

NICOLAS BOURRIAUD

ARTIST

Post-Partisan

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Since its initial publication in 2001, *Postproduction* has been translated into five languages; depending on the translation schedules in various countries, publication either overlapped with or preceded that of another of my books, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Relational Aesthetics), written five years earlier. The relationship between these two theoretical essays has often been the source of a certain misunderstanding, if not malevolence, on the part of a critical generation that knows itself to be slowing down and counters my theories with recitations from "The Perfect American Soft Marxist Handbook" and a few vestiges of Greenbergian catechism. Let's not even talk about it.

I started writing *Relational Aesthetics* in 1995 with the goal of finding a common point among the artists of my generation who interested me most, from Pierre Huyghe to Maurizio Cattelan by way of Gabriel Orozco, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Vanessa Beecroft, and Liam Gillick – basically, the artists I had assembled in an exhibition called *Traffic* at the CapcMusée d'art contemporain in Bordeaux (1996). Each of these artists developed strangely similar themes, but they were not a topic of real discussion, since no one at the time saw these artists' contributions as original and new. In search of the common denominator, it suddenly occurred to me that there was a new thematic framework for looking at their works. I realized that every one of them without exception dealt with the interhuman sphere: relationships between people, communities, individuals, groups, social networks, interactivity, and so on. In its time, Pop Art was born of a conjunction between the phenomenon of mass production and the birth of visual marketing, under the aegis of a new era of consumption. *Relational Aesthetics* was content to paint the new sociopolitical landscape of the nineties, to describe the collective sensibility on which contemporary artistic practices were beginning to rely. The success of this essay, which – alas – has at times generated a sort of caricatured vulgate ("artists-who-serve-soup-at-the-opening," etc.), stems essentially from the fact that it was a "kick start" to contemporary

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aesthetics, beyond the fascination with communication and new technologies then being talked about incessantly, and above all, beyond the predetermined grids of reading (Fluxus, in particular) into which these artists' works were being placed. *Relational Aesthetics* was the first work, to my knowledge, to provide the theoretical tools that allowed one to analyze works by individuals who would soon become irrefutably present on the international scene.

Postproduction is not a "sequel" to *Relational Aesthetics* except insofar as the two books essentially describe the same artistic scene. In terms of method, the link between them is simple: both present an analysis of today's art in relation to social changes, whether technological, economic, or sociological.

But while the former 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. My first reflex was to try to avoid the artists extensively discussed in *Relational Aesthetics*. Then, after a few pages, I realized not only that they fully corresponded to this theory of production but also that I wanted to delve more deeply into these works, which the notion of relational aesthetics certainly did not exhaust. *Postproduction* therefore contains more detailed, more analytical chapters on the work of Philippe Parreno, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Liam Gillick, emblematic of the earlier book, but also deals with the work of Thomas Hirschhorn, Mike Kelley, Michel Majerus, Sarah Morris, Pierre Joseph, and Daniel Pflumm, artists I had yet to write about. In short, the two books show the same scene from two different angles, and the more recent is more centered on form, above all, because the artists in question have impressive bodies of work behind them.

Regarding *Postproduction*, I have often heard the argument: "This is nothing new."

It's true, citation, recycling, and *détournement* were not born yesterday; what is clear is that today certain elements and principles are reemerging as themes and are suddenly at the forefront, to the point of constituting the "engine" of new artistic practices. In his journal, Eugène Delacroix developed ideas similar to those in *Relational Aesthetics*, but the remarkable thing in the nineties was that notions of interactivity, environment, and "participation" – classic art historical notions – were being rethought through and through by artists according to a radically different point of view. The critics who counter my analyses with the argument that "this is nothing new" are often the last to know that Gerald Murphy or Stuart Davis made Pop Art in the thirties – which takes nothing away from James Rosenquist or Andy Warhol. The difference resides in the articulation. The working principles of today's artists seem to me to break with the manipulation of references and citation: the works of Pierre Huyghe, Douglas Gordon, or Rirkrit Tiravanija deeply reexamine notions of creation, authorship, and originality through a problematic of the use of cultural artifacts – which, by the way, is absolutely new.

In *Postproduction*, I try to show that artists' intuitive relationship with art history is now going beyond what we call "the art of appropriation," which naturally infers an ideology of ownership, and moving toward a culture of the use of forms, a culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal: sharing. The Museum like the City itself constitute a catalog of forms, postures, and images for artists – collective equipment that everyone is in a position to use, not in order to be subjected to their authority but as tools to probe the contemporary world. There is (fertile) static on the borders between consumption and production that can be perceived well beyond the borders of art. When artists find material in objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, the work of art takes on a script-like value: "when screenplays become form," in a sense.

For me, criticism is a matter of conviction, not an exercise in flitting about and "covering" artistic current events. My theories are born of careful observation of the work in the field. I have neither the passion for objectivity of the journalist, nor the capacity for abstraction of the philosopher, who alas often seizes upon the first artists he comes across in order to illustrate his theories.

I will stick, therefore, to describing what appears around me: I do not seek to illustrate abstract ideas with a "generation" of artists but to construct ideas in their wake. I think with them. That, no doubt, is friendship, in the sense Michel Foucault intended.