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THE RADICANT
BY NICOLAS BOURRIAUD

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Point of departure for B's theoretical work; Why is it that globalization has so often been discussed from sociological, political, and economic points of view, but almost never from an aesthetic perspective? How does this phenomenon affect the life *form*?

(p. 7)

Methodology of exposition: is to connect an image, an idea, in a non-linear rhythm. ... "exposition of an idea through fragments, through a roving and disconnected type of writing, can sometimes better circumscribe its object than can a more linear approach." an orientation conceived like a Powerpoint presentation.

Uses the example of "a necklace whose elements are linked to each other by the prehensile power of an *idée fixe*, as a conceptual archipelago," which also corresponds to the central image of this essay."

Bourriaud provides a breakdown of 'The Radicant' into the three distinct parts:

1. first part approaches 'the subject' in a theoretical manner
2. provides aesthetic reflection based on recent works of art
3. extends radicant thought first to modes of cultural production, and then to modes of consumption and use.

His modus operandi:

State that he tries to never loses sight of looking at the world through the optical tool of art; this helps him to "sketch out a world and worldwide art criticism of which works are in dialogue with the context in which they are produced."

(p. 8)

Bourriaud opens with a recent historic date,

On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell

He points out that six months earlier, May 18th, the exhibition *Magicians of the Earth* opened, with the subtext of *First World Exhibition of Contemporary Art* in having pulled together artist from all the continents, both peripheral and central to the contemporary art world. Bourriaud points to this date as the official entry of art into a globalized world (now known as globalization) shorn of master narratives, and onto itself a new world order.

With the blurring of lines and in the equivalent exhibition of works by artists, priests, and artisans, stood as a symbolic response to the concurrent larger political context of 'The Fall of the Iron Curtain' and the end of an era of US-Soviet bipolarity. With both exhibition and end of the communist world in sight, this signed to B the end of history as we know it, wherein history no longer the supreme measure by which to classify and rank artistic signs. [up until then art history of the twentieth-century had been a linear succession of formal inventions, a procession of individual and collective experiments, each bearing a new vision of art.] These factors signed the end of an era (of Modernism), and postmodern thought appeared and triumphed in the following decade.

(p. 11)

Introduction distinguishes Modern thought and motivations from that of the Postmodern. Pointing to the conception of history, now described as post-history, as the key difference between Modernism and Postmodernism. B quotes Thomas McEvelley, "history is noting but 'a single line moving forward across the page of time, with the vast ahistorical blank spaces of nature and the undeveloped world around it.' And non-Western cultures? Non-historical, hence irrelevant. What about Baule fetish figures? Authorless, the product of an obscure tribe, mere kindling for the furnace of progress."

(p. 14)

Lots of background material on the transition from Modernist thought to Postmodernist thought and how their inter-relationship is locked together in a Master-Slave narrative that affirms each other's frontiers. "Since the 1980s, numerous critics have devoted themselves to deconstructing this discourse. The theme of liberating alienated minorities has come to supplant the persuasive rhetoric of modernism, but in the process it has made every utterance the object of a major suspicion: the modernist universal, according to this logic, was nothing but a mask of the dominant white male voice. The theory of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, enables its practitioners to detect unspoken traces of homophobia, racism, phallogentrism, or sexism beneath the surface of the founding texts of political, philosophical, and aesthetic modernism. Through a kind of double negation or reverse deafness, the postmodern scene endlessly reenacts the rift between colonizer and colonized, master and slave, keeping the frontier –its object of study- and thereby preserving it as such. Between modern universalism and postmodern relativism, it is said, we have no choice (14)"

(p. 14)

straight quotation of paragraph:

Postcolonial deconstruction has thus facilitated the substitution of one language for another, the new one contenting itself with subtling the old one, without ever getting started on the process of translation that would establish a possible dialogue between past and present, the universal and the world of differences. Postmodern thought presents

itself as a decolonizing methodology, the core tool of which, *deconstruction*, serves to weaken and delegitimize the master's language in favor of an impotent cacophony. Emancipation, resistance, alienation: these concepts born of Enlightenment philosophy, concepts that were criticized but at the same time legitimated by the anticolonial struggles and then by postcolonial studies, have become conceptual fetters [restrains, confines] from which we must free ourselves in order to rethink the relationship of contemporary works to power and politics.

(p. 14-5)

Bourriaud calls for a reconstitution of modernity in order to get to a new construct of the contemporary aesthetic, which he calls 'altermodernity'. He reasons that the link to modernity already taking shape in as a fluid, in process of shaping itself to the obstacles of today that exerts itself against.

He outlines that this reconstitution does not have to be an embrace of the past modernist concepts that prevailed, such as avant-garde, universalism, progress, radicality but it is necessary to take a step beyond postmodern borderlines, "boundaries born of an aesthetic Yalta that no longer delimits anything but regions dominated by the most banal convention. (15)

(p. 15)

According to B, a number of authors and artists have already taken steps.

“through the novel space in which they are feeling their way and has yet to be named.

At the heart of their practice are crucial principles on which modernity can be reconstituted. Principles that may be enumerated: a focus on the present, experimentation, the relative, the fluid.

The present, because the modern ("what belongs to its time," for such is its historical definition) is a passion for the current, for today understood as seed and beginning – against conservative ideologies that would embalm it, against reactionary movements whose ideal is the restoration of this or that time past, but also, in a manner that distinguishes our modernity from preceding ones, against futurist prescriptions, teleological notions of all sorts, and the radicality that accompanies them.

Experimentation, because being modern means daring to seize the occasion, the *kairos*. It means *venturing*, not resting contentedly with tradition, with existing formulas and categories; but seeking the clear new paths, to become a test pilot.

The relative, To be equal to this risk, it is also necessary to call into question the solidity of things, to practice a generalized relativism, a critical comparatism unsparing of the most tenacious certainties, to perceive the institutional and ideological structures that surround us as circumstantial, historical, and changeable at well.

The Fluid, ‘There are no facts,’ wrote Neitzsche, “only inter-order, the ephemeral over an eternity write in stone; it is a defense of fluidity against omnipresent reification.

(p. 16)

Today’s artists, whatever latitudes they live in, have the task of envisaging what would be the first truly worldwide culture. But there is a paradox bound up with this historic mission, which will have to be undertaken not in the wake of, but in resistance against, that political pressure to conform to what is known as globalization. In order for this emergent culture, born of differences and singularities, to come into being, instead of conforming to the ongoing standardization, it will have to develop a specific imagination, relying on a logic unlike that which presides over capitalist globalization.

(p. 17)

According to Bourriaud, 19th c. modernity crystallized around the phenomenon of industrialization. In our 21st c. our ways of seeing and acting have transformed in an equally brutal way by economic globalization.

Exploding frontiers...for ex. The 2002 International Migration Report of the United Nations, the number of migrants has doubled since the 1970s. Approx. 175 million people live outside their native countries, this number is on the rise and is no doubt under-estimated. “Increasing flow of money and migrants, the fact that expatriation has become commonplace, the mushrooming of transport networks, and the explosion of mass tourism are fashioning new transnational cultures – which in turn are triggering angry retreats into ethnic or national identity.”

(p. 17-8)

On the term hybridization: (I get the sense Bourriaud discredits the term and prefers the use of creolization, which he defines, but he does not distinguish why the term ‘hybridization’ is on the outs. I need to define the term by way of N. Patergastidas)

What postmodernism calls hybridization involves grafting onto the trunk of popular culture that which has become uniform markers of ‘specificities’ – features, usually caricatured, of a distinctive ethnic, national, or other cultural identity – just as mass-produced candies are infused with different synthetic flavors. Today only two cultural models, themselves contradictory, seem to resist these tendencies:

1. on one hand, the withdrawal into national, ethnic, or cultural identity [repli identitaire], the resurgence of traditional and local aesthetic values;
2. on the other hand, what is called, after the Caribbean model, creolization, a process involving the acclimatization and crossbreeding of heterogeneous influences. Edouard Glissant; “cultures of the world are furiously and knowingly coming into contact with each other, changing by exchanging, through irremediable collisions and ruthless wars- but also through breakthroughs of moral conscience and hope.”

(p. 20)

Figure of the *exote* is introduced, to help better appreciate today's art. The *exote* is haunted by figures of travel, expedition, and global dislocation. B. provides further elaboration of the *exote* later on. (p. 20)

When it comes to subject formation, identity politicizing, the common defensive reaction is exalting difference as substance. "If I am Ukrainian, Egyptian, or Italian, I should therefore resist the forces of uprooting – ill winds blowing from who knows where – and conform to those national historical traditions that allow me to structure my presence in the world as a mode of identity. Born in a specific context, I am called upon to perpetuate the old ways that distinguish me from others. But who are those others? It is surprising to note that the question of identity is most pressing for immigrant communities in the most globalized countries: the satellite dishes in ethnic ghettos, isolation within customs that cannot be adapted to the host country, grafts that do not take. It is roots that make individuals suffer; in our globalized world, they persist like phantom limbs after amputation, causing pain impossible to treat, since they affect something that no longer exists. Rather than set one fixed root against another, a mythologized "origin" against an integrating and homogenizing "soil," wouldn't it make more sense to assign them to other conceptual categories, ones suggested by a global imagination in the process of mutation? 175 million people on the planet living in more or less voluntary exile; about 10 million more every year; professional nomadism increasingly commonplace; unprecedented circulation of goods and services; the formation of transnational political entities- couldn't this novel situation give rise to a new way of conceptualizing cultural identity?

(p. 21)

Let us wager that our own century's modernity will be invented precisely in opposition to all radicalism, dismissing both the bad solution of re-enrooting in identities as well as the standardization of imaginations decreed by economic globalization. For contemporary creators are already laying the foundations for a radlicant art – radlicant being a term designating an organism that grows roots and adds new ones as it advances. To be radlicant means setting one's roots in motion, staging them in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them the power to completely define one's identity, translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviours, exchanging rather than imposing. What if the twenty-first-century culture were invented with those works that set themselves the task of effacing their origin in favor of a multitude of simultaneous or successive enrootings? This process of obliteration is part of the condition of the wanderer, a central figure of our precarious era, who is insistently emerging at the heart of contemporary artistic creation. This figure is accompanied by a domain of forms – the domain of the journey-form – as well as by an ethical mode: translation, whose modalities this book seeks to enumerate.

(p. 22)

ALTERMODERNITY

ROOTS: A CRITIQUE OF POSTMODERN REASON

25

Bourriaud opens this chapter by laying clear the most dogmatic aspects of postcolonial practice in aesthetics, skipping through the usual suspects of Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak. Bourriaud propose that “numerous aesthetic theories born of the nebulous alliance of cultural postcolonialism have failed to elaborate a critique of modernist ideology that does not lead to an absolute relativism or to a piling up of ‘essentialisms’ In their most dogmatic form, these theories go so far as to obliterate any possibility of dialogue among individuals who do not share the same history or cultural identity.” Bourriaud points to a “complete atomization of references and criteria of aesthetic judgement.” He further elaborates that when a deconstruction of Eurocentrism and phallogentrism is the critical norm, the problem of an establish periphery remains in place and the center is still designated. In essence, Enlightenment philosophy is in the defendant’s seat, so he asks “What is the change?”

B says that while Bhabha and Spivak’s critical work is important and commended. And the succinctly leaps into pointing out the unexpected perverse effects of postcolonial theory, stating that it has transformed “the modern outlook that grew out of the Enlightenment into something unrecognizable, something both omnipresent and reviled, ceaselessly deconstructed yet untouchable.”

B further equates this poco twisted version of the modern to Jacques Lacan’s description of “the status of an *objet petit a*, which is an object existing only in shadow, an empty center, visible only indirectly, in the form of its anamorphoses.” He says the main issue with postcolonialism is that ‘the modernist totem offers a strange analogy with capital, it is denounced and despised but at the same time considered untouchable, endlessly deconstructed yet left intact.’ hows how we have come to a standstill, quoting Jacques Lacan and concludes with the request for a new space for discussion.

(p. 26)

Bourriaud says that in the meantime, we are witness to a postmodern aesthetic *courtesy*, an attitude that consists of refusing to pass critical judgement for fear of ruffling the sensitivity of the other. (27) In my opinion, perhaps the modalities of having to pass judgement in art and aesthetics that makes it an odd bedfellow of postmodernism/postcolonialism.

According to B, the “overblown version of multiculturalism based on well-meaning sentiments, that is to say, desire for recognition of the other as *other* (Charles Taylor). But the perverse effect of this courtesy is that it implicitly leads us to view non-Western artists as guests to be treated with politeness, and not as full-fledged actors on the cultural scene in their own right. For what could be more insulting and paternalistic than discourses that dismiss out of hand the possibility that a Congolese or Laotian artists could be pitted against Jasper Johns or Mike Kelley in a shared theoretical space and made the object of the same criteria of aesthetic evaluation? In postmodern discourse,

“recognition of the other,” generates a kind of reverse colonialism, as courteous and seemingly benevolent as its predecessor was brutal and nullifying. (27)”

According to B, “we must move beyond peaceful and sterile coexistence or reified cultures (multiculturalism) to a state of cooperation among cultures that are equally critical of their own identity – that is to say, we must reach the stage of TRANSLATION. (27)”

At this time, the “stakes are immense.” According to B, “It is question of rewriting ‘official’ history in favor of plural accounts, and in the process working out the possibility of dialogue among these different versions of history. Without this, the trend toward cultural standardization will only escalate, reassuringly masked by the idea of ‘recognizing the other,’ where the other is conceived as a species to be preserved. Gayatri Spivak defends the idea of a ‘strategic essentialism,’ in which minority individuals or groups lay claim to the cultural substance on which they found their identity, which permits these ‘subalterns’ to gain a voice in the context of globalized imperialism. Spivak is known to view all cultural identity as potentially susceptible to deconstruction, but she proposes this detour ‘in a scrupulously visible political interest.’ Is this tactic truly efficacious? An ‘essence,’ the dictionary tells us, is ‘what makes something what it is’; essentialism thus refers to what is stable and immutable in a system or concept. **That the origin thus takes precedence over the destination in the life of forms and ideas turns out to be the dominant postmodern motif** (28).

B asks, “Why should Patagonian, Chinese, or Iranian artists be required to produce their cultural difference in their works, while American or German artists find themselves judged on their critiques of patterns of thought, or on their resistance to authority and the dictates of convention? (28)

The collapse of modernist universalism brought in a lack of common cultural space, as a consequence Western individuals have felt obliged to regard the other as representative of the true, but often times the site of enunciation is separated by a narrow barrier between them from the other. (28-9)

B sites Jean-Hubert Martin who said ‘every artists in the world can now achieve global fame **in accord with** the codes and references of their own culture (29). B says that we thus finds ourselves confronting an aporia: “although we know that the universal master narrative of modernism is obsolete, the idea of judging each work according to the codes of its author’s local culture implies the existence of viewers who have mastered each culture’s referential field, which seems difficult to say the least. But after all, why not imagine an ideal viewer with the properties of a universal decoder? Or why not accept the idea that judgment be suspended indefinitely?

The lynchpin to this concept is the ... ‘in accord with’ and no ‘by conforming to or following their codes and references,’ which indicate something exclusive, by harmonizing their codes with other codes, by making their singularity resonate with a history and with problems born of other cultures. **In short, by an act of translation. Indeed, today translation may represent that ‘basic ethical effort’ that has been mistakenly associated with recognition of the other as such. For translation always**

implies adapting the meaning of a proposition, enabling it to pass from one code to another, which implies a mastery of both languages but also implies the neither is self-evident. The gesture of translation in no way prevents criticism or even opposition; in any case, it implies a presentation. In performing it, one denies neither the unspeakable nor possible opacities of meaning, since every translation is inevitably incomplete and leaves behind an irreducible remainder. (30)

After outlining the new apparatus of technology to which artist work today, B. gets into lengths, with examples, of the rise of video art as the new lingua franca.

Be introduces a new question “With the standardizing tide of globalization traversing virtually all nation states, the portable dimension of national identities has become more important than their local reality (32).” He further elucidated and answers this query by saying “the ground is giving way; we are told to compromise our rituals, our culture, and our history, now confined to standardized urban contexts that no longer reflect any image of us, except in locations reserved fro that purpose: museums, monuments, historic districts. Our environments no loner reflect history; rather, they transform it into a spectacle or reduce it to the limits of a memorial. Where can it be rediscovered? In portable practices. It is in the domain of everyday lifestyles – images, clothing, cuisine, and rituals – that immigrants tinker, far from the gaze of the masters of the soil, piecing together a fragile and deracinated culture whose essential quality is that it is detachable. These portable forms are arranged one way or another installed ona cultural landscape that did not anticipate them. They grow like wildflowers, sometimes provoking violent rejection. Thus, culture today essentially constitutes a mobile entity, unconnected to any soil, while the phenomena of diaspora are still reflexively conceptualized in the outdated terms of enrootedness and integration. (33-4)

B posits, “Postmodern multiculturalism has failed to invent an alternative to modernist universalism, for everywhere it has been applied it has recreated cultural anchorages or ethnic enrootedness. For like Western though, postmodern multiculturalism operates on a logic of membership. A work of art is thus inevitably explained by the ‘condition,’ ‘status,’ or ‘origin’ of its authors. The work of a black, gay or lesbian, Cameroonian, or second-generation Mexican immigrant artist will thus mechanically be read through the prism of this biopolitical framework that is, however, every bit as normative as the others. Thus, everyone is located, registered, nailed to a locus of enunciation, locked into the tradition in which he or she was born (34).”

“*Where do you speak from?* critics ask, as if human beings must always stand in the same place and in one place only, and as if they could have at their disposal only a single tone of voice and a single language with which to express themselves. This is the blind spot of postcolonial theory when applied to art: it conceives the individual as definitively assigned to his or her cultural, ethnic, or geographic roots. In doing so, it plays into the hands of the powers that be, which profoundly desire subjects who enounce their own identity, thereby facilitating their statistical classification (34).”

“The art market wishes to have simple categories and recognizable images at its disposal to facilitate its distribution of products. Multiculturalist theories have thus merely reinforced the powers that be, for they have fallen into the trap that was laid for them: struggling against oppression and alienation through an act of symbolic house arrest – that of essentialist theme parks (34).”

On **representation** Bourriaud sites a Franz Fanon passage/position from *The Wretched of the Earth*, saying, “the ultimate weapon of the colonizer is his ability to impose his image over that of the colonized people. It proved necessary to destroy those intrusive images in order to rediscover, beneath the layer that was obscuring them, those of the peoples struggling for their independence. Indeed, how could anyone fail to notice that today more than ever, the political struggle is a struggle over representations? According to Fanon’s contemporary disciples, it is thus essential to replace a history dominated by ‘dead white males’ with what they rightly call ‘a genuine historical pluralism,’ that is, by integrating the voices of the defeated into the monophonic narrative of history. Yet the repressive and totalitarian destiny of the bulk of African countries that attained independence ought to have taught us a few things: once emancipation has been obtained, anticolonialism is not a substitute for political thought; by extension, it can by no means provide the basis for a viable aesthetic and cultural project. The anticolonial model, which permeates cultural studies and discourses on art, undermines the foundations of modernism without, however, replacing them with anything other than that very gesture of hollowing out; that is to say, with emptiness. (do I agree? Not clear on what art is he’s talking about?) And in that tireless deconstruction of the Western white male voice, we scarcely hear anything anymore but the soft voice of an aimless negativity (36).

According to B, ‘the postcolonial discourse appears hegemonic, for it is perfectly inscribed within postmodern identitarian ideology. If one were to caricature it, one could do so thus: the works of the past were merely the products of the historical conditions in which they appeared, and we should interpret them from an ethno-sociological perspective, whereas contemporary works can be explained by their birth in the universal megalopolis from which they draw their spontaneous meaning. The city, the city, the city. Postmodernism has thus replaced the abstract and theoretical universalism of modernism with another form of totalization, at once symbolic and empirical: that of an infinite urban environment that would be the arena for an identity struggle between immigrants and natives, and for territorial conflict between public space and private property. Thus becomes visible the primitive scene of postmodern ideology: the construction of a gigantic film set, before which rises the scaffold whereon what was once the modern event is to be liquidated – dissected and pulverized in an identitarian multiculturalism (36).

He continues to say, “The concept of the event, theorized by Alain Badiou, allows us to consider the question of modernity in a different way: to what are we faithful? To what historical fact are we binding our action? The theoretical stake of this essay could be said to boil down to the philosophical decision to remain faithful to the program opened up by modernism qua event in the realm of ideas (while picking and choosing among its parts),

without, however, perpetuating it as form, for it is neither a matter of embracing the fetishization of modernist principles fashionable in art today, nor of relegating the past the spirit that animate it (36).”

In a return to thread of history, B queries ‘if postmodern critical thought insists on a one-way relation of influence between art and history, it is because such a relation is at the heart of the politics of assignment, of the ideology of belonging (to a place, to a moment) that underlies its core discourse. Postmodern thought thus arises as the negation of those powers of decentering, of setting in motion, of unsticking, of de-incrustation; powers tht are the foundation of the emerging culture B terms *altermodern* (37).”

Pg. 37 details Judith Butlers concept of subject formation

Pg. 38 returns to the concerns for accommodation or integration of peripheral artists into the globalized contemporary art world, which is no doubt established in Western culture, a construction plan formed by that system of art. Proposes two paths. Not clear on how to paraphase.

B propose that this new altermodern system of art, what he calls “*the construction plan*,” cannot function without a knowledge of its history. He say “that history, however, is not self-enclosed but continuously enriched – thus, today we can still make discoveries about the past. It is up to artists of all countries to appropriate this history for themselves in every sense (39).”

B gives examples of Rirkrit Tiranvanija forging connections between the Bhuddist tradition and conceptual art as **an example of formal and historical transcoding**. He gives more art project examples.

What these artists claim to do, according to B, is these artists “what these artist aim for in their works is not to accumulate heterogeneous elements, but **to make meaningful connections in the infinite text of world culture. In a word, to produce itineraries in the landscape of signs by taking on the role of *semionauts*, inventors of pathways within the cultural landscape, nomadic sign gatherers** (39).”

This following passage sketches out the current grounds for which a number of queries arise to qualify the urgency for B’s concept of altermodernity. In this prelude he asks, “But how can we simultaneously define the existence of cultural singularities yet oppose the idea of judging works by those singularities, that is to say, refuse to judge them only in keeping with their traditions? **It is this aporia that is both the basis of postmodern discourse and the cause of its ontological fragility**. In other words, postmodernity consists in not responding to the question. For to formulate a response would require choosing between two conflicting options: one must either tacitly acquiesce to tradition, if one thinks that each culture generates its own criteria of judgment and must be evaluated according to these criteria, or else bet on the emergence of a system of thought capable of making connections between disparate cultures without denying each one’s singularity. Postmodern discourse, which oscillates between critical deconstruction of

modernism and multiculturalist atomization, implicitly favors a perpetual status quo. From this standpoint, it represents a repressive force, insofar as it helps maintain would cultures in a state of pseudo-authenticity, warehousing living signs in a nature park of traditions and modes of thought where they remain available for any merchandizing venture. What, then, threatens to disrupt this ideal reification? What is that studiously repressed object whose contours can be indirectly perceived in this ideological system? A word never to be pronounced: modernity. In other words, a collective project unconnected to any origin, one whose direction would transcend existing cultural codes and sweep their signs up in a nomadic movement.

Defines Altermodernity:

The Construction Plan: According to B, altermodernity ‘designates a construction plan that would allow new intercultural connections, the construction of a space of negotiation going beyond postmodern multiculturalism, which is attached to the origin of discourses and forms rather than to their dynamics. **It is a matter of replacing the question of origin with that of destination. “Where should we go?”** That is the modern question par excellence (40). Noted: this question is discussed by Lily Cho and at the PWIM conference, must check those notes.

The Conceptual Persona: B says that ‘the emergence of this new entity (altermodernity) implies the invention of a new conceptual persona that would bring about the conjunction of modernism and globalization. Likens the altermodern conceptual persona to B. Walters 1935 notion of the film actor from AinAofMR, except for ...(42)

According to B, “the twenty-first-century modernity, born of global and decentralized negotiations, of multiple discussions among participants from different cultures, of the confrontation of heterogeneous discourses, can only be polyglot. Altermodernity promises to be a translation-oriented modernity, unlike the modern story of the twentieth century, whose progressivism spoke the abstract language of the colonial West. And the search for a productive compromise among singular discourses, this continuous effort at coordination, this constant elaboration of arrangements to enable disparate elements to function together, constitutes both its engine and its import (44).

The operation that transforms every artist, every author, into a translator of him- or herself implies accepting the idea that no speech bears the seal of any sort of “authenticity”: we are entering the era of **universal subtitling**, of generalized dubbing. An era that valorizes the links that texts and images establish, the paths that artists forge in a multicultural landscape, the passage-ways they lay out to connect modes of expression and communication (44).

In these notes, I will provide an outline the principle characteristics of the figure of the Radicant as proposed by Bourriaud.

Before getting into the characteristics of the radicant artist, Bourriaud first describes the characteristic drives of the modernist aesthetic and then mirrors this with a description of the postmodern aesthetic. A model of operations that are invariable linked by default.

Weaves the figure of ‘the root’ as desired and described by Modernist as a return to the origin, a subtraction to purification to which ‘new’ beginnings can emerge unhindered. To the postmodern the figure of ‘the root’ is a principle of affiliation and assignment for individual identity within a progressively globalizing world. With this postmodern root system, the double bind of fixed ossified identities within host nations create forms of racism and discrimination, at the same time processes of assimilation, towards “standardizations take place effacing the old identities and historical singularities in the name of necessary uprooting.” (50)

Toward distinguishing the radicant figure with the figure of the root, Bourriaud posits “And yet the immigrant, the exile, the tourist, and the urban wanderer are the dominant figures of the contemporary culture. To remain within the vocabulary of the vegetable realm, one might say that the individual of these early years of the twenty-first century resemble those plants that do not depend on a single root for their growth but advance in all directions on whatever surfaces present themselves by attaching multiple hooks to them, as ivy does. Ivy belongs to the botanical family of the Radicants, which develop their roots as they advance, unlike the radicals, whose development is determined by their being anchored in a particular soil. The stem of couch grass is radicant, as are the suckers of the strawberry plant. They grow their secondary roots alongside their primary one. The radicant develops in accord with its host soil. It conforms to the latter’s twists and turns and adapts to its surfaces and geological features. It translates itself into the

terms of the space in which it moves. With its at once dynamic and dialogical signification, the adjective ‘radicant’ captures this contemporary subject, caught between the need for a connection with its environment and the forces of uprooting, between globalization and singularity, between identity and opening to the other. It defines the subject as an object of negotiation. (51)”

“Contemporary art provides new models for this individual who is constantly putting down new roots, for it constitutes a laboratory of identities. Today’s artists do not so much **express the tradition from which they come as the path they take between that tradition and the various contexts they traverse**, and they do this by **performing acts of translation**. Where modernism proceeded by subtraction in an effort to unearth the root, or principle, contemporary artists proceed by selection, additions, and then acts of multiplication. They do not seek an ideal state of the self or society. Instead, they organize signs in order to multiply one identity by another (52).”

“The radicant can, without injury, cut itself off from its first roots and reacclimate itself. There is no single origin, but rather successive, simultaneous, or alternating acts of enrooting. While radical artists sought to return to an original place, radicant artists take the road, and they do so without having any place to return to. Their universe contains neither origin nor end, except for those they decide to establish themselves. One can bring along fragments of identity, provided one transplants them to other soils and accepts the fact of their permanent metamorphosis- a sort of voluntary metempsychosis that prefers the play of successive guises and precarious shelters to incarnations of any kind. Thus, there are fewer points of contact with the soil, for the artists choose these contacts instead of enduring them. They drill down into the ground at a campsite; they stay at the surface of a habitat- it makes little difference. Henceforth, what counts is the ability to acclimate oneself to various contexts and the products (ideas, forms) that are generated by these temporary acculturations (52).”

“Radicant artist invent pathways among signs. They are *semionauts* who set forms in motion, using them to generate journeys by which they elaborate themselves as subjects even as the corpus of their work takes shape (53).”

*semionaut – translator’s footnote says, ‘from semios (sign) and nautos (navigation).

“They carve out fragments of signification, gathering samples and creating herbaria of forms. Today, on the contrary, it is the gesture of returning to principles that would seem strange (53).”

“Painting and sculpture are no longer regarded as entities whose elements it would be sufficient simple to explore. Thus, radicant art implies the end of the medium-specific, the abandonment of any tendency to exclude certain fields from the realm of art (53).”

“For modernist radicality, the goal was the death of artistic activity as such, the transcendence of the activity toward an ‘end of art’ imagined as a historical horizon in

which art would dissolve into everyday life – the mythical transcendence of art. Altermodern radicantity is a stranger to such figures of dissolution. Its own spontaneous movement would be to transplant art to heterogeneous territories, to confront it with all available formats. Nothing could be more alien to it than a mode of thought based on disciples, on the specificity of the medium – a sedentary notion if ever there was one, and one that amounts to cultivating one’s field (54).”

“Translation is in essence an act of displacement. It causes the meaning of a text to move from one linguistic form to another and puts the associated tremors on display. ...The radicant is a mode of thought based on translation: precarious enrooting entails coming inot contact with a host soil, a *terra incognita*. Thus, every point of contact that goes to make up the radicant line represents and effort of translation. Art, from this perspective, is not defined as an essence to be perpetuated (in the form of a closed and self-contained disciplinary category) but rather a gaseous substance capable of filling up the most disparate human activities before once again solidifying in the form that makes it visible as such: the work. The adjective ‘gaseous’ is only frightening to those who see art as identical with its regime of institutional visibility. Just like the word ‘immaterial,’ it is only pejorative for those who don’t know how to see (54).”

The form of the radicant is neither the modernist tree or the rhizome, the radicant takes the form of a trajectory or path; the advance of a singular project (55). Working from Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome which is “a multiplicity” that “has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions.” According to B, “the radicant, by contrast, implies a subject, but one that is not reducible to a stable, closed, and self-contained identity. It exists exclusively in the dynamic form of its wandering and the contours of the circuit it describes, which are its two modes of visibility. **In other words, it is movement that ultimately permits the formation of an identity** (55).

The figure of the subject defined by the radicant views the self as constructed out of borrowings, citations, and proximities, hence as pure constructivism. The radicant differs from the rhizome in its emphasis on the itinerary, the path, as a dialogical or intersubjective narrative that unfolds between the subject and the surfaces it traverses, to which it attaches its roots to produce what might be termed an installation: one ‘installs oneself’ in a place or situation in a makeshift or precarious way, and the subject’s identity is nothing but the temporary result of this encampment, during which acts of translation are performed. Translation of a path into the local language, translation of oneself into a milieu - translation in both directions. Thus, the radicant subject appears as a construction or montage, in other words, as a work born of endless negotiation (55-6).

Radical thought is not a defense of voluntary amnesia but of relativism, unsubscription, and departure. Its true adversaries are neither tradition nor local cultures, but confinement within readymade cultural schemata- when habits become forms – and enrootedness, as soon as it becomes a rhetoric of identity. It is not a matter of rejecting one’s heritage but rather of learning to squander it, of plotting the line along which one will then carry this baggage in order to scatter and invest its contents. In aesthetic terms, the radical implies a nomadic bias, whose most fundamental characteristic would be the tenant of existing forms, even if that means modifying them more or less extensively (56).

It can also mean wandering a calculated path by which the artist refuses to become a member of any fixed space-time continuum, refuses to be assigned to any identifiable and irrevocable aesthetic family (57).

According to B, the subject of globalization is evolving in an era that favors elective and individual diasporas and encourages voluntary or forced immigration. It shatters our notion of space. In our imaginary universe of dwelling, sedentariness is no longer an option among others. As figures of this transformation, contemporary artists have realized that it is just as possible to reside in a circuit as in a stable space, just as possible to construct identity in motion as through fertilization, and that geography is always psychogeography (57).

Right now, “the function of art is to fill them [blank spaces that dot the satellite maps of Google Earth] in through the free play of narrative and diagrams, by using the appropriate tools of representation. The derealizing type of abstraction can only be combated with a different type of abstraction that makes visible what is concealed by the official cartographies and authorized representations (60).”

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Some key terms and their definitions:

The exote: the exote is a figure established Victor Segalen (1930s?) as one who figures largely in the acts of translation. He defines the exote as “one who manages to return to himself after having undergone the experience of diversity (65).” He also says ‘When a European spends time in Polynesia or in China, two realities are pitted against each other without, however, canceling each other out, for both participate in the same space-time continuum: the exote and the exotic coproduce diversity by elaborating, through negotiation, a relational object in which neither of the two parties is effaced (65).’

“Diversity is an aesthetics of the origin, but it underscores that origin only the better to relativize it, presenting it as a simple point on a flicking, moving line. Not freezing the

image, but always inserting it in a chain: thus could one summarize a radican aesthetic (67).”

“What emerges from these heterogeneous approaches, beyond the boost they give to the idea of autobiography and beyond the archival compulsion, is implicit praise of rarity: in an increasingly standardized world, rarity is all the more noteworthy as an instance of breaking free from the general condition of seriality (71).”

In using Segalen’s concept, B notes, “What is important, he explains, is to break the monotony of uniformity, to work to discover or construct singularities. They need not be spectacular. To perceive these singularities, one need only change perspective and observe the details of a social formation more attentively (72).” “Thus, numerous artists who cull a trivial form from daily life or an anecdote from the past are merely applying Segalen’s axiom. A ‘system of very fine filigree,’ slender grooves or ‘striae,’ as sought-after and valued discontinuity: such is the world that the exote Segalen describes as that of diversity. A grain of sand in the manufacturing engine of the global, singularity depends today neither on precious materials nor on the unique hand of the artist, but on the initiation of an aesthetic event, accomplished through an individual’s encounter with forms: through the production of a new fold (Deleuze term), which generates an irregularity in the cultural landscape. Singularity is tied to events, and it opens the way for aftershocks and variants; but it also takes up the thread of modernity, for it always constitutes a rupture, a discontinuity in the smooth landscape of the present (73).”

Creolization: According to B, ‘creolization could be defined as a joyous practice of grafting, a productivity engine fueled by the cultural encounter that colonization enables with its act of breaking and entering, in the postcolonial reflux, in those potential spaces that Gonzalez-Foerster frames and identities in big cities, in the chinks opened up by migratory wandering. Today, creolization functions as a conceptual model whose figures could constitute the basis of a globalized modernity, a weapon against cultural standardization (76).”

Concluding statement: “The altermodernity emerging today is fueled by the flow of bodies, by our cultural wandering. It presents itself as a venture beyond the conceptual frames assigned to thought and art, a mental expedition outside identitarian norms. Ultimately, then, radican thought amounts to the organization of an exodus (77).”

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