

over-ambitious culture industry hack rather than a political demagogue. He may have picked up the moronic phraseology he employs almost unconsciously and have no idea of what it signifies politically. On the other hand, Boring Ass may be hedging his bets, thinking that ambiguous statements of the kind he is making about the 'altermodern' will ingratiate him with the political establishment in France if there are further swings to the right. It isn't entirely clear to me what Bourriaud's ambitions are, but it wouldn't surprise me to learn he wanted to be director of an institution such as the Centre Georges Pompidou, or else running cultural policy for the French government; and if this is what he desires, then his curatorial charlatanism (viz re-dating Metzger's work) indicates that he is unscrupulous enough to attempt to achieve it through a somewhat ambiguous redeployment of Nouvelle Droite motifs.

There are only two pieces in the *Altermodern* show that actually resonate with Bourriaud's inflammatory catalogue essay. Curiously, Adrian Searle in his *Guardian* online review felt moved to link them: "...one sits and listens to Olivia Plender's description of the relationship between

The recent trend for curators to view themselves as the 'real' heroes' of the art world continues with the Parisian fashion-poolie Nicolas Bourriaud (AKA Boring Ass) using *Altermodern*, the 2009 Tate Triennial, to promote himself over and above anything he's actually included in this aesthetic disaster. The selection of works for *Altermodern* struck me as remarkably similar to the last 'big' show I'd seen curated by Bourriaud, the *Lyon Biennial* in 2005. The art itself doesn't really matter, it is there to illustrate a thesis. The thesis doesn't matter either since it exists to facilitate Bourriaud's career; and Bourriaud certainly doesn't matter because he is simply yet another dim-witted cultural bureaucrat thrown up by the institution of art.

In Lyon, Bourriaud's theme was *Experience de la Duree*, which *Frieze* summed up as: "an art-historical argument for a 'long 1990s'.... Unlike Cinderella, methods of making and thinking about art don't become unwelcome at the ball just because the clock strikes midnight. If time, for David Bowie, 'flexes like a whore', for Bourriaud and Sans (Boring Ass's Lyon co-curator and Palais de Tokyo chum) its movements are closer to soporific languor." (*Frieze* 95, Nov-Dec

claiming Bourriaud is an unreconstructed crypto-fascist.

*The Wikipedia* (on 16 February 2009) summarises Alain de Benoist's views thus: "from being close to fascist French movements at the beginning of his writings in 1970, he moved to attacks on globalisation, unrestricted mass immigration and liberalism as being ultimately fatal to the existence of Europe through their divisiveness and internal faults. His influences include Antonio Gramsci, Ernst Jünger, Jean Baudrillard, Helmut Schelsky, Konrad Lorenz, and other intellectuals. Against the liberal melting-pot of the U.S., Benoist is in favour of separate civilisations and cultures. He also says he opposes Jean-Marie Le Pen, racism and anti-Semitism. He has opposed Arab immigration in France, while supporting ties with Islamic culture. He has also tried to distance himself from Adolf Hitler, Vichy France or Aryan supremacy, in favor of concepts like 'ethnopluralism,' in which organic, ethnic cultures and nations must live and develop in separation from one another."

Despite Bourriaud's inflammatory rhetoric about 'a multicultural explosion' in the *Tate Triennial* catalogue, I continue to view him as an

# Bourriaud's 'Altermodern' - an eclectic mix of bullshit bad taste

Stewart Home



Noktor Wibes says: Dear Sir, I object to your turgid analysis of Monsieur Bourrirude. I recently read his magnificent treatise "Annexation from Svengali Heights [Pre-Re-Constructed Enabling Techniques For Career Path Curators]" his definitive work on post-apartheid cluster fuck and was transported back in time as a consequence of ring modulation, therefore enabling me to reconstruct alternative futures for any real or imagined art movement or non-creative act at my discretion. I thoroughly recommend it! Monsieur Beauregard's work has also taught my dog to shoot a gun! February 17, 2009 at 9:43 am.

Jay Joplin Inc says: All this talk about ideology and aesthetics bores me, when I see an art work I ask myself one simple question: can I sell it for a lot of money? If the answer is yes then it excites me. February 17, 2009 at 2:10 pm.

Pundit says: But as an ubercurator who does Bourriaud feel will be the Premiere League champions this year? Curator artist Gavin Wade has made his views on the matter clear but altermodernist Bourriaud does not come clean on his own thinking - will Fergussons fight for autonomy and the possibility of singularity see Manchester United once more winners or will

London) and his art world reputation dates all the way back to the 1960s. Those two things don't particularly matter to me in relation to the curation of this show, but I do object to Bourriaud re-dating Metzger's work so that it can be presented as recent art. Metzger's *Liquid Crystal Environment* dates from 1965, not 2006 as the labelling in Bourriaud's *Altermodern* exhibition would have it. This work has also been shown relatively recently as part of the *Gustav Metzger Retrospectives* at the Museum of Modern Art Oxford in 1998/99, and the photograph in the *MOMA Papers Volume 3* (page 40) produced to accompany that exhibition is dated '1965/98' (the standard method of dating re-made work when the 'original' is unavailable). Metzger's *Liquid Crystal Environment* was shown again as part of the *Summer of Love* show at Tate Liverpool (2005) and then toured in Europe through to late summer 2006. The piece was re-made once more for this exhibition and is correctly dated in the catalogue (page 221) as '1965/2005'. The Tate then bought the piece from Metzger, and it should have been labelled in *Altermodern* as '1965/2005'; but this dating would render its inclusion absurd, and a charlatan like Bourriaud - who can't be bothered to seek out decent

contemporary work - has no qualms about faking the provenance of a piece like *Liquid Crystal Environment*. But let's move on to the catalogue, which like the posters and other graphic elements in the show was designed by M/M, the Paris based team of Michael Amzalag and Mathias Augustyniak. The Design Museum sums up the career of these bozos with the following words: "After starting out with music projects, M/M became involved with Yamamoto and Sibtou in 1995 and have since worked for other fashion houses including Balenciaga, Louis Vuitton and Calvin Klein. Their work in the art world ranges from commissions for museums such as Centre Georges Pompidou and Palais de Tokyo in Paris, to collaborations with artists like Philippe Parreno and Pierre Hughe. Amzalag and Augustyniak also work as creative consultants to *Paris Vogue*." My own take is that M/Ms way too self-conscious use of 'eccentric' typefaces is unnecessarily baroque and looks like complete shit. In a classic triumph of would-be 'style' over substance, M/M don't put page numbers on certain sections of the *Altermodern* catalogue, including the three 'keynote' essays at the front (meaning that

and Tom McCarthy are successfully distancing themselves from these bourgeois bores. *This text was originally posted on the Mister Trippy blog, Sunday, January 18th, 2009 at 12:51 pm.*  
*This text can also be found online at:* <http://stewarthomesociety.org/blog/?p=207>  
**Appendix 2: Selected comments**  
*The Devil's Knob says:* Don't 100% agree with you re: all the work - but know what you mean! Went round the show with some others last week. Whether or not some or all aspects of any of the works or the human / social / historical interest to "case-study" info are any good.... the whole things' all information-overload / compassion fatigue. It's impossible to take in (but not a la some outsize cockmeat challenging or defeating the gob / pussy / ass fuckholes of a fuckdolly - unless that's how enn-bee deems himself, this and us!). Frustration and boredom outweigh and replace mere curiosity, never mind founded or misguided fascination. Consciously or otherwise enn-bee must consider himself more important than the incidental and secondary "contents".  
*February 17, 2009 at 2:39 am.*

wittered on about the traditionalist imbecile Rene Guenon and denounced the INS lecture as 'incoherent' (obviously not aware of the fact that this was its entire point). The next person to gain control of the mike that was being passed around expressed complete agreement with the INS; while a third specified the form in which he wanted his answers, and yet after getting them as scripted rather than as demanded, he still appeared unaware that these had been written in advance.

The Q and A was followed by drinks. The Boring Ass impersonator used this social as an opportunity to parade a trophy blonde who hung onto his arm before the public. While I was enjoying a tippie, a journalist from the *TLS* mistook me for Thunderbird. I assured her that I was not McCarthy and when she eventually persuaded someone to point him out, she apparently gave him a ticking off for the prank he'd just played. Literary types are still into nineteenth-century notions such as sincerity, and by using the INS as a vehicle to revive the merciless assault on authenticity that characterised the most interesting cultural currents of the 1980s and 1990s, Simon Critchley

anyone wanting to cite quotes has to count off the pages by turning them); no doubt if M/M were architects the idea of getting 'transgressive' by designing buildings without foundations would appeal to them. That said, the catalogue's content is even worse that its cretinous design.

Bourriaud's introduction to the *Triennial* catalogue exposes the lack of anything substantial behind his half-baked notion of the 'altermodern'. To quote Boring Ass directly: "The term 'altermodern', which serves as the title of the present exhibition and to delimit the void beyond the post-modern, has its roots in the idea of 'otherness'." (page 12). If Bourriaud sees a void beyond postmodernism, this is presumably because he is loathe to admit that capitalism (like feudalism and every other form of exploitation to be found in recorded history) has a finite life-span. Likewise by connecting alter to other, Bourriaud reminded me of a book I read a dozen years ago, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti's Futurist Fiction of Power* by Cinzia Sartini Blum (University of California Press, 1996). In this tome, Blum 'investigates a diverse array of... futurist textual practices that range from formal experimentation with 'words in freedom' to

disappoint and it will surprise few readers of this report that the impersonators playing Thunderbird and the Hip Hugger were deliberately saddled with a lecture that was more suited to the printed page than public performance. Despite endless 'highbrow' (AKA first year undergraduate) references to the likes of Plato, Joyce and Wile E. Coyote, the content of the talk can be summarised with a pair of old leftist slogans: 'death is not true', and 'whenever someone utters the word authenticity you can be certain you're dealing with a fake'. The content of the lecture was cannibalised from both earlier INS manifestations and the work of 1990s counterculture networks such as the Association of Autonomous Astronauts and the Luther Blissett Project. The harsh lighting and bland delivery created a post-humorous ambience in which those members of the audience who did not know what was going on became the butt of this INS joke. The answers for the Q and A session at the end had been pre-scripted, but this form of 'democratic' participation is so ritualised that few seemed to notice that the replies were read back rather than spontaneous. The first audience member to speak during the open mike session

nationalist manifestos that advocate intervention in World War I and anticipate subsequent fascist rhetoric of power and virility. "Curiously, some of Bourriaud's rhetoric does indeed echo Marinetti's 'other' modernism, viz: "altermodernism sees itself as a constellation of ideas linked by the emerging and ultimately irresistible will to create a form of modernism for the twenty-first century." (catalogue, page 12). So don't go accusing Boring Ass of being a 'mainstream' liberal, since he counterposes 'irresistible will' to notions of agency! That said, it might be that 'natural' leaders like Bourriaud have 'will' and 'agency', and it is this which will determine the altermodern 'evolution' of 'the masses'! I am, of course, assuming here that when Boring Ass anthropomorphises altermodernism by talking about how it 'sees itself', he is simultaneously indulging in a process of personification in which he becomes the physical embodiment of his own 'ideal' in which case altermodernism might more properly be taken as a synonym for Bourriaud's personal variant on narcissism. Moving on, Bourriaud pointedly steps back from anything as contentious as overt link-ups with full blown fascist modernism: "The historical role of

his back (but not his arse) was a truly shitty piece of 'designer' knitwear in grey marl with buttons running down the sleeve. The fake Bourriaud proceeded to camp it up outrageously in his impersonation of an inept and self-important curator, and used a thick but phony French accent to render his 'Franglais' incomprehensible. This had those of us who have seen the 'English' 'translation' of Bourriaud's book *Relational Aesthetics*, rolling in the aisles. Indeed, my body was so racked by laughter that I failed to write down a single word of the parody Bourriaud speech. Fortuitously a brief sample from *Relational Aesthetics* (page 29), the text the INS piss-take was modelled upon, will convey its flavour: "Pictures and sculptures are characterised by their symbolic availability. Beyond obvious material impossibilities (museum closing times, geographical remoteness), an artwork can be seen (sic) at any time. It is there before our eyes, offered to the curiosity of a theoretically universal public. Now, contemporary art is often marked by non-availability, by being viewable only at a specific time..."

Having lampooned Bourriaud so mercilessly, whatever the INS did next was bound to

modernism, in the sense of a phenomenon arising within the domain of art, resides in its ability to jolt us out of tradition; it embodies a cultural exodus, an escape from the confines of nationalism and identity tagging, but also from the mainstream whose tendency is to reify thought and practice. Under threat from fundamentalism and consumer driven uniformisation, menaced by massification and the enforced re-abandonment of individual identity, art today needs to reinvent itself, and on a planetary scale. And this new modernism, for the first time, will have resulted from global dialogue. Postmodernism, thanks to the post-colonial criticism of Western pretensions to determine the world's direction and the speed of its development, has allowed the historical counters to be reset to zero; today, temporalities intersect and weave a complex network stripped of a centre. Numerous contemporary artistic practices indicate, however, that we are on the verge of a leap out of the postmodern period and the (essentialist) multicultural model from which it is indivisible; a leap that would give rise to a synthesis between modernism and post-colonialism." (page 12).

As a taster for their 2009 triennial 'curated' by Nicolas Bourriaud (AKA Boring Ass), Tate Britain hosted a series of talks concluding with one this weekend by the International Necronautical Society (INS). For their 17 January shindig, the INS hired actors to play General Secretary Tom "Thunderbird" McCarthy and Chief Philosopher Simon "Hip Hugger" Critchley. The event sold out well in advance because a sensation hungry public were under the entirely false impression that they would be personally addressed by this notorious pair of lobster loving nude chefs. Despite Radio 4 (*Today* programme, 29 December 2008) making the outrageous claim that McCarthy is widely recognised as a best-selling novelist, the majority of those present appeared blissfully unaware of the fact that the thespians pretending to be the notorious INS nude chefs were Sexton Blakes!

Before the Gilbert & George clones posing as Thunderbird and the Hip Hugger launched into the main act, the INS pulled their masterstroke by having a luvvie impersonating Nicolas Bourriaud introduce them. The actor playing Boring Ass boasted over-lovingly tousled hair and covering

#### Appendix 1: 5,494 Linda McCartney Vegetarian Sausages For Nicolas Bourriaud

All of which can be taken as so much sound and fury signifying nothing, the proverbial tale told by an idiot, because post-colonialism was 'always and already' an integral part of modernity (just as modernism and modernity are inseparable from a process of globalisation that was already in motion in the sixteenth century; and rather than marking a break with modernism, 'post'-modernism is actually a continuation of modernity). It strikes me that Bourriaud might benefit from sitting down with a few books written by the likes of Paul Gilroy. Likewise, Boring Ass talks of the historical role of artistic modernism, then of the historical counters being reset to zero (which he presumably sees as nullifying any historical role modernism performed); similarly, he speaks of our contemporary world being characterised by a complex network stripped of a centre, as well as the threat of 'the mainstream' reifying thought and practice. If there is a dialectical telos at work in Bourriauds 'thought' to provide a methodological underpinning to these otherwise senseless inversions, then it stands in direct contradiction to the claims he makes elsewhere in this text such as: "Our civilisation, which bears imprints of a multicultural explosion and the proliferation of cultural strata, resembles

So to sum up, *Altermodern* at Tate Britain isn't really about what's happening in contemporary art, it is actually about Nicolas Bourriaud and very little else. The show itself is boring and you really don't need to see it. Nonetheless, just what were the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation thinking of when they underwrote Bourriauds altermodern activities? Answers on a postcard please!

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*This text can also be found online at:*  
<http://stewarthomesociety.org/blog/?p=550>

*The text of Anarchist Integralism can be found online at:*  
<http://www.stewarthomesociety.org/ai.htm>

*The Art Monthly review mentioned in this text can be found online at:*  
[www.stewarthomesociety.org/art/hugonnier.htm](http://www.stewarthomesociety.org/art/hugonnier.htm)

*The earlier criticism of Mike Nelson mentioned in this text can be found online (bottom of page) at:*  
<http://www.stewarthomesociety.org/art/shirt.htm>

a structureless constellation awaiting transformation into an archipelago." It looks like what is waiting to kick off here is that old idealist fallacy about consciousness being brought in from outside the 'masses', a trope much beloved by the likes of Lenin and Mussolini. Likewise, while artistic modernism may indeed - as Bourriaud claims - serve to 'jolt us out of tradition', it is important to remember that fundamentalism and traditionalism are also products of modernity in its broadest sense. Given the positions Bourriaud strikes, it unfortunately also becomes necessary to restate once again that artistic modernism is not necessarily incompatible with fascism and/or nationalism, and indeed that fascism is not incompatible with anarchism (see, for example, my text of a dozen years ago *Anarchist Integralism*).

Bourriaud's rant about the "threat from fundamentalism and consumer driven uniformisation" and "being menaced by massification and the enforced re-abandonment of individual identity", like his ritual denunciations of multiculturalism, are familiar enough as political rhetoric. That said, most of us are probably more used to seeing such positions

Robin Hood and the various splits in the scouting movement in the early 20th century, and how that eventually led via digressions on EM Forster, the kibbo kift and the archives at the Whitechapel Gallery to a troubling faction called the Green Shirts (not a million miles from the fascist Blackshirts), who rallied against the British Credit System in the 1930s (one of their number fired an arrow at 10 Downing Street). On the table, there are last week's newspapers, with their credit-crunch headlines. The point circuitously being made is not so different from that of the mad, anti-semitic conspiracy theorist in Mike Nelson's installation. Everything is connected, they both say. We just need the key."

I have already criticised Mike Nelson elsewhere for his redeployment of anti-Semitic motifs in a different work, which was done 'without a suitable critical framing'. There I also observed: "the art world doesn't just represent violence, it also reproduces it; and like the rest of capitalist society, often in its most murderous forms. Art won't save the world; only the vast majority of us acting collectively can make this marvellous green planet somewhere that is really worth living."

articulated by ideologically motivated crypto-fascists than art curators. Of course, it is possible that when Bourriaud speaks of 'the threat from fundamentalism' he means the type found in the US Bible belt, but if this is the case it is extremely foolish of him to refrain from explicitly saying so because the terminology he uses is so closely bound up with the political rhetoric of groups like the French Nouvelle Droite that many people will assume he is invoking so called 'Muslim fundamentalists'.

In a review I wrote for *Art Monthly* last summer, I observed: "Interviewed recently by Anthony Gardner and Daniel Palmer, Bourriaud claimed 'our new modernity is based on translation'... When in the interview just mentioned, Bourriaud speaks of the 'fight for autonomy and the possibility of singularity', he could be mistaken for a late-twentieth century disciple of Italian Dadist Julius Evola." The specific disciplines I was thinking of were Nouvelle Droite ideologues such as Alain de Benoist, people who were far more influenced by Evola's fascist politics than his brief involvement with the modernist avant-garde. I would, however, stress that I quite deliberately used the term 'mistaken for' and I am NOT