

Senka Ristivojević

Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, Serbia

Book Review: Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relaciona estetika / Postprodukcija / Altermodernost [Relational Aesthetics/ Postproduction/ Altermodern]*, Belgrade: Faculty of Media and Communication, Singidunum University, 2020, ISBN 978-86-81042-77-9

Curator, art critic, and renowned art theorist and philosopher, Nicolas Bourriaud is the author of three texts compiled in the book *Relational Aesthetics/ Postproduction/ Altermodern* published by the Faculty of Media and Communications (2020). The texts were produced over a period of 15 years during the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. These three works cover a period that saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, the formation and rise of the European Union, the global financial crisis, and the beginning and upswing of cultural globalization. Of the three texts, *Relational Aesthetics* was published in Serbian in the magazine *Košava* in 2003, while translations of the other two texts were made available only last year.

Together with Jérôme Sans, Bourriaud founded Palais de Tokyo in Paris and served as co-director from 1999 to 2006. He was a curator at Tate Britain in London from 2007 to 2010, and director of École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 2011 to 2015. After that, he served as artistic director of La Panacée art center in Montpellier. He initiated the founding and was the director of the MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain that opened in 2019.

As a curator, critic, and lecturer, Bourriaud tackles the current moment in a fearless and enthusiastic manner, and while the moment lasts, he is able to articulate and offer an understanding of what is happening in a very heterogenous art scene in Europe. His methodology is greatly shaped by his close and direct contact with artists, his curatorial practice leads to theoretical observations and contextualizing the ongoing moment. At the turn of the 21st century, Bourriaud emerges as the creator of several incredibly important terms in art theory that laid the path for other authors to further interpret and develop important discussions in the theoretical field.

Focused and astute in his intentions, Bourriaud had already made significant contributions to the interpretation of current events in his first book by introducing

a completely new term to describe a new juncture in artistic practices in the final decade of the 20th century. As a young curator, Bourriaud published the book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998 in French, 2002 in English), an extension and elaboration of his text from 1996, written for the exhibition *Traffic* held at CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. The exhibition featured international artists, whose works signified the beginning of the 1990s, primarily in Western Europe – Pierre Huyghe, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Maurizio Cattelan, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Jorge Pardo, Philippe Parreno, Gabriel Orozco, Jason Rhoades, Douglas Gordon, and others. By collaborating and befriending these artists, cautiously immersing himself in their works, making connections and contemplations, Bourriaud coined the term *relational aesthetics* that he described as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space”. With this term, he seeks to explain the changes taking place on the European art scene: the introduction of interactivity, viewer participation, and building relations between the artist and the audience. In all these cases the artist is the facilitator, while the artwork serves as the initiator of this relation.

Bourriaud cites intersubjectivity and interaction as the starting point for artists at the end of the 20th century, and as examples of relational art he identifies invitations, social events, gatherings, meetings, etc. These are not a novelty in art, such activities are rooted in avant-garde artistic practices from the early 20th century, Fluxus, Dada, and later in the realms of minimalist and conceptual art. However, artists from the 1990s focus on building relations, by producing “relational space-time elements, inter-human experiences trying to rid themselves of the straitjacket of the ideology of mass communications”.

His book *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* was published in 2001. Bringing forth another new term, Bourriaud defines *postproduction* as the use of forms, signs, objects, images from daily life, their combination, and newfound life in this new context. Reminding readers of the historical-artistic practices of appropriation, from Duchamp, through Andy Warhol and James Rosenquist and up to Jeff Koons, Bourriaud understands appropriation as the first stage of postproduction. Whereas these artists strived to blur boundaries between art and life, *postproduction* uses daily life and its objects as raw material for creating art. In this way, the culture of use signifies the transformation of the artwork's status. It becomes an active agent that offers the viewer the possibility and the freedom to use art for their own benefit. In relation to postproduction and the culture of use, Bourriaud makes parallels between visual artistic production and deejaying. Bourriaud understands postproduction, strategies of reactivation and the deejaying of visual forms as a reaction to a world oversaturated with images in daily life and media. The author poses the question of whether the reality we live in is the only possible one or can be reshaped from the same material into different versions.

Altermodern is another term that Bourriaud conceived in an attempt to define contemporary activities, this time focusing on the art scene during the first decade of

the 21st century. The text *Altermodern* was published as the introduction in the catalog of the 4th Tate Triennial (2009) in London. In the text, the author states that modernism represents a radical break from tradition, and declares the global financial crisis as marking the end of postmodernism and the period of mourning lost hopes, realities, utopias, and orders. What happens if we break away from modernism? Bourriaud approaches this new modernity through the concept of *viatorisation*, from the Latin *viator* for travel or traveler. Artists travel through space, time, and media, vying for uniqueness in the specific moment and trying to resist cultural standardization and commercialization.

The three texts by Nicolas Bourriaud are instrumental to our understanding of artistic tendencies at the turn of the century, as well as the directions in which art is heading. Many discussions, ideas, and analyses in art theory emanate from Bourriaud's concepts and terminology, such as relational aesthetics, relational art, postproduction, deejaying of visual forms, and altermodern.

Bourriaud's analysis of the current moment brought meaningful insights regarding the authentic ideas that formed and altered the society we live in today. For art in Serbia, the translations of these texts arrive late, but the time that elapsed since their inception does not diminish their significance. These works remain relevant for the local scene, as they provide us with signs on how to navigate through contemporary art, which the author calls the 'hybrid zone', in a world that is in a constant state of rapid change.