this commerce.*[154]

Again, what is also important here is Bourriaud's positing of the subject and object of art within an ethical principle.

[154] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* p.18.

Chapter 2

Archive and Network: Informationalised Relational Aesthetics

Introduction

In this chapter, I will look at the ways that relational and post-relational practice has extended its principle of the use of social forms to informational networks and archival-artistic practices. This aspect of relational aesthetics is more clearly developed in *Postproduction* and *The Radicant* than in the earlier *Relational Aesthetics*. The later works not only advance a more overtly technologised form of relational practice but also give a clearer account of the Networks of Expanded Authorship (NEA's) that underpin relational art's model of postproductive authorship. This is the principle of the use and re-use of existing forms and artworks. Thus authorship is a *shared* undertaking and the artwork becomes 'a dot on a line' or a node within an extended matrice of relation. The later works evince a more direct engagement with informationally focused modes of production but equally this does not justify the conclusion that relational art has migrated wholesale into the circuits of electronic communication and exchange. It would be more accurate to say that relational art has expanded the range of its forms: it has increased its 'stockpile'.

Bourriaud's later work has not received anything like the same level of critical reception as *Relational Aesthetics*. This affords me the opportunity to set out those aspects of his theory that develop the programme of relationality explored in the previous chapter. Moreover, to look at these developments in the context of a broad range of writing that addresses the nature of the network society, the general social techniques of informationalised labour, the nature of the archive and the performativity of relational art. My aim is, then, to construct a constellation in which to examine new aspects of the programme, for

example, the full articulation of Bourriaud's thinking on topology, the nature of the informational readymade, and the heterological and intertextual motility of his later aesthetics. It also allows for some discussion of the wider discourse within contemporary art of the relevance of theories of material and immaterial labour, which have hitherto been applied to 'informationalised' artistic practices. At the same time, I will draw upon arguments from the existing critique of *Relational Aesthetics* in order to examine their specific operation and validity within an informationalised topology. What persists of the critique within this new topology, though they are not addressed directly to Bourriaud, is the critique of informationalised artistic labour as an extreme form of heteronomy and question marks over its mimetic form. Thus, the legitimacy of the internet as a potentially emancipatory tool and site for artistic practice takes on a new focus in postproductive and radicant practice.

In this chapter, I draw upon a broad range of sources and my Adornian/Bourriaudian methodology of the essay as form/polemic is therefore indispensable to my objective: to account for the informationalised form of relational aesthetics as a radical disjuncture from the forms of the avant-garde and its cognates of detournemont, montage and collage. This argument requires that one focus upon Bourriaud's claim that artworks are now made within a radically reconfigured spatio-temporal relation. This affects both the general epistemological field and the category of mimesis to an unprecedented degree. Art operates, in fact, within the milieu of hypomnesis: that is within an informationalised culture in which *memory inconveniences culture*.

The argument of this chapter can be summarized as follows: the conjuncture of globalization identified by Bourriaud can be easily disregarded as simply another statement of the obvious. It doesn't ostensibly tell us anything we don't already know. This is why the later writings have been overlooked: they are all too readily within the

dystopianism of much postmodern discourse, for example Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* and Žižek's eschatology of the 'end of times'. Upon closer examination, Bourriaud's extreme and heterologically mimetic thinking of this conjuncture merit more detailed analysis, specifically, his analysis of the changing epistemological field and the temporal-spatial relations of the global conjuncture.

The materiality of postproduction and radicant practices are premised upon the complete identification of space and time. Relational space is thus posited as a 'substance' of Aristotelian proportions. Bourriaud embraces these conditions and their productive potential. For example he embraces the 'objectile' as a replacement for the artistic object and advances methodologies of screenplay and scripting as forms of negotiation in which, radicalizing Adorno, truth is no longer presented as an internal contradiction but, rather, becomes a form of illusion that is radicant: that is 'on the move'. In addition, the materiality of postproductive and radicant art is reliant upon enactment through performed relation.

There is nothing abstract in Bourriaud's configuration of space and time. Perhaps it has been read in rather abstract terms that tend to deflate its importance. I will argue that the spatio-temporal relation of informational culture manifests itself in lived experience and produces a form of subjectivity that can be observed in the general social techniques of informational labour. I will be drawing upon a range of thinkers in order to advance this argument. Manuel Castells work on the network society and his analysis of the techniques of informational labour in which relational production and feedback are essential components of the production of subjectivity: the goal of capital. Equally, Jon McKenzie's thinking of performativity and the 'generalised field of performance' is not just a reflection upon the performative injunctions that determine subjectivity through labour but is also extremely useful in the analysis of the public realm, after Negt and Kluge, within a model that is technologically determined. Significantly, his model calls for forms of

negotiation rather than for the transgressive model of performance theory. John Roberts analysis of the de- and re-skilling of artists and the idea of artistic 'non-productive labour', in Bourriaud's terms, 'silent production' of new forms are crucial to a materialistic understanding of post-relational autonomy. I will link the testamentary turn of the 'archival impulse' in art identified by Hal Foster with Roberts' thinking of the informational readymade in order to examine how productive mimesis might operate within the informational realm.

What is also fundamental to this chapter is a reading of the archive that is Derridean and a mode of heterological thought that must contest any positivistic reading of archival practice. I will argue that the heterological strain in Bourriaud's thinking is in fact not only reconcilable with Derrida's thinking of the archive, but is a precondition for Bourriaud's aleatory materialism, and ultimately his performative presentation of relational topologies.

Postproduction and the Radicant: The Constellation of informational-relational art

From Relational Aesthetics to Postproduction

The passage from Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) to *Postproduction* (2002) marks a shift in the critical focus of aesthetic theory from situational encounters as artistic forms towards informational networks of expanded authorship. Bourriaud's polemic does not mark a wholesale migration of the artistic vanguard into a new topology, that of informational configurations. Rather, it extends the territory of relational works towards a more complex matrice of times, places and forms. Thus relational and postproductive practices developed contiguously in the first decade of the twenty-first century.[155]

[155] There seems to be some acknowledgement of this in *The Radicant.* Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2009).

Bourriaud explains that the relationship between *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction* is that the latter repeats the basic premises of his first book within an alternative conjunction: 'the link between them is simple: both present an analysis of today's art in relation to social changes, whether technological, economic, or sociological.'[156] However, Bourriaud acknowledges a shift in emphasis towards the analysis of a particular mode of production and epistemological field. He identifies 'the changing mental space' that has been opened for thought by the internet, the central tool of the information age. Therefore, whilst *Relational Aesthetics* deals with a 'collective sensibility, *Postproduction* analyzes a set of modes of production, seeking to establish a typology of contemporary practices and to find commonalities.'[157]

Within this mode of production the artist relies upon the use and re-use of existing forms and artworks. 'Post' refers not to a negation or surpassing but to a zone of activity in which forms are constantly modified and shared. Postproduction does not then deal with the 'raw materials' of labour but its products 'held together by exchange'. Postproduction undoubtedly challenges the principles of artistic authorship and the ownership of works. How then does this differ from previous models and the avant-garde in particular? Bourriaud acknowledges that 'citation, recycling and *détournement* were not born yesterday'.[158] However, he claims that:

> The working principles of today's artists seem to me to break with the manipulation of references and citation: the works… deeply re-examine notions of creation, authorship, and originality through a problematics of the use of cultural artifacts – which, by the way, is absolutely new.[159]

This statement needs some qualification, specifically, the need to re-examine 'creation, authorship and originality' arises, as we have seen

[156] Bouriaud, *Postproduction*, p. 8.
[157] Bouriaud, *Postproduction*, p. 8.
[158] Bouriaud, *Postproduction*, p. 9.
[159] Bouriaud, *Postproduction*, p.9.

before, from a conjuncture of over-production that Bourriaud fully embraces rather than attempts to negate. Thus, creation, authorship and ownership are reconfigured within the radically different configuration of globalization and the availability of new forms and social techniques to artists. This is what John Roberts refers to as re-skilling.[160] Thus for Bourriaud:

> This art of postproduction seems to respond to the proliferating chaos of global culture in the information age, which is characterized by an increase in the supply of works and the art world's annexation of forms ignored or disdained until now.[161]

In *The Radicant*, Bourriaud asks why globalization has been so widely discussed within almost every discipline but *lacks its own aesthetics*. He asks how these developments affect the life of forms.

Bourriaud claims that the diminution of the distinction between reception and practice produces new cartographies of knowledge. We have encountered this argument before within the ambit of the blurring of the distinction between consumption and production. What is interesting in Bourriaud's *Postproduction* is his approach to the subject-object relation of the artwork. He casts them in a radicalised form in which the object is in fact 'objectile'; that is, constantly in flux. I find this interesting because assuming that objectiles lack origins or destinations then Bourriaud's transitive ethics take on a renewed importance here that we can call *post-relational*. Specifically it is the motility of the relational link rather than the objects themselves that is productive of subjective relations within this arena. Moreover, this allows for some minimal ontology of this *movement of relation.* That is a sufficiency of being to become an object of knowledge. This is a major theme within my final chapter. Bourriaud's *radicant* formulation of the artwork is that of an artwork torn up from its roots. He speaks of the artwork in

[160] John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London; New York: Verso, 2007)
[161] Bouriaud, *Postproduction*, p.13.

Postproduction as a 'temporary terminal' within a network and as a 'moment' within a chain of other works.

Postproductive practices call then for new modes of the inhabitation and use of forms. For Bourriaud, narrative takes upon a renewed importance; 'screenplay' becomes form in the sense that ones negotiation of this territory can be scripted. The semionaut emerges as the artistic director of a script onto culture. He advances also, the notion of topological construction and the translation of pre-existing forms that overall vastly expand the constituency and the 'stockpile' of forms available for artists to experiment with. What links the principles of narrative and topology is I think the notion that one constructs space through narrative itself; that is through a process of the translation of forms.

I think that one of the most important of observations that Bourriaud makes concerns the relationship between time and the contemporary process of materialisation in art. The following comes from *Relational Aesthetics:*

> For most people, and in spite of technological development which ridicules this type of bias, the time span of an item of information and the capacity of a work of art to confront time are linked with the solidity of the materials chosen, and accordingly, and thus implicitly, with tradition.[162]

We have seen that Bourriaud insists in his transitive ethics upon the materiality of the relation *between* things. What is at stake here is slightly different: it is that we cannot found our thinking of materiality upon temporal notions of duration and *durability* that have determined our notion of the material forms of plastic arts. The radicant artwork and the processes of postproduction are precarious activities and its forms transitory. This for me demands that we need to be cautious before defining artistic or non-artistic labour within the terms of materiality and immateriality. I will return to this important point later in this chapter.

[162] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 54.

The persistent question of Artistic Autonomy

Within the milieu of radicant and postproductive practices, what then is the status and role, if any, of artistic autonomy? New forms of sociability in artistic practice and in particular, archival and informational practices, appear to bring artistic labour within what appears to be a total identification with the general social techniques of informational labour. The question to be levelled at these works is now familiar: can archival and informational artworks mount an immanent critique of the commodity form? Are networked-informational artistic practices simply another example of art's subsumption beneath its heteronomy? The question is consequently: what would an immanent critique of the commodity form look like within an informational paradigm and how should we apply or modify the notion of artistic autonomy within such a new and challenging configuration?

What is potentially problematic about postproduction is its migration towards an informational topology and as such its distinctive series of methodologies that identify it 'mimetically' with informational labour generally. Thus it appears to risk to an even greater extent than early relational art, 'an extreme heteronomous critique of art's autonomy.' Crucially there is a risk that the differential networks produced in postproductive art merely constitute sites of only *temporary* autonomy (in the sense that they remain behoven to the hegemonic forms of informational exchange: its logic of de- and re-territorialisation) and produce only those weak models of alterity that Bourriaud equates with the worst aspects of deconstructive thought. As I said in the previous chapter, I think the answer lies in a critique of the reductive charge of 'mimeticism' and a fuller examination of Bourriaud's account of the postproductive methodologies of topology and translation.

The question of postproductive art's autonomy question is not to be simply technologically determined. It must simultaneously be read along

side other equally important gravitational shifts we can associate with this art, not least Bourriaud's emphasis upon the narrative forms of postproductive and radicant art. This can be read within the broader account of the emergence of a testamentary turn in art. This testamentary turn I will trace back to Hal Foster's essay 'The Archival Impulse'. I will associate this 'testamentary turn' with a form of critical realism based upon Bourriaud's idiomatic articulation of this in terms of narrative and screenplay. In other words the testamentary turn in fact becomes the *use of the testamentary form*.

The Archival Impulse

In 2004 Hal Foster identified an emergent 'archival impulse' within fine art practice. Why an impulse? Whilst he acknowledges that the use of archives in art is nothing new in itself, he does remark upon the 'distinctive character' of emergent practices as gestures of 'alternative knowledge or counter-memory', and their organisation within collaborative networks of artistic practice.[163] Foster claims that an important tendency within the archival impulse is: 'the will to connect what cannot be connected in archival art…this is not a will to totalise so much as a will to relate – to probe a misplaced past'.[164]

Thus the spirit of the archival impulse is characteristic of relational art's methodology in that it runs against any desire to totalise. Moreover it is an impulse toward the combination of fragments. Foster attributes this tendency to a 'general failure of the symbolic order of the social or a failure of cultural memory' identifiable with much of the mnemonics of postmodernism. He terms this a 'paranoid dimension' involving the projection of meaning onto a world divested of meaning.[165] In this paranoid dimension we might equally identify a first symptom of *post-relationality*. However, in Bourriaud's terms this paranoid dimension

[163] Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, 110, (2004), pp. 3-22 (p. 4)
[164] Foster, p. 21.
[165] Foster, p. 21.

becomes a virtue to be embraced in the form of the work. It is the *precarity* of the form of the work that comes to the fore and its agents constitute a 'relational precariat' who are not so much paranoid as accepting of hypomnesis as a *fait accompli*.

Archival artworks mark an initial shift of the archival domicile and the annexation of its authority within the artistic domain, and this is what links earlier non-web based archival artworks to artistic models of institutional critique generally. That is, they are bound up with the institutional privileges under which objects are consigned within a given configuration of knowledge. This shift is amplified by the development of these artistic practices through the web, which further decentralises institutional critique to a position beyond ostensive institutional frameworks or artistic dependency upon galleries and museums. In this respect networked archives assume some of the characteristics of 'non-site' we associate with Robert Smithson's early site-specific work. However, this shift of the archival focus away from institution *per se* and into a closer alliance with non-artistic forms of informational culture, opens archival-informational practices to an even greater charge of reductive mimesis than we have thus far encountered.

The shift towards informational culture is important because it entails an artistic engagement with the relations of production of 'informational subjectivity'; that is a relationship between the individual and the network, which both marks artistic subjectivity and also entails the mimesis of informational labour within the praxis of artistic labour. The informational artwork moves within the dominant cultural logic of informationalised social relations and their means of production. Foster does not address this technologised stage of the archival impulse, but Bourriaud does in his acknowledgement of a radically new set of relations of artistic production. For this reason I will be placing archival artworks

and postproductive practices beneath the umbrella of 'informational artworks'.[166]

What is at stake, within new forms of artistic sociability, is a particular *logic* of informationalism which impacts upon the organisation of social relations and determines questions of 'value' and 'materiality' across the broader social sphere. I take my lead on this from Hal Foster when I say that informational logic transcends the borders of the internet and digital networks. Bourriaud also acknowledges that postproductive practices need not necessarily take place within the space of the internet. This is because the logic articulates the materiality and value of *informationalised social relations*, not the material *essence* of information as such. In fact I would argue that there is nothing essential about information. What is important is the type of subjectivity and the form of knowledge it produces: this is a fundamentally relational question.

This train of thought is identifiable in Foster's essay. He refuses to identify the archival impulse exclusively with 'archival' artworks, arguing that the tendency may be better articulated within 'material' rather than 'immaterial artworks' citing with approbation for example, the practice of Thomas Hirschhorn.[167] Foster provides a salutary warning that the impulse cannot be subsumed beneath formal questions of materiality or immateriality. I think there is a more useful distinction to be made between productive and non-productive labour because this tells us something about the subjectivity of the labourer. In particular the sociable form of non-productive labour, in its *material* differential relation, to informational value. Non-productive labour is by no means unproductive. It is what Bourriaud names along with de Certeau's 'silent production'. It is a form of production that goes largely un-noticed because it falls beneath the radar of production determined according to normative standards of exchange value.

[166] This is to be distinguished from the informational artwork, on the basis that its labour occupies and produces its own topology, and that its logic produces the social.
[167] Hirschhorn's works are generally described by Rancière as sculptural-monumental; they continue within a tradition of installation art at their formal level.

Informationalised relations produce themselves immanently through their dominance over the general social techniques of labour. At the same time these forms cannot be ultimately determined or controlled and are therefore open to *détournement*: they can be translated and migrated by social agents who may perform them differently. In other words, whilst the logic of informational culture may be hegemonic the forms it produces can be used potentially against the totalisation of the social. It is precisely the role of informational logic to materialise what has hitherto been considered immaterial (information) but this is an after effect of the materiality of the relations it produces through labour. Its primary operation is the illocutionary metamorphosis of the subjectivity of workers. Illocutionary force is understood here in Austinian terms as the performance of an act, which produces a change in our perception of reality. Its primary product is subjectivity itself and the epistemological field that Bourriaud identifies in *Postproduction*. Foster's concern about the literal identification of the impulse with the archival work is, he says, to avoid a *machinic processing* within which artworks may simply articulate decentred modes of subjectivity and scepticism.[168] This is precisely the model of sociability that informationalism presents, and hence we cannot present classically 'material' artistic production as somehow offering an alternative critical space by virtue of its materiality alone.[169] Rather than through the opposition of the material to the immaterial, critical spaces are produced through the contestation of informational logic by non-productive labour.

Foster explicitly links the archival impulse to acts of *détournement* and to a notion of re-inscription; Foster also proposes that they are works 'signed by the community'.[170] Thus the presentation of community is also the

[168] Foster, p. 5.
[169] 'But in most archival art the actual means applied to these 'relational' ends are far more tactile and face-to-face than any Web interface. The archives at issue here are not databases in this sense; they are recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and as such they call out for human interpretation, not machinic reprocessing' Foster, pp. 4-5.
[170] Foster, p. 7.

means by which communities will subjectivise themselves. If artistic labour is to challenge the 'subject-object relations of advanced capitalism' Foster suggests that it is not sufficient for artistic practice to migrate wholesale to the organisational logic of the archive. Artistic practice must retain some reflective space or the dissonance of some alternative placing of the work within which established relations might be tested. Put simply, then, Foster's argument rehearses the familiar problem of the subsumption of art's autonomy within that which is heteronomous and the danger it creates of a 'machinic processing', or, a re- ordering of impoverished informational relations. I think that Bourriaud addresses this by proposing a model of autonomy based upon the co-existent 'tenancy of culture', a critique of essentialised alterity and a refined model of mimetic 'operations'.

Intertextuality and postmodern heterology

Artistic practices that utilise archival and networked approaches to knowledge suggest the emergence of artistic forms of sociability in which the works lend themselves to 'intertextual' interpretation. Not simply because they blur the distinction between art and non-art, artistic and informational labour, production and consumption, but also potentially they suggest a heterology or *weaving* of relation in their performative undoing and recombination of relational forms.[171] They suggest a principle of construction that might be suited to a form of artistic praxis in

[171] The possibility of a heterology extends from the restrictions imposed by the operation of the *symploke*. Rodolphe Gashé says, that '*Symploke* can achieve its goal only if it expels from the envisioned totality those opposites that cannot be determined in terms of negativity, that is, in terms of dialectical Otherness.' Rodolphe Gashé, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 97. Thus; 'The new art of weaving suggested by Derrida's heterology... is no longer governed by truth values, and it escapes regulation by the ideas of totality and unity. Derrida's deconstruction of *symploke* – his generalization of interlacing, and his thinking of radical alterity – are subversive of thought itself, of what has been called by that name in the tradition, namely the thinking not only of something specific but of *one* determined thing, of a thing in its Oneness. Aristotle set the standards of thought when he stated that one does not think at all if one does not think *one* thing – the thing in its essential unity. From this perspective, Derrida's heterology… is, strictly speaking, no longer a philosophical enterprise…'. Rodolphe Gashé, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 99-100.

which topology and translation will play pivotal roles. The intertextuality of postproductive and radicant artworks are important precepts for the translatability of forms and the productive model of mimesis. They assist in the configuration of a topology for the very operations of Bourriaud's aleatory materialism and its inscription into fact. The production of such sites demands, as Derrida would term it, after Maurice Blanchot, a '"holding together" of the *disparate* itself'.[172] The informationalised and archival trope within postproduction invites us to consider how the precarity of these artistic practices might produce an immanent critique of capital without becoming absorbed in 'a mysterious debate with power'.[173] How then might they avoid the traps of reductive informational mimesis?

The Spirit and Logic of Informationalism: The tendency towards identity

The Net-Self relation

Representations and performative incarnations of community are common to both relational and postproductive practices albeit on the basis of differing topologies of 'encounter'. But it is within symptomatic articulations of community as postproductive networks that we can identify a strand of 'socially engaged' art that defends its subjectivity and sociability against its sole determination by an emphatically informational logic, or a commodity form of subjectivity. The complexity of informational mimesis lies in the fact that it is not simply the interaction between participants in a network, but also *between the net and self*, that generates its subjects. If the net-self relation is the determinant of subjective identity, the question is, therefore, how can reductively mimetic relations be avoided?

[172] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, (New York; London: Routledge, 2006) ,p.35

[173] Alain Badiou, 'Destruction, Negation, Subtraction: on Pier Paolo Pasolini', <www.lacan.com/badpas.htm> [accessed on 5 March 2012] (p. 3).

Postproduction is prosthetically subjectivised by the network and is productive of subjectivity within the 'net-self' axis outlined by Manuel Castells.[174] Informational subjectivity is 'marked' through the injunction to perform and participate in the informational economy; that is *to appear as such* within its logic. We will need therefore to look more closely at the question of performativity within informational labour. Before I do this I would like to set out some aspects of Castells' theory of 'network society'. Castells' network theory provides some connective thought through which to expand my argument about the relationship between the artistic and general social techniques of informationalism and Bourriaud's implicit re-definition of artistic autonomy.

One of Castells' key contributions to this question is to give a more detailed and nuanced account of the relationship that he claims to have emerged between the net and the self. The network is a key component in the construction of contemporary subjectivity since it both fragments homogenous subjectivities and communities within its global hegemonic logic and facilitates their nodal reconfiguration within new alliances and permutations. Its effect is to both de- and re-territorialises identity.

Castells' thesis is that technological revolution has radically changed the relationship between the economy, state and society and that this naturally entails a change in the material base of society, which operates at the level of global interdependence. Castells claims that within this configuration, the search for identity, whether collective or individual becomes the fundamental source of social meaning.[175] In *The Radicant*, Bourriaud recognises this in his discussion of the dual movements towards the creolization or the essentialism of identity within global networks. For Castells, the role of the global network in the search for identity is that it 'switches on or off individuals, groups, regions and even countries

[174] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of The Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, 1 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000)
[175] Castells, p. 3.

according to their relevance in fulfilling the goals processed in the network, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions.' [176]

Castells characterises this as a split between universal instrumentalism and particularistic identities, thus as a bi-polar opposition between the net and the self. On this basis it is the control, or gatekeeping of informational flows that ultimately confers the power to bestow identity. Moreover, there is within the instability of the strategic management of flows, a difficulty in *sharing* identity resulting in the increasing fragmentation of identity. Like Foster, Castells claims that the global network has influenced postmodern culture. Specifically,

> Postmodern culture, and theory indulge in celebrating the end of history, and, to some extent, the end of reason, giving up on our capacity to understand and make sense, even of nonsense. The implicit assumption is the acceptance of full individualization of behaviour and of a society's powerless over its destiny… [leading to] forms of intellectual nihilism, social scepticism, and political cynicism.[177]

Castells' overall proposition is similar to Maurizio Lazzarato's assertions that the 'commodity form' of the subject has emerged. According to Castells this is because 'the search for identity is as powerful as techno-economic change in charting the new history'.[178] I would argue that this fragmentation has engendered a symptomatic response within socially engaged practices of the last fifteen years. Relational and postproductive practices are practices of self-styled inhabitation of networks premised upon the productive potentialities of the fragmentation of social bonds and identity. On one level they seek to challenge the subjective logic of informationalism and the paralysis of social agency. They are counter hegemonic gestures. At the same time, the construction of relational forms seems to be homologous to networking logic itself, which is a representation of the simultaneous logics of global and local networks.

[176] Castells, p. 3.
[177] Castells, p. 4.
[178] Castells, p. 4.

Postproductive practice seeks to expropriate control of the switching mechanisms by which subjectivity is determined.

New Forms of Informationalism

Castells claims that informationalism is based upon a technology of knowledge and information, this brings culture and productivity into close proximity as never before. He states that their contiguity gives rise to 'historically new forms of social interaction, social control and change.'[179] The search for identity is acutely compelled by informational logic, because subjectivity is its primary productive output. Castells quotes Alain Touraine as follows; 'in a post-industrial society in which cultural services have replaced material goods at the core of production, *it is the defence of the subject, in its personality and in its culture, against the logic of apparatuses and markets, that replaces the idea of class struggle.'* [180]

Castells gives an indication as to the reason for the emergence of counter-hegemonic or resistant strains both within art and politics as characteristically 'local', 'liminal' or 'micro-communitarian':

> When the Net switches off the self, the self, individual or collective, constructs its meanings without global, instrumental reference: the process of disconnection becomes reciprocal, following the refusal by the excluded of the one-sided logic of structural domination and social exclusion.[181]

In terms of artistic response this can raise both the spectre of weak alterity under the mantle of identity politics but also the possibility of counter-hegemonic networks emerging with very particular goals and self-prescriptive modes of switching. These are now the parameters of artistic networks autonomy. Artistic autonomy is constituted by the interaction

[179] Castells, p. 4.
[180] Alain Touraine, *Qu'est-ce que la democratie?* (Paris: Feyard, 1995), p.168, cited in Castells, p. 22.
[181] Castells, p. 24.

between autonomous systems and the goals of those networks it comprises. Castells states that:

> The performance of a given network will then depend upon two fundamental attributes of the network: its *connectedness*, that is, its structural ability to facilitate noise-free communication between its components; and its *consistency*, that is, the extent to which there is a sharing of interests between the network's goals and the goals of its components.[182]

The autonomy of art within such a model might appear to entail the ability to self-differentiate in the production of quasi-independent networks. How then are informational relations produced?

Informationalism and Labour

Informational labour is the basis of the production of social relations. This form of labour is based upon copying and dissemination. They are its general social techniques. The labour force is mobilised in activities of informational production, analysis and dissemination without itself having a productive goal in the classical sense of the application of knowledge to any manufacturing process. The management of knowledge and information are essential to the performance of organisations within an informational global economy and this in turn is also productive of informational social relations:

> The process of work is at the core of the social structure. The technological and managerial transformation of labour, and of production relationships, in and around the emerging network enterprise is the main lever by which the informational paradigm and the process of globalization affect society at large.[183]

Castells divides informational labour into three dimensions. These are value making, relation making and decision making. The building of

[182] Castells, p. 187.
[183] Castells, p. 216.

relations is a normative term within what is considered production. These tasks are distributed hierarchically between networkers who establish the network and those who implement decisions at an operative level. It is the position and privileges of the independent networker, which is of most interest when considering the social system of art. The artist as networker, operative, and decision maker is increasingly identified as one who produces or redefines value by establishing novel nodal connections between informational objects and intensifies the flows of information within these idiomatic networks.

Informational Artworks

Within the overall project of postproductive practice, the artist is therefore called upon to develop these new skills. Here we enter into the dialectic of artistic de-skilling and re-skilling identified by John Roberts' *The Intangibilities of Form*[184]. Any argument about artistic de-skilling which generally emerges within any critique of new forms of art needs to be countered with the notion of re-skilling. Within the artistic appropriation of the techniques of informational labour, artists seek to annex these forms and to use them in silent or 'non-productive' activities. This is easier said than done, not least because the immanently productive nature of information relies upon the recuperation of non-productive labour to productive use. Castells takes the view that the 'informational age' is one in which: 'The action of knowledge upon knowledge itself is the main form of productivity.'[185]

If there is to be any resolution of this problem of recuperation, I believe that it entails a re-thinking of the logic of the readymade within informationalised terms. This is because the logic of the readymade is premised not simply upon procedures of artistic appropriation but also contains within it a principle of translation and topological redeployment.

[184] John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London; New York: Verso, 2007)
[185] Castells, p. 17.

This is the radical nature of the readymade and the assisted readymade. It allows for translation and metamorphosis. Does the network preclude this? Is its topology too fluid and prone to re-territorialise counter logical presentations?

The Informational Readymade

The analysis of archival-informational labour must address the archival impulse's indebtedness to our post-conceptualist understanding of the readymade. Hal Foster identifies the relationship between archival information and the readymade, arguing that 'information does often appear as a virtual readymade, as so much data to be reprocessed and sent on.' [186] He also identifies a correlative shift in artistic labour based upon inventory, sampling and sharing. Thus the movement towards postproductive practices can be seen as a logical extension of the archival impulse opening new possibilities for the 'informational readymade' as a critique of the commodity form.

John Roberts' *The Intangibilities of Form* provides just such an approach. Roberts contextualises the question as follows;

> the new technology is seen as a recombinant form of artistic production all the way down – artistic labour becomes the continuous immaterial reorganisation of the readymade (the labour of others) on screen and as such a powerful democratizer of artistic practice; second, and relatedly, the fundamental condition of digital practice as a multiple-entry, non-linear flow of text and image successfully dissolves the division of producer and consumer in ways that the early avant-garde barely broached. The renewed utopian remit of expanded circuits of authorship under digital technology, then, is unmistakeable. [187]

The readymade is viewed as a break with artistic craftsmanship (de-skilling) and the valorisation of 'the interpretive powers of the artist, and

[186] Foster, p. 4.
[187] Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, pp. 180-181.

not as a technical category and demand' (re-skilling). But after Duchamp, it becomes an 'operative process for artists.'[188] In response to changes in the relations of production there is a point of 'mimetic identification between artistic and social production'.[189] This 'rendezvous' is the function around which the autonomy of art pivots. Bourriaud's assessment of Duchamp is that Duchamp 'used a mass produced object as a 'tool of production' and thereby brought;

> the capitalist process of production (working on the basis of accumulated labour) into the sphere of art, while at the same time indexing the role of the artist to the world of exchange…Duchamp started from the principle that consumption was a mode of production…'[190]

Once the artist enters into this indexical relationship to exchange, we are faced, with the problem of the immanent productivity of information. The chief problem for any notion of informational readymade is, therefore, that the circuits of production and circulation are identical;

> The novelty of the new informational infrastructure is the fact that it is embedded within and completely immanent to the new production processes. At the pinnacle of contemporary production, information and communication are the very commodities produced; the network itself is the site of both production and circulation.[191]

The potency of the readymade relied, according to Roberts, upon its ability to migrate between the circuits of alienated and non-alienated labour at will, or through the process of nomination. If the informational readymade is enclosed within the identity of its production and circulation, how might it achieve such a metamorphosis? I think that the answer must lie in the principle of translation that underpins Bourriaud's thinking of topological formations.

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[188] Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, p. 22.
[189] Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, p. 25.
[190] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.23.
[191] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 298.

Roberts states that since the *autonomous* unrepresentable art object no longer presents the fetishistic presence it once did, having been appropriated by culture, the claims of the classical readymade to disrupt the value form are no longer credible.[192] Therefore we are no longer faced with a choice between the theoretical approaches of Adorno and Benjamin in which a challenge to the value form must either elude the logic of reproduction altogether, hence it is un-reproducible, or it must alternatively be infinitely reproducible. It seems that we are tied to the latter approach as of necessity. This second approach must also take into account the fact that the reproduction of a 'digital readymade' entails no actual material expenditure that is, it is not premised upon scarcity.

With the loss of the Adornian argument art is of course placed at risk of its loss within the heteronomous forces of productive labour. Roberts makes it clear that 'The struggle for artistic autonomy is not excludable from reproducible forms'.[193] I think that Bourriaud accepts this position when he talks about the multiplication of forms as an alternative to their negation.

Roberts reminds us that the readymade's 'reliance upon the 'literalism' of the object of productive labour was too open to confusion as a form of artistic nihilism.'[194] Duchamp understood this charge, and in order not to risk dissipating the potency of the readymade he limited the number of readymades he released into the art market. This is a knowing assessment of the readymade's strengths and weaknesses. It marks the extent to which an object of mass production can be posited as uniquely non-alienated. The challenge for the informational readymade is somewhat different. Its efficacy relies upon the preservation of its principle of metamorphosis, in the modern idiom its translatability and re-use. I am in agreement with Roberts that perhaps the efficacy of the informational

[192] Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form* p. 26.
[193] Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form* p. 32.
[194] Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form* p. 41.

readymade lies in its capacity to extend the life of commodities in unexpected and unauthorised ways. In other words, to use and re-use information in ways that contest their ownership. It seems that its most potent use is based upon translation through the principle of sharing and modification that Bourriaud suggests but in which it is not only authorship but also ownership that is contested. Perhaps it is the annexation of ownership that now constitutes the critical import of the readymade.

Is Postproduction a Form of Immaterial Artistic Labour?

I have said that digital exchange does not entail any material expenditure but of course this needs some clarification. I start from the general proposition that all labour is material. At the same time I recognise that my reading inevitably calls for some position on the question of material and immaterial artistic labour, which has been an important question for recent aesthetic discourse.

Within Bourriaud's later texts, *Postproduction* and *The Radicant*, there is not only a reflection upon those relations of production prevalent within informational communicative networks, but also the nature of materiality *per se*. Some preliminary points need to be made here. Firstly, Bourriaud makes it clear from the outset that his later work is simply a deployment of the principles of relational art within a particular topology, predominantly, though not exclusively, the internet. On that basis I do not think that we can regard relational art in any way a thesis on cognitive capitalism: that it privileges 'immaterial' artistic production over other kinds of material production. On the contrary relational art is subject to the processes of combined and uneven development and embraces every type and means of production. What is also clear is that the relational matrices that Bourriaud proposes can produce sites of relation that might be topologically situated across multiple sites and through diverse modes of reception. In other words postproductive and radicant practices are not

simply locked into electronic circuits of exchange. Maurizio Lazzarato has identified what is problematic in the distinction between material and immaterial labour and the tendential dominance of the latter in the theorization of advanced capital. He says that the concept of immaterial labour all too quickly lost its political import, that is its articulation of the modes of subjectivisation and entrepreneurial individualisation, and became systemically applied to categories of economic production. Thus there is a danger in the use of the concepts of immaterial labour and cognitive capitalism that tend to rely upon a systematic categorisation of changing relations of production. This is important in relation to Bourriaud's materialism. As I have stressed, Bourriaud's materialism originates in Althusser's aleatory materialism of the encounter: this is a materialism that is theorised *against* Marx, or rather Marx's idealism. In 'Marx in his Limits' Althusser questions the 'speculative geneticism' of Marx's account of the modes of production.[195] Althusser's Marxism is of a different hue to this teleological account and calls into question the historical necessity implicit within Marx's account. In particular his charge is that Marx writes history in the 'future anterior'. Althusser draws upon an alternative 'materialist undercurrent' in Marx in which a mode of production is seen as the result of the aleatory encounter of independent elements: thus modes of production are necessarily contingent in origin. To treat them as necessary accomplished facts is to produce the illusion of a false totality.

The material/immaterial labour argument that emerged in Marxist thinking in the 1970s and 1980s is generally acknowledged to be rooted in Marx's 'Fragment on the Machine', which predicts a shift of emphasis in the capitalist mode of production towards intellectual labour.[196] As such it is rooted in a teleological account of the modes of production which is at odds with Althusser's approach and by implication, that of

[195] Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, ed. By F. Matheron and O.Corpet, trans. by G.M.Goshgarian (London and New York: Verso, 2006)

[196] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. by M. Nicolaus, (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 694.

Bourriaud. This is not the only reason why I believe it would be a distortion of relational art to classify it as a form of immaterial labour. Lazzarato himself has explained that he has abandoned the concept. In fact Lazzarato appears now to be advocating a programme in which microcommunity might play a role in the production of singular counter-subjects which might contest the individuating imperatives of capital that are currently founded upon a principle of competition. For Bourriaud materialism is quite clearly a matter of the 'lasting encounter'. He proceeds by way of the inscription of relations as the means of concretising their forms, not by way of prescriptions based upon pre-established categories.

I will expand upon some of these points in order to demonstrate a key proposition of this thesis: the construction of the materiality of forms requires the postulation of an ontology and the inscription of materiality as a mode of performative labour. I want to look at this in the context of material and immaterial labour and to focus upon what, according to one of its creators, Maurizio Lazzarato, was lost of its original intentions in its critical reception. The ambiguity and inadequacy of the concept exposes some of the challenges that network culture presents to resistance.

Is the Problematic Concept of Immaterial Labour Exhausted?

In an interview Lazzarato makes the following initial remarks upon the concept of immaterial labour:

> By definition, labour or an occupation cannot be immaterial: what would it mean if they were? Even if they represented a smaller investment of subjectivity, they could not be immaterial. Even if you work on a computer there is a lot of materiality at your fingertips.[197]

[197] Maurizio Lazzarato and Others, 'Conversation with Maurizio Lazzarato-Public Editing Session 3, June 23, 2010', *TkH Journal for Performing Arts Theory* (2010), pp. 12-22. (p.13).

> The only way ahead is to think about the big picture without limiting ourselves to the concept of immaterial labour.[198]

In Lazzarato's original conception of immaterial labour, there were two principal strands. The first entailed a classical Marxist analysis of changes in production and labour and the second dealt with the concept of subjectivity. Lazzarato says that this second strand has been insufficiently emphasized. This dealt with,

> the concept of subjectivity production as outlined by Foucault and Felix Guattari. We were trying to combine two traditions: an Italian tradition that is known as *operaiste* – or rather *post-operaiste*, since *operaism* ended in 1973 – and the French tradition. So, starting with this article, the concept of production shifted toward the concept of subjectivity production.[199]

He says that problems arose with the concept of immaterial labour because it was ambiguous. He therefore abandoned it and has never returned to it. One wonders, incidentally, whether the delay in translating Lazzarato's work gave the concept of immaterial labour greater longevity in the English-speaking world. One of its ambiguities centres upon the concept of immateriality itself. Lazzarato says that it became difficult in practice to distinguish between the material and the immaterial, as it did for Marx. For Lazzarato, the problem with the reception of the concept was that people interpreted material and immaterial as opposites and that the concept was unable to escape this dualistic reading. He says that although the concept was 'originally conceived as political it was "recast" in a socio-economic light as soon as it was published.'[200]

For Lazzarato, this did the concept a disservice, in that it led to the labelling of different industries and types of workers as either material or immaterial. In particular this led to the problematic labelling of the internet, as a site of *de facto* immaterial production. This categorization

[198] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 13.
[199] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 12.
[200] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 12.

was not what Lazzarato had intended, so he abandoned the concept and shifted his focus onto subjectivity production. He stresses that Felix Guattari has argued that the crisis of the last 40 years is not a political or economic crisis but 'a crisis in the production of subjectivity, a crisis of subjectification.'[201] Lazzarato says that from this perspective the category of immaterial labour no longer makes sense.

Lazzarato experimented with other concepts and principally, 'deterritorialization'. But 'deteritorialized labour' did not work either, because 'deterritorialization' lacked some of the nuances of immateriality. He experimented with this notion on basis that classical modes of Fordist production, concentrated in and around the factory had lost their territorial identity. But this did not work 'against the bigger picture', and neither did 'cognitive work'/'cognitive capitalism' or the 'creative class'.

In terms of the possibilities of an art of immaterial labour, Lazzarato's view is that immaterial labour cannot be associated with creativity because what has actually happened is a 'neutralization' of creativity. He claims that creativity is disappearing 'except in its most formatted, standardized forms'.[202] The overall problem he says does not lie within the distinction between material labour and immaterial labour, but with precarious, short-term, forms of work that cuts across every class and sector.

During Bojanna Cvejic's interview, she asks Lazzarato a very good question, which sheds light upon one of the principal dilemmas of post-relational practice.

[201] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 12.
[202] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 13.

> I'd like to know how you explain the theoretical but also the political differences between capitalism's individualism, which is depoliticizing, and singularity as a production of experimental subjectivity. [203]

Lazzarato's reply is that: 'What capitalism asks for – the subjectivity it produces – is a very extreme form of individualization. One has to be ones' own entrepreneur, meaning one must be able to take on all the economic and social burdens of production'.[204] So the model of subjectification is the entrepreneur, but this is a very weak model. Lazzarato says that, 'The model of the entrepreneur does not resolve the problem of capitalist subjectification. That is why there is a crisis of subjectification.'[205] He says that the entrepreneur 'destroys society by definition, it destroys social relations because it replaces them with a competitive and purely economic logic.' [206] Capital deterritorialises and reterritorialises using models of subjectification, including religion and the nation state. Lazzarato claims that the problem with the entrepreneurial model is that it is based upon individual initiative and that this 'is not a form of subjectification that will work."[207] In this we might see another reason for hypostatic relation: that is the entrepreneurial form of individuation of capital is destructive of the kinds of relations that we would associate with the encounter.

Critics of capitalism are hindered because subjectivity no longer depends upon a corporately unified working class, and thus 'the working class has lost this capacity to embody capitalism.' The overall problem then is an absence of alternative forms of subjectification. I have referred to this as the possibility of counter-subjects to capital. Lazzarato next addresses the difference between individualization and singularization. He says that we must separate out singularity and individuality. Whereas capitalism equates the two, he argues that we need to move beyond the

[203] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 13.
[204] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 13.
[205] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 13.
[206] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 13.
[207] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 13.

individualised subject, 'because we are caught in systems that largely go beyond the singular individual. But capitalism needs to bring deterritorialization back to individualization.[208]

How then would one define a singularity that could be defined as a collective singularity? According to Lazzarato, this problem can only be addresses by testing the network. He suggests artists' micropolitical experiments as an example of this. Once again, we return to micropolitics as productive of novel forms of collective singularity. And, in a way that is by now familiar, Lazzarato introduces the thinking of the event as a possible means of producing a counter-subject to capital. He says that

> An event takes place and that event introduces a new temporality. This new temporality affects subjectivity first and foremost. The political movement opens up a space and it's in that space that subjectivity can qualify itself.[209]

This thinking proposes an aesthetic model as interruptive of flows. He says that Deleuze and Guattari chose an aesthetic model in order to use such a methodology. So an interruption in the spatio-temporal flow 'opens up a new mode of temporality, and this new temporality begins or triggers a creative process. We go through a window of meaninglessness in order to produce a new meaning.' [210]

How then can these micro-interruptions be used? For Lazzarato, these interruptions need to be put to work *experimentally*, rather than theorized. Significantly, within his generally aestheticized methodology of subjectivity production he sees no continuing role for the avant-garde. He says that:

> Once upon a time we could think about artistic revolution, a political revolution, or a social revolution on almost separate terms. There were avant-garde aesthetics. Today, it is no longer possible to think about an

[208] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 14.
[209] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 15.
[210] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 15.

> aesthetic change as such, or a political change as such. I think that's what is hard to understand. Apparatuses for producing subjectivity span across all of these elements.[211]

What I draw from Lazzarato's remarks is firstly that 'immaterial' labour draws the focus away from the more important process of subjectification and the need to focus upon micropolitical strategies of interruption and experiments in the production of counter-subjectivity. Lazzarato puts event at the heart of the relational act and on that basis he anticipates my argument in chapter 4. Echoing Bourriaud's *The Radicant*, this event is motile. It is a specific operation of time and space.

I will argue that such notions of the event of relation lack any ontology. Part of the strategy of making these interventions visible within a materialist aesthetic is to grant them some minimal but sufficient ontology. The enduring question of the 'materialism' of information is this: if we are willing to accept that information is ontologised by the performative acts of informational labour, why not extend this notion to the thinking of relation itself? If the production of a new epistemology of information is the result of the action of knowledge upon itself, why not apply the performantive aspect of this proposition to 'immaterial' relations of encounter? This would be to render them factual in the sense of granting these notions a philosophical and social mode of appearance.

Archaeological Archives and Anarchivistic Archives

I want to extend Lazzarato's thread of argument around the potentiality of micropolitical experiment to the notion of archive and to ask specifically what kind of an archive would be adequate to the fluidity of micropolitics? In *The Radicant*, Bourriaud identifies archival practice as a potential site for the construction of singularities, linking its compositional form to a series of encounters. In what follows I want to consider how this might be done against the totalising tendency of the

[211] Lazzarato, 'Conversation', p. 16.

archive; that is, its positivistic or encyclopaedic tendencies. What are the characteristics of an objectile postproductive or radicant archive?

Castells insists on the hypomnseic nature of informationalism, stating that alliances and successes collapse and are replaced by new configurations. He identifies a culture of instant consignment to memory and claims that memory becomes: 'Too rigid for the varied geometry required by informationalism'.[212] This echoes Stallabrass's reflection that: 'The net has the potential to be the ultimate archive, the repository of all human knowledge, opinion and culture, yet it combines that ideal with an aggressively amnesiac urge.' [213]Castells states that 'the spirit of informationalism is the culture of creative destruction.'[214].

I take this as my starting point. The hypomnesic nature of informationalism and the motility of post-relational forms call for an appraisal of the archive's destructive capacities and I turn for this to Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*.

Archive Fever

I propose to examine the archive both in terms of its authority and power, in terms of its *nomological* ordering principle and its *anarchivistic*, or deconstructive operations as the source of its evental dynamic. *Archive Fever* sets out the archive's principle of construction and destruction or disassembly. What is at stake here is whether archival-artistic practices reproduce the logic of de- and re-territorialisation of capital (the reductively mimetic argument) or whether they might constitute a critical enclave within that logic. This depends upon the viability of a heterology of the archive as a necessary negation of idealism, history and teleology, which in fact prepares the ground for the positive articulations of Bourriaud's aleatory materialism.

[212] Castells, p. 215.
[213] Julian Stallabrass, *Internet Art: The Online Clash of Culture and Commerce* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), p. 44.
[214] Castells, p. 215.

The search for singular configurations in the form of the archive entails the examination an of the archive's (im)possibility. If archival practices in art aim to challenge the 'subject-object relations of advanced capitalism' as Foster suggests, then we are presented with the need to diagnose the conditions under which the symbolic order of informational society might be 'resisted', if not overdetermined. The relationally hypostatic plane of informationalism would seem to be an unpromising site for artistic agency, given that informationalism is a logic that serves global capitalism, that is, it capitalises relations. And yet the attraction of the archive remains compelling as a site for artistic intervention. In Derridean terms, it offers a site for the assembly of relations premised upon a principle of disassembly. This principle of destruction is for Derrida secretly constitutive of the archive's power and authority. In other words, the archival authority provides us with a theoretical model of something that is inextricably linked to the subject-object relations of advanced capitalism but, at the same time, the archive harbours but erases its anarchivistic origin its acute relation of non-relation to that power. On Derrida's reading of Freud, it is the destructive operation of the death drive that provides the archival dynamic. Indeed he states that 'in effacing the death drive we are in effect archiving a repression or supression'.[215] In Derrida's identification of the *mal d'archive* as coterminate with its otherwise *encyclopaedic* or *archaeological* functions. The archive then demonstrates the (im)possibility of its own closure.

Much contemporary analysis of artistic-archival practice focuses upon its claim to link *existing* relations within novel configurations. As such it is positivistic in character provided that this 'archaeological' model does no more than link relations within a horizontal epistemological plane. The critical endorsement of archival-artistic practices has tended to fetishise 'the gathering together of signs' and appropriates the authority and power of the archive as an institutionally legitimised artistic form already

[215] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 31.

established by previous avant-gardes. These practices, however, do not venture much beyond this principle of recombination of what is particular into the potentially critical form of the archive as a singular construction. It is hardly surprising, then, that the archival form of relational art has developed in the context of an underlying suspicion that it is mimetic in character. The argument is that an archive that conforms to an *a priori* system of enunciation can only be reductively mimetic of those relations that 'belong' to the concept. For example Okwui Enwezor's essay 'Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument'[216] is typical of this approach. The essay appears within a book which presents a collection of artists' work in which archival practices have been adopted as a formal methodology. The essay presents the potential of the archive as contiguous with its didactic powers: to issue the salutary lessons of a forgotten history speaking to us across time and space. There is no consideration, here, of the social and formal implications of archival practice as artistic labour, nor the analysis of the 'Freudian impression' that is central to Derrida's text from which it takes its title.[217] In short this archaeological model does not engage with the (im)possible relation of non-relation that must found any claim to singularity. Rather, it relates what is 'not related' within the functions of a pre-existing epistemological plane. This is symptomatic of a Foucauldian reading of the archive. For example, Enwezor argues that,

> the archive as a representation of the taxonomy, classification, and annotation of knowledge and information could also be understood as a representative historical form, which Foucault designates as a historical *a priori*, defined as a field of archaeological inquiry, a journey through time and space; one whose methodological apparatus does not set 'a condition of validity for judgements, but a condition of reality for statements.[218]

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[216] Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and The Monument*, in *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2008)

[217] This extends his analysis of *the* impression in Freud and the Scene of Writing and of the trace in *Of Grammatology*.

[218] Enwezor, p. 16.

The problem here is that Enwezor grasps the domiciliary and nomological function as an invitation for artistic intervention in the structures by which archive founds a discourse. His conception of an historical *a priori* is problematic in that it presents the positivism of the archive and bears no resemblance to Derrida's description of the archive as harbouring *l'avenir*; that which is singular and therefore un-knowable as such. He leaves untouched the question of the archive's anarchivistic power, which for Derrida is inseparable from its foundational authority.

In his reliance upon Foucault's archaeological model, Enwezor mirrors Foucault's conception of archive by describing it as a system of enunciation. He cites with approval the following passage from the *Archaeology of Knowledge*:

> The archive is not that which, despite its immediate escape, safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for future memories, its status as an escapee; it is that, which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset *the system of its enunciability*.[219]

Foucault's analysis is anathema then to the search for a singular relation-non-relation. It is rooted within the principle or logic of its enunciability. It is therefore anathema to Bourriaud's inductive methodology. Foucault says of archaeology:

> This term does not imply the search for a beginning; it does not relate analysis to geological excavation. It designates the general theme of a description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence: of the enunciative function that operates within it, of the discursive formation, and the general archive system to which it belongs. [220]

My purpose here is to demonstrate that for the critical knots within the archive to be potentially productive of new relations we must find a way out of this 'enunciative field'. Derrida's reading appears to offer this

[219] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.146.
[220] Foucault, p. 148.

possibility, because it reveals the source of the archive's contradictions as a frontier between the singular and the particular and therefore in Bourriaud's terms a potentially liminal site.

Archive as a Source of Power and Authority

For Derrida, the archive is a point of commencement or commandment. This is its ordering or nomological principle. At the same time the archive must be placed, and this is its point of contact between nature and legislation, its domicile. The point at which order is given, Derrida terms the *exergue*, which he says has both, an 'institutive and conservative function'. It represents 'the violence of a power which at once posits and conserves the law'.[221] Significantly he adds that since this point of archival commencement operates in silence 'it never leaves any archives of its own'.[222] Derrida claims that this concealment is the reason for the silent operation of the death drive at the heart of the archive.[223]

Within Derrida's exposition of the notion of archive we have then both an ordering principle, a nomology, and a placement or domicile. It is the figure of the *arkheion* that gives this principle of domicile to the archive and thereby gives authority to those who command it, as 'having the right to make or represent the law'.[224] This domiciliary function marks both the institutional passage from the private to the public and into a privileged topology.[225]

Within the procedures of archival labour we find that the 'archiviolithic' nature of the death drive is harnessed in a compulsion towards iteration and citation, or towards a prelapsarian and unmediated archival origin that produces or posits itself as a stable origin, as law. Informationalism and its cognates of repetition and erasure give an operative force to the search

[221] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) p. 7.
[222] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 10.
[223] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 10.
[224] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 2.
[225] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, pp. 2-3.

for what the archive conceals. It embodies the search for a point of exception, or in Derridean terms an (im)possible search for the other of the archive's symbolic order.

Archive and Network: Derrida's Question

Derrida's asserts, that 'there is no political power without control of the archive if not of memory' [226] We can see the political import of the link between archive and network. Since the archive derives its power through originary principles of ordering and placement, conferring authority and privilege upon those who determine this, any change within this configuration entails a possible redistribution of archival power.

Derrida asks the following question; 'Can one imagine an archive without foundation, without substrate, without substance, without subjectile?'[227]

In the realm of the informational digital network, what are its effects upon the nomological and domiciliary foundations of archival practice? Can we reconcile the notion of nomological and domiciliary consignment within a network that operates upon an entropic substrate in which the archiviolithic is facilitated by continuous change and modification of its subjects and objects, or rather, in postproductive terms, its subjectiles and objectiles? What is at stake here is the precarity of the archive as the principle that potentially enables the appearance of non-identity and the demonstration of the archive's simultaneous deconstruction of its own law.

Bourriaud's 'objectile' appears to legitimate an anarchivistic understanding of postproductive practices as intertextual, in the sense that postproduction appears to deny any ontology to its objects, privileging instead their directionality. Informationally networked practices appear in their intertextuality to be the full realisation of Derrida's foundationless

[226] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 4.
[227] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, pp. 26-27.

archive in the manner of the *general text*. Rodolphe Gashé describes this as follows:

> As [Derrida] shows in 'The Double Session,' the general text whose structure of re-marking folds the text upon it(self) in a nonsymmetrical and nonreflexive manner defers, discards, or sets Being aside (*à l'écart*). The general text marginalizes Being, being itself the margin of Being. As the margin of Being, the general text has no ontological status; with regard to Being, it is neither absent nor present, since both modes of temporality and of being are particular to Being alone.[228]

In other words it is the very specific spatio-temporal conjuncture that Bourriaud identifies within postproductive and radicant practice that allows us to think of an archive that abandons its 'substrate'; that is its ontological foundations, in favour of the principle of its relational motility. The radicant artwork, to recall, tears up its own roots. I would add however that in setting aside being we are speaking here of the classical ontological model. This is the Aristotelian model that prescribes, 'that which is not a thing is nothing'. We need a way to describe postproductive processes that might connect them to aleatory materialism as the very emergence of the 'thingness of these operations'. I will return to this question in Chapters 3 and 4.

Within the *objectile* field of the general text, the text is never constituted *as such* by signifying units outside of the general text but by *traces*. Therefore, a text is no more than a set of traces, or their linkage within a system of textual referral. In this way, the differential network endlessly refers to something other than itself and never to anything outside of the text that would bring this process to resolution. The general text is heterogeneous, and irreducible with respect to any ultimate unity.[229]

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[228] Rodolphe Gashé, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 286.
[229] Gashé, *The Tain of the Mirror*, p. 289.

In order to fully answer Derrida's question, it is important to recognise that a new configuration emerges in the 'topo-nomology' of the informational network. To paraphrase Derrida, the archive is 'no longer under house arrest.'[230] The network without substrate resists any topological determination. Rather, it appears to be atopological in the positive sense that it invites diverse topological determination or nomination. We might describe the motility of radicant art as a form of relational drive.

Derrida's *l'avenir* differs from the modernist and subtractive notion of the 'passion for the real' because *l'avenir* operates upon a principle of delay, as an impossible promise, whereas the passion for the real operates as an article of faith asserting the immediacy of the present. For Derrida the conditions of archivisation make it into 'a movement of the promise and of the future' no less than a recording of the past'.[231] This notion of the archive as a movement of the promise is what distinguishes it from the modern as 'messianistic' without thereby falling into messianism.

This may finally account for the archival impulse, but what are the broader consequences of the new topo-nomological configuration? The implications of this change run much deeper than pseudo-technical democratisation. This is because the archival apparatus of the network produces as much as it records its event; it mediates the content. This is where I identify a principle of non-mimetic translation at work within the anarchivistic and precarious archive.

Derrida discusses this in the following passage,

> this is another way of saying that the archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomnesic technique in general is not only the place for stocking or conserving the archival content of the past which would exist in any case, such as without the archive one still believes it was or will have been. No, the

[230] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.16.
[231] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.16.

> technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very becoming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivisation produces as much as it records the event.[232]

Derrida's notion of the archive as hypostatic is crucial to his overall question about technology. Derrida describes the archive not as a living thing, but as that which submits to the possibility of repetition and reproduction. It resists both mnesis and anamnesis, thus at the point of its exergue, the forgotten event of its origin is constitutive of 'a priori forgetfulness and archioviolithic in to the heart of the monument'.[233] This equates not to the *a priori* precept of enunciation but with the necessity of contingency: the credo of aleatory materialism. Derrida says that within Freud's notion of archive, although he produces a model of 'auxilliary representation', he nevertheless maintains the primacy of live memory and anamnesis. That is, he maintains their originary temporalisation. Thus the archive for Freud retains a search for live origin. [234]Derrida's (im)possible archive braids together the encyclopaedic promise of closure and erasure and the operation of the death drive. In reality he says their operations can be barely separated. Take the following passage:

> As we have noted all along, there is an incessant tension here between archive and archaeology. They will always be close the one to the other, resembling each other, hardly discernible in their co-implication, and yet radically incompatible, *heterogenous*, that is to say, *different with regard to the origin*, in *divorce with regard to the arkhe*.[235]

Derrida claims that by ignoring the hypomnesia of the archive and its archviolithic origin the archaeologist makes the archive no longer serve any function. It is taken as live and unmediated. As I have said, the migration of archival practices into the digital network entails a

[232] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 17.
[233] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 12.
[234] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 92.
[235] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 92.

movement into an *atopology* of radically different spatio-temporal relations that is symptomatic of informational culture. This appears to allow for increasingly unstable and open 'objectile' archives and the intensification of archive fever. But it embodies also the precarity of network relations that have no intrinsic mnemonic quality and can be linked arbitrarily. This is reflective of the precarious topology of social relations under globalised capitalism. Derrida's analysis of the archive reveals its constitutive instability as a site of intersection between the singular and the particular. On that basis we could say that archival practices constitute a fertile space for the staging of artistic autonomy and informational mimesis.

Archive and Event

As I have said, Derrida reflects on the archival promise in messianic terms: that is as distinguishable from messianism. This is a future which is not only unknown, but is unknowable *as such*. It does not fall within a horizon of knowledge or pre-knowledge but is *evental* in character. Derrida describes this as 'a performative to come': it has no relationship to what is, or to what will have been actually present. [236] The messianic is then posited less in the enunciative sense, but rather through the principle of delay.

It is this notion of wager that provides the possibility of exception from the symbolic order of subject-object relations. The modernist 'historian of the present' must become the 'historian of the promise'. This is to say that returning to the narrative construction of a topology, this would be a presentation of *testimony* that emerges within, but is in excess of its epistemological plane or aspiration. The event of the archive is tied to a principle of movement that is potentially productive of new knowledge but lacks the substrate of any system of enunciability. It is a movement towards knowledge.

[236] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 72.

The Question of Realism

Postproduction embraces the hypomnesic character of information and the spatio-temporal collapse within networks. Web based, digital exchange artworks are constituted within nodal networks whose fragments are 'objectile', occupying no fixed position and as its intertextual figures are never fully 'present'. What is different then between relational aesthetics' use of secondary documentary material and that of post productive content is that within postproduction there are no primary materials. As with the aleatory materialism of *Relational Aesthetics* the model of sociability presented by postproduction, relies, in fact, on an articulation of *informational realism* that no longer points to any constitutive originary foundation. This informational realism testifies to its state of precarity and regulative incompletion. This is perhaps what the globalized conjunture brings to bear upon 'the life of forms'.

The Generalised Field of Performance

Introduction: Informational Performativity

We have already established that the general social techniques of informational labour require a performative form of labour in which production is based upon the action of knowledge upon itself. Informational labour is performative in the sense that it produces a form of subjectivity as the principal product of these operations. In this section I will examine the nature of informational and post-relational performativity in greater detail. 'Performative' and 'performativity' are terms commonly used today within critical art, often interchangeably. This tends to diminish the importance of the illocutionary nature of the performative that is, its normative and ritualistic function in materially changing social and specifically legal relations. Equally, if productive mimesis is the guarantor of arts' autonomy, it is necessary to establish in

what sense it differs from the retionalised mode of performance within the generalised field of performance. Provisionally I will say that this is because the performativity of mimesis inhabits this generalised field but proceeds within its own mode of non-rational cognition. It is an activity that has no set goals.

In *Perform or Else* Jon McKenzie identifies performativity as a site of normative force, relying upon Judith Butler's analysis of performative speech acts. He says that,

> Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements which, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power…The power of discourse to produce what it names is linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power acts as a discourse.[237]

J.L Austin developed the concepts of performativity and illocution within his jurisprudence to address the problem that the transformative effect of statements cannot be assumed in the absence of any observable change in conduct or in social relations.[238] Austin's speech acts are rational and empirical devices. Without them, a purported speech act contains no warrant as to its efficacy or, more importantly to its enforceability as bare promise, in the absence of a normative legal framework, which might supports it and provides sanctions against any breach. In essence a bare statement provides no guarantee of its veracity unless there is a legal framework to support its illocutionary effect. Performative acts are rationalised against illusion and deception The theory of illocution is a guarantor of certain legal rights and values and it is perhaps no surprise that performative theories re-emerge around informational culture. This is because information lacks essential materiality. Its materiality depends upon the veracity of its performative materialisation through labour.

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[237] Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 15.
[238] J.L. Austin, *How to do things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976)

Jon McKenzie's analysis of performativity seeks to give an historical account of the genesis of performance studies, performance management and technological performance within their distinctive fields, but crucially defines a general theory of performance which might link these categories within a metatheory. His analysis allows some consideration of performativity, which is consistent with my treatment of informationalism: that is, as an overriding social phenomenon that affects all aspects of social relations, including those within art. It is a totalising discourse.

If we accept that the logic of informationalism is linked to a vast performative site, which implicates the entirety of social relations, then we can see that the notion of illocutionary effect is itself in crisis. In fact, it is evident in Austin's work that this term is designed to express and address a certain anxiety about the nature of the 'real'. It falls within what Adorno calls the disenchantment of the world. Performativity is an exercise in metamorphosis carried out in the name of instrumental reason. When linked to the informational *hypostasis* of network society we might conclude that the auto-affective promise and the desire for illocutionary performance nevertheless occlude the necessary movement of the death drive which seeks to undo the fiction of informational 'presence', materiality and all those forces of logical consignment that give informationalism its normative power. In fact I would characterise informational labour as a form of *illocutionary hysteria.* This is at once a recognition that the forms of material culture have changed irrevocably into a system for the production of sign value and at the same time a deep anxiety about the use value of this mode of production.

Relational aesthetics through gestures and live performance exhibit an illocutionary tendency; or rather they are posited as productive of socio-artistic forms. This manifests itself in the performance of micro-social systems as self-evidentially performative and the mimetic performance of heteronomous social relations. Postproductive practices represent nodal configurations of anarchivistic, non-productive labour. It seizes upon the

principle of immanent informational productivity and adopts it as the principle of non-productive exchange. The critical mass or 'lumpen army' of this non-productive labour not only undermines the traditional critical target of 'artistic authorship' but the very notion of property rights on which authorship rests. The effect of the reproducibility of digital information, without its expenditure, has in fact fuelled the emergence of the creative commons.[239] This is, because the private ownership of property is premised upon scarcity, when information is ubiquitous. The fact that it can be exchanged without being thereby used up is in fact what makes it possible to bring an immanent critique of its logic within the terms of delayed and interrupted consumption. Postproduction is a critique of the legal norms of performativity that establish authorship and ownership. How then does performativity produce what it names within an informational society? Within hypostatic and hypomnesic-informationalism, performativity through labour, guarantees presence as such. Echoing Castells McKenzie claims that knowledge has become performative in its own right. McKenzie draws upon Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, to account for what he calls a 'qualitative mutation' in knowledge. His argument is that whereas specialised knowledge serves the ends of progress, postmodern knowledge is self-legitimating since its aim is to optimise any given system's performance efficiency. Equally, he claims that there has been a mutation in the notion of performance, since performance 'presences' informational relations through their iteration and citation. McKenzie states the position very clearly: 'Performativity in fact extends beyond knowledge; it has come to govern the entire realm of social bonds. Because performativity is the mode through which knowledge and social bonds are legitimated in contemporary societies.'[240]

[239] Stallabrass argues that it is the cost free sharing of information, which distinguishes the commons of a gift economy from that of 'potlach'. Stallabrass, p. 207.
[240] McKenzie, p. 14.

Performance and Feedback

It is within the operation of feedback loops that the mechanism for the modification of performed relations is founded within general informational labour. The efficient management of informational production allows for some 'creative' interruption of performed relations. McKenzie argues that this casts doubt upon the purely 'normative' interpretation of performance management. Whilst I would argue that the demonstration of internal difference remains grounded within the immanent informational plane, it is through the mimesis of this technique that art potentially finds its points of resistance. Any notion of an autopoietic social system of art, or of artistic 'autonomy', must take into consideration its placement within a site of generalised performance as the point of enactment of aesthetic autonomy.

In McKenzie's tentative construction of a meta-theory of performance it strikes me that the separation of performance management, performance technology and performance studies provides an ideal fiction whose negotiation provides an expedient foundation for the critique of performativity itself. These categories become discursive staging posts for a theory of performative artistic autonomy.

One of McKenzie's most compelling arguments, which he backs up with detailed examples, is that we can no longer read performance studies simplistically as transgressive or 'resistant' performance, and performance management and technological performance, as its conservative counterpart. Within the generalised field of performance it is the unpredictable exchange of forces between these regimes, which founds a critical dialectic of performativity. This seems to preclude any reading of relational art as simply antagonistic. Such a reading appears untenable within the generalised field of performance.

For McKenzie the paradox within any general theory of performance is that it 'can be read both as experimentation and normativity.'[241] In terms of the histories of different branches of performance, McKenzie cites Herbert Marcuse, who argued in 1955 that 'post industrial societies were ruled by what he called the "performance principle", an historical reality principle founded upon "economic alienation and repressive desublimation"'.[242] Equally, within the humanities a theatrical concept of performance developed around an analysis of social ritual. This manifested itself within political demonstrations and performance art. He summarises the development of performance studies as follows:

> …within Performance Studies, performance has taken on a particular political significance; with increasing consistency, performance has become defined as a 'liminal' process, a reflexive transgression of social structures. Marginal, on the edge, in the interstices of institutions and at their limits, liminal performances are capable of temporarily staging and subverting their normative functions. Through the study of such genres as demonstrations, political theatre, drag, public memorials, performance art, and everyday gestures of social resistance, performance scholars have sought to document and theorise the political practices enacted in performances around the globe.[243]

A New Performative Heteronomy?

Overall then, the imperative to 'perform or else' within performance management is complemented by the imperative to perform efficaciously within performance theory as resistant to social control. I would argue that the key to any negotiation between these performance paradigms is the analysis of general informational social technique (or the category of technological performance). Since both performance management and performance theory are mutually implicated within their respective engagements with the value form (as the marrying of feedback and neutered creativity into a bureaucratic form) it is only through the analysis

[241] McKenzie, p. 9.
[242] McKenzie, p. 3.
[243] McKenzie, p. 8.

of informational labour that we can step back into a meta-theory of performance. Practices of reproduction, archiving and iteration, need to be read within a performative paradigm whose consequences are as significant for art as was Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.[244]

McKenzie links the categories of performance management and performance theory through technological performance. Without wishing to submit my argument to an abstract technologism, it would be dilatory to ignore technological performance as common to both fields and as central to their articulation through labour. He states that:

> The fields of organizational, cultural and technological performance, when taken together, form an immense performance site, one that potentially encompasses the spheres of human labor and leisure activities and the behaviours of all industrially and electronically produced technologies.[245]

What is more, McKenzie suggests that the citation of different concepts of performance across these paradigms may also be generated by the power of performance.[246] I would suggest, quite simply, that what McKenzie gives us here is a symbolic model of performance and articulates perfectly its repression of illocutionary anxiety within all aspects of the socius. To summarise: the critical efficacy of performance within critical art and the efficiency of performance within performance management operate within the paradigms of performative illocution. Hence they both anticipate their own effects. The very delineation of artistic from non-artistic reason is determined within this general field of performativity. In order to develop a model of resistant art, we must introduce from Derrida, the notion of *originary performance*. That is, the pledge or the promise, 'that does not conform to pre-existing conventions, unlike all the performatives analysed by the theoreticians of speech acts, but whose

[244] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations* trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999)
[245] McKenzie, p. 12.
[246] McKenzie, p. 37.

force of *rupture* produces the institution or the constitution, the law itself'.[247] It is my contention that this originary performativity takes hold within non-productive artistic labour and the principles of postproductive art.

From Transgressive to Resistant Models of Performance Theory

McKenzie makes an overall movement from transgressive to 'resistant' models of performance. I would say that when informational logic is pinpointed as the source of a particular subjectivity and social relations, 'resistant performances' might contest informational logic on the basis that its wager upon the possibility of an alternative logic against the former opens up the un-truth of informational relations, and the fiction that its value is produced in the illocutionary precipitation of its raw material: that is, as 'information', rather than in its mode of subjectivisation. The merit of relational aesthetics is that it takes up the issue of illocutionary anxiety, and performs this anxiety in the construction of informationalised relations even at the risk of its own autonomy.

This entails that within current practice, the axis of artistic autonomy and heteronomy is traversed by a second axis of normative and resistant performativity. In both axes, the transgressive model is superseded by the resistant model. The paradigm of resistance therefore assumes, against transgressive models, that we cannot simply label performance theory radical nor performance management and technological performance normative. Artistic autonomy assumes, then, an Adornian complexion within a performative field. Autonomy is immanently constituted within this field by its heteronomy and the destructive immediacy of the transgressive gesture is replaced by the labour of producing informational forms that might inhabit this field. This is because the transgressive credentials of performance theory are no longer guaranteed or certain. In

[247] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 36-37.

fact transgression has become subsumed within a performative culture that assimilates transgression as feedback. The key to resistance becomes, after Adorno, something akin to the occupation by art of the syllogistic rational forms of its host. This would be the normative logic of 'productive' performance hosting an irrationally mimetic form of its 'make believe'.

Relational Topology and Mimesis

What I propose is that the materiality of postproductive and radicant practice rely upon heterological thinking in order to create a space for the construction of relational topologies that do not rely upon any pre-determination within a concept, or in archival terms, within a principle of positivistic enunciation. Thus the heterological strain enables the principle of the necessity of contingency to challenge reified relations. The processes by which these alternative topologies are inscribed is that of performative illocution that relies upon the mimesis of the general social techniques of labour. At the same time what potentially produces a productive rather than a reductive mimesis of existing relations is the principle of translation through the extenuated use of forms. These uses challenge the legalistic determination of information. This is why I have taken the informational readymade as a model. Its efficacy is based upon its capacities to link different levels of alienated and non-alienated reality through formal migration and metamorphosis. To recall, one of Bourriaud's definitions of form is precisely the fissure that occurs at the meeting of these different levels.

What I have established in this chapter is that the spatio-temporal territory of electronic communication does not only provide a site for re-narrativising relations in their particularity, that is, within a principle of re-ordering. What post-relational and radicant practices seem to permit is a challenge to the performative and legalistic norms of informational production. Thus, the heterological approaches of *Archive Fever* and the notion of originary performance can be used to explore the precarious

ontology of information as an impoverished form that is exclusively reliant upon modes of subjectivisation for its materiality. The totalising movement of relations within the performative field of information allows for the use of informational readymades as forms of delay and interruption that ground themselves in the subjectively ‘rational’ forms of illocution. They also tap into the anarchivistic and hysteric drives concealed within this. Thus performative mimesis, in the form of the readymade, becomes an immanent critique of the logic and value forms of informationalism. In its use of the promissory forms of relating we might find the mechanism by which aleatory materialist constructions might ‘take hold’ and the process by which they become forms of knowledge.

Chapter 3: The limits to art as a form of sociability within the political aesthetics of Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou

The (Im)possibility of the appearance of the singular

WHATEVER IS the figure of pure singularity. Whatever singularity has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an *idea*, that is, to the totality of its possibilities. Through this relation, as Kant said, singularity borders all possibility and thus receives its *omnimoda determinatio* not from its participation in a determinate concept or some actual property (being red, Italian, Communist), but *only by means of this bordering*. It belongs to a whole, but without this belonging's being able to be represented by a real condition: Belonging, being-*such*, is here only the relation to an empty and indeterminate totality.

In Kantian terms this means that what is in question in this bordering is not a limit (*Schranke*) that knows no exteriority, but a threshold (*Grenze*), that is, a point of contact with an external space that must remain empty.

Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*[248]

Giorgio Agamben's 'community to come' was formulated as long ago as the early 1990s. It has since passed from the status of allegorical preservation of the very idea of alternative, an exercise in recalcitrant will to puncture capital's confident and triumphant moment of global ascendancy, to something that, if not quite approaching practical politics, then certainly speaks to an *imaginaire* that has become conceivable again. It is not just that narratives of retreat gave way to those of excess; rather, the very notion of excess is being transformed from an allegorical expression of utopian desire to one that is increasingly understood as construction of, and through, lived reality.

Gail Day'The Fear of Heteronomy' [249]

[248] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 67.
[249] Gail Day, 'The Fear of Heteronomy', *Third Text*, 23.4 (2009), pp. 393-406 (p. 406).

Introduction

This chapter challenges the thinking of relation that has prevailed within recent analysis of relational aesthetics and political aesthetics. It seeks pinpoint what is problematic in this mode of thinking, which posit singular relation as essentially *non-relational* and thus denies it a specific ontology or any productive mode of representation. To suppose that singular relation has no ontology or means of representation is to say no more than this: the singular cannot appear or it lacks a time and place for its appearance.

My premise for this chapter is that the emergence of relational aesthetics expresses a desire for the appearance of singular constructions of relation, those not pre-determined by thought or thought's destination. This is the ostensibly aporetic demand that singular relations appear within our very midst. Agamben's expression of a 'utopian desire' for a materialism of the singular has a long genealogy within art philosophy and politics. This genealogy is part of an undercurrent of the re-thinking of relation that will form the subject of my final chapter. For present purposes, what Day's reading points towards is the emergence of something different: that is, a symptomatic understanding of Agamben's desire in which, on my reading, a principle of social construction and a method for its realisation is taking hold. This is not a recalcitrant slip into idealism. On the contrary, Agamben's account of the singular eludes the concept or any teleology that might make it so. Rather, in the reception of Agamben the shift from an allegorical reading to that of the expression of an inhabitable, constructed reality poses a more interesting question: if Agamben's position seems far-fetched then the true object of scrutiny ought to be the binary classicism of relational thought, that of the singular and the particular, concept and object, that produces this idealism *as an effect.* Against concept and object, Agamben ascribes the painstaking construction of a material forms of singularity to *quodlibet*: a form of construction that has fallen out of general linguistic usage meaning 'to get on with', without a sense of destination or origin. It falls outside the

notion of ‘to do’ or ‘to make’ that generally discloses a specific intentionality. That is to say, one should critically examine the forms of thought and the entrenched ontologies of relation that render the appearance of the singular relation idealistic, either as unthinkable or as held captive within the suspensive category of the (im)possible. This critical examination is based upon my understanding of ontology as something ‘predicated’ and therefore subject to change.

In this chapter I will focus in particular upon the notion of ‘community’ as cognate with the current relational mode of representation and praxis. In particular, I will consider the ways in which Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière’s thinking of the separation of singularity, its non-relation, have shaped our thinking about relational art. I will argue that a reductive reading of Rancière as the darling of post-relational practice and of Badiou as the exemplary anti-relational theorist is to ignore their common anti-relational instincts: instincts that are moreover a product of a shared *classical* ontological understanding of relation. My argument is that they may appear to be oppositional figures but this apparent opposition is the result of the refraction of their classicism through their differing political standpoints (Badiou the Maoist and Rancière the anarchist.) These are strategies each has adopted towards the crippling and hypostatic ontology of relation they inherit. At the same time I aim to salvage certain aspects of their thought, ideas that are currently petrified and articulated within a ‘suspensive’ or (im)possible thinking of relation for my fourth chapter on relational ontology and forms of representation.

Much of this chapter is concerned with an analysis of recent writing and thinking around the notion of community as indicative of the desire for the appearance of singular ‘communities of sense’. I propose that in its exploration of new approaches to the thinking of relation and its spatio-temporal matrices, this writing advances us towards an articulation of *post-relational art*. Post-relational art might then be provisionally defined as a mode of thinking of relation that moves beyond the classical binarism

of relational ontology towards a material ontology adequate to the singular construction.

What I hope to demonstrate is that post-relationality is both an emerging form of aesthetics but at the same time, this thinking emerges from accounts of communitarian relational praxis. It is praxis that is pushing binary, non-relational thinking to a point of *reductio ad absurdum*. In other words, post-relationality has emerged through a dialectical exchange in which the praxis of relational art has interrogated the premises upon which existing forms of relational analysis have subsisted and proved inadequate to the appearance of singular relational constructions.

I have said that I regard both Badiou and Rancière as anti-relational thinkers, that is, as thinkers of non-relation, and moreover that neither theorist is adequate to a faithful reading of relational and post-relational aesthetics. This might appear axiomatic to a reader of Badiou but baffling to a reader of Rancière. Badiou's anti-relationality is self-evident. His neo-Platonist aesthetics refuse any passage of 'truth' or the idea through the sensible because his theory of the event, the event of new relation, will not sanction it. Badiou's thought places the event of new relation within a destructive/subtractive coupling that owes more to thought than to action. In his 'inaesthetics', he consigns political art to romanticism or didacticism and refuses, in his theoretical writings, any dialectical relationship between art and politics. He rejects hybrid forms of art and the interdisciplinary methodologies of contemporary art. And yet, in spite of this, his polemics flirt with the notion of a political art. Ultimately, Badiou brackets out art from politics (an extreme form of artistic autonomy) but lays claim and fidelity to art's potential radicalism as an activity performed by subjects he cannot identify or imagine, who produce artworks he cannot identify or imagine.

Badiou's aesthetics are also anathema to the analysis of relational aesthetics because they reject the hybrid and interdisciplinary nature of

current artistic practice and thereby underdermine relational art's legitimacy. Badiou sees bond or 'lien' as the place of relation because for him appearances are predicated upon the operations of the logic of a world. For this reason, what appears is for Badiou always particular. Any rare and fleeting appearance of the singular by way of exception and through the eruption of an event within a particular situation entails its simultaneous disappearance. The effect of the singular is only registered in an implicative way through its effects. These are enacted by subjects to the truth of an event through acts of subjectivisation and fidelity. It is thus only within the particular that the truth of an event may establish itself within what appears. Given the level of abstraction within Badiou's thought it is hardly surprising that it has found little foothold in post relational discourse, in spite of Badiou's significant influence in the discourse of political aesthetics. Badiou claims that his system of thought can be applied to any truth procedure, including art. Yet his refusal to enter the discourse of relational aesthetics seems to leave it marginalised.

What is most crippling in Badiou's thought to the development of post-relational thought is, however, his wholesale rejection of the notion of community. On the latter he is emphatic, for example he says that: 'Every invocation "of custom, of community, works directly against truths"' [250] and 'philosophy and communal specificity are mutually exclusive: " Every particularity is a conformation, a conformism," whereas every truth is a nonconforming'. [251] For Badiou the only community consistent with truth would be a 'communism of singularities,' a community of 'extreme particularity.'[252] Hallward states that:

> What may distinguish Badiou's critique of the communal is the rigor with which he carries it through to its admittedly unfashionable conclusion: 'The whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other must be purely

[250] Hallward, *A Subject to Truth*, p. 26.
[251] Hallward, *A Subject to Truth*, p. 26
[252] Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. by Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 82-83.

and simply abandoned. For the real question – and it is an extraordinarily difficult one – is much more that of recognizing the Same.'[253]

And yet, what is maddening about Badiou's thought is that within his polemical writing and political activities his advocacy of cellular models of political organisation would appear to offer important formal strategies of organisation that conform to the type of micro-communities he rejects elsewhere in his writing. It appears at times that Badiou lives a double intellectual life and that he uses his polemics as an opportunity to escape the ontological straight-jacket imposed by his own system.

Rancière accepts the heteronomous promiscuity of the modern artwork within his rubric of redistribution and dissensus. In fact it is his dissolution of the categories of the political and artistic within a generalised relational field of 'sense' that I believe makes him an attractive theorist to relational artists. And yet, I maintain that he is, like Badiou, a thinker of non-relation. Given that recent writing and relational art are clearly influenced by Rancière's thought this requires some justification.

My argument will be that Rancière is a relational anarchist. This means that his thinking of relation locates itself within a realm of pure heteronomy, lacking any time, or place of appearance of the singular community. Rancière's refusal to locate his dissensual community of sense within the social conditions and institutions that condition and motivate artistic production produce a measure of abstraction equal to that of Badiou's thought. Rancière proposes his spaces of dissensus not as spaces as such but as partitions of sense in which it is impossible for any dialectical process to take place. He proposes then: anodine, aestheticized spaces of partition in which there are no causes to be fought for nor any truly social forms of art to be made. There is nothing new in arguing that Rancière's singular communities of sense lack any ontological determinacy, a position I endorse, but what I aim to do here is

[253] Hallward, *A Subject to Truth*, p. 26

to advance this argument through an examination of the precepts of his thought. My argument is that Rancière is behoven to a non-relational analysis of relational and communitarian art because he has failed to recognise certain crucial characteristics of relational and post-relational thinking outlined by Bourriaud: in particular, Rancière's thinking of relation lacks Bourriaud's developed theory of social mimesis. Bourriaud's post-relational notion of mimesis is the key to opening the door to the methods of translation and topology that provide relational art with its existential legitimacy as a materialist and critical realist aesthetics.

If mimesis is thought in Rancière's terms as a merely parodic activity or the political vehicle for the direct representation of social conditions – conditions that implore some response or critical intervention – then it is easy to see why he would reject mimetic practice as 'particular' *tout court*. Equally, without a developed thinking of mimesis, the ethical turn in art and the demand of political efficacy identified by Rancière can appear as no more than literal and illustrative gestures of art's 'resistance', demanding again their wholesale rejection. The political and ethical efficacy of art, which I suggest are enduring and necessary to political aesthetics are thus rejected in order to save them from their instrumentalisation within consensus politics. The high cost that is paid by Rancière's aesthetics of separation is art's irrelevance.

What is a Community of Sense?

How does the notion of a 'community of sense' question or perhaps affirm the entrenched ontological thinking of relation within the singular and the particular?

The prevailing trend within 'socially engaged' artistic practice is towards the creation of experimental communities based upon theoretical models developed principally by Jean-Luc Nancy, Georgio Agamben and Jacques

Rancière. My understanding of their positions draws upon a collection of writing on post-relational art: *Communities of Sense*. The notion of *sensus communis* based in part upon Rancière's redistributive aesthetics, has taken hold I think because it is less abstract than Badiou's thought. For Badiou, Rancière's communitarian 'apolitics' entail merely 'the reactivation of sediments.' What then, for Rancière, is a community of sense?

He describes it as follows:

> I do not take the phrase 'community of sense' to mean a collectivity shaped by some common feeling. I understand it as a frame of visibility and intelligibility that puts things or practices together under the same meaning, which shapes thereby a certain sense of community. A community of sense is a certain cutting out of space and time that binds together practices, forms of visibility, and patterns of intelligibility. I call this cutting out and this linkage a production of the sensible.[254]

For Rancière the community of sense encompasses both art and politics, in fact, he regards them as contingent descriptions of an overall distribution of the sensible. He says that art and politics do not constitute 'two permanent realities' requiring discussion of their interconnection. They exist contingently. It follows from this that, 'a relation between art and politics is a relation between two partitions of the sensible.'[255]

Unlike Badiou, Rancière provides a model of artistic practice which embraces the formal hybridity characteristic of much of the modern period, but, in particular the opening period of relational practice, and its cognates: networking, participation, interaction, site-specificity. Rancière's articulation of the autonomy of art is also marked by a

[254] Jacques Rancière 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics' in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* ed. by B Hinderliter and others (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2009), p 31.
[255] Rancière, 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics', p. 32.

rejection of any formalism that might reconstitute the binary opposition of autonomy and heteronomy. He argues that:

> The political act of art is to save the heterogenous sensible that is the heart of the autonomy of art and its power of emancipation. The community of sense at work in the politics of aesthetics is a community based on both the connection and disconnection of sense and sense. Its separateness 'makes sense' to the extent that it is not the refuge of pure form. Instead, it stages the very relationship of separateness and inseparateness.[256]

To a certain extent it is the impurity of the relational form, its post-formalism, which makes Rancière's notion of separation a productive match for the evaluation of relational artworks. Although he is often critical of relational art, particularly in its earliest 'consensual' manifestations, Rancière's dissensual redistribution of sensual relations appears to resonate with Bourriaud's articulation of postproductive practice at some level. However, the question remains whether the principle of 'sensible partition' is not in itself sufficient to found any sort of relational aesthetics.

Aesthetic Separation And Aesthetic Community: Dissensus

For Rancière the aesthetic community is founded upon the paradox of its connection and disconnection from the heteronomous realm, and this is the basic constitution of the dissensual figure'.[257] These realms of dissensus stage conflicts between two sensory worlds, and the dissensual figure may become manifest in the artwork. [258] Rancière is critical of what he terms anti-aesthetics, and sees a role for philosophy in the framing of aesthetic discourse, that is, describing the parameters of the redistributions of 'sense and sense'. In this he differs from Badiou, who seeks to set out philosophically the general conditions for the emergence of truths within the separate and distinct realms of art, politics, science

[256] Rancière, 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics', p. 39.
[257] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 58.
[258] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 58.

and love, without seeking an active role for philosophy in the hermeneutics or discourses that they engender. Rancière casts aesthetics within the framing of the appearance of the dissensual figure as fiction, or the truth of non-truth. This is the basis of his criticality and offers a formulation of the 'real'. Within his dissensual model Rancière proposes an overlaying of that which is conjoined in that which is disjoined sensorily. This paradox produces a tension between present and future, in which the artwork is representative of 'the people to come' and is therefore a monument to its expectation and to its absence.[259]

This articulation of the 'community to come' within the future anterior tense is symptomatic of the separation of the singular from its appearance. It posits that some form un-preconfigurable break or event will provide the necessary dynamic for the coming of the future. This form of thought is therefore non-relational and this form can be observed also in the work of Badiou and Derrida. Whilst for Rancière it is the lack of measure characteristic of the aesthetic regime of art, the incommensurability of appearance and meaning that potentially provides this disjuncture; for Badiou this break entails the emergence of the immeasurable excess of a situation over itself. For Derrida articulates it as the undeconstructibility of the promise or the excess of testimony over fact. In other words these thinkers share an instantiation of the singular as (im)possible.

For Rancière the key to this aesthetic disconnection or break lies in accepting an end to the connection between *poiesis* and *aisthesis* which determined the representative regime of art within a binarism of origin and destination. He views the rupture of this pairing as constitutive of art's aesthetic regime. Rancière says that we are nevertheless still prone to believing in the cause and effect relation of the representative regime of art. Rather than accept this unity of the measure of cause and effect Rancière proposes a third term, 'that escapes the dilemma of

[259] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 59.

representational mediation and ethical immediacy.'[260] This third term is 'aesthetic efficacy itself. '"Aesthetic efficacy" means a paradoxical kind of efficacy that is produced by the very rupturing of any determinate link between cause and effect.'[261] Rancière bases his notion of 'aesthetic efficacy' upon Kant's concept of beauty. It is the indeterminacy of beauty, quite apart from any concept that grants its paradoxical efficacy.[262]

According to Rancière, by dispensing with the concept, Kant's formulation of beauty entails the loss of any determined relationship between poiesis and aisthesis.[263] As a result of this separation from the concept, art is granted a 'free play' that sanctions the emergence of 'free appearance'. [264] Rancière asserts that this free play entails the negotiation between art and anti-art. Aesthetic separation from the concept is, for him, symptomatic of the dissolution of the boundary between art and everyday life.[265]

In spite of this, relational aesthetics for Rancière, in its literal presentation of new forms of community, is an attempt to overcome the cancellation of the mediation of being apart and the being together of a new community.[266] Rancière's target here is the consensual model of relational aesthetics, as an art of consensus based upon some reinscription or reparation of the social bond, which writers like Claire Bishop have sought to distance from its antagonistic counterpart. This literalism, as I have argued in relation to Bourriaud's approach to the public realm, can give relational aesthetics the complexion of liberal dogmatics; as the presentation, or rather demonstration, of art's political efficacy. Rancière reads this stage of relational practice as a parody of art's political efficacy. However, one might counter Rancière's parodic reading with the

[260] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 61.
[261] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 63.
[262] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 64.
[263] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 64.
[264] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 64.
[265] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 69.
[266] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 69.

view that relational artworks display a subtle irony, in the sense that they present, theatrically, the promise of the same.[267] The theory of relational mimesis I set out in chapter one would also tend to question Rancière's assumptions about the literalism of political representation within art. It is time, then, to turn to the question of post-relationality and its representation of singular community in order to establish a more complex rubric for relational political aesthetics.

Experimental communities of sense

A selection of texts by Carlos Basualdo and Reinaldo Laddaga, Rachel Haidu and Emily Apter that appear in the anthology *Communities of Sense* is a good starting point for the analysis of post-relationality. They are important texts that flesh out relational practice and begin to identify its post-relational form.[268] They offer some insight into how we might analyse an experimental community as an artwork. I would describe these texts as significant movements towards the post-relational, on the basis of their advocacy of a more radical site-specificity. Though critical of *Relational Aesthetics*, these essays are similar in outlook to Bourriaud's later writings in that they advocate a site-specificity that enters into broader spatio-temporal relational matrices that are considerably more diffuse and complex than those evidenced in early relational practice.

Basualdo and Laddaga make a distinction between different phases of development within relational aesthetics, concurring with Rancière's observations that the site-specific and monumental have displaced gallery-based works. They argue, for instance, that Thomas Hirschhorn's work:

> differs from those earlier projects that Nicolas Bourriaud addressed in his brief book on relational aesthetics. The corpus of relational aesthetics, as it was

[267] One can find a forerunner here in the aesthetics of failure and the humour evident in the happenings of Allan Kaprow.

[268] *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* ed. by B. Hinderliter and others (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2009)

> initially presented in Bourriaud's book, consisted mostly of punctual interventions in relatively homogenous and stable regions of social life. [269]

The post-relational stance is then critical of the earlier micro-actions on the basis that relational works inflected situations without breaking them. Basualdo and Laddaga advocate a model of relational aesthetics based upon what they term 'boundary organizations', which address globalization from below and in this respect they owe some allegiance to Hardt and Negri's theory of the multitude. They describe these organizations as temporary spaces for the creation of unlikely communicative relations between worlds: places of experimentation and research. [270] Against a background of globalization and informationalisation this type of post-relational aesthetics resists the dissolution of social forms. They present their working methodology as follows:

> a problem is seen both as an obstacle to be overcome and as the occasion for an interrogation of social relations and the subsequent elaboration of alternative forms of sociality. During this process, the artist and the newly formed community create archives that can be circulated outside the site of their original production, whose function is to memorize and publicize the model.[271]

Rachel Haidu considers practice as an exploration of the precarious community. She is critical of Claire Bishop, for example, for adopting an aesthetics that expressly absorbs political and social ambitions. She says that in Bishop's model: 'The aesthetic inherently contains the promise of ameliorative social change rather than actively struggling with the contradiction such desires and promises impose on the work of art.'[272] Thus we are unable to move away from a model of political efficacy

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[269] C. Basualdo and R. Laddaga, 'Experimental Communities', in Hinderliter, B. and others, *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 197-214, (p. 204).
[270] Basualdo and Laddaga, 'Experimental Communities', *Communities of Sense*, p. 199.
[271] Basualdo and Laddaga, 'Experimental Communities', *Communities of Sense*, p. 199.
[272] R. Haidu,'Précarité, Autorité, Autonomie', in Hinderliter, B. and others, *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2009) pp.215-237, (p. 233).

towards the aesthetics of political praxis. Bishop of course uses Rancière as a point of reference in her critique of relational aesthetics but she is an impatient critic of utility rather than materiality.

Haidu's articulation of relational art embraces a model of artistic autonomy similar to that expressed by Rancière. What is significant in Haidu's writing is the presence of a more nuanced notion of site specificity, which pays greater attention to the local topology and relations pertaining to the site. Too often, site-specificity is presented on the basis of its bare egalitarian credentials of simply being a place 'outside of the gallery or institution'. She endorses the following quotation from Miwon Kwon; 'Today's site-oriented practices inherit the task of demarcating the *relational specificity* that can hold in dialectical tension the distant poles of spatial experience.'[273]

Within the post-relational, some of the lessons of institutional critique have been assimilated, along with some of Kwon's reflections upon the shortcomings of nomadic site-specificity in *One Place after Another*.[274] Site-specificity becomes in post-relational terms, 'site singularity', that is it simultaneously aims to produce and inhabit a site of enduring community along the lines advocated by Grant Kester. Kester's dialogical aesthetics must be credited within this debate as the basis of a thinking of relation that is both materialist and realist. His work has not been scrutinised to the same extent as Bourriaud's and I put this down simply to the fact that North American relational art does not carry the same weight of history, nor the expectations and disappointments (Marxist disappointment) that are central to the propositions of new forms of artistic sociability in Europe. The importance of topology within Kester's dialogical aesthetics is the recognition that artistic practice is capable of 'switching on' a given community, not as an act of memorialisation nor as

[273] Haidu, *Communities of Sense*, p. 227, citing Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p.166.
[274] M.Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002)

a monument, but as a material instantiation of the liminal expression of local and global logics.

Emily Apter's analysis of experimental communities is unusual in that it directly references Badiou's political polemics as a tool for artistic praxis. She says, reflecting upon the post-1968 development of socially engaged art that: 'It was within a culture of group activism – collective bargaining, discussion groups, group sex, communal property – that the conceptual category of the group subject took hold as a kind of Venn diagram of militant subjectivity.'[275] Apter's 'Thinking Red, Ethical Militancy And the Group Subject' reflects her interest in Badiou's work from the perspective of the creation of group subjectivity, and a directly productive connection of this with the history of the avant-garde. She draws upon Badiou's commitment to a 'politics without party' and the de-Thermidorizing of political time she identifies with *Metapolitics,* and Badiou's dispensation with conventional measures of periodicity in *The Century*. Strictly speaking *The Century* re-Thermidorizes politics and art on the basis that it is an historical account of a reactionary political epoch. This interpretation is interesting however because there is a strong identification with de-Thermidorized politics within post-relational aesthetics, as a principle that invites social collage and practices of re-inscription.

Notwithstanding the fundamental difficulty in applying Badiou's work to the analysis of relational practice, Apter recognises the importance of political militancy in Badiou's politics and particularly the similarities in organisational form between *L'Organization Politique* and the techniques of the contemporary post-relational 'avant-garde'. In fact, whilst I have argued that Badiou has been relatively marginal in his influence upon contemporary practice, what Apter has seized upon, is that only in Badiou's accounts of cellular political micro-organisations in *The*

[275] E. Apter, 'Thinking Red: Ethical Militance and the Group Subject' in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* ed. by B Hinderliter and others (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 301.

Century, and *Metapolitics* do we encounter any real glimpse of the political form and organisational topology adequate to the future of relational-artistic praxis.

Why do experimental communities need to be artworks?

The purported centrality of artistic intervention to the production of communities of sense begs the question, why do these communities necessarily need to be presented as artworks? The artist Jay Koh, who plays a pivotal role in the argument of Grant Kester's *Dialogical Aesthetics*, an argument for a concrete form of dialogical-situational art (a wholesale redefinition of the institution of art), explained to me that he is indifferent as to whether his works are received as political or artistic. The general migration of politics into art is mirrored by a concomitant aesthetics of the political. Therefore art becomes a tool of demarcation, and one that requires a specific mode of representation, or imageness that reflects its status as a placeholder. Typical of the views of the contributors to *Communities of Sense*, is Jean-Luc Nancy's claim that political transformation is, 'a question of the art of politics – and perhaps simply of art, since the only means civility has at its disposal are statements, signs and roles.' [276]

And again echoing Rancière: 'Art borrows or contests the authority to determine where, or in what, politics begins and ends, but only in so far as it also redefines the limits, quite simply, of art 'itself'.[277] Again we could say that relational artworks have engendered and have been engendered by a politics of aesthetics on the basis that relations perform or enact the function of redistributing sense as such. So for example, the editors of *Communities of Sense* state in their introductory chapter that:

> Relationality is a function of the distribution and organization of sense, what Nancy calls 'spacing'. This approach to the issue of collectivity posits it as

[276] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', citing J L Nancy, *Communities of Sense*, p. 25.
[277] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense*, p. 19.

> internally multiple and dynamic. Being is constituted only in relation to others: one's being is a function of the way in which sense is distributed, or rather, spaced. This spacing not only sets the condition of relationality among beings but also of each singular being's relation to itself.[278]

Whilst I would agree with the importance of this sense of relation as being-toward-another and with the editors' assertion that 'community becomes an enactment of a dislocation', I would add that artistic-relational redistributions of sense are linked to political redistributions because they are performatively feasible as dislocations through what is common to the forms of artistic and non-artistic labour. In other words it is the recombination and use of the social forms of relation linked to the topological displacement of normative relations through the enactment of artistic labour that might specifically delineate these experimental spaces. Without explicit recognition of this we risk the creation of communities of sense that are a 'private paradise for amateurs and aesthetes'.[279]

Rancière may be right to deride the theatricality of some relational art, but he lacks any *material* remedial suggestion. I think this is because his model of mimesis as 'duplicaton' is unfairly reductive. Mimetic artistic labour links aesthetic theory to practice, and art to anti-art, as a determinate negation of the subjective relations produced by the commodity form.

<u>The problem of the self and relation within relational works</u>

In *Communities of Sense* there is an acknowledgement that a certain notion of the relationship between self and community may produce limitations upon art as a sociable form. This is because there is yet another binary axis in the thinking of community based upon individuality and totality.[280] There is in other words a problematic presupposition of community as a collectivized self as an *a priori* totality.

[278] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense,* p. 14.
[279] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 69.
[280] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense,* p. 14.

On this basis the question of community becomes problematic as 'self mimetically linked to the individual self in the form of a unified body politic.'[281] This approach runs contrary to Bourriaud's thinking of conjuncture and methodology of aleatory materialism. The editors of *Communities of Sense* remark that Nancy's notion of relation introduces an additional movement, towards the thought of being-in-common, against 'the absolutist logic of metaphysics [that] casts itself into relation with its other, with that which undoes absoluteness, precisely because as absolutes, both individuality and totality exclude the possibility of their mediation.'[282]

Community then is defined for the writers on the basis of Nancy's argument as 'that which dissolves what Nancy calls "the autarky of absolute imminence, the irrational fixity of absolutes"'. [283] This reading of Nancy suggests that a 'community could be rethought, in so far as it can be experienced as a single phenomenon, *as a form of relation* rather than as a self or a being'.[284] [my emphasis]

The authors suggest that Nancy has 'redefined community as the being in common of sociality' and against the notion of groups as the sum of individually identitarian subjects: 'community is enacted through contingent modalities of spacing'.[285] I would agree with this on the basis that it identifies important aspects of the thinking of post-relation that dissolves traditional categories that determine the exclusion of aformal relation. However, as I will argue in relation to Rancière's work, this spacing must be enacted within a particular topology.

What is also important to retain from this approach is of course the search for modes of subjectivization through artistic works, which are not based

[281] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense,* p. 14.
[282] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense,* p. 14.
[283] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense,* p. 14, citing J.L Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. by P. Connor (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p.4.
[284] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense,* p. 14,
[285] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense,* p. 15.

upon a reductive Cartesian subject. However, this does not necessarily mean that we can dispense with the individual subject: rather, we should recognize the centrality of the subject as constituted by the ontological impasse as such. Indeed much of the rhetoric of *Communities of Sense* as the 'staging of a gap' of non-relation is consistent with such an approach; a being-in-common of relation must be staged within its site of non-relation, so within a dialectical figuring. This is because this produces a place of critical intervention or critical realism.

If one posits the subject in this way then, to follow Žižek's reasoning, it is not that we need to embrace anti-Cartesianism, but rather to identify the radicality of its absent core.[286] That is we embrace the anti-philosophical foundation of identity rather than disclaim the subject at the risk of the loss of any potential social agency.

Communities of Sense and the Question of the Real

According to Beth Hinderliter's teleology of artistic practice, artistic models of institutional critique of the 1970s were based upon a Marxian return of the real, becoming in the 1980s models of communicative action that served to save the real of political art. However, in the contemporary information age,

> opacity is often not the outcome of a gap between political appearances and social realities, but the results of the ceaseless proliferation of information. It is the persistent emphasis on information and the 'factity' of knowledge that leads to a particular economy of power and visibility in which, as Étienne Balibar argues, the dominant powers do not practice 'secrecy' any longer…[287]

This is a familiar argument, to the extent that the hypostasis of information leaves nothing of the 'real' to uncover or to appear. In the light of this Hinderliter claims that if we identify politics with aesthetics,

[286] This is Žižek's argument in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2009)
[287] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense,* pp. 10-11.

then the problem is not how to uncover appearances, but to create a 'sphere' in which equality might be enacted. This space of disagreement is a space in which forms of subjectivization might appear through the redistribution of appearances. [288] For Hinderliter, the task facing contemporary artistic practice is the creation of what Étienne Balibar calls 'places of fiction', which she describes in terms of 'the production of the real on the basis of experience itself'. [289]

This is where Nancy's rhetoric of spacing appears to have taken hold. The problem is not to uncover the real but to create a space for the 'enactment of equality'. Equality for those, 'in between names, groups, and classes'. The issue, then, is not to re-contextualise the visible, but to reconfigure the visible and its spectacular economies through mimetic performance and its documentation. This is to use the image and other representational forms in order to mediate the social relations under which they are constituted. Basically we can identify within this thinking of community a strategy of recombinancy in which spacings, dislocations and redistributions of the particular allow the singular relation its space of appearance as a first movement within the construction of community.

Rancière and the Democratisation of Appearances

It is Rancière rather than Badiou who has become the principle theorist of choice for those engaged with relational and post-relational art practices. We have seen this in Claire Bishop's endorsement of Rancière as the basis of her 'antagonistic' relational aesthetics and also the prominence he is given, along with Nancy, in *Communities of Sense*. There is no doubt that Rancière has been instrumental in the resurgence of political aesthetics in recent times, and his re-investment in appearance as a 'mechanism' for producing difference along with the operations of the image are essential to the conception of the artistic document I will be putting forward in my final chapter.

[288] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense*, pp. 10-11.
[289] Hinderliter and others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense*, pp. 10-11.

What I will consider here, however, is why Rancière is the contemporary thinker of relationalty *par excellence.* I will argue that his prominence is based upon his self-styled 'relational anarchism'. His theories have been welcomed and easily morphed into artistic praxis. This is because Rancière conflates art with politics in a convivial fashion. Yet Rancière's valorisation of community begs the question: popularity relies upon his valorisation of 'community' – what kind of community are we speaking of and when and where does it happen?

I will begin with Rancière's approach to the question of the singular and the particular in order to demonstrate the source of his 'relational anarchism'. We have seen that the question of the singular and particular forms the context for Rancière's work, as it does for Badiou and many others. Whereas the singular within Badiou's Platonism has been criticised for its submission to the realm of the pure idea, the appeal of Rancière, on the other hand, is that he formulates the appearance of the singular; he purports to give it a sensible form as a place of dissensual exception within the manifold of consensus. Rancière defines consensus as 'an agreement between sense and sense'. This agreement operates,

> between a mode of sensory presentation and a regime of meaning. Consensus, as a mode of government, says: it is perfectly fine for people to have different interests, values and aspirations, nevertheless there is one unique reality to which everything must be related, a reality that is experienceable as a sense datum and which has only one possible signification. [290]

In other words, if we consider consensus as the realm of particularity, or 'sovereign relation', the singular appears through the dissensual dispositif as a point of disagreement between sense and sense. For Rancière, dissensus occurs as a 'performative contradiction between sense and sense'. Dissensus marks an emergent instance of a truly democratic space or 'community', 'brought about' by the 'redistribution of the sensible'.

[290] J. Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 144.

Again the appeal to relational artists is that ostensibly this calls for agents to bring this about. It is this promise of an embodied dissensual space – of a community of sense – which no doubt explains Rancière's appeal to post-relational practitioners eager to build upon the tradition of site-specific intervention. However, Rancière's formulation of 'sovereign singularity' arguably comes at a price. One might ask: when and where does this politics happen and who are its agents? In terms redolent of Badiou's description of the event he claims that the ruptures of dissensus cannot be calculated. They are liable to occur at any time in any place. [291]

Paula Tambaki's assessment is that Rancière recognises the problems of consensus politics as a unidimensional politics. But he then withdraws *tout court* into the figure of dissensus on the basis that it is disagreement, which truly constitutes democracy, or the democratic spaces for its emergence. This presents a problem in 'the arbitrariness of the litigious politics which Rancière defends'.[292] She says that by setting politics *against* the police order he fails to account for how this might disrupt the latter.[293] Thus once dissensus has been *staged* we return to the police order: it doesn't 'breed' within the police order. Rancière therefore too radically equates politics and democracy. This leads to an impasse with the state and given the rarity of this politics, produces a hyperpessimism. We are unable to re-invigorate democratic politics using this model and if politics is rare, this cancels its dissensual nature.[294] The problem as she sees it is that, dissensus pertains to 'episodic' politics, not to the socio-symbolic. For her, the separation of politics and the police prevents the realisation of Rancière's supplement. Dissensus institutes, but prevents, any facilitation of a litigious politics begging the question: 'where does politics happen?'[295]

[291] J. Rancière, *Dissensus*, p.143.
[292] Paula Tambakaki, 'When Does Politics Happen?', *Parallax*, 15.3, (2009), pp. 102-113 (p.103)
[293] Tambakaki p.103.
[294] Tambakaki, p. 105.
[295] Tambakaki, p. 108.

This problem of what I term the 'atopology' of Rancière's thought has been criticised by Jodi Dean. She says that Rancière presents our democratic milieu as *habitat* not struggle. 'Such lived democracy is a habitat rather than a struggle; it is the setting in which we find ourselves rather than a position requiring sacrifice and decision. As habitat, democracy is not itself political.'[296] She adds that 'Democracy is anticipated or lost but never present'; and that the torsion of Rancière's politics is that 'the people and the government are never present at the same time.' She concludes that Rancière's aesthetic regime of art is merely 'the democratisation of appearance'.[297]

It is Rancière's reliance therefore upon a principles of dissensual partition based upon a conflation of politics and art as merely instances of the sensible that lays him open to this criticism. He advocates a form of social collage separated from the social and symbolic orders of the particular, that suggests a different order of non-relationality to that of Badiou. He comes dangerously close, in fact, to the de- and re-territorialising logic of capital in its aesthetic informationalised form. On that basis Rancière is equally open to the charge of aesthetic anarchism.

Rancière's non-relationality begins with his de-ontologised notion of relation. In 'Heteroreductives – Rancière's Disagreement with Ontology',[298] Bram Ieven points out that for Rancière, the aesthetic regime of art, it's being 'without measure' or any intentionality or any commensurability between *poiesis* and *aesthesis*, is a way out of 'the impasse of particularity'. [299]For Ieven, Rancière thereby opens a

[296] Jodi Dean, 'Politics Without Politics', *Parallax*, 15.3, (2009), pp. 20-36 (p. 22).
[297] Dean, pp. 26-27.
[298] Bram Ieven, 'Heteroreductives: Rancière's Disagreement with Ontology', *Parallax*, 15.3 (2009), 50-62.
[299] To recall, for Rancière; 'poiesis and aisthesis stand henceforth in immediate relation to each other. But they relate to one another through the very gap of their ground. They can only be brought to agree by human nature that is either lost or by a humanity to come. From Kant to Adorno, including Schiller, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the object of aesthetic discourse has only ever been to think through this discordant relation. What this discourse has thereby striven to articulate is not the fantasy of speculative minds, but the new and paradoxical regime for identifying what is recognizable as art. I have proposed to call this regime the aesthetic regime of art.'

heterogenous space, that is, of heterogenous spatiality and temporality. This removes Rancière's position from the space of ontology and places him within a relational field dictated by the aesthetic.[300] Thus far we might make comparisons with Bourriaud's position: however, in Bourriaud's thought the heterogeneity of non-related singularities find their existential adequation principally through forms of social interaction, engagement and encounter. They acquire ontology because they are determined within a topology and inhabit the socius through the enactment of mimetic social forms. It is this formal linkage to the existing social, its forms of labour and institutions, which distinguishes him from Rancière. Thus Bourriaud articulates a topology of appearance whilst retaining a heterological outlook as the necessarily contingent foundation for concrete intervention. Ieven says that Rancière moves away from ontology because he equates ontology with realism, that is, a realism that he associates with the 'police logic of order'.[301] This, in turn, is because Rancière views realism exclusively as a *methodology*, that operates according to given 'partitions of the sensible'. There is no 'real' world, simply configurations of what is given as 'the real'. But this heterological position lacks any second movement that might nominate a space of appearance. Hinderliter describes his methodology as follows;

> According to Rancière, the problem in our age is not the 'loss of the real', but the loss of appearance as a mechanism for producing difference. This enables the political constitution of nonidentary subjects who disturb a specific division of the perceptible by linking together separate worlds and organizing spaces where new communities can be formed. [302]

This model of recombinancy becomes problematic, however, under de-ontologised conditions. Ieven argues that the ontological indeterminacy of the aesthetic regime of art begs the question – 'what enacts realism in the

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Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), p. 8.

[300] Ieven, p. 56.

[301] Ieven, p. 56.

[302] Hinderliter and Others, 'Introduction', *Communities of Sense,* p. 9.

absence of ontology?'[303] To clarify, if politics and aesthetics are for Rancière indistinguishable within the partition of the sensible, or merely terms we apply to a given partition, what is lost within a politics of ontological indeterminacy, is any place for its emergence within or conditioning of the real in its socially constituted particularity. Gail Day summarises the problem as follows: 'It is impossible to isolate art from politics; absolutely true, but dissensual practice, whether in art or politics, has to accede to determine points and decisions (and also to partisanship) if it is not to be drained of content.'[304]

Instances of Identification and Separation in Rancière's thought

Rancière's strategy for negotiating the singular and the particular retains a symptomatic dualism that is repeated throughout his politics of aesthetics. They appear within a double movement in the figures of absolute identification and absolute separation. Rancière collapses the separation of art and politics in order to enable his singular *dispositif* of dissensus. He then separates aesthetico-political singularity from any notion of the political efficacy or ethical immediacy of critical art, in order to isolate the singular from the injunctions of the consensus of the particular. I will argue that this double movement produces in fact the aestheticisation of politics: this is a wholesale *dis-identification* of art from politics.

The first movement, that of an identification of identification or collapse of the division between art and politics can be seen in Rancière's theory of aesthetic autonomy. Rancière's articulation of 'artistic autonomy' collapses the distinction between art and non-art in its emphasis upon *the autonomy of experience*, or the 'free play of the senses'. He says that: 'the artwork participates in the sensorium of autonomy in as much as it is not a work of art'[305] This formula of artistic autonomy undoubtedly lends itself to the analysis of the hybrid and interdisciplinary practices within

[303] Ieven, p. 60.
[304] Day, p. 403.
[305] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: on Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 117.

relational art, but his position differs from Bourriaud in important respects. According to Day, Rancière's placement of the autonomy of art within the notion of the sensible means that he ignores art's social and institutional autonomy. It is these aspects of art's social autonomy that for Day firewalls it from what she considers to be the overstated fear of heteronomy. Day argues that there has been a significant shift in attitude towards political aesthetics, in the sense that the belief that art's critical distance is threatened by what is heteronomous to art, to its penetration by the powers of capital, has diminished. She argues that the fear of heteronomy is in decline and has been replaced by more explicitly committed forms of political art on a scale not witnessed since the 1960s or the 1930s.[306] She says that: 'The alleged 'risk' to art today is vastly overstated. Indeed, most so-called 'political art' remains thoroughly autonomous in its mode, institutional function and discursive situation'.[307] I would add that a faithful reading of Bourriaud's account of social mimesis supports such a conclusion

On this basis, we could say that in alienating the social conditions of art's production and in identifying of art as sensuously coextensive with politics (as pure relatum) Rancière facilitates the mere partitioning and redistribution of singularities. Not only do they lack a particular locus of appearance but they simultaneously deny any partisanship of a political art. Thus he repeats the Spinozist model, in which relations proceed in baroque form from an all encompassing democratic origin that assumes the form of the relational 'real' of a community of equals – or the equality of speaking beings. In other words, Rancière's de-ontologised relations appear to be accidental emanations of the democratic principle itself. His outright separation of consensus from aestheticised politics prevents any critical fissure with the social conditions under which the latter emerge and relies exclusively upon the force of the 'heterogenous sensible'. Moreover, Rancière's autonomy of aesthetic experience is problematic in the sense that dissensus employs aesthetics to supplant politics in such a

[306] Day, p. 393.
[307] Day, p. 394.

way as to present these partitions of the sensible as historically neutral. In turn then he fails to address art's autonomy as equally requiring a history of autonomy's social institutionalisation.[308]

The second movement of Rancière's theory entails the separation of art from the demand of its political efficacy and ethical immediacy. For him, these injunctions perpetuate the representative regime of art within critical art discourse. Rancière suggests that in spite of the century of critique directed at the mimetic tradition in art, mimesis remains entrenched within the forms of political and artistic subversion. He says that:

> Underlying these forms is the assumption that art compels us to revolt when it shows us revolting things, that it mobilizes when it itself is taken outside of the workshop or museum and that it incites us to oppose the system of domination by denouncing its own participation in that system. This assumption implies a specific form of relationship between cause and effect, intention and consequence. [309]

I think that the forms of artistic subversion he describes are indeed prone to literalism and political naievety but equally Rancière does not give sufficient weight to Bourriaud's recognition of the limitations of a transgressive political art and rejection of such opportunism.

According to Rancière, the notion of the efficacy of art was 'debunked' at the close of the representative regime of art, but in spite of this, there remains a trace of its causal logic within current thinking. By dispensing with the representative model he is able, firstly, to break free of the model of the avant-garde on the basis that this has historically overdetermined art's critical functions through its particular model of aesthetics and politics. This separation and de-Thermidorized model of the politico-aesthetic creates a carte blanche for Rancière's aesthetic regime of art, and again this goes some way toward explaining Rancière's positive

[308] Day, p. 398.
[309] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 135

reception amongst those who seek to distance themselves from the avant-garde and its perceived failures. Day claims that Rancière's division of the avant-garde into either categories of 'strategic vanguardism' or Schiller's aesthetics of sensible partition, introduces a dualism which is 'totally artificial, ignoring the fluidity of social process and the mutability of political subject formation under determinate situations.'[310] She says that this separation demands an anti-historical formulation, in the sense that 'his account (of art) is subject to a certain dehistoricisation that follows from the rigid separation he makes between the autonomy of aesthetic experience and autonomy within historical and institutionalised social practices.' [311]

Rancière advocates the replacement of the notion of political efficacy with that of 'aesthetic efficacy'. This entails aesthetic distance through the suspension of artistic intention (after Schelling's notion of the free play of the senses). He defends aesthetic efficacy on the grounds of 'its capacity to resist forms of economic, political and ideological domination', through a dissensual commonsense.[312] For Rancière the aesthetic efficacy of art is based upon a paradoxical distancing in which the artwork is premised upon indifference and subtraction. This withdrawal is conceptualised by Schiller as 'free play' and 'free appearance'. [313] So the artwork is 'radically indifferent, absent in will or design' and he characterizes this as the aesthetic rupture that is the paradoxical efficacy of dissensus.

What is called for is a more nuanced understanding of art's political efficacy that would recognise a principle of efficacy immanent to the processes of the translation of social forms and modes of reception advocated by Bourriaud. Rancière dismisses as anti-aesthetic the tendency of critical art to obey the injunctions of political efficacy and ethical immediacy. In other words, for art to 'step outside of itself' but this

[310] Day, p. 400.
[311] Day, p. 402.
[312] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 139.
[313] Rancière, *Dissensus* p. 138.

pairing of inside and outside contradicts the sensorium of art and politics he advocates elsewhere. Rancière's aesthetic efficacy is the free play of relation assigned to an abdication from the *productive* relation of non-relation between art and its social institutions and conditions of production.

It is this double movement that perhaps conditions Rancière's overall rejection of the critical model of relational art practice. He says that relational art 'shuttles' between representational distance – that is, an eagerness to avoid representational mediation – by enacting itself performatively, and the self-evidence of its efficacy as political art. In an important passage in *Dissensus* Rancière summarises the position as follows:

> we continue to believe that art has to leave the art world in order to be effective in 'real life': we continue to try to overturn the logic of the theatre by making the spectator active, by turning the art exhibition into a place of political activism or by sending artists into the streets of derelict suburbs to invent new modes of social relations. It thus appears that, from the outset, the idea of critical art is caught between two types of pedagogy: one that could be called *representational mediation*, and another we might refer to as *ethical immediacy*.[314]

Rancière views relational aesthetics as symptomatic of a post-utopian present in which it becomes parodic of so-called political art caught within undecidability. He says that this undecideability feeds off the equivalence that now prevails between parody-as-critique and the parody-of-critique.[315] What Rancière identifies as pernicious is that: 'This undecidability in turn tends to boil down to the simple parodic *mise-en-scène* of its own magic', and, that this mode of manifestation is characteristic of the commodity itself.[316]

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[314] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 137.
[315] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 144.
[316] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 145.

This criticism is unduly harsh in the light of this art's critical role in framing the anti-relational as the 'real'. Non-relational conceptual tools hinder the thinking of relation but they also make non-relational form the content of this art. This is a content that reverberates around the wider socius. It treats relational art as the self-evident practice of demonstrating art's political efficacy rather than an enquiry into what its political efficacy might be, driven by a clear methodology.

Rancière's views on critical art it must be noted have been subject to a number of fluctuations. His tendency to re-work and re-publish some of his texts can make it difficult to track the development of his thought. In spite of this difficulty, it is fair to say that Rancière's de-ontologised view of relation is behoven to a classicism of relational thought that actually obstructs the new thinking of relation.

Collage and Montage

Within Rancière's proposal for new critical art there is an underlying methodology of collage or montage that mirrors relational aesthetics: it proposes a *recombinant practice*. Rancière's theory of dissensual community is though, a poor model for a *performative methodology of social action*. Jacques Aumont's analysis of montage is clear in that it is the relationship of the inorganic to the organic of the social whole that distinguishes *productive montage*.[317] I contrast this with Jameson's unproductive model of *bricolage*.[318] Rancière's *social* montage, lacks or rather rejects outright any relation to the socially organic, socio-symbolic forms or the social autonomy of art and its institutions, and is therefore open to the charge of 'social bricolage'.

Rancière seeks to unproblematically migrate the pictoral logic of montage into a principle of social action, as we can see in the following passage:

[317] Jacques Aumont, 'Montage in Question', in *Montage: Eisenstein* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1987)
[318] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1992)

If collage has been one of modern art's major techniques, the reason is that its technical forms obey a more fundamental aesthetico-political logic…. Collage can be realized as the pure encounter between heterogenous elements, attesting *en bloc* to the incompatibility of two worlds. [319]

What Rancière regards as affirmative in collage is that it is a process that is, 'nourished in the performances of critical art' and that it is polemical in form. [320] In *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, Rancière establishes a relationship between dissensus and collage in which 'redistribution' has two different inflections through 'dissensual collage': the first is destructive of existing sensory distributions, and the second entails the placement of one logic inside another - in Rancière's words 'placing one sensible world in another'[321] or dividing something – a community, in relation to itself.

For Rancière, collage facilitates the practice of fiction, as a matter of inventing new framing strategies within the sensible realm. But I think that this does not entail any crossing of a boundary between fiction and reality, but rather, multiplies fiction against reality. Overall I would summarise Rancière's position as follows: He attempts to present the aesthetic regime of art as an exemplary paraconsistent logic in which the difference between sense and sense might emerge in the form of the dissensual dispositif. But the heterological separation of its relatum from the state or the police order, cannot achieve this because he severs the sensible from the social in such a way as to produce a space of dis-identification.

[319] Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), p. 47.
[320] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 151.
[321] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: on Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 211

The anti-relationality of Alain Badiou

I will now consider Badiou's anti-relational philosophy and Peter Hallward's critique of Badiou's thought in *Think Again* (2004) and *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (2003). Badiou's thought takes us to the very limit of what is sayable of relation at the level of classical ontology and logic. But I will begin with Hallward's useful analysis of Eduard Glissant's 'Poetics of Relation', in order to begin to determine the context within which relation might be viewed as complicit with a deterministic politics and the 'extinction' of the singular.[322] Hallward posits the binary poles of 'sovereign relation' and 'sovereign singularity' as the dualism of particularity and singularity that informs Badiou's thought.

A clear distinction must be made between relation, classically defined as not an object for philosophy or as a vector within logic and the notion of material singular relation proposed by post-relational practice. Classical thought can only really conceive of the latter as some form of evental occurrence: that is a mechanism for acknowledging its influence without granting it a determinate ontology.

For Hallward the consequence of thinking within sovereign relation and sovereign singularity creates a twofold danger. The first entails a positivist *Grundnorm* of relation, which authorises a structured system of relation equating the rational with the good. The second danger is that of a 'totality of equivalences'. In its second guise then it takes on a Spinozian or Leibnizian promise of totality. To follow Hallward's critique of Eduard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, relation takes the baroque form of a self-regulating nature in a discourse based upon the 'extinction of the specific', [323] or the dissolution of the individual in the whole. [324]

[322] Peter Hallward, 'Edouard Glissant : Between the Singular and the Specific', *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11.2 (1998), 441-464.
[323] Hallward, 'Edouard Glissant', p. 458.
[324] 'Here, Relation *is* reality, it is not a 'relationship' *between* things. In perhaps what is the most and important declaration of the book Glissant explains that: 'to the degree that our consciousness of relation is total, that is immediate and turned immediately to the realizable totality of the world, *we no longer need, when we evoke a poetics of*

This binary rubric then lends itself towards a thinking of Relation as that which equates all forms of reality. 'Relation abolishes all representation of relation; ultimately it even abolishes the very idea of relation, to simply become… Relation.'[325] Rather than claim any being of relation, a proposition that would thereby relate, it aims, 'to arrive at that perfect tautology, 'only Relation is relation'.[326] Ultimately this thinking produces an aporia of non-relation based upon a principle of identity.

The Dangers of non-relation

It is the 'twofold danger' of Relation modelled as a sovereign concept – as liberal democratic positivism or as the baroque 'extinction of the specific', which informs Badiou's insitence upon 'implacable singularity' and therefore the primacy of 'non-relation' – within a militant politics of the event. This adherence to the singular, defined as that which subtracts itself from any situation, forms the basis of Badiou's critique of 'didacto-romanticism' in art in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. In other words it would seem that art, as a truth procedure, must in Badiou's writing remain subordinate to the achitecture of the philosophical framework established in *Being and Event*. Badiou's supporters, notably Bruno Bosteels, have expressed the view that *Being and Event* is a necessary step within the development of Badiou's overall philosophical system and have emphasised that Badiou's more recent work, which seeks to theorise those mechanisms of appearing which lie between being and event, constitute a return to the materialist dialectics of *Theory of the Subject.*[327] Both *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* can therefore be characterised as systematic explorations of the relation that is no-relation, between

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relation, to add: relation between what and what? That is why the French word 'Relation', which functions a bit like an intransitive verb, does not correspond for example to the English term relationship.' Hallward, 'Edouard Glissant', p. 456.

[325] Hallward, 'Edouard Glissant', p. 457.

[326] Hallward, 'Edouard Glissant', p. 457.

[327] Bruno Bosteels, 'Alain Badiou's Theory of the Subject: the Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?' in *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, ed. by Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 115-168.

implacable singularity and determinate particularity. From the perspective of the development of a materialist dialectic, there is support for the view, notably again from Bosteels, that Badiou has succeeded in moving beyond the abstraction of *Being and Event*. However in relation to Badiou's pronouncements on art, there remains a clear division between his anti-relational theory and his polemical work. Even his 'Manifesto of Affirmationist Art' retains a baffling abstraction.

In other words there are fundamental problems with Badiou's aesthetic theory and this is reflected in the lack of interest or application of his theories within the contemporary critical discourse of aesthetics. Rancière's caustic analysis of Badiou, is that his neo-Platonic adherence to 'the passage of the idea' denies the subtractive or singular event any sensible form – hence the lack of examples in his work of what an affirmationist work of art might be, or look like. Badiou also identifies a notion of the subtractive artistic work with artistic autonomy that is classically modernist in hue. That is to say, whilst lauding artistic autonomy as subtraction, his theory simply does not recognise the properly dialectical relationship between artistic autonomy and artistic heteronomy. Badiou's subtractive delineation of what is proper to art is thus strangely non-dialectical. Rancière condemns it as anti-aesthetics. To take Badiou at his own word, this is, indeed, an 'avant-garde without the avant-garde'.[328]

These two criticisms culminate in what Rancière describes as Badiou's 'twisted Platonism', an unlikely alliance between the condemnation of images and the necessity of their appearance as the sensible passage of the pure idea. Moreover Badiou's rejection of hybrid forms of artistic practice aligns his thinking with modernisms that make his ideas difficult to reconcile with contemporary artistic practice. Badiou identifies not just what is proper to art, but to the various arts: his analysis of cinema as a 'bastard art' is typical of this trait. More fundamentally Badiou's

[328] Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. by Alberto Toscano (London: Polity Press, 2007)

separation of art and politics seems untenable in the present moment. Significantly this separation ignores the relationship between artistic and other types of labour, and the fact that in whatever form it takes, art remains tied inextricably to a model of production.

Sovereign Singularity as Subtraction

In *Polemics*, Badiou is scathing about the influence of particularity in its post-modern form:

> we can refer to as 'postmodern' that which bears witness to the unlimited and capricious influence of particularity. Two types of particularity exist: there is communitarian, ethnic, linguistic, religious, sexual, and so on, particularity; and then there is biographical particularity, the self as that which imagines that it can and must 'express itself'.[329]

He says that these 'postmodern products' are the material form of a pure and simple regression to Romanticism.[330] Badiou proposes an affirmationist art contrary to the saturation of didacticism, classicism and romanticism and the didacto-romanticism of the 20th century. Against the problem of 'domination in all the arts by the figures of egoistic and communitarian expressiveness, which is only a degraded didactico-romanticism, a kind of avant-garde without avant-garde.'[331] This difference between the singular and the particular posits the singular as non-relation and the particular as relational. Badiou speaks of an 'implacable singularity.' [332] Badiou relates the singular to 'subtraction' as follows: 'In subtraction art destines the real it encounters to all people, negating the influence of particularity. Subtraction is the modern method for integrally affirming the universal.'[333] According to Badiou's logic this is the 'maximal appearance of the singular' or what I term relation without relation, as a thinking of the positive.

[329] Alain Badiou, *Polemics*, trans. by Steve Corcoran (New York: Verso, 2006), p. 134.
[330] Badiou, *Polemics*, p. 135.
[331] Badiou, *Polemics*, p. 136.
[332] Badiou, *Polemics*, p. 143.
[333] Badiou, *Polemics*, p. 142.

Badiou's *Manifesto of Affirmationist Art*, which repeats the aesthetic figure of the idea as supra-sensible is symptomatic of a broader problem in Badiou's thought: it is anti-relational all the way down. To put this in terms of Hallward's terms, we might say that Badiou's response to the danger of 'sovereign relation' is an espousal of 'sovereign singularity'. That is, Badiou's thought represents the binary completion of an axis of relation and non-relation in which the dialectical middle ground or mediating term is excluded because the singular is at all times irreducible. This is the residue of Badiou's Maoism. Hallward's suggest against this, a potential middle ground. He proposes that philosophy can and must address *what is specific rather than specified*. Hallward's assertion is that some consideration of the time, place and quality of relation allows for the emergence of a properly dialectical relationality, which is excluded by Badiou's logical or set-theoretic construction.[334]

Badiou's supporters might object that Hallward's critique in *Subject to Truth* is based upon a reading of *Being and Event*, and must be read in this light. Badiou addressed the problem of location and topology well before this in his materialist dialectic, *Theory of the Subject* (1982) and returned to this materialism in the form of the logic of appearance in *Logics of Worlds* (2006). I will discuss this in due course when I consider Hallward's response to *Logics*, but for the moment I wish to set out the 'rules of engagement' that govern the critique of Badiou's anti-relationality.

Rather than solve the question of non-relation through the introduction of a mediating term it is more fruitful to ask why is Badiou an anti-relational thinker all the way down? Hallward cites two major influences on Badiou's thought: these are Maoism and set theory. Badiou's Maoism influences his theorisation of the event as the splitting of thought, in

[334] Peter Hallward, 'Order & Event: On Badiou's Logics of Worlds', *New Left Review*, 53 (2008), 97-122.

which the 'third term' does not arise *stricto sensu* unless externally imposed. The split creates an instance of pure decision between undecideable terms and as such there is no necessary relation that emerges between evental terms in a reflective dialectical sense, rather, the third term remains external to them both. This is one instance of anti-relationality all the way down.

Set theory forms the basis of Badiou's 'monumental construction', as Benjamin Noys terms it.[335] Badiou's monumental theoretical construction is perhaps the final attempt to resolve the antinomies of metaphysics within a coherent philosophical system. This meta-ontology relies upon the absence of objects for mathematics, its pure abstraction, in order to construct an account of the relationship between what inexists as purely multiple and that which is determined according to the One of a logic. It also seeks to account for the passage from one to the other through the overdetermining and diremptive effect of an event upon a situation.

Since, in terms of set theory, the event can only occur at the void point of a situation, Hallward identifies a dualism in Badiou's thought between that which is presented and that which is represented in a situation. The void as described by Badiou, accepts no more than an existential predicate, that is, its elements exist but eschew any relational predication all the way down. In Hallward's terms, such relations are punctual rather than qualitative.

Hallward, it seems to me is right to express misgivings about the dualism at the heart of Badiou's thought. In Alberto Toscano's 'Introduction' to *Logics* he remarks upon the marked difference between Badiou's philosophical and polemical writings. This in fact has influenced my choice of an Adornian methodology. This brings me back to a primary assertion of this research; that it is only through the dissimulations of the essay or the polemic that we are provided with the means to explore what

[335] Benjamin Noys, 'Monumental Construction': Badiou and the Politics of Aesthetics', *Third Text*, 23.4 (2008), pp. 383-39.

is singular rather than specified or particular, or to address the appearance of the sensible without being thereby determined beneath a sovereign relation or sublimated within sovereign singularity.

Thawing relations? Badiou's Onto-logy of Appearances

In 'Some Replies to a Demanding Friend', the Afterword of Hallward's *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, Badiou issued an emphatic response to the criticism that in *Being and Event*, his anti-relational use of set theory rendered it too abstract and non–dialectical.[336] In this text he set out an ambitious statement of intent, in which broadly speaking he indicates the proposed teleology of his logic of appearing. His aims can be summarised as follows: to provide an account of *Dasein*, of being-there, or the structure through which appearances are manifested within a situation, whilst maintaining the ontological primacy of mathematics through set theory. Badiou's approach to this precarious task is to maintain a metaontology of mathematics, and at the same time to provide an account of logical relation that avoids any return to post-Fregean analytical logic.[337] To recall, Badiou's *Theory of the Subject* proposes an evental model as a first dialectical movement within a second dialectical passage based upon topology or 'splacing' allied to a model of subjective agency in turn reliant upon forcing and fidelity.

This was based upon a rather narrow prescription of the event as a rare occurrence, lacking any possibility of pre-evental analysis. The important question that drives this analysis is whether one can instigate a categorical or ordered logic of relation, capable of serving any practical purpose in

[336] *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Hallward (London: Continuum Books, 2004), pp. 232-237.

[337] 'That logic can be properly understood as mathematical requires a conception of logic that allows it to emerge from within the movement of mathematics itself, rather than from the application of a linguistic frame to mathematics.' So the real question is 'what event of thought, with regard to logic, enables philosophy to evade the hold of grammar and logic?' Badiou finds his answer in category or topos theory so that 'Logic is a local dimension of possible mathematical universes' Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 302.

the analysis of art, politics or any other truth procedure. Must Badiou's philosophical and polemical writings remain themselves in a relation of non-relation?[338]

The stakes though are much higher than this. Hallward opens this out into a broader question – that of the catachrestic relation-non-relation between classical and intuitionist logics.[339] The first, which is punctual in character, remains bound to the law of the excluded middle. Badiou's militant Maoism paradoxically positions him within a classical system, which denies the emergence of any third or mediating dialectical term between the objects comprised within a category. [340] Badiou rejects mediation within a categorically determined situation *tout court*. Peter Osborne describes Badiou's *Being and Event* as 'perhaps *the* great work of philosophical neo-classicism.[341]

Intuitionist logic would allow for such mediation, and crucially, temporalises the splitting of terms. It would allow also for the quality of

[338] 'Now nonrelational abstract being is itself endowed with a more relational, more emphatically situated onto-logical dimension: the dimension of its appearing or being-there. As Badiou writes, 'being is essentially being-there (Da-sein),' and 'being-there is conceivable only in terms of relation' since every 'there' is the product of a particular set of differential relations that flesh out a situation in a particular way. There is thus less of a stark choice between disjunction and relation, between deliaison and liaison, than there is a recognition of the apparent paradox that 'being is multiple, in radical disjunction [deliaison], and yet at the same time everything is in relation' (TA 16.1.96) To some extent at least, Badiou has incorporated the relational alternative his philosophy, thus far, had always sought to exclude.' Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, pp. 293-294.

[339] 'The overcoming of classicism requires the three-'if not-not p is to be something more (or less) than P, we need a third position that is that of the time of creative negation or transcendence. Nonclassical logic, in other words, presumes a genuine mediation of P and not P as a relation over time (the disjunction of outcome from origin), whereas classical logic presumes the immediate identity of P and not – not P (the identity of outcome and origin)' Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* p. 310.

[340] 'The essential thing to remember is that the configuration of a two always eliminates relations between two elements. Such relations are indeed, as Badiou argues, describable only from the position of an implicit third element. The 'between' is external to the two. As pure splitting, the two has no discernible terms in the strict sense; such terms come to exist as a consequence of the two, as a result of a true decision, itself made as a choice between strictly 'indiscernible' elements, the two of a truth will divide its situation between those who are for or those who are against, but this division is always a result: before the two, the situation was governed by the false unity of consensus, by the apparent identification of elements with their situational place.' Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, p. 47.

[341] Peter Osborne 'Neo-Classic: Alain Badiou's Being and Event' *Radical Philosophy*, 142, March/April (2007), pp. 19-29. (p. 19)

relation to count for something.[342] This distinction is very much redolent of Gashé and Schimmel's exposition of relation as *ens minimum (minimal being)* with which I will begin my final chapter. If we are to mitigate the ultra-Platonism of the purely singular non-relation, through the promissory and intuitionist notion of a relational configuration, the purity of any classical logical construction becomes untenable. This is borne out by Badiou's efforts to accommodate the demands of the intuitionist-relational imperative within a classical logical framework. He produces a general logic of marvellous intricacy, but perhaps also an epitaph to 'what is proper to philosophy'.

In this vein, *Logics* makes adjustments to the architecture of *Being and Event*, firstly by retroactively ascribing being to the multiple on the basis of axiomatic inference as the first principle of materialism.[343] Formally speaking this is a perfect solution to Badiou's distrust of Hegel's absolute; it defines Badiou's logic in materialist terms, and it is his only concession to temporality, a necessary concession since it creates a fissure between being and appearing. So, the transcendental functor of a situation confers being upon multiplicity *a posteriori*. This fissure finds its expression through Badiou's postulate of materialism.

The postulate of materialism in conjunction with the retroaction of being qua being crucially introduces an onto-logy of what appears in a rather

[342] 'Philosophy can have no distinctive purpose if thought is not conceived as a creative practice that resists, in its essence, specification by an object, interest, or identity. Thought cannot be reduced to the passivity of consumption or representation…. My own question is simply this: what kind of de-specification does thought involve? Does it involve subtraction not only from the positively, objectively specified…but from the properly specific as well, in the sense of being specific to but not determined by something? Should we not distinguish a specified realm of definition or classification from a properly relational realm of the specific per se? This is a distinction Badiou is generally reluctant to make.' Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, p. 28.

[343] 'Between two objects A and B there can exist relations (i.e., variations on the relation of order, or is> and<), on the condition that these relations 'preserve the essential characteristics of their regime of appearing: localizations, and intensities of existence.' Or again: a relation between two objects preserves the atomic logic of these objects' That is they are particular but logically (mathematically) determined.' Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, p. 300.

unconvincing theory of atomism.[344] Therefore, in spite of Badiou's rejection of any ability of a categorical element to differ or differentiate, he needs a basic thread of relation between being and appearance, which he can therefore only expresses as a logical existential predicate. Category theory then is used to confer a materialist ontology upon set theory, in a way that compounds the overall abstraction of Badiou's philosophy.[345]

The question of 'actuality' in *Logics* is linked to the 'Transcendental functor', in terms of the degree of an element's appearing. This is a basic relation of ordering (> or <). Again both being and quality are simply predicated as ordered categories and the theory remains essentially abstract.[346] Overall, then, we might say, to mimic Rancière that the future of relation is already behind us. It will always remain a philosophical problem provided one remains within the confines of what is proper to philosophy, a classically structured ontology. Aesthetics has grown restless with this impasse. This is because Badiou's classical logic cannot rise to the challenge of expressing any relation that is not already subject to a transcendental functor of its appearing.[347] This is the basis of the

[344] 'If the objects that appear in a world can be broken down into such minimal and indecomposeable components then it is logically possible to correlate them directly to the comparatively minimal elements of a corresponding mathematical set'.There is no doubting such a logical possibility. Crucially, however, Badiou's theory offers no way of demonstrating that such a correlation is actually real or effective. That every such atomic prescription is real must be assumed here is a pure postulate, which Badiou names the postulate of materialism'.' Peter Hallward, 'Order & Event: On Badiou's Logics of Worlds', *New Left Review*, 53 (2008), 97-122 (p. 113).

[345] In 'Some Replies to a Demanding Friend', Badiou says; 'The main theorem of this whole theory demonstrates the existence of a crucial link between appearance and being, namely the retroaction, onto a pure multiple, of the transcendental structuring of a world. Using the pure relational logic of Topoi, we can actually demonstrate that, when it is caught up in a determinate world, a multiple receives an intrinsic form. This theory 'shows both that every object is composed of atoms and that every' homogenous' part of an object can be synthesized (i.e. enveloped by a dominant term)', *Hallward, Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Hallward (London: Continuum Books, 2004), p. 235.

[346] 'What a transcendental does, essentially, is to order the various elements of its world in terms of their existential intensity: the fundamental wager of Logics is that the simple mathematical relation of asymmetrical order (i.e. the relation that ranks any given quantity as greater-than or lesser than other qualities) suffices, ultimately to organize the otherwise infinitely ramified complexity of a world' Peter Hallward, 'Order & Event: On Badiou's Logics of Worlds', *New Left Review*, 53 (2008), 97-122 (p. 111)

[347] 'as long as philosophy is defined as singular rather than specific, as long as it preserves itself in its pure de liaison, as long as it retains a strictly axiomatic integrity, it will not be able to provide a fully convincing account for the shift from withdrawal

crisis of relation in art. The question is, then, whether an 'intuitionist logic' might avoid this determinism?

In conclusion, what this chapter demonstrates is that the re-thinking of relation requires us to critically examine, and where necessary discard, the conceptual tools of philosophy currently at our disposal. I say this in the spirit of Adorno's identification of the problems of philosophy as the insistence upon the thinking of identity. In the next chapter I will explore a rethinking of relation and representation that seeks to avoid the pitfalls of non-relational thinking identified in this chapter. What this chapter also demonstrates is that an anarchistic and exclusively heterogenous thinking of relation is no less anti-relational than the articulation of appearance through a formal logic. What is required then is an epistemology of singular relation, which might allow its own topologies upon a principle of inhabitation of extant social forms and institutions. What I have sought to identify is that it is the praxis of relational art that in fact demands a theoretical approach adequate to its appearance as an object. Consequently, post-relational thinking as an emerging category, defines the parameters of a new political aesthetics.

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to intervention, from subtraction to transformation, from prescription to production.' Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 322.

Chapter 4: Relational Form as Representation

Introduction

In this chapter I will be addressing one of the pivotal questions of this research: whether forms of non-visual representation might be available to relational and post-relational practices without thereby compromising their credentials as micropolitical works? As I indicated in my first chapter, notwithstanding Bourriaud's hostility towards 'the visual' he insists that the art of 'the present day' must find languages, epistemologies and forms of representation appropriate to a globalized aesthetics and which might challenge the 'problem of general reification'. In the first part of this chapter I consider various proposals that have been put forward and identify the different types of representation that might be included within a 'defence of representation'. Essentially the need for new forms of representation is a response to the requirement that relational forms appear; that is, in Bourriaud's terms that they are capable of inscription 'as fact'. It also enables a rethinking of the political efficacy of art which has tended to reject relational artworks on this very basis.

Re-thinking representation is not simply a matter, however, of expanding the notion to include formal topologies or more sophisticated spatio-temporal relations that allow for the conjuncture of extenuated formal matrices. I will argue, following on from my analysis of classical relation in the previous chapter, that relation itself needs to be re-thought in order that these representative forms may take hold. So for example the thinking of the 'aformal intricacy' of relation and 'relational shape' suggested by Rodolphe Gashé requires a movement of thought beyond the general/particular division and some recognition of the relational event that the principle of relating entails. What I aim to demonstrate is that the notion of relation has a long provenance and contested ontology, and that certain features of the ontological problem of relation are currently being rehearsed within arguments around political aesthetics. They re-appear now, I suggest, because, against a backdrop of capitalised relation, in which every relation is an object, the subject appears

inadequate to its object. The contested ontology of relation grants certain permissions to the artist, a certain freedom that enables a critique of advanced capital and the commodity form. This requires, the positing of a non-relation between ontology and knowledge. This is a complex point. I intend to move the thinking of relation into closer alignment with Bourriaud's aleatory materialism and inductive methodology: towards a thinking of complex and novel relations as objects that have their time and place, or topology. The aim then is not to re-ontologise aformally intricate relations: this would entail their particularisation and return us to the aporia described in Chapter 3. Rather the aim is to grant some epistemic validity to emerging aformal relations as evental relations that require no ontology and in fact must precede their eventual ontological and epistemological determination as accepted or 'established fact'.

In order not to totally abandon 'the visual' I will then look at the documentation of live art and the ontology that underlies this in order to consider how relational art might use, or continue to use visual representations – principally still and moving images – *against* ideology. This entails some thinking of the way in which documentation is in fact the staging of an encounter itself between performer and documenter, and the ways in which these documents 'invite discourse', as potentially transitively ethical. This will require some re-thinking of the image. I turn to Jacques Rancière for this in order to move the emphasis away from meaning and mute alterity (Roland Barthes' analysis) and place the image within its circuits of exchange and its formal operations. I will then complete the chapter with some reflections on the potential use of matrices and relational shapes as objective categories of the real. This is an Adornian movement and relies, once again, upon what is inductive, fragmentary and aleatory in these constructions as at once the presentation of an immanent logic that also contains shards of the wider social without thereby totalising it. It proposes the singular relational formation as a singular and thereby objective appearance of the real.

Critical Realism and Documentation after Micropolitics

Critical realism or social realism has emerged as possible only with the demise of micropolitics. It forms an important part of the credo of the group Chto Delat for example. For Roberts, the Russian groups Chto Delat exemplify a third avant-garde:

> In contradistinction to the historic avant-garde, the new avant-garde 'necessarily has the negation of capitalism's totality as its point of departure.' At the same time it strives to connect this negativity with aesthetic method, adequate to the study of the world in which new subjectivity arises not only as something destructive, but as something that produces social life.[348]

Chto Delat's avant-garde model is divided into three categories or principles:

> realism as critical-modernist method in the spirit of Bertholt Brecht (mapping as a form of resistance, counter-narrativization and counterhistoricization, montage, subversive affirmation, the carnivalesque, fictional reenactment); fidelity to the revolutionary impulse of the historic avant-garde as totalizing critique; and a defence of artistic autonomy as a principle of self-organisation. [349]

Chto Delat's model of practice encapsulates the strands of internationalism and networked organisation, with a commitment to a post-relational capitalist realism. Its utopianism and revolutionary pathos are not premised upon the oxymoron of critical engagement, but operates as a heightened sensible form of fiction that sits within the hypostasis of relation-non-relation, or as Adorno would call it a 'wrong world'. Roberts points out that in their work the gap between the actual and the ideal is a productive one. Their work does not entail a production of new utopian forms of disengagement from the world, but rather it seeks these fissures

[348] Roberts, 'Revolutionary Pathos, Negation and the Suspensive Avant-Garde', *New Literary History* , 41 (2011), 717-730., p.728.
[349] Roberts, 'Revolutionary Pathos', p.724.

in the world as points of critical artistic engagement. [350] In other words, we need to view its utopianism not in the terms of utopian modernism rejected by Bourriaud or by Rancière as a paradise for aesthetes and amateurs, but rather, regard it as a productive fissure in which we can critically rediscover the communist form.

If social realism emerges from post-relational models of suspension, I think that documentary artistic practices serve an important role in this respect. I have already explored the de-ontologised document through the work of Auslander. To recall, the document is now defined by its role as mediator rather than in relation to any original event. Boris Groys has recently put forward the idea that the document is no longer based upon any solid foundation of time, and that it points always away from the present. In ceasing to be of the, or any, present, he says that it no longer 'presents' art but merely stores it – alluding only to its deferral.[351] This may offer some solution to Badiou's conundrum of presentation without representation. More than this it reflects the suspensive nature of post-relational practice in such a way that allows for the presentation of relational shape since it is both a representation and a form of mediation between subjects.

A Defence of Representation

The artists collective Chto Delat have recently published a collection of essays that call for a reappraisal of the role of representation within politically engaged artistic practice. Dmitry Vilensky argues in an essay titled, 'In Defence of Representation' that it is reductive to equate representation with hierarchy or to alternatively to assume that the rejection of representation denotes its absence.[352] Moreover, he warns

[350] Roberts, p.724.
[351] Groys, B., 'Comrades of Time' in *Cognitive Architecture: From Biopolitics to Noopolitics: Architecture & Mind in the Age of Communication and Information*, ed. by Deborah Hauptmann and Warren Neidich (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010), p. 96.
[352] Dmitry Vilensky, 'In Defence of Representation' http://chtodelat.org (unpaginated). Downloaded on 08/08/12.

that it is dangerous to leave a vacuum of representation that is left open to precisely the forms of ideological exploitation that politically engaged artists generally seek to avoid. He argues that the role of representation is to produce consciousness and that the acquisition of consciousness is itself an act of representation. David Riff makes the point more strongly when he says that a representation divorced from consciousness is not actually a representation.[353] What is more, Riff observes that consciousness can breed productively upon 'representations of misrepresentations'.

Vilensky makes what might appear to be the trite observation that radical art 'needs to be noticed' and that events 'need to be experienced'. In the light of my observations on the critique of relational aesthetics, the point is anything but trite. One of the major obstacles that early relational art encountered was an inability to account for its mode of appearance. This not only led to a misreading of relational art as a project of dematerialisation, it pushed the documentation of relational art into an ontology of performance/document, which is unhelpful. I will deal with this question in due course. Vilensky's overall position is that you cannot change the world without representations and that globalization calls for new systems of representation. He proposes a dialectic of representation and participation. Bourriaud is of course in overall agreement with this position.

If participation is then, to be considered within the ambit of representation then we might add the other 'performative' cognates of relational art on the basis that they are performative acts of consciousness. Gene Ray argues that as reality changes reality requires a change in the modes of representation and the means by which to de-reify society.[354] On that basis we might include within these new modes,

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[353] David Riff, 'A Representation Which is Divorced from the Consciousness of those whom it Represents is no Representation. What I do not know, I do not worry about' http://chtodelat.org

[354] Gene Ray, 'Radical Learning and Dialectical Realism: Brecht and Adorno on Representing Capitalism, http://chtodelat.org

encounters, gestures, discussion, along with some of the operations we identify with informational labour. We could then include feedback, networking and the management of the nodal switches that dictate informational flows and produce counter-networks. Specifically, postproductive and radicant practices such as montage as a principle of social action, screenplay and sampling might also be fitted within the ambit of *representative actions.* Provided one reads these performative actions of and upon consciousness within a mimetically productive framework, one can see here, the basis for a counter-public. That is, a series of operations of *Erfharung* that produce spaces for consciousness. What is more Bourriaud's aleatory materialism prepares the ground for the recognition of new categories of representation. Gene Ray observes that in order to de-reify society one must be able to recognise it not as natural (in Althusser's terms necessary) but as a changing 'causal nexus' as an ensemble of relations that are historical. In other words, the elements of a theory of relational representation are in place, but at present, the micropolitical influence over its programme has inhibited Bourriaud in making a strong and direct connection between his performative principle of social action and the appropriation of forms and the articulation of this as a methodology of representation. One might argue after Jodi Dean and Jason Jones that this form of territorialised and non-totalising representation might be named 'post-representational'.[355] I would add that this would need then to be closely aligned with Bourriaud's methodology of the fragment.

I have said that Bourriaud fails to make emphatic the connection between the principles of social action and representation. In Steve Edwards 'Two Critiques of Representation (Against Lamination)' he identifies another problem with the rejection of representation. This is the substitution of 'bourgeois' forms of representation with problematic models of participation as a form of direct democracy. He claims that this is naive and idealistic on the basis that representation not only persists but is,

[355] Jodi Dean and Jason Jones, 'Occupy Wall Street and the Politics of Representation', http://chtodelat.org

moreover, essential to 'naming collective life'.[356] We have seen this objection raised in the critique of Rancière's aesthetics of dissensus as a disassociated politics. Where Edwards advances that argument is to point out that this type of extreme autonomy in fact pays insufficient regard to the representative forms of liberal democracy itself and the 'interpellative processes of capital and the state'. This mode of the refusal of representation therefore posits an idealised autonomous subject capable of operating beyond these strictures. In recent art he says that the communist critique of representative democracy becomes laminated with the ethical edict against 'speaking for the other', which thereby produces a reluctance to engage in representation; and in relational aesthetics, the endorsement of participation against representation. I would agree that there is some truth in this, particularly in early relational art. This is why this debate might catalyze relational art's call for new forms of representation and give a vigour to its *materialist* claims: claims that currently lack credulity. It also permits and necessitates some reappraisal of the role of documentation in relational art.

Before I consider this I want to turn to the philosophy of relation. I do this in order to look at the premises upon which the representative forms of relationality I have discussed might take hold and avoid regression into the binary aporia of generality and particularity.

What is a Relation?

The problem of relation turns upon its ambiguous ontology. Should we treat relation as a thing? Or, is the real of relation that relation that is no relation, expressed as the singularity of the minimal thing? This disputed ontology remains essential to current thinking in which the anti-relationality of the singular is posited against the materialism of the particular. Relation has emerged as a crucial category in the rethinking of artistic political agency because for the left this ontological schism is

[356] Steve Edwards, 'Two Critiques of Representation (Against Lamination)', http://chtodelat.org

overshadowed by the seeming political failure of classical Marxism and the purported failures of the avant-garde. On this basis, the thinking and production of the new must therefore be formulated in terms that abandon the party structure and the utopian forms of modernism. This produces an appeal to the appearance of the singular. We might say that the antinomy of this demand forms the situation within which aesthetics is called upon to re-think its modes of representation.

In his introduction to *Of Minimal Things: Studies in the Notion of Relation*, Rodolphe Gashé provides an overview of the history of 'relational' ontology.[357] He begins with the claim that the subsumption of the category of relation to formal predictive logic in the 19th and 20th centuries, along with the 're-elaboration of the foundations of mathematics' gives the impression that relation has run its course and finds philosophical elucidation only within the analytic tradition.[358] In Hegelian terms, he claims that this perspective produces a one-sided logic of relation, which in fact subsumes mathematical logic beneath linguistics. [359] What interests Gashé is, rather, the classical theory of relation. This provides him with a point of departure from which to reopen its ontology. Significantly, he introduces this question as being extra- philosophical, on the basis that relation in fact defines the limits of philosophical enquiry *itself*. Relation can be articulated not only within predicative logic, but also within the rhetoric of the limit. And from this perspective it is specifically the negotiation of this limit, which is the central challenge to its ontological determination or non-determination.

Gashé tells us that the increased sophistication of the medieval framing of relational terms, and the attendant philosophical debate around diverging theories of relation in the 14th century, gave rise to those contradictions, which are of continuing relevance today. He says that: 'realist and

[357] Rodolphe Gashé, *Of Minimal Things: Studies on the Notion of Relation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)
[358] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 1.
[359] It is important to retain some essence of this notion of relation, perhaps in abeyance, since it does link a certain notion of relation to informational and networking logic.

conceptualist theories of relation were pitted against one another' and that this was motivated by a theological enquiry, which asked whether there existed a real relation, 'between God and his creatures'.[360] This debate drew heavily upon Aristotle's assumption that a relation is an 'attribute, or accident', of a subject, or substance'. In spite of this aleatory quality Gashé asserts that mediaeval theories of relation were nevertheless realist:

> Contrary to the Stoics, who held all relations to be subjective and to lack all extramental reality, medieval philosophers believed in the reality of relations. Their overall concern was what kind of extramental being to ascribe to relations. Generally speaking, the type of being that Scholastic philosophy accorded to relations is that of a thing.[361]

Notwithstanding this: 'If by conceiving of relations as 'things' the Scholastics credited relations with extramental reality, they nonetheless accorded a very specific ontological status to this reality.'[362] The scholastics accorded *being* to relation as a thing, but its ontological status remained essentially an accidental attribute; 'a real relation is an Aristotelian attribute, or accident, one that amounts to the property, *inhering in a thing*, of being-toward-another'[my emphasis].[363] This is the sense in which Aristotle terms the being of relation as *pros ti*, being-toward-another, but it must be emphasised, always as a categorical derivitave.

In Aristotle's metaphysics, relative terms, or things whose essence refers to something else, were therefore accorded the lowliest status of beings amongst beings. The scholastics viewed relation as *res relativae*: relative things, which are nevertheless real. They remained relative, whether 'dependent on the foundation in which they inhere', therefore, real as modes of things, or having 'an accidental being of their own independent

[360] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 2.
[361] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 2.
[362] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 2.
[363] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 2.

of the being of their ground'.[364] Gashé says that in spite of this ontological difference between a dependently and independently real relation, they nevertheless remain only relative things, having 'less reality than their foundation' and 'in the case where being-toward-another-thing differs from its foundation, the extramental reality is, according to Duns Scotus, that of a 'tiny being', or, in Richard of Mediavilla's terminology, a *minus ens*.' [365]

It is worth dwelling upon this distinction between the being of dependent and independent relations. Firstly, because if relation as a 'minimal thing' can be ascribed *irreducible* singularity as opposed to the *derivative* particularity of other determinate beings, it might be possible to find even within the singular, a distinction or splitting of that which in itself is dependently and independently grounded within being. This would indicate being-toward-another or *pros ti*, which departs from the Aristotelian categorisation of relation. I will return to this point in due course. The distinction, I would argue, has also gained a renewed significance in the light of our encounter with hypostatic informational networks. Informational fragments, exhibit no foundational relational quality, and, therefore, exist as *minus ens*, or at the very limit of ontological determination. What I am seeking to connect between this thinking and the overall thesis is that the question of relation currently emerges within the context of impoverished ontological and mnemonic conditions. Archival-informational practices themselves entail the *retroactive* construction of dependent foundational relations from the independent *minus ens* of informational 'fragments', and in turn, the foundation of relational being within the *exergue* of a subject. The following quotation from Gashé may serve to illustrate: 'For Thomas Aquinas, a real, or categorical relation inheres only in the subject, or foundation, of a relation, and the category of relation itself is 'the weakest or least real' of all the categories'.[366]

[364] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 2.
[365] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 3.
[366] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 3.

Within Gashé's overview, relation is inherently a being that requires a support. Relations are, therefore, for Gashé, minimal things and thereby easily confused with intra-mental realities. He says that 'a predicative relation is an accident of the least being' when compared to substance.[367]

Gashé proposes, however, that the scholastic definition of relation need not prohibit its analysis upon differing terms to the substance/accident ontology that he claims limits its development. He argues that the realisation of formal predicative logic implicitly recognizes in its limitations, the continued relevance of the question of intra-mental or mind independent relation. The nature and quality of their existence has not been resolved. The logic of relations he says, remain a tributary to the ontological and metaphysical assumptions of Plato and Aristotle.[368] Gashé refuses the ontological determination of 'thing' and 'no-thing', using the term 'minimal things' to refer to the smallest and most elemental issues or matters of concern to philosophy.[369] Relation, he says is 'one of the most (if not *the* most) extreme of philosophy's elemental topics'.[370] A minimal thing constitutes the thing at its most minute and is therefore the most basic and simple of philosophical problems. He cites Julius Jakob Schaaf approvingly, who speaks of philosophy as intrinsically a science of relation: 'Taking up the Scholastic designation of relation , he explicitly emphasizes a positive moment contained in the expression, in addition to its characterization of relation as a deficient thing.'[371] This positive moment, he writes, 'consists in this: the being of relation [*Beziehungsein*], precisely because it is an *ens minimum*, is not an object among objects, a thing amongst things, but reveals itself to be the *trans-objective as such*.'[372] [my emphasis]

[367] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 3.
[368] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 4.
[369] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 4.
[370] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 4.
[371] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 5.
[372] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 5.

This is why, for Schaaf, it is the founding category of philosophy. Gashé disagrees with Schaaf on the basis that relation is more elemental than anything of explicit philosophical concern and thus sites it outside of philosophy. But he does retain what is affirmative in Schaaf's account. For Gashé, relation is too small a thing for philosophy, which overlooks it and undervalues it, notwithstanding that relations may have a 'deciding philosophical importance.' [373] For him the question of what is proper to philosophy indicates that what is thematically grouped under relation is necessarily and productively indistinct. He states that: 'if not the minimal "philosophical" problem: it is a limit-problem, an issue at the limit, to which all other questions of philosophy, large or small, are indebted and to which they must be traced and related back.' [374]

This I would suggest is a very significant passage for the exploration of the relation of non-relation; of the liminal relation with which I am concerned. Gashé does not, or will not, explain the precise nature of this 'indebtedness' or 'deciding philosophical importance'. On my reading, whilst Gashé is prepared to accept that a relation may be ontologically too indistinct to be determined negatively as a thing, he is reluctant to embrace what is of 'deciding philosophical importance' about the minimal thing within the tenets of a positive philosophy.[375] It seems to me that some version of a positive philosophy is the only possible solution to relational hypostasis and that Gashé's willingness to 'step outside' of philosophy or more precisely, negatively determined logic, need not entail a return to an inclusive metaphysics as self-completion in the name of philosophy. Rather, we should read the ontological indeterminacy of relation as a supplement. The relation-of-non-relation of *ens minimum* is

[373] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 5.
[374] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 5.
[375] The problem of relation-non relation and specifically a purely relational reading of Hegel's dialectics has given rise to a call for a return to positive philosophy in the recent writing of Markus Gabriel in a book co-authored with Slavoj Zizek, *Mythology Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (London: Continuum, 2009) and a detailed and deliberately selective account of the contemporary importance of Schelling's philosophy by Andrew Bowie, which interestingly reframes the relation-non-relation. See Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

then a foundational metaphor for philosophy, and links the limits of philosophy to its others, literature, art etc.

This metaphor, logically determined as the aporia of the ontological limit, permeates discussion around new relations and their promissory or possible emergence, based upon the wager that they will become extra-mental things. Thus, I would argue that the point of indistinction between what is particular and what is singular, precisely the question of limit is that which founds relation as the point of *affirmative* departure for a materialist dialectic, within an anti-historicist configuration. In Gashé's terms a minimal thing is not to be conceived of as a simple or indivisible element of philosophy; rather, minimal is to be given the meaning – least possible quantity.[376] He says that: 'such decrease in the being or quantity of an entity is valued as a deficiency precisely because the least possible marks a limit beyond which no quantity obtains anymore.'[377]

Gashé seeks to identify this as the point at which 'least possible' quantity enters into a *manifest* relation with others outside of bare opposition. He states that minimal things are not simply things on the verge of ceasing to be, but are already 'something other than things'. [378]

This rather intriguing statement suggests some new means with which we might engage with the relation of non-relation, namely the positing of being outside of itself. In a key passage Gashé explains his position as follows:

> Understood as minimal things, relations, therefore, not only hold toward the non-relational, whether in the sense of a deficiency of relation or in the sense of the Absolute, but also imply a being-toward-something that is no longer of the mode of what philosophy has always thought of as the relational[379]

[376] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 6.
[377] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 6.
[378] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 6.
[379] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 6.

He continues:

> As a minimal thing, relation is reference to the others of philosophy: others that are not limited to its canonical others, such as literature, theology, or the natural sciences, and also, more disquietingly, others that are others in non-predictable ways. The plural of minimal things is irreducible. Qua minimal things, relations indeed refuse the identity of the concept.[380]

In some sense then, the notion of relation as minimal thing points us to the limit that separates philosophy from anti-philosophy and cognitive from non-cognitive reason. Gashé's explanation is that classical philosophical accounts of relation proceed from those qualities the object possesses in respect of itself or attached to another thing. The logic of relation links and erases the singularity of relation. In classical logic, therefore, there is a failure to solve the expression of relation precisely because the logic of relations is 'haunted' by ontological questions.[381] In this respect, Gashé draws upon Heidegger, who, he says, expresses his doubt that *pros ti*, translated as 'relation' takes sufficient account of its Greek sense, that of being-toward. He says that for Heidegger, relation is a 'subjectivist metaphysical reduction' of its true sense of being toward another.[382] It is this being toward another that is the essential peculiarity of relation. Gashé asks:

> How does the thought of the other toward which the relation holds itself bear on the relation itself? Further, what are the *senses* – the direction and the ways in which it has to be taken – of such relating to something other? Is being-toward-another possible without a movement away from and ahead of the subject of the relation? Can relation be adequately thought without heeding the implication that its *relatum* lets the subject come toward it in the first place? If this is a necessity that is structurally implied in the very thought of relation, then is not relation primarily a response, a yes, to a prior invitation?[383]

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[380] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 6.
[381] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 7.
[382] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 7.
[383] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 7.

We can read here an important correlation between relation and transitive ethics. If it is the other that relates to the subject, that draws the subject towards it as much as the subject that identifies its other and subjectivises it, then it is precisely the mimimal being of this kind of relation that is key to the singular or non-identical. At this point there is a marked difference between Gashé and Badiou, in particular Badiou's axiomatic approach to relations in *Logics of Worlds*. Badiou's position is as follows: 'But a relation as such is precisely not an event. It does not transform the transcendental evaluations; it presupposes them, insofar as it too appears in the world.'[384]

One might say that for Gashé eventality is the essence of relation as minimal thing, rather than viewing relation as the axiomatic combination of objects. What is evident in Gashé's analysis is its suspension between positive and negative philosophy; it is a supplemental account. Gashé proposes on the one hand that the directionality of a relation impacts upon its own object so that an object might move away from its self-identity. If the Absolute of relation is negative self-relation or identity, constitutive of a thing then the movement towards some other entails a 'breach' of identity.[385] Furthermore, self-relation or identity includes the demarcation from its other. This is how Hegel's logic addresses the concept. The absolute contains a 'trait' towards the empty place of the other. Therefore the *relatum* to which another is held 'is by definition only within the place of the other'.[386]

Again the following passage is helpful:

> the relation is not conceivable without heeding that space and place of the other – a place that can be occupied but that no host can ever saturate, and that is, by definition, a place awaiting another to come. But if the subject to a relation is

[384] Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. by Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 310-311.
[385] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 8.
[386] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 8.

dependent in this manner on the other, the subject is never at its place either. In its place, too, there is 'only' a subject to come.[387]

What Gashé is proposing, then, is that if a relation is essentially being-toward something other it may not have an essence of itself. Paradoxically, relation directed to another entails that such 'relation to the other precedes all identity'.[388] He emphasizes that we ignore this at our peril. The subject must already be in the place of the other. This approach produces certain consequences for our thinking of relation. Gashé summarises them as follows: firstly; 'the event of relation [is] anterior to relation'; and secondly that the rethinking of relation requires us to think of its occurrence in non-relational terms. [389] If we embrace Gashé's position, then, any consideration of relation rests upon a distinction between its expression within terms of the absolute, and as self-identity. Gashé's assertion that, 'to engage the opening event of relationality is not possible without at the same time reconceiving the traditional philosophical ways of thinking of possiblization',[390] This is why Gashé can be productively read along side Althusser's aleatory materialism and other more recent accounts of finitude in which contingency replace originary thought and conceptualisation.[391] Thus, if materialism is premised upon its contingency, materialism arises from an evental digression from non-relation. As Gashé says: 'The very concept of relationality carries with it a reference to the nonrelational'. And this, he states, was recognized as an essential trope of relation by the skeptics. It was also Hegel who demonstrated, 'that the Ab-solute is the highest form of relation in that it accomplishes relation to itself and thus relates relation to the nonrelational.'[392]

[387] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 8.
[388] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 9.
[389] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 9.
[390] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 9.
[391] See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on The Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008)
[392] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 9.

Gashé says that Schaaf similarly links the relational and non-relational by highlighting the indivisible unity between that which is absolutely without relation, a singularity that is beyond the power of negation, and that, which exists in relation. [393] Gashé further claims that philosophy has thus far addressed the problem either by severing relation from non-relation to the benefit of one term of the relation, or by staging relation and non-relation within a binary dialectical opposition. [394] Gashé is critical of dialectics in this respect. He says that if thinking relation must entail its relation to the 'without-relation' then thinking in terms of dialectical opposition offers only a single and limited notion of relation when what are required are altogether different terms. He says that: 'Visibly, relation has with respect to substance, and its unity, a multiplying power. It secures the difference of things, their singularity. Indeed, the being-toward-other-things, is an expression of a things 'finitude'.[395]

He states that:

> the very fact that being-toward-another presupposes a place of the other, a place that can be occupied by the opposite, or other, of the subject (entity or self) but which is not saturated, fulfilled, or exhausted by this occupation; the fact that the identity of the subject of a relation comes to the subject only from the *relatum* and, hence, is always in waiting; and the fact that, finally, all relation involves a relation to a non-relational that is something other than a negative modification of relationality – these very facts narrow the proliferation of the multiple implications of and cross-references to what I would like to call a 'simple complex'.[396]

Relation as simple complex is not for Gashé the very first thing philosophically speaking, but rather a threshold of the communication between entities or domains, which are in the position of others among each other.[397] The notion of relation as minimal thing emerges from

[393] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 10.
[394] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 10.
[395] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 10.
[396] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 10.
[397] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 11.

Gashé's reflection upon its philosophical history, but remains primarily useful for Gashé as a singular configuration. He advocates the dismantling of relation as a formal concept together with the ontologies to which it has been subordinated. For Gashé: 'The first item on the agenda of a rethinking of relation is thus to free relation as *pros ti* from the *pro hen*, the relation to the One, and to restore the specificity and singularity of relations.' [398]

Gashé describes relation as having many *shapes*, rather than the modalities of a concept of relation, which he claims are irreducible. He offers examples such as encounter, arrival, address, contact, touch, belonging, distance, accord, agreements, determination, measuring, translation, and communication. He describes this approach to 'relational shape' as a restoration of the 'aformal intricacy' of relations.

Gashé explains that:

> Without such an account, all restoration of relation to its aformal intricacy remains an exercise in empiricism, that is, in an approach that is only the negative of the exigency to relate (everything) to the One. Rethinking relationality cannot consist simply in turning one's back to that demand. Rather than submitting to this demand for unification into the One, the rethinking of relation in question transforms this demand by tying into knots the cluster of traits involved in relations – that is, traits directed toward, and stretching from, the place of the other to the place of the subject of a relation, according to a relation that combines with modes of comportment that are no longer conceivable in terms of relation or non-relational.[399]

What is compelling in this for my overall thesis is that the re-thinking of relation that abandons its conceptualisation and admits its 'traits' and aformal intricacies might found a theory of relational representation

[398] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 11. What Gashé proposes is a splitting of *pros ti*, simply (being-toward-another) from *pro hen* (relation as an attribute of totality). Gashé posits that *relation might establish itself outside of substance or self-identity*, that is non-conceptually, thus proposing an ontology of pure singularity.

[399] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 11-12.

capable of articulating singular and non-identical relational forms. In divesting relation of its empirical and its ontological determination we do not thereby sacrifice its value: to recall Schaaf's expression, we reveal its 'trans-objective' form. In Gashé's conviction that relation is granted primarily by the other we find a thinking of relation that supports Bourriaud's aleatory materialism. Gashé says that relation, 'it is not something that can be calculated, predicted or secured. To come into a relation is, therefore, also a matter of chance, luck, as it were.' [400] What is thus paradoxical in Bourriaud's search for new forms of knowledge based upon the encounter is, in fact, the recuperation of an old form of knowledge. The materiality of post-relational art in fact relies upon two neglected undercurrents of thought: aleatory materialism and the Scholastic thinking of relation.

The form of the 'simple complex' of aformal relation advanced by Gashé is homologous to Bourriaud's micropolitical stance. I think that it addresses the impasse identified by Steve Edwards between the ethical demands of non-representation and the political demands of representational critique. For Gashé, 'simple complexes' are relationally evental and thus they take non-relation as the principle upon which relationality can be re-thought. The importance of the 'simple complex for artistic practice is that Gashé posits the evental relation as prior to relation as such. To summarise, then, what Gashé's account offers us is firstly a description of relation that is so much conditioned by its non-relation as to fall outside the purview of philosophically determined being, that is determined through negation. At the same time he asserts the influential value of this minimal being upon philosophy as what is heterogenous to it, not in terms of 'positive' philosophy, but in terms of those others of philosophy in which the plurality of relations remain irreducible but nevertheless capable of presentation.

The Future of the Image

[400] Gashé, *Of Minimal Things*, p. 13.

In the course of this chapter, I have identified a reaction against the prevalent mistrust of images and the reductively 'anti-representational' stance taken within various forms of recent 'situational art'. This prejudice persists in Bourriaud's thinking of the 'visual'. Can visual forms of representation escape the prohibition of images and their ethical condemnation: that images 'speak for the other'? This is an important question because relational art relies upon its visual documentation in order to disseminate its ideas and to produce audiences for its artworks.

In this section, I will consider Rancière's essays, 'The Future of the Image' and 'Sentence, Image, History'.[401] What Rancière offers us is a clear analysis of the problematic fatalism that surrounds images, and as such, the recognition that a new distribution or regime of imageness associated with the critique of fatalism is identifiable with what he calls the 'operations of the image'. This carving out of a 'dissensual' space for the operations of the image is dependent upon challenging the rigidity of a clear distinction between the indexicality of signification (that which we associate with positive knowledge) and the constructive principle of the operations of the image in preserving the persistence of testimony, as an excess of signification and constitutive of the social bonds or community based not upon signification, but rather upon the principle of recognition.

Rancière's provocation is that: 'the end of images is behind us.'[402] What exactly does this mean? Rancière begins with an analysis of the eschatology of the image, identifying two 'catastrophic' opinions about image and reality. On the one hand; 'there is no longer any reality, but only images…[And] conversely, that there are no more images but only a reality incessantly representing itself to itself… '[403]

[401] Jacques Rancière, *The Future of The Image* (London: Verso, 2007)
[402] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 17.
[403] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 1.

In fact, he says that both positions testify to the collapse of the distance that used to enable us to distinguish between images and reality leading to the conclusion that the image no longer exists. Rancière urges that rather than think of images as realistic reproduction, we should instead *examine the rules by which a given regime of the image determines what is representable and unrepresentable*. On this basis he directs us towards the *operations* of the image, which is to say, 'operations that couple and uncouple the visible and its signification or speech and its effect.'[404] Rancière distinguishes the image conceived of as a simple relationship that produces a likeness of the original, as that which stands in for it, from 'the interplay of operations that produces what we call art: or precisely an alteration of resemblance.'[405] The images of art produce *dissemblance* and he equates this dissemblance with a *subtraction* from meaning.

For Rancière this alterity, which he maintains 'enters into the very composition of the image',[406] if dissociated from the *operations* of the image produces the notion of hyper-resemblance in which the alterity of images is posited as material presence. He explains that hyper-resemblance is the 'original resemblance' that does not attest to an elsewhere of reality but to a *form* of alterity itself that is either demanded of the image, or whose absence is deplored. In other words this is a form of hypostasis of the image's alterity: it makes of it a relation that I would term 'romantic' and ideological.[407]

This model, in fact, is underwritten by the mode of the image's material production. The indexicality of the photograph, as exemplified by Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, in which studium and punctum divide the image between sayable and visible, into photographic meaning and mute presentation or wordless image, is an artificial division. Rancière asserts that this is premised upon a naive transcription of the techniques of

[404] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, pp. 4-5.
[405] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 6.
[406] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 3.
[407] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, pp. 8-9.

photographic reproduction into the concept itself.[408] For Rancière this relationship merely defines a specific regime of imageness, or, a relationship between the visible and the sayable. My understanding of his criticism of Barthes is that the latter recognises a decoupling of the formerly stable relationship between the sayable and the visible characteristic of the representative regime of art, (a movement that can be traced back to the 19th century novel), but ignores the potency of the incommensurability of the aesthetic regime that replaces it; and in fact *Camera Lucida* can be read as a mourning for the representative regime itself. Thus the indexical theory of photography for Rancière fleshes out the fantasy of the romantic poetics of 'everything speaks', facilitated by an arbitrary separation of studium and punctum. He says that: 'What the simple relationship between mechanical compression and the punctum erases is the whole history of the relations between three things: the images of art, the social forms of imagery, and the theoretic procedures of criticism of imagery.'[409]

In essence, then, Barthes recognises the rupture within representative signification, but petrifies the image within an ontological binarism that remains premised upon a model of authenticity, or reality as a given rather than an *operation*. He thereby excludes the social relations that govern this regime of imageness, which is now premised not upon reproduction but repetition, not singular production but the mass production of this very alterity. In other words Barthes brackets out alterity from the very heart of the image and from its conventional forms of signification. He ignores the social relations that determine the image's reception and meaning. And what is more, Barthes fetishises what is not exchangeable in the image as the benchmark of its alterity. In other words he associates the alterity of the image with art when in fact it is the truth of the social.

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[408] The photographic image appears through its method of production to be a good match for *symploke*, but is in fact reduced from the metaphor of the weave to the metaphor of the index or 'natures pencil' as Henry Fox Talbot described it.

[409] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 15.

Rancière asserts that the dissimulations of artistic images and the commerce in social imagery of the 19th century produces a hermeneutics of decipherability, driven on in part by Marx and Freud's writings. Rancière says that this forged a relationship between 'the operations of art', 'the forms of imagery' and 'the discursiveness of symptoms' premised upon a loss of use and exchange value. [410]

Rancière asserts that a new image value is produced through a twofold power of the aesthetic image: 'the inscription of the signs of a history and the affective power of sheer presence that is no longer exchanged for anything'.[411] So *the fate of the image is already behind us* in the sense that we have moved beyond what Rancière terms, a contemporary mediological discourse that asserts the identity and alterity of the image yet denies the apparatuses of their production and circulation. [412] In fact he asserts that the end of the image had already been rigorously explored in the art of the early 20th century, which sought the abolition of the mediation of the image in order to 'realise the immediate identity of act and form.'[413] This immediacy of act and form is characteristic of relational art and perhaps its hasty disassociation from the lessons of the avant-garde.

Rancière proceeds with a classification of the operations of the image, which he considers to be symptomatic of our current regime of imageness. He singles out the *naked image*, the brute trace of history, 'testimony to a reality that it is generally accepted will not tolerate any other form of presentation.'[414] Also the *ostensive image* which asserts its power of sheer presence without signification, in the name of art. This operation he says is the presentation of the obtuse presence having the capacity to interrupt histories and discourses. It presents a singular mode of testimony. Finally the metaphorical image that refuses to isolate artistic

[410] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 17.
[411] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 17.
[412] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 18.
[413] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 21.
[414] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 23.

operations and products from 'forms of circulation of social and commercial imagery and from operations interpreting this imagery'.[415] This operation entails the singular rearrangement of circulating images', and is he says a more playful operation, or entails, a form of recombinancy. What is important about Rancière's analysis is that these operations do not work in isolation, but rather, they call upon elements of the logic of one another, that they in fact operate dialectically, in the production of a narrative supplement. He says that they are 'three ways of coupling or un-coupling the power of showing and the power of signifying, the attestation of presence and the testimony of history'.[416]

My reading of Rancière's operations of the image is as follows: if we accept that alterity enters into the very composition of images then we cannot simply divide the place of testimony from that of signification or indexicality. Rancière says in *Dissensus*, that residues of the representative regime of art persist within our contemporary reading of the image. It is essential that some trace of this remain in order to create a tension between the powers of signification and powers of testimony. Another way of describing this would be to regard this as being comparable to the ineliminability of the aesthetic as commensurate with an administered world.

Rancière's sentence-image-history echoes Ricoeur's view that it is testimony that is productive of social bonds and indeed of community.[417] Ricoeur identifies the ethical dimension of dissensus in his account of testimony as the opening of a discursive space through the presentation of divergent testimonies within the 'sensus communis' or community of sense.[418] In Rancière's terms, this becomes the incommensurability of community as differing from itself, as therefore, a singular production of itself. These singular presentations both undo the representative

[415] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 24.
[416] Rancière, *The Future of The Image*, p. 26.
[417] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) p. 166.
[418] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: on Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2009)

relationship between text and image and provide their own principle of linkage or measurability between the sayable and the visible.

What Rancière appears to suggest for my overall thesis, and frames for my enquiry into the documentary real is this: the mourning for the efficacy of images and the valedictory pursuit of 'the social bond' are but different attributes of the same question. Just as the future of the image is already behind us so is the future of relation. Relation as relation, and the photographic image are similarly burdened by the repeated self-evidence of their indexicality. Both relation and index possess no ontological 'presence': as simply being toward an-other, they are no more than an expression of finitude. Henry Fox Talbot's' use of the term 'nature's pencil' as a description of the indexicality of the photograph, well before its consecration as art, might equally serve as a description for relation, and its burden in achieving recognition as an artistic form.

Whilst I have been critical of Rancière's political aesthetics, his analysis of the image is crucial to a thinking of the image which is in itself redefined within the overall project of relationality. Under the weight of the ethical prohibition upon images the reception of images must embrace the use and dissemination of images as essential to the social system of art and its circuits of exchange. This entails the recognition of the relationality of the image as a 'simple complex' in its own right.

The Ontology of Performance and Performance Documentation: Live Art and Relational Aesthetics

Relational artworks are generally documented and disseminated in the form of still and moving images, very much in the manner of live and performance art's circuits of publicity. What then is the role of documentation within relational art? A first question is whether live art is really a model for relational and post-relational art practice? Given that they appear related perhaps only through their post-formal homologies and cognates: performance, participation, event, collaboration, this was

my initial assumption. But as I have already demonstrated, these similarities are not so much qualitatively different within relational practice to their precursors within 1960s live art as qualitatively indifferent. By this I mean to say that it is very difficult to separate the cognates of performative art from the performance management of labour. This was McKenzie's observation.

A second line of enquiry might be the assumption that they share the evental ontology of performance, and that relational aesthetics has somehow assimilated to its own ends that which appears radical in live art: its claim to resist the mediation of representation and its substitution of a direct form of social action. This seems to square with the model of relational art as a strategy of dematerialisation, but Bourriaud expressly rejects this charge. But does relational art retain any of the vestiges of the essentialist ontology of performance art? This is an insistence upon the ontological primacy of the live art event. Live art and relational aesthetics differ markedly, in that the former adheres to the purity of performance whereas Bourriaud distinguishes relational art's use of performance in terms of *the use of the performance form*. Not only do I think that performance within relational art differs from its precursors in live art it is important to recognise that the 'unmarked' and 'unmediated' model of performance is itself questionable. It is necessary to question this model in order to liberate the documentation of performance practices from the shadow of this essentialist ontology of the 'live'. Within this model, performance is privileged as the 'true' site of the work. Its classification of performance documentation as secondary, serves to preserve the authenticity and singularity of performance, and to preserve the mnemonic hierarchy that privileges mnesis above anamnesis. In what follows I will question whether performance substantiates its radical credentials as 'unmarked.'[419] I will seek to establish that the relationship between performer and documenter is often an important encounter in its

[419] The term 'unmarked' valorizes the performance as non-commodifiable. See Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993)

own right and that the very notion of the 'unmediated' is idealistic and untenable.

The ontological distinction between event and document

Within the community of live art, practitioners who have their roots in the theatrical tradition tend to place greater emphasis upon the singularity of the performance as event, and so have a more problematic relationship with documentary material than those who have entered live art practice from a training in the plastic arts. Peggy Phelan asserts the radical nature of the 'unmarked' event as naturally resistant to the kind of commodification that bedevils fine art production. This argument is pursued to the extent that both she and Susan Melrose[420] question the effect of their own discourses upon the events they describe and upon the need for specialist expertise in live art respectively. Phelan describes the relationship between event and document in the following ontological terms:

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.[421]

Phelan's overall assertion of the strength of an ontology of disappearance might be described as an extreme form of the taboo upon images criticised by Edwards. In her analysis of performance and its photographic documentation, Phelan states that:

[420] Susan F. Melrose,'Confessions of an Uneasy Expert Spectator' <www.sfmelrose.org.uk> [accessed 5 March 2012], (p. 1).
[421] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), p.146.

> While photography is vulnerable to charges of counterfeiting and copying, performance art is vulnerable to charges of valuelessness and emptiness. Performance indicates the possibility of revaluing that emptiness; this potential revaluation gives performance art its distinctively oppositional edge. [422]

It appears that the radicality of the event as ontologically pre-eminent can only be maintained at a cost: that of denying any dialectical or performative role for the document itself and for a dialectical relationship between mnesis and anamnesis. These documents constitute a fixing or naming of themselves at the very edge of the work's disappearance. Their singularity is premised upon the documents' *fragmentary* nature by which they might evade the ontological dualism of the generic and the particular. In Agamben's words in their 'manner of rising forth; not a being that is in this or that mode, but a being that is its mode of being, and thus, while remaining singular and not indifferent, is multiple and valid for all.'[423]

Put simply, Phelan gives insufficient weight to what is indiscernible in the image at the expense of its capacity to substitute or stand for the event. In fact, her position assumes a certain regime of imageness: that of the representative regime of art. For her metaphoric/metonymic distinction I would substitute the category of the paradigmatic as a means of overcoming the ontological separation between event and its documentation. My focus is upon what is irreducibly singular within both, and their dialectical intertwining.[424] For many of the live artists working outside of the theatrical tradition, and particularly those asserting leftist agendas, it appears necessary to engage in both metaphorical (representational) and metonymic (unmarked) activities at the same time. Thus the artwork comprises a number of operations of image in relation to event. For example the artist Mark McGowan considers these two

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[422] Phelan, p. 147.

[423] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 28.

[424] The distinction between the two is anyway more often than not unclear. Again see for example Driven, R and Porings, R (eds.), *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast* (Berlin; New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 2003).

activities as complementary practices.[425] He claims that the uncertainty and purity of the event as it unfolds under chance conditions remains central to his practice. At the same time, drawing upon *Unmarked* he claims that this event is 'buttressed' by documentation that gives rise to a narrative both before and after the event. So for example a press release would form the pre-evental narrative, whilst a video of the event posted on You Tube forms its post-narrative function. Leaving aside for the moment the issue of his solicitation of media attention, the question emerges whether this dualistic activity is driven by economic necessity, an elaborate game, or a contribution to a wider narrative about the conditions of the production of the artwork and *the necessity of representation*. It is worth looking at the particular passage from *Unmarked*, in which Phelan raises the notion of the document as a 'buttress':

> The pressures brought to bear on performance to succumb to the laws of the reproductive economy are enormous. For only rarely in this culture is the 'now' to which performance addresses its deepest questions valued. (This is why the now is supplemented and buttressed by the documenting camera, the video archive.) Performance occurs over a time, which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as 'different.' The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present.[426]

Unmarked itself contains a number of these 'spurs to memory' and they are unquestionably valuable in advancing the discourse of live art and productive of defining the social system of art. The fact is that the United Kingdom's annual National Review of Live Art is systematically documented and archived by the University of Bristol. And yet private photography and video performances of the event are frowned upon. For me this raises worrying issues about the professionalisation of documentary practices. There is a vitality and intimacy to many

[425] *Yesvember*, ed. by Claudia Milioti, (London: University of The Arts London and Chunky Arts, 2004)
[426] Phelan, p. 146.

recordings of historical performances. Often they are recorded by artist's friends collaborators and bystanders. It also draws an artificial divide between performer and camera-person that ignores the collaborative nature of much early performance art in particular.[427] More importantly the fact that documentation is universally practiced yet widely condemned exposes a symptomatic 'philistine' tension between metonymic and metaphorical approaches to the event, and a corresponding discourse of resistance to and complicity with documentary practices that are constitutive of the current conditions of a possible post-relational practice. Mark McGowan's exemplary philistinism for example is that he willingly makes of himself a focus of this aporia.

Auslander's Challenge to Essentialist Performance Ontology: What is Liveness?

> I am suggesting that thinking about the relationship between live and mediatized forms in terms of ontological oppositions is not especially productive, because there are few grounds on which to make significant ontological distinctions. Like live performance, electronic and photographic media can be described meaningfully as partaking of the ontology of disappearance ascribed to live performance, and can be used to provide an experience of evanescence. Like film and television, theatre can be used as a mass medium. [428]

For Auslander the relationship between live and mediatised forms is historical and contingent rather than 'ontologically given or technologically determined'. He bases his opinion upon examples of theatre in which performance might take place concurrently across a number of different sites, and upon the vanishing and temporary nature of recorded documents (his discussion focuses upon the use of analogue

[427] Tracey Warr, 'Image as Icon' in *Art, Lies and Videotape*, ed. by Adrian George (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), pp. 30-37.
[428] Philip Auslander, 'Ontology vs History: Making Distinctions Between the Live and the Mediatized'. The Conference Archives <www.webcast.gatech.edu/papers/arch/Auslander.html1997> [accessed on 5 March 2012], (p 4).

recording media). Auslander leaves open the question of whether digitisation might re-instate the ontological distinction based on its relative permanence as a medium.

A more pressing argument, is Auslander's position on the ontology of 'liveness', a term which has more or less displaced the traditional category of 'performance'. On one level we might read this simply as an acknowledgement that the camera is part of the performance. For example Alice Maude Roxby talks of the art of documentation in terms of arriving at the performance image, and emphasises the collaborative nature of such an undertaking.[429] However, to simply recognise the imbrication of performance and documentation cannot fully address the continuing polarisation of the 'live' and the 'mediated'.

In *Liveness; Performance in a Mediatized Culture* Auslander examines the nature of 'liveness' more extensively.[430] Through an historical analysis of the mediatisation of theatre through film and television, he concludes that the category of liveness is in fact premised upon that of mediatization. Significantly, his analysis also considers their relationship from the perspective of cultural production and specifically the commodification of liveness. Auslander begins by noting that whereas in their early form, mediatized events, particularly television, were modeled on live ones. He says that: 'The subsequent cultural dominance of mediatization has had the ironic result that live events now frequently are modeled on the very mediatized representations that once took the self-same live events as their models.'[431]

Auslander states that the relationship between the live and the mediatized as oppositional occurs at the level of cultural economy rather than from

[429] Alice Maud Roxby, 'The Delicate Art of Documenting Performance: Me and My Camera (Person)' in *Art, Lies and Videotape,* ed. by Adrian George (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), pp. 66-77.
[430] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2008).
[431] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 10.

the intrinsic characteristics of their forms.[432] For example, live performances often incorporate mediatization to the extent that the live is a product of media technologies.[433] Moreover, Auslander cites with approval Jacques Attali's description of the cultural economy of performance as requiring a distinction between economies of representation and those of repetition; the distinction between the representation of a singular act and the repetition of mass production.[434] Attali proposes that although 'representation emerged with capitalism', ultimately capital 'lost interest in the economy of representation'. Repetition of the mass production of cultural objects allows, against the singularity of a representation, the stockpiling of mediatized performance as accumulated value.[435] On this reading, performances serve therefore as raw material for mediatization.[436] Auslander says this is very clear within the world of commercial entertainment, but is not restricted to that realm. So, for example, he says that that the early documentation of performance and body art of the 1970s documentation was not initially carefully planned, but artists quickly became conscious of the value of documentation and the need to stage work for the camera.[437] Auslander cites Gina Pane's description of the role of photography in her work: 'It creates the work the audience will be seeing afterwards. So the photographer is not an external factor, he is positioned inside the action space with me, just a few centimetres away. There were times when he obstructed the [audience's] view!'[438]

In addition he states that: 'It is clear, then, that such archetypal works of body and endurance art as Burden's and Pane's were not autonomous performances whose documentation supplements and provides access to an originary event.'[439]

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[432] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 11.
[433] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 25.
[434] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 27.
[435] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 28.
[436] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 28.
[437] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 31. Chris Burden's practice is identified as exemplary in this respect.
[438] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 31.
[439] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 31.

On this basis, he asserts that a documented work of performance art is not performed as an end in itself, rather 'performance art is the virtual equivalent of its representations.'[440]

It is not simply mediatization however that produces this model of liveness, but also a change in the nature of performance itself: in its rejection of theatrical paradigms, and specifically the assumed separation between actors and audience. Auslander relies upon Michael Kirby's description of this kind of performance within experimental theatre as 'nonmatrixed representation' in which characterisation is abandoned and the performer merely carries out certain actions that nevertheless have referential or representational significance.[441] This model for Auslander remains useful in describing much performance from the 1960s to the present, and serves also as a bridge from the experimental theatre of the 1960s in its opposition to the mass media to a mediatized performance model.[442]

I would note at this point that nonmatrixed performance-representation certainly ought to be included within the covert genealogies of relational aesthetics. However I would say that what is produced is a separate matrix: one that explicitly explores the forms of the social. Kirby also claims that: 'in nonmatrixed representation the referential elements are applied to the performer and are not acted *by* him' in such a way that the performance *requires* some form of mediation of the performers actions to create their meaning. This model of nonmatrixed, task-based performing therefore not only creates the need for mediation but allows the performer to move from the context of the avant-gardist mode of reception to that of mass culture.[443] This dependence of the performance

[440] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 31. Citing Kathy O'Dell.
[441] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 32.
[442] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 32.
[443] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 33.

upon mediatization significantly produces a situation in which 'the performance is only successful as a simulacrum of the record.'[444]

Auslander gives the following assessment: he says that mediatization is now explicitly and implicitly embedded within the live experience, and that: 'Within our mediatized culture, whatever distinction we may have supposed there to be between live and mediatized events is collapsing because live events are increasingly either made to be reproduced or becoming ever more identical with mediatized ones.'[445]

This diagnosis, he says, is pervasive even in intimate, small-scale live performances, because it is a matter not simply of the use of technology, but also the influence of 'media epistemology'. Reality itself is perceived through the mediation of technology and therefore provides a framework for perception. Benjamin's influence is evident here in that the assertion is that sensory norms are by their nature partially historically determined.[446] Benjamin's mode of perception within mass culture as premised upon the desire to overcome distance or bring things closer, overcomes the auratic object through the reproduction of its likeness. This entails that the quality of the original's presence is always depreciated. However, for Auslander the live inscription of representation within the real compensates for, this depreciation.[447]

We could say that live performance, in fidelity to its prohibition of images, serves to naturalise its mediatized representations through our nostalgia for the 'im-mediate'. So the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, and therefore authenticates its reality, creating a circularity, rather than opposition between the live and the mediatised, which in fact augurs in a culture of simulation. The replacement of the live with technological and epistemological mediatisation produces an anxiety around the live which underpins the ontology of performance

[444] Jacques Attali cited at Auslander, *Liveness*, p.33.
[445] Auslander, p. 35.
[446] Auslander, pp. 36-37.
[447] Auslander, pp. 38-39.

exemplified in Peggy Phelan's position.[448] The assertion of the ontological primacy of the performance over its documentation allows the former to present the illusion of its elision of the economy of repetition. Auslander's position is, of course, that the distinction does not hold on the basis that this: 'is embedded within the language of live performance itself'. This destabilises Phelan's claims for independence. Auslander says in relation to Phelan's position; 'I doubt very strongly that any cultural discourse can stand outside the ideologies of capital and reproduction that define a mediatized culture or should be expected to do so, even to assume an oppositional stance.'[449] The assertion of the oppositional character of performance art reflects an ideology, which Auslander claims is self-legitimating through a reductive adherence to the principle of authenticity based upon photographic indexicality. Auslander's claim is however that the photographic or filmic document presents *a mode of performativity itself*, an argument I will expand in due course. Auslander takes a similar view to Rancière in which *the reality of the performance consists in all of its apparatuses of representation.*[450]

Auslander asserts the *relationality* of liveness as a concept used to distinguish among cultural forms, and not a value neutral category. Importantly he analyses the claim that live performance builds community through its creation of bonds between the members of an audience. He claims that the unifying effect of audience participation may, though, 'be little more than the common consumption of a particular performance commodity'.[451] His assertion is that communality on whatever level is not a function of liveness: it is not dependent upon any spectacle, but rather upon the 'specific audience situation'.[452] Equally the notion that bringing performer and spectator together creates community is, he says, unsustainable on the basis that the elimination of the distinction between performer and spectator destroys the possibility of

[448] Auslander, pp. 43-44.
[449] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 45.
[450] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 57.
[451] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 64.
[452] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 65.

performance *per se*. He says that for example Jerzy Grotowski and August Boal's attempts to bridge this gap necessitated them abandoning the category of performance altogether.[453] This is because the experience of theatre actually relies upon this separation, something inherent also to live performance. It is premised upon a desire for unity based upon an essential separation, which precludes this. Mediatized performance, however, may provide a satisfactory experience of community in its capacity to bring this about within an'audience situation'. What is evident is that we encounter different forms of community of varying 'distances', for example, 'virtual', 'existent' or 'transpatial'. This model, of performance matrices seems to me a better match for postproductive and radicant art practice than the ontology, which produces a misreading of relational art as the 'fetishization' of the encounter or event.

The Performativity of Performance Documentation

In an essay bearing this title Auslander develops his analysis further, this time, placing a greater emphasis upon the nature of the relationship between document and artwork.

Auslander begins with a comparison between Chris Burden's *Shoot* (1971) and Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void* (1960) and asks what difference does it make to our understanding of the performance document that the first really happened, whilst the latter was staged. He proposes a fundamental division between two categories of the performance document, which he names *the documentary* and *the theatrical*.[454] The documentary category is conceived within the traditional ontological primacy of performance over its representation, the former authorising the latter. Picking up his association of this ontological model with a trivial realism in photography, he remarks that the documentary mode posits a correspondence between the signifier and the

[453] Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 65.
[454] Philip Auslander,'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', *PAJ*, 85 (2006), 1-10 (p.1).

signified, or a particular connection to the real in which the document is allowed to substitute for the performance. In relation to the classic iconographic imagery of performance documentation,[455] he notes Jon Eriksson's suggestion that the use of black-and-white photography reinforces the documentary status as a supplement. This supplementary model does suggest a relationship of mutual dependence, with the photograph operating as an indexical anchor, but, overall, he proposes that within the documentary model the photograph acts as an access point to the reality of the performance.[456]

Within the theatrical category, Auslander places artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Cindy Sherman and Nicky S. Lee. In their work the performances are staged in order to be photographed or filmed and have no autonomous existence, or existence as presentations to an audience. He says that: 'the space of the document (whether visual or audiovisual) thus becomes the only space in which the performance occurs.' [457] In other words it resembles the photo-shoot. In spite of the ostensible differences between the categories, Auslander's view is that both are equally staged for the camera. He reads within both, the use of documentation to achieve symbolic status within the realm of culture.[458]

Auslander bases the ambiguity of the distinction between the categories upon his account of Vito Acconci's *Photo Piece* (1969) in which the performance consists of the taking of photographs (they are taken while Acconci is performing, rather than being photographs of Acconci performing). He claims that this artwork points towards a central issue, namely 'the performativity of documentation itself.'[459] This notional performativity recalls Austin's distinction between performative and constative utterances, between description and enactment. Auslander draws an analogy between the documentary category viewed within its

[455] See Paul Schimmel, *Out of Actions, Between Performance and the Art Object 1949-1979* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998)
[456] Auslander 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', p. 2.
[457] Auslander,'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', p. 2.
[458] Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', p. 3.
[459] Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', p.5.

traditional ontological statement as constative, whereas performance documents,

> are not analogies to constatives, but to performatives: in other words, *the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such*. Documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe an autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance…[460]

In this sense performance becomes a pro-filmic event. Auslander says that it is through performativity that actions are framed as display, and through which the artist assumes responsibility to a different audience. This is not the audience for the live event but the audience for its documentation.[461] I have already noted the emphasis that performance places upon the presence of an audience and its interaction with performers. However, Auslander identifies a different set of assumptions within performance documentation. He says that:

> It is very rare that the audience is documented at anything like the same level of detail as the art action. The purpose of most performance art documentation is to make the *artist's work* available to a larger audience, not to capture the performance as an 'interactional accomplishment' to which a specific audience and a specific set of performers coming together in specific circumstances make equally significant contributions. For the most part, scholars and critics use eyewitness accounts to ascertain the characteristics of the performance, not the audience's contribution to the event, and discussions of how a particular audience perceived a particular performance at a particular time and place and what that performance meant to that audience are rare. In that sense, performance art documentation participates in the fine tradition of the reproduction of *works* rather than the ethnographic tradition of capturing *events*.[462]

[460] Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', p. 5.
[461] Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', p. 6.
[462] Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', p. 6.

Of course the documentation of relational art does seek to include its live, or participatory audience, within encounters. But this does not mean that its documentary audience is any less significant or any less the 'site' of the work. In other words it seeks to do both. It is worth noting however that it is one of the means by which relational art presents the self-evidence of its ethical immediacy, in having staged the overcoming of theatrical separation. I would call this its *use of the theatrical form*. However in the manner of the nonmatrixed performance, relational aesthetics is equally reliant upon some mediatization of its actions in order to confer meaning, or indeed, to give its encounters any formal integrity. In other words, relational art entails a situation of generalised performance, in which the artist is distinguished from other participants on the basis of their responsibility for the production and circulation of the performance documentation itself: this is documentary performativity.

Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity: The Uneven Development of the Ontology of the Performative Document

At this point I now want to consider a particular account of the way the plastic arts have responded to the potentialities of the document's ontological uncertainty and have exploited its form. This is the subject of Alexander Alberro's *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (2003). What is important in Alberro's analysis to the artwork/document distinction is his analysis of primary and secondary materials. He derives this from Seth Sieglaub's assertion that:

> when art does not any longer depend upon its physical presence, when it has become an abstraction, it is not distorted and altered by its representation in books and catalogues. It becomes PRIMARY information; while the reproduction of conventional art in books or catalogues is necessarily SECONDARY information…When information is PRIMARY, the catalogue can become the exhibition.[463]

[463] Seth Sieglaub, cited in Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and The Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p. 155.

Installation art is paradigmatic of this post-conceptual condition. This passage, taken from an interview with Seth Sieglaub on early conceptual art, introduces an important approach to the ontology of the document rooted within the fine art rather than the performance tradition. Its influence continues to be felt in the current work of artists experimenting with the archival form. Its fundamental radicalism appears to be that it refuses to distinguish between artwork and document; indeed, it appears to render such a distinction unimportant. What then is the relationship between this approach and that of Phelan? What is Sieglaub's conception of the event, if any? This is a difficult question for a number of reasons. The first and most obvious is that Seth Sieglaub was first and foremost an art dealer, and according to Alberro, a skilled and wily publicist who borrowed from and bought into the burgeoning cultural capital of public relations in the early 1960s. Add to this the fact that the artists represented by Sieglaub ranged in their diversity from Allan Kaprow, whose 'happenings' we might formally place within the performance tradition, to the documentary works of Joseph Kosuth and Douglas Huebler. The latter's substitution of the idea of the work for the work itself is perhaps a better fit for the notion that the document performatively displaces the work itself as primary.

The distinction between an artwork of whatever form and its documentation remains important at the level of form rather than ontology and yet this is at odds with the dissolution of the primary/secondary distinction suggested by the analytic philosophical tendency within some conceptual art practices. This tendency tends to suggest that there remains nothing of the work outside of their descriptive or propositional content. Rather than positing the disappearance of the 'event', we are faced with a rejection of any ontology of art whatsoever. The primary/secondary distinction within conceptual art (or at least hard

conceptualism)[464] is a substitution of terms for concepts, in fact, a series of exchanges at the level of representation whose primary concern lies within the dematerialisation of the art object and its rematerialisation as a sign of that dissolution rather than with metonymic questions of body and memory we associate with performance work. I prefer to see the primary/secondary distinction as indicative of the possibilities of translation that inhere within the work/document form. This entails that one bracket out what is normative in the distinction from its ontology. It is the normativity of the distinction, which makes it a potentially useful social form. In the conceptualism of the 1960's, Duchamp's question, 'Where is the work?' is inflected with anti-retinality and a commitment towards the artistic proposition rather than exclusively towards ontological disappearance. The work endures as a concept, and specifically as the documentary representation of that concept. On that basis, it remains fundamentally metaphorical, and yet critical of its own metaphoricity. Alberro describes this process as: 'The development of a type of work that could be presented without originals – a syntagmatic work whose materiality slid along a chain of signifiers…'.[465] Thus the thinking of the artwork within chains of signification appears to be related to the manipulation of the forms of original and copy.

I would like to explore the primary/secondary distinction in a little more detail comparing, in particular, the work of Robert Barry and Douglas Huebler. In Barry's *Inert Gas Series* of 1969, the artist released canisters of inert gas into the atmosphere at a site in the Mohave desert. He then photographed the site to document the work. As Alberro explains;

> Since the inert gas is not only formally unstable but also invisible, the photographs Barry took of the site in the Mohave desert occupied by the gas

[464] This term is derived from Peter Osborne, 'Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy' in *Rewriting Conceptual Art* ed. by Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999) pp. 47-65.
[465] Alberro, p. 74.

represented nothing more than desert landscape... Paradoxically, then, Barry made the photographs to deny the existence of visual evidence.[466]

The photographs were not shown but publicity materials with a written description of the piece gave a telephone number through which the public might hear an audio recording describing the piece. In Alberro's account he examines Sieglaub's objective in marketing the artist as such, notwithstanding the lack of any marketable work. What interests me about the work is the way that it demonstrates various tactics of documentation. Firstly *Inert Gas Series* entails an action by the artist. This gives it a basis in an event for which the photographs are explicit representations of the event's disappearance, or in Alberro's terms 'imperceptable signs'. In this sense we can consider such photographs as inherently metonymic (Alberro's paradox of the representation which fails to represent). It is clear in this instance that we are not being shown the work since the gas itself refuses to signify anything but this does not equate to the failure of signification; what is signified is the event of the artwork.

The descriptive documentation of the work entails another strategy, that of substitution. It can stand for the work or operate as an instruction as to how it might be repeated. In this respect we return to the sliding chain of signification. And thirdly, the telephone message represents a nascent use of basic technology to engage with an audience on the level of post-narration. It is a forerunner of Mark McGowan's use of You Tube.

In Douglas Huebler's *Rochester Trip* (1968), the work need not be performed at all. There need not be an event as such. The documentary material is an *injunction* to perform. It has the quality of an instruction manual. What unites Barry and Huebler's work is that they are premised upon the distinction between primary and secondary material and seek to question the role of representation within aesthetics, or rather the aesthetic regime that founds artistic autonomy. What emerges

[466] Alberro, p. 118.

paradoxically is the *ineliminability of representation from aesthetics*. This is one of the propositions with which I began this chapter. Peter Osborne's analysis is instructive here. Reflecting upon Joseph Kosuth's conceptual art practice and its relationship to the logical positivism of AJ Ayer, Peter Osborne states that Kosuth 'directly contrary to his own understanding…. enacts an *aestheticization of logical positivism*'.[467] That is, it is the artist's 'total signifying activity' that becomes the content of the work, and the resulting disintegration of the distinction between primary and secondary materials flows from this. However, there are consequences. This aestheticization of the logical proposition robs Kosuth's readymades of their indeterminacy or its negative charge. The readymade thus becomes a modality of determinate negation.

Kosuth identifies the artwork as tautologous: that is it says nothing about any matter of fact, merely that it is art and on that basis equates its autonomy with self-referentiality. In this way he proposes that works of art are analogous to analytical propositions thus attempting to formulate an anti-aesthetic artistic autonomy. For Osborne, Kosuth then advances upon this proposition of analogy to a further proposition, namely that, 'Works of art are analytical propositions'. In so doing he,

> simultaneously introduced and foreclosed the semiological character of visual art, by abstracting from all questions of medium, form, visuality and materiality, while nonetheless continuing to pose them, implicitly, in his presumption of art's difference from other forms of signification.[468]

Kosuth's implicit presumption of art's difference can only be presented as a proposition within the context of art, and again as Osborne points out an analytical proposition is tied to a model of meaning, which is 'resolutely anti-contextual.' Speaking of Kosuth's attempt to eliminate aesthetics from the traditional question of aesthetic autonomy Osborne states that:

[467] Osborne, p. 62.
[468] Osborne, p. 59.

> The question is not how to *eliminate* or *reduce* the aesthetic dimension of the object (its morphological characteristics) but how, in each instance, critically to regulate the play between 'aesthetic' and 'conceptual' terms. As the institutional history of the documentation of performance pieces and temporary works shows, it is an irreducible dimension of the logic of the artistic field to present in visual form, however attenuated or seemingly irrelevant.[469]

Both Alberro and Osborne make the point that any challenge to the aesthetic quality or materiality of the artwork within conceptual art entails a necessary foregrounding of the personality of the artist and of the nominative function of artistic subjectivity. When Osborne is speaking of Kosuth's flawed 'aestheticized logical positivism' he claims that Kosuth's need to downplay the contextuality of his work in order to emphasise its propositional quality. According to Osborne this deprives him of what was a key ingredient in the work of Marcel Duchamp: the capacity for *negation* inherent to the unassisted readymade as constitutive of its aesthetic autonomy. As a consequence, he argues, Kosuth was forced into a corner, in which his authority as an artist (and the necessary merger between artwork and professional criticism entailed by the 'proposition as to art's nature') rested upon his ability to establish his authority in such propositions upon pure artistic intention, so the artist as author, is replaced with the (meta) artist, an individual who confers artistic status through nomination. This is a reflexive form of self-curatorship. [470]

On this basis, what may seem a rather simplistic argument on Alberro's part, that the conceptual artists associated with Seth Sieglaub operated within a growing public relations economy, and thus relied upon publicity as a figure for the absent or dematerialised field of artistic production, can be re-cast decisively within the framework of the artistic

[469] Osborne, p. 62.
[470] Osborne, p. 60. In fact this is a flaw inherent within any logic. The nominative procedure within which one grounds a given logic, becomes aestheticized through the legitimizing function of the artist-curator's personality and reputation.

negation of aesthetic autonomy. Alberro states that: 'The emergence of conceptual art is closely related to [the] new moment of advanced capitalism…[its] unusual formal features and mode of circulation in many ways utilize and enact the deeper logic of informization.'[471]

We might understand this as an operative re-distribution within the field aesthetic of an avant-garde based upon the 'event' of conceptualism. It is a rehearsal of what is occurring now. That is, an attempt to re-define the role of representation in response to a particular conjunction of social relations within public relations. This has little to do with its 'failure' to dematerialize the art object. Osborne provides the helpful analysis of philosophy as art's 'vanishing mediator' and describes what I would call conceptualism's event as:

> through its identification with philosophy, to have reasserted the ineliminability of the aesthetic as a necessary element of the artwork, via a failed negation. At the same time, however, it also definitively demonstrated the radical insufficiency of this element to the meaning-producing capacity of the work. As such, it reaffirmed the constitutive ambiguity of philosophy's double coding within the artistic field, as an enduring productive resource.[472]

What I draw from this, and which corroborates Auslander's account of the performativity of documentation, is that the ineliminability of the aesthetic is both tied to the ineliminability of art's status as a commodity amongst other commodities, and the need for art to invent forms of representation in order to remain immanently self-critical: this in fact conditions its *concept* of autonomy. To recall, Adorno tells us that art becomes social by its opposition to society, and that it can only occupy this position as autonomous art, and yet art remains part of society and empirical reality of which they are part. Art must therefore accede to a certain form of mediation that places its autonomy in a place of acute tension. He says that:

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[471] Alberro, p. 3.
[472] Osborne, p. 65.

> Art keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance; unless it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity. Its contribution to society is not communication with it but rather something extremely mediated: It is resistance in which, by virtue of inner-aesthetic development, social development is reproduced without being imitated. At the risk of its self-alienation, radical modernity preserves art's immanence by admitting society only in an obscured form, as in the dreams with which artworks have always been compared.[473]

The 'Documentary Real'

My understanding of the documentary real is that it is constructed through a matrix of relations that includes any interpretive task or performative mediation through the agency of the artistic document. Thus the real in the sense I use it, maps the relations that configure a work's discursive 'site'. I would describe the encounters of relational aesthetics as the performance of inter-subjective encounters that require and indeed are conditioned by the expectation that they require some extraneous or additional mediation or supplement. There is an in-built expectation that they will be viewed by audiences who understand and participate at different places within the relational matrix of mediation necessary to ascribe meaning to the work. That is, an audience whose proximity to the work varies, and who are subjectivised by the work on different levels.

The point here is that if we accept that relational forms are discernable within networks of encounter then the relation of the photograph to the work and the mediation, and the auto-affective capacities of the document's circulation and reception, must be read into this matrix in order to define the present institution of art, literally art's sociable form. Bourriaud himself suggests that the work 'does not offer itself as a spatial whole, but as a time span to be crossed'.[474] The work comprises 'the

[473] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans and ed. by Greta Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Athlone Press, 1997), p. 226.
[474] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 73.

totality of the artists practices of signification'.[475] Monica E McTighe's work around the relationship between installation art and its documentation is helpful in formulating the 'documentary real' in these terms.

McTighe's work looks at the connections between installation art photography and memory. Installation art and photography present a particular mnemotechnics within contemporary art practice. She claims that photography connects the practice of installation art to the way contemporary society cultivates memory and constructs history particularly in relation to archives and collections. This relies upon a Derridean conception of the photograph as supplementary in the sense that it thereby 'presences' the work. The 'sequence' of supplementary mediations of the art work form a chain that in fact produce the sense of the work in the very deferral of it. This is similar to Auslander's notion of informationally-mediatised epistemology. McTighe's formulation relies upon Miwon Kwon's and Robert Smithson's thinking of site-specificity. In Smithson's work, it is the non-site of the work in relation to its photographic documentation that is key. The photograph itself as this 'non-site' adds to the *mobility* of the work and allows for an expansion of the 'site' of the work to extend its epistemological field and interpretation. On this basis, she asserts, following Kwon, that the discourses of memory and history can be included within the contemporary discourse of the site-specific to include, in addition to material content, people, objects, places and disciplines. In other words, the move from gallery based relational practice towards post-relational experimental community, is both facilitated by this expanded field of epistemology, but moreover, the post-relational work *produces its own site*. The site consists of that in which topology and discursive symptoms become the work's 'locus' and its production. This approach is helpful to re-thinking sites as a 'configurations', as Badiou would term it, and to the question of the pre-evental analysis of a site, based on its relative 'discursive instability'. For

[475] Monica E. McTighe, *Epic Forgetting: Mapping Memory Practices in Installation Art* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2005)

McTighe it is the installation and its documentation that marks those sites as 'heterotopian' – as sites that connect to other times and places. In other words, they form a site of intersection.

If we accept that relational forms are produced within a matrix, comprising the relation of the photograph to the work in its mediative and auto-affective capacity; and include within this matrix the document's circulation and reception, then the 'documentary real' can be read as a productive site that nominates the 'institution of art'. It is within this expanded matrix that we can begin to speak of relation in terms of its *relational shape*. In order to bring my analysis of the re-thinking of relation into the analysis of post-relational art, what I am proposing is that Bourriaud's topologies and matrices of encounter demand some means of thinking of relation in its non-relationality, that is as a singular construction.

Realist Topology

The development of the post-relational idiom is defined by the emergence of topology as a key artistic category that responds to, and augments, the local and micropolitical configurations of relational art. In particular, the notion of relational shape emerges from a heterology of thought that is sympathetic to Bourriaud's aleatory materialism. Gashé's rethinking of relation as riven by the event of its non-relation might take hold symptomatically as the basis of a material aesthetics in which the event is placed at the heart of relation rather than outside it. This tends to ground Bourriaud's transitive ethic within the notion of being-toward-another as a category of relationality that has its own particular history. It lies within a notion of relation that Gashé argues has been forgotten or erased.

Post-relationality also requires a re-thinking of the relationship between the real and the virtual in which minimal relations comprise a form of realism that sets itself in opposition to the actual. 'Capitalist Realism' ought properly, then, to be termed 'Capitalist actuality', given that it is

merely a logical and contingent form of appearance. This introduction of 'the actual', liberates 'realism' from dystopian discourse and allows it to enter into a critical relation to post-relational practice's 'realism'. In other words, it recognizes in aleatory materialist form, the contingency of the real.

Another movement towards the form of this realism relies upon an Adornian reading. The post-relational matrix is a fragmentary construction. In this respect, it denies the real as a totality of relations and rejects any *Grundnorm* of relation that might dictate the ordering of its relations. By doing this it not only presents the internal logic of its configuration but immanently questions the necessity of the logic of the 'actual' within which it inheres. In Adornian terms this grants the matrices of relational shape their objective credentials.

What I am proposing is that post-relational forms entail both the thinking and the representation of 'realist' topologies that move us beyond the constrictions of metapolitics that conflates all forms of representation with ideological or 'actual' appearance. Topology, and matrixed topology in particular, is the 'post-public' model for the production of discursive space. Within the broadening rubric of representation I have identified, the production of this space is therefore an act of representation on the basis that it produces subjective consciousness.

If such a topology is to be an immanent critique of the actual, then it must produce itself within vastly transformed conditions of production. These are the conditions of disorientation and precarity: of de- and re-territorialisation. I would describe it as the performance of a topology within the promisory form of social realism, in which the virtual is the necessarily non-relational part of productive relation as representation. If we are to formulate some programme of representational efficacy for post-relational practice, this must occur on the basis that the forms of representation are now inherently topological rather than semiological.

The ‘visual’ documentation of post-relational practices entails the linking together of representations within larger assemblages or chains. Representational chains thus produce some of the specificity of a topology. In addition, post-relational networks of distribution and circulation link audiences and spatio-temporal configurations within a performative matrix. The social system of art becomes, then, the production of the social itself as an acute form of differential network. This differentiation takes the form of an excess of testimony over the actual. The post-relational form of topology I adopt is an expansive assemblage of specificities of relational shape. This topological assemblage produces a universal subject *as being in and for itself*. It seems to me that what we are witnessing within post-relational aesthetics is a new ability to think the specificity of a relational as a socialized singularity, and moreover, the annexation of a broader rubric of representation modelled upon consciousness as the contestation of subjectivity. As such, it is not necessary to abandon micropolitical forms in order to facilitate new forms of representation within relational art. Neither do we need to lump together all forms of visual representation with the pejorative form of ‘the visual’. If there is to be a maxim for post-relational representation it might be one we have already encountered: ‘when and where does it appear and for whom’.

Conclusion

How are the concepts of relation and representation conjoined within relational and post-relational political aesthetics and how are these concepts evolving within the rubric of a new critical realism, or the 'documentary real'?

Within early relational arts its representational forms tended to be limited to gallery based installation type artworks, the documentation of performances and descriptions of relational art within journals and books. The engagement of this art with forms of representation was at first tentative and with good reason. Bourriaud found himself caught within one of the paradoxes of political art: that is the injunction to provide a critique of representation at the level of the 'generalised reification' of relations within a 'totally administered' world, countered by an ethical prohibition upon images and the ideological dangers of 'speaking for the other'. Bourriaud recognised the need to produce new forms of representation adequate to the realisation of new material forms of relation but was bound by the micropolitical premises of his programme and what appears, in retrospect, to have been micropolitics' reductive condemnation of all forms of representation as instances of 'over-encoding'. Thus the criticality of early relational art manifested itself weakly at the level of representation and was heavily reliant upon Bourriaud's polemics as a source of legitimacy for its political credentials. Bourriaud's initial solution was to draw upon Daney's theorisation of 'the visual' in order to bracket out visual/ideological forms of representation from the representative capacities of relational art's micropolitical forms and communities. This was, however, only a partial solution. The critique of *Relational Aesthetics* seized upon the weak representational manifestation of relational art and this produced the charge that relational art neither provided any object of contemplation nor demonstrated its usefulness or political efficacy: in other words, that it lacked any qualities upon which it might be judged. Early relational arts lack of a developed procedure of representation made it vulnerable to

a number of misreadings. Chief amongst these was the claim that relational art was an art of *dematerialisation* and that it merely re-iterated the failed programme of conceptual art's critique of the commodity form but with a new inflection of theatricality: the fetishization of relational encounter. This went against Bourriaud's insistence that relational aesthetics was a materialist programme and that the forms of relation it produced were concrete. In addition the representative forms of democracy and of the counter-public realms that Bourriaud appeared to advocate in *Relational Aesthetics* were underdeveloped and contributed to a reading of relational art as consensual and convivial. This prompted a critical division between convivial and antagonistic relational aesthetics in which particular relational practices works that evinced a strong photographic element were lauded as antagonistic, and in which antagonism became a benchmark for the judgement of relational artworks.

Overall, the critique of early relational aesthetics helped to re-clarify the irreducibility of representation within any programme of aesthetics. It allowed Bourriaud and his interlocutors to explore a speculative micropolitics of representation that encompassed a potentially broader range of forms. Bourriaud's response in *Postproduction* and *The Radicant* was to engage more explicitly with forms of exchange and to explain in greater detail the forms of representation that might be used to re-narrativise their forms, for example the screenplay and the sample. Thus there is a movement towards the use of form in its representative capacity. Along with Bourriaud's more emphatic explanation of the relationship between mimesis, topology and translation this provided a more nuanced account of the way that the use of forms is both a representational act and a principle of construction: that is, the proposition that relational topologies produce sites of representation and the nature of the counter-public it proposed. At the same time the discourse of political aesthetics moved towards the notion of community as a representative form which encouraged the thinking of more extenuated form of artistic representation.

In my analysis of the re-thinking of relation, I concluded that the categories of relation and representation are linked within a classical mode of thought in which the general and the particular render 'extinct' the thinking of singular relation or the appearance of singular forms. Thus in very Adornian terms I re-discovered the obstacles that philosophy can place in the way of developing forms of art. In an extension of Rancière's maxim I concluded that the future of both representation and relation are 'behind us'. This was not an eschatological conclusion. It was merely the premise for a rethinking of relation and non-relation together rather than in terms of anti-representation. This culminated in a link between Bourriaud's relational matrix as a singular appearance with the notion of relational shape and the non-identitarian aformal intricacy of relation taken from Gashé. Where they meet is in the notion that encounters, meetings gestures and other types of interaction might form the basis of a broadening of the palette within which we might recognise representational forms. Broadly, these are forms of representation premised upon their ability to act upon consciousness.

Within the current defence of representation there is a recognition that the ethical refusal of modes of representation leaves only a vacuum for ideological forms of representation to fill. Within this, visual documentation has a continuing role to fill on the basis that it can be viewed, not as enslaved to 'meaning', but increasingly as a tool. In other words there is developing recognition of the performativity of the performance document and a realism about its dialectical relationship to the forms of 'liveness', that have previously been used as a purported form of resistance to commodification. This resistance has been predicated upon a privileged ontology of performance, which in fact is illusory and unhelpful to the development of post-relational modes of representation.

Why has the question of relation emerged as a problem for culture generally? Why does the discourse of relationality dominate political aesthetics and philosophy?

I have concluded that the question of relation arises whenever there is an acute need to question the intra and extra-mental properties of relation. In our conjuncture, this arises from a state of generally reified relation in which the thinking and the implementation of new relations appear to be disjoined. That is, they appear within a relation of non-relation. This, in turn, dictates that the very aporii of non-relation become a productive site for both art and philosophy. Given that the site of non-relation is a site of singularity in which, by definition, the non-object or non-being of relation cannot appear, this precipitates in philosophy, an analysis of the precepts of singularity and particularity and the very philosophical logic that precludes the appearance of singularities. Within art, this appears in the form of a re-appraisal of the precepts of representation and demands a re-thinking also of the nature of artistic autonomy or, the relation of non-relation between art and what is heteronomous to it.

Why have relational and post-relational practices returned to the ontology of the event?

Within a relationally hypostatic constellation, the aporia of non-relation invites a form of speculative ontology or metaontology of the event. The event appears as the absent third term within a contradiction between the singular and the particular. The problem with this is that it has taken a providential or messianic form that elides the role of human agency. Hence, we encounter the event in its non-appearance, in its maximal and fleeting appearance as rupture. What has emerged within the theorization of the event, and particularly its rarity in Badiou and Rancière's thinking is that the thinking of the event was in fact a symptomatic framing of relational hypostatsis. I have chosen to theorise the event, after Gashé, as inhering within the very aformal intricacy of relation and as a principle of movement towards non-identity. In this respect, the evental nature of

minimal relations allows for a thinking of the particular in its contingency. This is why I conclude that aleatory materialism is a thinking of the event that emerges from a heterological mode of thinking better attuned to challenge hypostatic relation than the providential model. When the event is conjoined to the motility of relation what emerges is a model in which artistic agency becomes relevant once again.

What is the relationship between relational and post-relational practice and the historical and neo-avant-gardes? How have the cognates of sociability within previous forms of 'socially engaged practice' translated into the rubric of relationality?

I have concluded that there is a productive relationship to be explored between the neo-avant-garde and post-relational practice as a 'rich loam' of experimentation but I chose not to examine this relationship in any detail. This was partly in recognition of Bourriaud's insistence that the 'unprecedented' programme of relationality is qualitatively different from the avant-garde and partly in order to examine those aspects of relational aesthetics that purportedly make it so. There is certainly a migration of cognates and procedures from the historical and neo avant-gardes into relational aesthetics. Participation, collaboration, performance and encounter all feature within both. In early relational art these cognates do carry with them some of the immediacy and political-interventionist verve of the avant-garde. However, what distinguishes post-relationality from the avant-garde is firstly the milieu and conjuncture in which it arises. Thus, globalization demands an aesthetics adequate to the shrinking spaces of artistic autonomy and in which the influence of popular culture is exponentially greater than it appeared under modernism. In addition to this, the blurring of the distinction between consumption and production and unique spatio-temporality of networks of communication and exchange require relational art to operate within very limited spaces of non-identity. In fact, relational art is tasked with producing these spaces. This is of a different magnitude to the site-specificity and performance spaces of the 1960s and 1970's.

Relational aesthetics takes greater risks with artistic autonomy than do previous avant-gardes, quite simply because it has to. At the level of methodology, Bourriaud's anti-teleological and anti-historical rejection of the avant-garde (although I think he genuinely admires it) is no affectation. Even in the shift of emphasis that occurs between *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction* Bourriaud maintains a strong methodology and an adherence to his principles of chance or aleatory materialism. Thus in spite of his rhetoric of altermodernism, his thinking is rather post-modern and anti-philosophical in this respect. It is certainly not an easy fit with theories of the avant-garde, at least until Foster's formulation of it in non-utopian terms.

What are the consequences for the theory of artistic autonomy of relational and post-relational artistic practice? Can the theory of autonomy be maintained in the light of these practices? In other words, what gives these practices their distinctive character as art?

The initial critique of *Relational Aesthetics* exhibited a great deal of anxiety about the autonomy of this new artform. This was a reflection of the mimetic qualities of relational art: its use of the forms of non-art. Allied to this was the demand that relational art demonstrate its aesthetic qualities, either through the demonstration of its objects or its efficacy. Therefore, without any ostensibly tangible demonstration of its forms relational art was unable to distinguish within the extant notion of autonomy, any substantiation of its claim to be art beyond its nominative capacity. This resulted from a misreading of both Bourriaud's principle of productive mimesis and translation and the importance of aleatory materialism in relational aesthetics. These are the means by which new forms are created and established. Thus, there has been confusion around Bourriaud's articulation of the principle of 'inhabitation' or the co-existence of relational forms with the hegemonic. This concern with aesthetic autonomy persists also in the archival and informational forms of relational art although these are less directed at relational art than as

the whole range of critical art and networks of expanded authorship that have emerged within ‘internet art’.

Overall, it is fair to say that anxieties about the autonomy of relational art have abated as debates around art’s sociable forms have fixed upon the more tangible category of community. There has been a general recognition also that Bourriaud’s project has not in fact produced any dire consequences. Aesthetic autonomy can be used, wrongly in my view, as an eschatological category that censures the heterononomous proclivities of emerging art. On my reading of Adorno’s dialectic, it is the risk that one takes with non-art that produce the most acute form of contradictory engagement with art. Relational aesthetics rejuvenates the notion of artistic autonomy and produces a maximal appearance of its contradictory nature.

In addition, the global economic crisis and recent critical engagement with the ‘idea of communism’ has also produced a shift in critical focus and a reading of relational art as one approach among many others to the sociable forms of art. Thus relational art has to some extent been swept along in a wave of utopianism, which has had something of a re-birth as a preliminary form of critical engagement with capital. Relational art’s stockpile of forms and methodologies has informed this movement. As a consequence, relational art has lost its novelty and is no longer the centre of critical focus it once was. This has enabled some critical distance to open up on relational art. I have been able in my thesis to consider relational art and its critique *together*. On this basis the thesis might be read as an account of the operations of artistic autonomy and the very dialectical process that informs it and mutates it. Relational art has changed the notion of aesthetic autonomy because it has insisted upon its legitimacy as art and has devised strategies for engagement with non-art that entail realistic assessments of the conjuncture of globalisation and the forms of artistic inhabitation that are possible within it.

In what sense are relational and post-relational artists as 'tenants of culture' employing the use of forms mimetically?

I think that Bourriaud recognises that there is no 'outside' of culture and that to this extent as 'tenants of culture' or 'renters' of cultural forms artists are totally implicated within its structures. The point is to learn how to inhabit it 'better', that is for artists to make their presence known rather than to seek some means of escape. This is where the influence of de Certeau upon relational aesthetics should not be underestimated. In the early development of relational art in particular, Bourriaud's search for ways to articulate this principle and for appropriate forms of expression (I am thinking in particular of his use of the Marxist term 'liminal') have invited misreading. For example, liminality entails some place in which the commodity form of exchange is suspended. Thus his use of the term as denoting the production of discourse comes at a price: this is association of liminal relational form with a literal rejection of exchange value. This is not what he intended and I certainly think that this reading enabled Bourriaud to refine his use of 'tenancy' in his later work. For example by the time we reach *The Radicant*, the notion of tenancy as a principle of occupation is replaced with a principle of motility and relational flows. Also in the later work it is the motility of the movement between relations that becomes prevalent rather than the notion of any domiciliary inhabitation.

Bourriaud's thinking of mimesis is essential to a reading of 'inhabitation'. Mimesis entails the notion of transformation through the use of forms and the construction of topologies that establish new relational matrices allow Bourriaud to construct a form of inhabitation that we might describe in Stallabrass's terms as 'real virtuality'. This form of virtuality therefore enables a reading of inhabitation that is not based upon the simple repetition of extant relational forms.

What is the nature of relational art's engagement with archival practices and informational networks of expanded authorship within contemporary art practice?

As the principal locus for the construction of relations as a general social technique of labour, it is hardly surprising that relational art has sought to explore this territory as artists acting under the archival impulse have done since the turn of this century. The internet provides an ideal site in which to pit artistic labour against non-artistic labour and is a site in which the appropriation of forms, translation and sharing is easily achieved. It provides a model in which the performativity of labour can be explored and a site at which subjectivity is contested.

However, the charge of the reductively mimetic nature of this art has persisted. The questions of whether 'resistant' networks and 'informational readymades' are possible within the strictures of the network, has become the focus for the question of autonomy. Counter-networks are potentially limited in their efficacy on the basis that they are easily recuperated, whilst the homogeneity of informational relations would seem to preclude any migration or metamorphosis of the informational readymade. These are tough questions for anybody to answer, and perhaps it is too soon to tell whether there is indeed any efficacy in this art as the means to critique capital. A provisional solution might be to view the question in terms of hegemonic logic and counter-logic, and in addition, to view the matrices of relationality not simply as encased within electronic communication but as establishing social relations *outside* of its circuits. This would be the way that Negt and Kluge would examine a counter-public sphere: as an agglomeration of diverse sites and audiences. On this basis, the networks of post-relational production should be read within a broader matrix of relational production, that Foster anticipated in 'the archival turn'.

Relational artworks can take many forms including gallery-based works, online networks of expanded authorship and experimental communities.

Can we yet discern a new artistic form of post-relationality? What is the difference between relational and post-relational artistic practice?

'Post-relationality' is a symptomatic term that arises in many different forms in this thesis. I have tried not to give it a fixed definition, nor have I tried to historicise it (for example in the move from gallery based artworks toward communitarian and matriced relations). Its usefulness has been as a name for a constellation of impressions that I have of the development of the programme of relational art. It is a name for the calling back and forth of these symptoms. Its elements include, but are not comprised, within the notion that relational art was post-relational from its inception: this means that early relational art was less a remediative aesthetics than a diagnostic one. It includes the post-representational, or elements of it, in the sense that the urgent need to re-formulate representation in relational terms becomes increasingly apparent as the critique of relational aesthetics confronts relational art with its non-appearance. It also recognizes the action of artistic praxis upon classical notions of relation within philosophical discourse and the need to replace this with a heterological thinking of relation that is both aformal and more nuanced than 'the particular' and enables its materiality to be built upon a principle of contingency. The list is not exhaustive. It merely indicates certain transformations that have taken place in the thinking of relationality within the last ten years.

What might characterise the emergence of the 'post-relational' is a productive reading of the 'relation of non-relation' that arises within many aspects of culture, not as the impasse of anti-relationality but as the means by which to re-think relation and its forms of representation and epistemology. The epistemology of the 'post-relational' is dominated by these concerns and, in addition to the need to define new forms of knowledge within the precepts of post-representation and counter-publicity. It operates also within a notion of performative materiality and a heterological mode of thinking that is now associated with the materialist undercurrent in Marx's thinking.

Given that relational aesthetics is founded upon a micropolitics that is inimical to representation and in particular, to 'visual representation', what would be an adequate model of the forms of representation proposed by relational and post-relational artistic practices? What are the various forms of representation implicated within relational art and what might a relational 'topology' offer in terms of beginning to speak of new forms of representation such as 'relational shapes' and matrices?

Relational aesthetics followed the prevalent hostility towards representational forms, certainly the forms of visual representation that have been prevalent in critical art at least since the 1960s. And the centrality of micropolitics dictated this. To recall, micropolitics is not simply a theory of anti-representation although this is an important element. It would have been impossible for relational art to develop microstructural responses to globalised capital without the benefit of this thinking. Nor could it have recognized that a thinking of relation upon a different scale (minimal relation) is pre-requisite to any form of critical inhabitation of reified macropolitical structures. Relational art has not been alone in this: the influence of Deleuze and Guattari upon critical art has been massive within art schools at least since the early 1980s. However, I think that from the outset relational art was haunted by the anxiety that it may not find an adequate mode for its appearance. This can be seen in Bourriaud's formulation of 'visual' (ideological) against transitive-ethical forms of representation based upon the encounter. In the latter respect, Bourriaud falls into the tendency of critical art to substitute what Rancière calls 'ethical immediacy' through the principle of action as social montage. Whilst Bourriaud rejected Conceptual art's notion of dematerialisation (although this is itself a reductive account of Conceptual art, albeit a prevalent one), he understood equally that Conceptual art demonstrated the irreducibility of representation within aesthetics. Thus, he acknowledges throughout his work the need to find new forms of representation. Bourriaud's use of Daney's notion of the visual is problematic in itself. It is not so much that I disagree with his assessment that certain forms of image making are authoritarian and

ideological. Rather, it is that the question of the mechanism for this is not fully explored. This is why I have used Rancière's analysis of the taboo upon images (as over-signifying or as failing to signify) in order to re-open the question. This enables the defence of representation as a form of consciousness to include the visual.

One of the fortunate consequences of Bourriaud's rejection of 'the visual' has been, that this channeled his creative energies into the thinking of non-visual forms of representation. His thinking of topology appears in *Relational Aesthetics* although not in an expanded form. In the later writing, topology, has an important role to play in the future development of representation. For Bourriaud, it provided a means of linking relations within transformative matrices, not only as articulations of the relations they envelop, but also as the production of relational space itself. Bourriaud's thinking of 'publicness' develops markedly in this respect from his early consensual model. I believe that the complexity of Bourriaud's thinking of relational space has prompted the re-thinking of the philosophy of relation that is a necessary step towards re-thinking representational form. In my development of Bourriaud's conjunction and matrice, I have used Gashé's thought to augment Bourriaud's methodologies of the fragmentary construction and aleatory materialism. This connects the use of the topological form with a mode of thinking that grants it a purchase upon appearances whilst simultaneously rejecting the thought of origin or destination within its mode of representation. I have also introduced into Bourriaud's 'encounter' the notion of relational shape as a means of articulating what is specific and sensory within these relations.

Where is the work? What is the ontology and function of the artistic document within the social system of relational art? .

I believe that the visual documentation of some but by no means all of relational art practice has at times functioned in a similar way to that of many live art practices. That is, it has assumed a subaltern role in relation

to the ontologically privileged and ‘unmarked’ performance: still and moving image documentation becomes a means to an end that does not sit well with relational art’s micropolitics in the same way that documentation has been regarded as a ‘necessary evil’ of live art. All forms of critical art require some means *by which to appear* and to produce their social systems. I have concluded that the proper question to ask is about the source of this anxiety.

Visual and moving image documentation is one of the principal means by artworks maintain the exchange between the *autopoiesis* of art, that is, its internal logic, and its relation to the forms of the socius that are determined hegemonically within the logic of the commodity form. This Adornonian thinking holds true even now. It is the basis of a social system of art that does not in Rancière’s brilliant maxim become ‘a paradise for aesthetes’, nor does it become in Badiou’s terms ‘a mysterious debate with power’. Within the critique of relational aesthetics this manifests itself in the problem that relational art is clearly indebted to previous forms of performance and live art. But in relational art’s disavowal of its relation to those forms, at least in Bourriaud’s polemics, and, in fact, its annexation of this heritage within a sleight of hand that is *the performance form*, it does not thereby divest itself of the burden of representation that performance and live art has wrestled with and failed to resolve. I have been meticulously fair to Bourriaud and to his anti-historicism. However, in many respects Bourriaud’s ‘use’ of form amounts to their excoriation. His anti-historicism denies but inherits their problematic, particularly in relation to representation. Bourriaud’s aleatory materialism is at odds with his ethics of visual representation but he is more willing to point out the idealism of his critics than acknowledge this trait within the antecedents of relational art.

This has had some unfortunate consequences for the reading of relational art. I believe that relational art is qualitatively and conjuncturally different from live art: but equally relational art’s shared reliance with live art upon the immediacy of performance as an alternative to visual

representation has made it prone to a reading within the teleology of performance. This is not a problem in itself but it has precipitated a reading of relational art's essentialism based upon its ethical baggage: the ontology of liveness. Auslander's 'liveness' argument clearly demands that one accept the mediation of the live by still and moving image. Moreover that performance is reliance upon this mediation in order to 'presence' it. Auslander's account is useful in formulating a notion of how visual documentation might perform a role in the broader matrixed forms of representation that are currently being explored. My conclusion is that a document is merely one element within a performative matrix.

What might a model of the documentary real or more broadly critical realism look like? Can relational practice make a claim to critical realism? In particular, what can Bourriaud's notion of operational realism contribute to the renewed debate around realism within representation?

What is emerging is a picture of post-relational critical realism in which a matrix of operations and methodologies of representation are used in both the production and inscription of spaces of critical consciousness. Critical realism is both an incomplete aggregate of critical interventions and a spatio-temporal proposition. Once again, this needs to be viewed within the form of a constellation in order to avoid its conceptualisation. Critical realism is a movement against its own identity with any concept. In a truly Adornian sense, the legitimacy of its claim to 'realism' is precisely its fragmentary form and therefore, its ability to imitate a fragmented reality.

I will highlight some of the operations and multiple forms of critical realism. Bourriaud posits operational realism in art as being suspended somewhere between 'contemplation' and 'use'. This is not a statement of indeterminacy but of 'lived experience'. It sets out a principle of movement between these concepts in which 'realism' becomes their negotiation. In this sense it is the process of relational art that produces

its objectivity. Within the motility of operative realism, artworks are simultaneously products, tools and a medium in their own right. In this sense, the processual element of Adorno's thinking is accelerated in Bourriaud. Bourriaud's 'objectile' replaces Adorno's partial identification of objects, or we might say that the principle of *Darstellung* in Adorno moves via the principle of *Erfharung* as 'passage' in Negt and Kluge's thought, towards a fully performative and narrative inscription of the artwork. In this sense, the 'realism' of relational art is informed by and attuned to the generalised field of performance that no longer affords any opportunity for direct or transgressive presentations of criticality. However, it recognizes within this, the potential uses of the performance form. Thus, performative artistic labour is the means by which subjectivity is contested and at the level of aleatory materialism, the means by which novel relational forms take hold.

The critical realism of early relational art operates within a mechanism of framing and is thus closer to the notion of the framing of 'untruth' that we find in Adorno. Bourriaud identifies realism with the point of fissure or encounter between two forms. However, in its later development, the 'relation of non-relation' between forms of the encounter and extant social forms becomes an instance of productive non-relation, a singular presentation, rather than a presentation of irreducible singularity. When these forms are conjoined with the principles of topology, mimesis and translation they acquire a greater purchase upon the mechanisms of appearance. Bourriaud's real is a conglomeration of surfaces and forms that are potentiality malleable. In fact it is this precarity that aligns them with the real and in particular with the precarity of capital's forms of labour and its individuation of subjects. In this respect there is a sense that the realism of post-relational art acquires its aesthetic 'indifference' precisely through the mimesis of the techniques of 'productive' labour. Bourriaud's 'realist' principle of 'make-believe' is the narrative principle by which its framing mechanisms and its principle of performance are brought together in practice.

My reading of Bourriaud's realism is, therefore, as follows: his inductive methodology produces, in a manner similar to Adorno, not a complete rendering of his object (the social) but a fragmentary construction of its elements or facets. On this basis, we might say that it is an objective presentation: its appearance is not mediated by any concept. Where Bourriaud's matrices differ from Adorno's constellations is that they contain also a performative principle. Hence, to return to Bourriaud's first point, the matrices of relation are spatio-temporal arrangements, but this principle of form is conflated with use. These matrices, as models of sociability, are to be used, surfed, negotiated and scripted. Bourriaud's realism might be described as Adornian in its objectivity, that is, it is objective precisely because it obeys its own internal logic, but crucially it also contains some sense of Negt and Kluge's *Erfharung*. It is the movement of lived experience and a precarious negotiation of its own matrix. When Bourriaud tells us that the way to encounter a relational artwork is to ask whether it proposes a world, one that offers an invitation to participate within it, I think that he makes an invitation to us to produce something real. Whereas Adorno's realism negatively presents the real in its contradiction, Bourriaud's approach is to perform within that (non-relational) space and to inscribe relations through acts of social montage and performance.

Political aesthetics has been dominated in the early twenty first century by the relational philosophy of Jacques Rancière and the anti-relational philosophy of Alain Badiou. Are their philosophical positions adequate to the analysis of relational and post-relational art?

Alain Badiou's philosophy is a poor tool with which to analyse relational aesthetics. It is anti-relational all the way down. Yet he remains of central importance in framing the nature of relational hypostasis. The rigid opposition between the singular and the particular in his work, demonstrates the problem that a classical mode of philosophy imposes upon thought. Equally, if this non-relation can only be crossed through the ruptural emergence of a subjectivising event, this is of little use to a

mode of critical art in which performativity and direct action play an increasing role. It is only in Badiou's political polemics that we find a cellular model of political organization that might provide any useful material forms for relational and communitarian art. This framing of hypostasis has informed my conclusion that relational art was already post-relational. That it was a diagnostic of relation as much as a proposition as to their construction. Rancière proves paradoxically to be an anti-relational thinker also on the basis that he refuses any relation between community of sense and the extant social institutions. This mode of refusal is a means by which to avoid the particularisation of singularity and an idealistic over-identification of the political and the aesthetic. If one uses either of these approaches in the analysis of relational art one is faced with the problem that the premises of these thinkers deny singular relation any sensual or material mode of appearance within the social.

Can relational and post-relational art substantiate its claim to be a materialist aesthetics and if so, in what sense?

Relational art's materiality rests upon a set of aleatory materialist principles, which may in time enable one to call this, or its current counterparts, a materialist art. What relational art has lacked is an appropriate mode of appearance, or theory of representation. This is crucial. If transitive ethics and aleatory materialism are to work in conjunction, and I think they can, then they require some means of inscription into consciousness. In aleatory materialism, the encounter becomes concrete only when it has inscribed itself in fact. Thus the materialism of future relational art will, I think, become established provided that modes of both visual and non-visual representation can be fully articulated as an artistic language.

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