The journey-form as described by Nicolas Bourriaud in his most recent book of art theory and criticism, _The Radiant_, describes our post-industrial, globalised and inexorably networked milieu as one in which we are set adrift on serial itinerant journeys (even while staying put at home). The journey-form assumes a world-environment that is replete with signs and through which we are obliged to forge our own paths with whatever trail-blazing equipment we have available to us in order to construct our own order and sense out of the chaos and nonsense.

_The Radiant_ arrived promptly in the wake of Bourriaud's curatorial of the 2005 Tate Triennial at the Tate Britain entitled 'Aftermoderne', another clever neologism suggestive of a dawning world historical moment. If Bourriaud is good at anything it is conceptual coinage, and whether we like him or not such clever nomenclatures as 'relational aesthetics' seem to open up promising new swathes of territory ripe for not only artistic, but also design activity and research.

In early June 2009 I am invited to take a journey-form in search of Nicolas Bourriaud, somewhere in Paris. We have finally agreed upon a date and a time for a rendezvous, although a definite location for our meeting is never forthcoming. On my part there persists the lingering doubt as to whether such a meeting will offer any further insight to augment the published works already available, the renowned and much critiqued Relational Aesthetics, followed by Postproduction, and then most recently _The Radiant_, among other publications and curated exhibitions. Bourriaud is a busy man. In the situation of the interview rehearsed phrases are often merely regurgitated in small bytes as theoretical refrain: We all have our conceptual wares to circulate in the marketplace of thought, and it's true that over time many of us become theory-sluts, throwing around one familiar name or concept, then another, merely for the intellectual ring of it. Still, I am compelled by some residual sense of authenticity that might be granted in the face-to-face encounter. When we fail to meet he warns me in an accusatory tone: Most art theorists (and here we can include architects and design theorists as well) seem to be tourists on an organised trek rather than explorers. Perhaps it's true that we always knew in advance what we would come to eventuate: two wandering paths that failed to intersect.

Let's say, for the purposes of this conversation, that the meeting took place in the Palais de Tokyo. After all, fiction, as Bourriaud himself argues in _The Radiant_, can be employed to clarify reality. The Palais de Tokyo, a contemporary art space opened in 1999, would be a suitable setting for such a meeting. Together with Jerôme I San, Bourriaud was one of the founding curators of this remarkable laboratory of contemporary art production—opening hours midday to midnight—where ping-pong tournaments would sometimes take place on a Friday evening, and where art aficionados young and old could be found lingering over their drinks on the terrace as the sound of skateboarding punks punctuated art conversation. He arrives and he takes a seat, though it is obvious that he is distracted and has far more important things to do. Tell me, who are you, he asks. Am I supposed to be meeting you or someone else here, as he stands to depart.

The first question I would put to Bourriaud gives a little bit like this: The conceptual naming of a 'relational aesthetics' has turned out to have an enduring impact on ways in which not only artists, but also designers aspire to have their work engaged with. Could you tell me a little bit more about what you intended to achieve through this fruitful and provocative conceptual naming?

Artistic activity is a game, Bourriaud explains, whose forms, patterns and functions develop and evolve according to periods and local contexts; it is not an immutable essence. The location of art, he continues, as he slides out of the seat I have thoughtfully arranged for him, is in the realm of human interactions. Art is the place that produces a specific sociability, he suggests, as it turns his face from mine, as it potentially creates forms of conviviality, he says as he founds in an unfriendly way. The argument is that art should not be separated out as a distinct activity from the goings on of the socio, but that its activities are always already embedded in this lively and changeable milieu. Relations and encounters generally expand beyond narrow definitions of art to create everyday micro-utopias or relational micro-territories, he insists. Finally, he explains of the seminal work of Relational Aesthetics, it opened a discursive territory on which I have no grip anymore. It is true that an academic industry has emerged that focuses on a critique of Relational Aesthetics, but whether it is Claire Bishop or Stuart Martin's essay you choose to read, it would appear that Bourriaud's critics remain compelled by the promise of this conceptual assembly, and despite themselves want to salvage something from it for future use. Academics will never be able to understand artworks and artists, Bourriaud tells me in an accusatory tone. He has his back turned to me now.

A first step toward relational aesthetics is to recognise that art has the capacity to intervene amid social relations. This becomes even more obvious with respect to the fields of architecture and design, where programmatic requirements implicitly stipulate the accommodation of myriad relations that will come to be performed in both private and public spaces. The risk here is that the greater proportion of activities pertaining to art and design might then be said to fall under this description, as inevitably some social relations or other will be facilitated, so rendering the conceptual assembly rather weak. Nevertheless, there appears to be the promise of away of living or modes of life that a relational aesthetics could offer up. But Bourriaud is dismissive of the glimmer of an ethics that seems to emerge in his written work, as well as in curated shows such as "Trace" (1996).

"We all have our conceptual wares to circulate in the marketplace of thought, and it's true that over time many of us become theory-sluts, throwing around one familiar name or concept, then another, merely for the intellectual ring of it"

with its aim to create productive gathering places for artists and visitors alike: I tried not to waste my time answering the incorrect or stupid interpretations, including 'ethical' readings of it, he tells me with some disdain.

I attempt to point out that this is a perverse response given the sustained treatment of Félix Guattari's ethics-aesthetic paradigm is the final chapter of Relational Aesthetics, as well as Bourriaud's discussion of translucence as an important aesthetic and ethical imperative that fights for the indeterminacy of the code or the system of signs through which a work is communicated. In addition, 1 fruitlessly attempt to point out, there is his discussion of an ethics of precariness. He will have nothing of it, he will take no responsibility for suggesting the delineations of an ethics-aesthetics of his own making, except to ask in a Nietzschean fashion: are you willing to argue for all eternity the moments you are experiencing right now?

Bourriaud's small book entitled Postproduction further develops the theme of relational aesthetics by examining the predominant modes of creation, the techniques, tactics, methodologies, as well as approaches to material that contemporary artists from the 1990s onwards employ. If Relational Aesthetics remarked upon an ethos that Bourriaud as curator and critic perceived was at work in the art of the 1990s, then Postproduction discusses some of the key techniques activated by relational aesthetics. As a further conceptual installment, _The Radiant_ continues by framing what might be described as a series of post-industrial subjectivities, such as the exote, _The Radiant_, the nomad, the wanderer, the migrant—subjectivities that form and deform in varied attempts to either resist or to creatively and disruptively work from within our precarious contemporary milieu, which on darker days seems to have fallen ill with the fatigue induced through increasingly homogenized, economic globalization.

Many of the techniques described in Postproduction, Bourriaud explains, resemble the kind of work undertaken in the postproduction of film or music, or else, resemble the sampling of DJs, VJs and programmers, or those creative mixers we could call electronic bricklayers. Further procedures named by Bourriaud borrow from the Psychosociographical experiments of the Situationists, and their key concepts of détournement (dismantle) and dérive (drift), these techniques are particular favourites among architects. In addition, many of the materials used, he suggests, are non-precious, are junk or disposable, and in this material respect it becomes a matter of engaging in a poetics of the next-to-nothing. Through whatever means, art, Bourriaud insists, is used to look at the world. Here I slightly speculate whether architecture and design then further facilitate the framing of a point of view on a localised world. Bourriaud asks: what are the tools that allow one to understand the world? These are the tools, whatever is ready-to-hand, that artists know how to use. And then, reality is attenuated through the work of the imaginary, and art and life are brought together so that they are indistinguishable, that is to say, we recognise that our relations already have an aesthetic super-abundance, if only we look at them in a slightly adjusted light.

To preempt my question concerning the extraordinary library of philosophers Bourriaud draws upon across his published works, he warns me: I think of myself as a curator who writes, not as a philosopher. And with this remark, his exciting his Style and the thrust of the argumentation, which a
less generous reader of Theatricus, or Post-graduation, for instance, might call sloppy. As he strides out the door Bourriau throws one last remark to me over his darkly clad shoulder; Art is also achieved via instructions communicated from a distance, or after some delay, and can emerge in the gap between the meaning of a sentence and its translation, or between a lived moment and its subsequently accepted version. As architects and designers we are specifically aware of how our instructions are communicated via sets of conventional drawings and other representations, means, but what Bourriau offers here is how the act of translation can add something new to the message we are attempting to communicate.

My electronic instructions from the distance between Berlin and Paris or London (it's impossible to tell from which location Bourriau communicates with me), direct me to be in Paris in time for a meeting on Monday the 8th of June at 8pm, though things may develop, I am told. Bourriau is already out the door and heading across the busy avenue du Président Wilson when he insists—works of art create relations and these relations are exterior to their objects; they possess aesthetic autonomy, and here he admits to paraphrasing the thought of French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, whose refrain is: relations are external to their terms. It is a matter of necessity that I will form some relation or other, but it is a question of contingency with whom or what this relation will bind me. And so, my journey-form will take a line of flight that emerges away from the direction of Bourriau himself and lands me instead at the meeting table of Frédéric Migayrou, curator of architecture at the Centre Pompidou, but that is a more interesting story to be told at another point in time along my haphazard trajectory.


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### REMEMBER THE FUTURE

The future was here. Where to now? By Daniel Neville

I remember the future well. Jetpacks, Mars missions and food capsules. It used to be so much fun. The promise of plastics just over the horizon and a helpful robot in every home. Say what you will about those times, but at least the future meant something in those days. Progress. You knew where you stood and our enlightened little selves could never do any wrong.

But then some of us started venturing off into the night like moths to a noon green flame. It was getting dark and we didn't really have a choice. Besides, Mars was getting boring and we needed something grittier than what our streamlined lives could give us. The first time you jacked into cyberspace with its glowing grids of unfolding information you forget how painful getting those damn chips inserted into your brain was. And, oh, the parties; throbbing music, lasers and reflective frock clothes were such a distracting novelty at the time. But we're all become fragmented cynical beings and whispering moral relativists. So much so that we didn't realise the robots had started turning against us until it was nearly too late. I mean, who were we to judge their value system? Thank god for the millennium bug is all I can say. Who knew that little bit of erant code would shut them down?

But where to now? It's been nine years since we've been really living in the future and everyone seems to be taking it for granted. We've been sampling the past for so long that everyone's forgotten how to look forward and come up with something new. I thought progress was supposed to be a linear function of time? People just don't seem to want to live in the future anymore. Sure, we have personal communication devices but how boring is that? Speaking of boring, have you been to the suburbs lately? There's not a cell bevies helped in sight. And what's with all the cheap neo-Edwardian façades? That's not how I remember the future. They're pretty much raising their finger to any notion of futurity, aesthetic or otherwise.

Hell, I'll even sheepishly admit to turning my back on the future. I've had a beard for the past few years and nothing says dismissal of the future like scruffy unshaven facial hair. Who saw that trend coming a few years back? But as much as I miss my jetpack I don't really want it to be part of my future today. I don't have a nostalgia for the absolute and I'm certainly not sentimental about the impotent base of individualist ethical subjectivism. So where does that leave us? It seems people are just getting on with it and being pragmatic about the whole thing. It's not like we have a choice these days. Sure, there's movement, but it just seems to be too informal at this point. Everyone seems to be so process oriented and participatory, but I'll happily accept that this seems to be the point.

But if you want a taste of what it's going to look like, travel through some architectural undercurrents. Big shiny impossible ones. The crazy stuff seems to be coming from students and the big studios. You can't start with the future until we have a general consensus of what the city should look like. If any of those shiny urban mind grenades of CAD-rendered design fiction are the backdrop for a poorly Photoshopped global mega-slum squatter city then you know you've found something. Despite the bulking chasm between the two they're both built on a tangential acknowledgment of dynamic biological processes. And we'll all be living in both of them at the same time, whether you like it or not.

When you're done glossying your eyeballs with pretty pictures go read some good-old-fashioned science. The mind-bending stuff. Anything that does a good job of melding complexity theory, relational generative networks and biotech is a good place to start. As long as you're running far away from Reductionist and Post-structuralist theory. And if you don't understand it yet, just keep on going until your nose bleeds. Those scientists never give up on progress, whatever the political climate. It's in their blood to keep on pushing the boundaries of what's appropriate. We'll worry about navigating microcapitvian ideologies later on, if at all.

We're not there yet, but we'll know when we move back into the future. We'll know because it will be weird, achingly weird. If it's both familiar and unrecognisable but it smacks you in the face with progress then you'll know you've found it. Even if it happens to have a damn jetpack.

Daniel Neville is a Melbourne designer and blogger at http://revolution.typepad.com. His supplementary ramblings on the future can be found by reading his recent posts where he should be covering the festival by the time you read this.