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South African digital art practice: an exploration of the altermodern

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RESEARCH REPORT

South African Digital Art Practice:

An Exploration of the Altermodern

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Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted towards the degree of MADA by Coursework in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any other degree of examination.

Signed

Carly Whitaker

_____ day of _____ 2012

Abstract

The Altermodern is a critical artistic theory defined by Nicolas Bourriaud, a French theorist and curator. His theory seeks to define a specific way of living and inhabiting in our current globalised state. Bourriaud observes and discusses how artists practise and align this with a global dynamic and via a mobility which he observes through specific concepts. This research report investigates whether this theory of the Altermodern aligns with South African digital artists and their practice and whether this theory can be used as a framework for the South African digital art being produced at present and in the future. Although currently limited, the South African digital art field is developing and a framework is necessary for artists to move forward within the surrounding discourse.

This report discusses the various characteristics and nature of the digital medium, such as its interactivity and dynamism, which are then aligned to the Altermodern. This alignment is carried forward into a discussion of digital art in South Africa which is defined and aligned with the Altermodern. The field of South African digital art is expanded to include specific case studies. Interviews conducted with Nathaniel Stern and Marcus Neustetter, practising digital artists, are reported and their respective artworks, *Given Time* and *relation IV,* are reviewed, while Tegan Bristow, who curated the show *Internet Art in the Global South* (2009), discusses her role as a curator and researcher in the field.

This report aims to make an initial contribution to the discourse on South African digital art through a critical engagement of the Altermodern and the specific case studies.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor Tegan Bristow for her continued support, encouragement and considerate engagement with my research at all times. I am extremely grateful. Thank you too, to Nathaniel stern, Marcus Neustetter and Tegan Bristow for agreeably answering my questions. And lastly, thank you to my mother, father and brother for their continued support and encouragement in this achievement.

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Chapter 1:

Nicolas Bourriaud and the Altermodern

Introduction

This research paper aims to contextualise South African digital art through the Altermodern, a critical art theory written by Nicolas Bourriaud, a French art and cultural theorist and curator.

This paper has been structured into five different chapters, the first of which engages directly with Bourriaud as a theorist and discusses the role played by his curatorial methods in relation to the development of his theories. Three main texts by Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), *Postproduction* (2002) and *The Radicant* (2010), are considered individually and their progressive relationship discussed to obtain a better understanding of the development and progression of his theory of the Altermodern, which will be addressed last. The theory of the Altermodern is then contextualised in relation to postcolonialism and postmodernism. This will enable a critical global framework to be developed.

Chapter 2 explores and defines digital art by looking at contemporary discussions around the medium. Key characteristics and themes are discussed in relation to the Altermodern. This area of focus is then narrowed in Chapter 3 to digital art in South Africa. Once the South African digital art field is outlined and established, it is aligned to the

Altermodern. In Chapter 4, three case studies are explored thoroughly, based on questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire used for the interviews was structured around specific aspects of the Altermodern.

The primary question being investigated in this paper is whether or not the Altermodern resonates with digital artists in South Africa and whether or not it can be used as a framework for their work and practice

Bourriaud's curatorial methods and theory development

Nicolas Bourriaud was the Gulbenkian Curator of Contemporary Art at Tate Britain for the Tate Triennial *Altermodern* (2009) (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) from 2008 to 2010. During this period, he began to consolidate his theory of the Altermodern, exemplified in the text *The Radicant*. Prior to that, he had been the co-director of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris from 1999 to 2006.

In all three texts – *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), *Postproduction* (2002) and *The Radicant* (2010) – Bourriaud acknowledges that his own method of theorising stems from his contact with "artists and from assiduous observations of their work" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 7). In *Postproduction* he explores his reasons for writing *Relational Aesthetics* explaining that the goal was to find a "common point among the artists of [his] generation" (Postproduction pg 7), and developing a "new thematic framework for looking at their works" (pg 7). His theories are used to trace similarities between different artists, to establish a description of contemporary art and are a product of his role as a curator.

Relational Aesthetics was written in response to the commonalities which Bourriaud observed in artists which he curated for the exhibition *Traffic* (1996) at CapcMusee d'art contemporain in Bordeaux, France. He observed “strangely similar themes” (Bourriaud, Postproduction pg 7) in the group of artists which he had selected and developed a new thematic framework for them. *Relational Aesthetics* can be seen, as Bourriaud puts it, to “paint the new socio-political landscape of the nineties, to describe the collective sensibility on which contemporary artistic practices were beginning to rely” (pg 7). *Postproduction* (2002) describes the same “artistic scene” (pg 8), yet it analyses “a set of modes of production” (pg 8) as opposed to the “collective sensibility” (pg 8) in *Relational Aesthetics*. While *Postproduction* was published before he curated *Playlist* (2005), it undoubtedly informed Bourriaud’s curatorial decisions for this show at the Palais de Tokyo which featured a section of *The Radicant* in the exhibition catalogue (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 8). The catalogue which accompanies the Tate Triennial *Altermodern* (2009) at Tate Britain, London provides an adequate summary of the theory which is explored in greater detail in *The Radicant*. The exhibition itself, the artworks and the conceptual connections which Bourriaud has established through their placement, outlines the book’s central theory.

In the exhibition catalogue for the *Altermodern*, Bourriaud describes the balance which should exist in a collective exhibition, between the artworks and the narrative they create. Bourriaud states that a collective exhibition based on a “theoretical hypothesis” (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 1) needs to achieve this balance and it is this balance which then “acts as a form of subtitling” (pg 1) for the exhibition. As a curator Bourriaud uses the *Altermodern* exhibition as an exploration of the theory of the

Altermodern, he draws on the theory itself and seeks to explore and define it through the works and artists he has selected.

Bourriaud sees the role of the curator to prevent signs and images from vanishing into indifference (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 1) and alludes to the role of the critic as a decoder (Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics pg 7). Bourriaud states that identifying these signs and images enables him to explore their narratives and in so doing, to establish a voice which merges the artists' statements and the "dialogues woven between the artefacts" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 1) manifesting in a complex arrangement, an exhibition of signs and images. In all three texts and the related exhibitions, Bourriaud takes on this role of identifying the signs and images, sincerely and honestly in the development of his exhibitions and theories. While Bourriaud develops the two theories separately Relational Aesthetics and the Altermodern, it is clear that they are interlinked. *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction*, led Bourriaud by means of his curatorial methods to develop the theory of the Altermodern and the Radicant, which is directly related to the exhibition *Altermodern*. Bourriaud uses these three texts to establish a framework for global contemporary art production – which will then be used to contextualise South African digital arts practice in the following chapters.

Relational Aesthetics: an analysis

Relational Aesthetics was written in 1998 after Bourriaud curated *Traffic* at CapcMusee d'art contemporain in Bordeaux (1996) and was translated into English in 2002, Bourriaud observed a general misunderstanding of the art which was being produced in the

1990s due to the then theoretical discourse and its perceived shortcomings (Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics pg 7). This discourse, based on postcolonial and postmodern theories, provided an inadequate framework from which to critically engage with the artwork of the 1990s. Bourriaud's text starts by discussing 'relational form' and establishes what exactly Relational Aesthetics is, he explores how Relational Aesthetics emerges in the artworks of the 1990s. There are specific aspects of *Relational Aesthetics* which are the focus of this chapter so as to develop a solid background for the Altermodern.

For Bourriaud, an artwork is a "bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations... ad infinitum" (Relational Aesthetics pg 22) a "linking element... a dot on the line" (Relational Aesthetics pg 21). Bourriaud suggests that the form of an "artwork exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship" (pg 21). In many ways, regardless of the medium the artist is using, the relations become the form for the artwork, the concept of the artwork exists within the relations and because of the relations which the viewer is able to establish through the artist, the artwork and ultimately bring into the 'real world'. Relational Aesthetics establishes a framework for art which is referential. It provides an outline for artworks which are referential, suggests and initiate specific "human interactions" (pg 14). These relations are based on a social context. The theory also establishes these relations and their significance in creating a form which facilitates an artist's concept and idea. Bourriaud describes the artist as "embarking on a dialogue" and through their practice a formation of relations occurs "between consciousnesses" (pg 22). Bourriaud sees art today as "modelling possible universes" (pg 13) as opposed to determining an entire world forming "imaginary and utopian realities" (pg 13), artworks as a product of an artist's way of thinking are "ways of living and models of action within the

existing real" (pg 13). The multiplicity of relations that exist in the present become the focus of the artist and the artwork through the formation of relations. Artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Vanessa Beecroft, Carston Höller and Christine Hill are some of the artists whom Bourriaud uses to explore his observations and establish his theory.

Bourriaud observes a return to the modernity of the twentieth century and a departure from the postmodern world of the 1980s (Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics pg 13). This new modernity which he witnesses emerging is based on "different philosophical, cultural and social presuppositions" (pg 12) and goes against the "idealistic and teleological" (pg 13) nature of early twentieth century modernism. This observed modernism is synonymous with movements of the early twentieth century such as Dada and Surrealism. Bourriaud states that "it is not modernity that is dead, but its idealistic and teleological version" (pg 13), reflecting his desire to define a new modernity. Though this modernity he describes and explores in *Relation Aesthetics* is not described as 'new', Bourriaud does describes the avant-garde as having vacated which implies a movement away from this old modernity towards a 'new' one.

Charles Harrison explores modernism in his essay titled "Modernism", identifying different types of modernism: one specific to a cultural period "specific to the age" (pg 143), which saw a reaction and set of attitudes towards new "economic, technological, and political tendencies" (pg 143); and another as an "artistic tendency" (pg 147) which Greenberg identified "as a critical tradition" (pg 147). It is necessary to have an understanding of what exactly modernism is when engaging with what Bourriaud identifies as modernism and as he begins to establish a new modernism.

Much like the modernism which Harrison describes as the “intentional self-critical preoccupation with the demands of a specific medium” (pg 145) in the Greenbergian form, Relational Aesthetics is a theory which surrounds the aesthetics of an artwork based on the inter-human relations which it represents, creates and initiates (Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics pg 112). There is a move from being self-critical of the medium to being self-critical of human relations (the medium). The focus is then on the relations which are set up between and among humans and the social context surrounding their relations. The form of an artwork according to Bourriaud exists in the “dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artist proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise” (pg 21). Bourriaud describes this as constructing a dialogue and the flow of segmented information (pg 22). The theory and works which are defined in it are a reflection or an inverted reality which establishes a dialogue through this reflection; between the artist, the world and the viewer (pg 22).

There are various aspects and roles within these relations, such as transmitters and receivers of information which all work together to form a network, a community of relations within the world. This is constructed by the artists and brought into the ‘real world’. This aspect of *transitivity*, where one element refers to the next element, which in turn refers to the next element and so the first refers to the third, is something which Bourriaud carries through his different texts. This act of passing over meaning and affecting alternate elements is what Bourriaud describes as “truncated channels of communication” (Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics pg 26) and is integral to many works which were being produced in the 1990s. Bourriaud acknowledges that the concept of transitivity is not a new concept in art history and allows for the artwork to become an animated object. He refers

to Eugene Delacroix and his diary entry which suggests the role and responsibility of the viewer in contributing to the meaning of a work (pg 26). Bourriaud notes the existence of art in relation to the dialogue around it, and Marcel Duchamp's conceptualising of the artwork existing within the viewer (pg 26). Bourriaud sees the art of the 1990s as extending this previously explored concept, these relations which exist within the artwork, artist and viewer, into the 'real world'. Transitivity can be seen allowing for the relations to exist within an artwork.

Bourriaud describes "all manner of encounters and relation invention" (Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics pg 28) such as when Rirkrit Tiravanija organises a dinner at a collector's home and leaves all the ingredients required to make a Thai soup for the collector (pg 7). Any form of event, such as the one described, Bourriaud interprets as an "aesthetic object" (pg 28) and becomes a key component of the artwork. The idea of a gathering, a collective group of people who are there for a singular purpose, a community where a shared experience occurs, is intrinsic to relational artworks. The relations are established within the community through an event, a performance. Such as with Jens Haaning's "Turkish Jokes" (1994), in which Haaning broadcasts funny stories in Turkish over a loudspeaker in a public Copenhagen square (pg 17). Bourriaud describes Haaning as having created "a micro-community" (pg 17) through the broadcast and event. This "momentary grouping", where the "degree of participation" needed by the viewer, the "nature of the work" and the "models of sociability proposed and represented" according to Bourriaud resulted in a very "'specific arena of exchange'" (Relational Aesthetics pg 17 - 18).

The emergence of new “communication vehicles” and “new technologies like the internet and multimedia systems” which Bourriaud is aware of, initiates a communal aspiration to “create new areas of conviviality and introduce new types of transaction with regard to the cultural object” (Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics pg 26). This ‘way of thinking’ seems inherent to new technologies with regard to relations and the flow of information, and the distinct ways of thinking which these technologies establish and demand of users.

Bourriaud states that the digital image, as a result of a calculation and its programmable nature, informs the contemporary art scene. In the 1960s artworks became less about “independent realities and more a programme to be followed” (Relational Aesthetics pg 70) such as with the gathering or performance. This principle extends into the relational programme, which guides Bourriaud’s interpretation and framework for installation and performance artwork (pg 67). In the 1990s artists explored “sociability and interaction” (pg 70). He describes artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Henry Bond and Pierre Huyghe as “constructing models of sociability for producing human relations”, which is an extension of concepts present in 1960s performance art which was portrayed as a “model to be followed” (pg 70). The convivial nature of this sharing or establishment of relations which exists in the “interstices” can be described as “micro-utopias”, as “relational programmes” (pg 70).

Screen based works are a re-occurring motif in contemporary 1990s artworks, such as “film, computers and video” (Relational Aesthetics pg 66). He compares this motif and example of new technology to photography and the incorporation of photography, as a new technology, into artistic discourse as a “realistic representation” (Relational Aesthetics pg

67), and presents it as an extension of this process. According to Bourriaud, new technologies enable us to obtain “new ways of seeing” (pg 66) and changing “mentalities and attitudes” (pg 69). The screen is a form and site for “arresting light... and an interface on which information is written” (pg 69) bringing together film, computers and video (pg 66). These new ways of thinking which new technologies open up, are created through art and can be set against the human relationships produced by the technologies of that day. Bourriaud states that art creates awareness about “production methods and human relationships” as a result and product of technology (Relational Aesthetics pg 67).

From the screen to the digital image, technology alters the way we think. The “manoeuvrability of the video image” (Relational Aesthetics pg 75) due to the VCR (Video Cassette Recording), which of course has developed even further since the 1990s, influences the way we understand performance. The actions of the VCR allow the user to ‘freeze time’, rewind and fast forward allowing the work of art to be seen as a still, frozen in time, a representation of reality. Vanessa Beecroft’s “tableaux vivants” (pg 75) which are moments upon which the viewer can look, are an example of this artwork. Her live gallery performance consisted of 20 models, all dressed the same and wearing red wigs, who were only visible to the viewer through a doorway (pg 8). This work, as an example of a performance, with installation aspects, is very time-specific and calculated, yet it can be re-enacted and recorded, enabling it to respond to the nature of the screen (pg 76). Beecroft’s work, live or re-enacted and documented, reflects this altered way of thinking about and perceiving art. This adds a further layer of relations.

Relational Aesthetics as a theory, seeks to draw elements from an artwork, establish relations with the world and between the artwork and the viewer, using transitivity. The "arena of exchange" (Relational Aesthetics pg 18) which is formed in relational art should be assessed and based on "aesthetic criteria" (pg 18). According to Bourriaud this requires an analysis of the consistency of its form, the "symbolic value of the world [this form] suggests to us" (pg 18) and the "image of the human relations reflected by [the artwork]" (pg 18). Bourriaud describes this as a formation of a "social interstice" (pg 18). It is these characteristics which Bourriaud carries forward into the Altermodern.

Relational Aesthetics: a critical understanding

In order to better understand the theory which Bourriaud develops in his writing on the Altermodern, a critical understanding of what he is writing about is necessary. Relational Aesthetics has been responded to by Claire Bishop (Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics) and Liam Gillick (Letters and Responses) who express interesting interpretations of the theory. These responses shed additional light on the Altermodern as there are many common threads between the two theories.

In 2004, two years after *Relational Aesthetics* (the translated version) was published, Bishop wrote her response presenting various opinions of Bourriaud's text and new theory. Two years later Liam Gillick presentenced his response to her response and so on. There were many flaws which Gillick pointed out in Bishop's argument and she in his, however, for the sake of this research, this lengthy biannual debate will not be continued. Instead, the

focus will be on various aspects of each argument which either contribute to Bourriaud's or added a valid opposition to it, so as to present a balanced point of view.

In her article *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,* Bishop begins with a sufficient exploration of Bourriaud's theory and examples; she then adapts two of her own chosen examples (Thomas Hircshhorn and Santiago Sierra) to Bourriaud's theory and uses 'antagonism' to explore them further. Her actual argument against Bourriaud seems a little vague and Bishop fails to direct her argument straight at Bourriaud's theory and rather uses other theories to 'prove' his theories as weak or misplaced as Gillick points out. Some of the interpretations which Bishop raises can be applied to *The Radicant* and therefore the Altermodern.

Bishop criticises Bourriaud's methods, stating that his "curatorial modus operandi" is a "reaction to the type of art produced in the 1990s" (Bishop, Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics pg 52) and criticises his use of the 'laboratory' concept. This experimental curation, where the exhibition is seen as an experience, a site of exploration is problematic for Bishop. Bourriaud's exploration of transitivity and the varying degrees of interactivity in which it can result in, is also problematic for Bishop. Bishop interprets this as a question of stability and suggests that this affects the viewer's ability to determine the identity of a work of art which is "wilfully unstable" and "unclear" (pg 52). The idea that a work can change, be "open ended, interactive, and resistant to closure" (pg 52) and be altered by various factors, challenges the works identity and further investigation into its conceptual meaning.

Bishop explores the lack of artistic identity in the artists whom Bourriaud selected for *Traffic,* stating that this is because "'relational' art ... makes use of existing cultural forms – including other works of art" (Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics pg 55). She insinuates there are no visual distinguishing factors which the viewer (or Bishop) is able to attribute to relational art or to specific artists. Perhaps Bishop is deliberately misinterpreting Relational Aesthetics, the relations are the aesthetic for Bourriaud and they become the artist's form which he or she is able to use in order to construct the work. Bourriaud makes this clear in his text. Bishop focuses on critiquing two artists who Bourriaud uses to substantiate his argument, Liam Gillick and Rirkit Tiravanija, both of whom have distinguishing characteristics about the work which they produce. Gillick and Tiravanija do not necessarily produce work which establishes them aesthetically. Gillick has more of 'aesthetic style' than Tiravanija whose practice is performance-based; yet both artists use scenarios as their form, both artists produce work which results from a certain practice. In much the same way that Pollock's gestural marks define and characterise his work aesthetically as well as conceptually, so do the relations which Gillick and Tiravanija set up. These relations enable the viewer to define and explore further conceptually and aesthetically. This is Bourriaud's point, that the characteristics of these works are the relations which are established; they are not presented to the viewer like the brush strokes of a Pollock.

The most interesting part of Bishop's argument is when she questions what "types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?" in relational art (Bishop, Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics pg 65). Bourriaud does allude to this in his text and it is a question which should be asked when exploring relational art: Who are the artists creating these relations for? Are they creating them or does the viewer create them? What relations are

created and why create them? Bishop claims that the relations which emerge are of an antagonistic nature based on theories by Laclau and Mouffe concluding that antagonism is based on subjectivity which "is the process of identification" (pg 66). Antagonism is therefore the "relationship that emerges between such incomplete entities" (pg 66) and is not of an entirely democratic nature. Bishop perceives this as contradicting Bourriaud's suggestion, as she describes it, that the relations being set up are "intrinsically democratic" (pg 67) and seem to align with "an ideal of subjectivity as a whole and of community as imminent togetherness" (pg 67), as relations produced by artists such as Tiravanija are "microtopian" (pg 67). Bishop is intent on politicising the relations which she perceives as emerging in relational artworks and criticises Bourriaud for not bringing this to the fore in his argument.

Bourriaud does not suggest that the relations which he describes or the artists he uses as examples are setting up, as being democratic in their entirety. It seems that Bishop and Bourriaud agree on this, even though Bishop does not seem to think so from her interpretation. Bourriaud is critical about the idealism which is associated with and emblematic of modernism such as democracy. Bourriaud is aware of the idealism associated with the relations. He states that each artwork produced under relational aesthetics is a "proposal to live in a shared world... a bundle of relations with the world" (Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics pg 22), but it is what the relations are saying about the world which is where it becomes interesting and where the aesthetics of the relations is manifested. As explored earlier in this chapter, Bourriaud refers to the convivial nature of the "interstices" (pg 70) where the relations exist and can be described as "micro-utopias" (pg 70). He states that if the artists who are operating within relational aesthetics reject the notion of the

avant-garde which was so closely associated with modernity, then they are not “naive or cynical enough [to practise as though] the radical and universalist utopia” (pg 70) was still a priority. *Untitle (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* by Felix Gonzalez-Torres consists of a pile of sweets on the floor of a gallery which acts as ‘temptation’ for the viewer/audience. This poses the viewer with a choice, the simple act of making a decision: to take a sweet or not. Through this decision, Gonzalez-Torres explores the relationship we have to authority, “our sense of moderation and our relationship to the artwork” (pg 57). The relations which relational artists create refer to the world in which they live, the one we inhabit and how the two co-exist. It is inevitable that they reflect and comment on this world, which is by no means utopian nor does it aim to be. It is in fact naive of Bishop to suggest that the relation aim to be utopian. Surely we have moved beyond this modernist principle.

Liam Gillick’s response to Bishop’s critique, points out numerous factual errors which Bishop makes. Gillick points out that *Traffic*, which Bishop incorrectly cites as occurring in 1993, did in fact occur three years later (Gillick, Letters and Responses pg 96). Despite his blatant disapproval of Bishop’s response, Gillick does respond to Bourriaud’s text, stating that its problem is how it has been received, that in many situations it has been “uncritically accepted” (pg 96). Gillick does point out that Relational Aesthetics was written in “response to the artists whose work it discusses” and is “part of a critical distancing” by Bourriaud as a curator something to which Bishop alludes but does not directly acknowledge (Gillick, Letters and Responses pg 96).

Bourriaud’s theory, which is centred on human relations, reflects a departure from postmodern discourse and begins to establish a new modernism. Bourriaud uses his

observations of artistic practices and artworks to re-define the role of the artist as a constructor of relations which reflect back into the 'real world'. Bourriaud describes a contemporary sensibility and observes a new way of thinking which is brought about by new technology and explores the effect this has on artistic practice and how it brings about an old concept of transitivity. Artists establish communication and dialogue is formed, through relations. Bourriaud lays the foundation for the development of *Postproduction* and *The Radicant*.

Postproduction: an analysis

Postproduction was written in 2001 as a continuation of the theories Bourriaud outlined in his *Relational Aesthetics*. *Postproduction* describes a similar artistic scene to *Relational Aesthetics* which described a 'collective sensibility' observed by Bourriaud. In *Postproduction,* however, Bourriaud presents a more analytical description of the practice of these artists. He establishes and initiates a conversation around the contemporary "modes of production" (Bourriaud, Postproduction pg 8). Postproduction is a technical term which describes a specific process in the audiovisual field which is applied to "recorded material" (pg 13). Bourriaud has observed this process being adopted or emulated in the practice of artists. Bourriaud likens artists to DJs or programmers working with existing material and using tools to transform it (pg 13).

Bourriaud acknowledges that the principles he describes in *Relational Aesthetics* such as "interactivity, environment and participation" (Bourriaud, Postproduction pg 9), are not new principles. They are what he terms "classical art historical notions", but it was how

these terms were being articulated by contemporary artists which was different (pg 9). The idea that artists are able to draw upon a "cultural market" and use pre-existing cultural objects and re-contextualise them alters the form of the artwork; Bourriaud suggests that the artwork "takes on a script-like value" (pg 9). It is this radically different way of thinking and imagining which emerges as an activity of sharing of signs within cultures and a "culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal" which moves beyond a sense of "art of appropriation" (pg 9).

Bourriaud sees this specific way of making art, the "art of postproduction" (Postproduction pg 13) as a response to the "chaos of global culture in the information age" which was accompanied by an increase in the amount and availability of artworks. The use of previously existing artworks, the re-working, reproduction and interpretation of these works is a distinct characteristic of work from the early 1990s work which Bourriaud observes. This is a continuation of Relational Aesthetics, which Bourriaud sees as departing from the "changing mental space that has been opened for thought by the Internet, the central tool of the information age" (Postproduction pg 14). The artist becomes, as Bourriaud describes, a "semionaut", travelling through the images and signs, generating "original pathways through signs" (pg 18) and images. In *24 Hour Psycho* Douglas Gordon takes the Alfred Hitchcock film *Psycho* and using methods of postproduction re-contextualises the film, he slows down the film, 'stretching' it to run over a period of twenty-four hours (pg 15). This not only creates a new work, but changes and comments on the original work. It is this simple act which Bourriaud describes and observes.

Bourriaud explores distinct modes of production being used by artists. It is these modes which are influenced by the use of technology. Technology within a global culture contributes to an alternative way of thinking, one which utilises postproduction methods. Bourriaud proposes ways in which to "inhabit" this new global culture. Artists become semionauts and their artworks products of their findings.

Postproduction: a critical understanding

It is necessary to address the overlapping of Bourriaud's analysis in *Postproduction* with *Relational Aesthetics*, apart from it 'describing the same scene'. The artists which Bourriaud discusses and observes, such as Pierre Huyghe, Vanessa Beecroft and Liam Gillick, all act as semionauts, creating artworks which draw on pre-existing cultural signs and re-assemble them. Bourriaud describes 'postproduction artists' as "inventing new uses for works" (Bourriaud, Postproduction pg 45). These artists create "different storylines and alternative narratives" (Postproduction pg 46) from forms which they have decoded through the use of the world. These narratives occur through relationships which are established, connections which are made through the artist's action. The cultural objects which undergo a 'post production' process are altered or changed, becoming new artworks through an artist's action and create a narrative. Liam Gillick does exactly this in his work *The Pinboard Project* (1992) where he places newspaper articles and images on a pin board for an audience to reposition and interact with, if they so choose. According to Bourriaud, Gillick "questions the dividing line between fact and fiction" (pg 46) by reorganizing these two entities and through the use of 'scenario'.

Bourriaud begins to view the exhibition as still being very much part of the process, part of the relationships and narrative formed (Bourriaud, Postproduction pg 71). He does not see it as the end of the artist's process or production, but rather part of it. This changes the role and position of the gallery; it is merely a site for production within a dynamic narrative of the artwork. This way of thinking aligns with his approach to transitivity and interactive works in relational aesthetic artworks. Bourriaud states that it is up to "us as beholders of art to bring these relations to light", to evaluate the relations in "their specific contexts" (pg 94).

The Radicant (Altermodern): an analysis

Bourriaud curated the Tate Triennial *Altermodern* in 2009 which was held at the Tate Britain, London, and then later published *The Radicant* in 2010. Both dealt with similar concepts, established an altermodern framework and explored a 'Radicant' aesthetic. The exhibition can be seen as a precursor to the text which explores the theory in greater detail about Radicant art and the Altermodern. For the purposes of this report the exhibition's catalogue will be used as a theoretical text in conjunction with *The Radicant* to explore Bourriaud's writings further.

Bourriaud makes reference to modernism in both *Relational Aesthetics* and in *Postproduction* yet in *The Radicant* and the Altermodern it takes form as a 'new modernity' and builds on the descriptions in both previous texts. Bourriaud draws on similar traits of modernism that Harrison highlights in his essay, however in Bourriaud's writings he is not transferring the ideals and principles from the early twentieth century modernism but

rather explores them through our present society and culture. Bourriaud identifies a modern entity which is able to negotiate time and takes on the 'current' situation. In *The Radicant*, Bourriaud reclaims this concept without implying that it is a "throwback", without disregarding the "totalitarian temptations and colonialist claims" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 15) of modernism from the previous century. He states that it is not necessary to identify "avant-garde, universalism [and] progressive radicality" in this new modernity in order for it to be 'modern' (pg 15).

In the introduction to the catalogue for *Altermodern* (Tate Britain, London, 2009) Bourriaud states that "art today needs to re-invent itself on a planetary scale" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 2). Through the theory of the Altermodern, Bourriaud proposes to re-invent modernism as an extension of the critiques made through *Relational Aesthetics* and to contextualise it as a global form rather than a 'western' form. In the Tate catalogue, Bourriaud describes the term 'Altermodern' as originating from 'alter' and 'modern', describing something which is different, an alternative, yet something which is modern, a "multitude of possibilities, of alternatives to a single route" (pg 2). Bourriaud describes it as a "constellation of ideas" intent on creating a "form of modernism for the twenty-first century" and places it within globalisation, thus establishing a "global dialogue" through these ideas (pg 2). The term itself establishes a distinct move away from amplified postmodernism and represents the emergence of a global culture. Bourriaud deliberately places this theory within a new modern discourse and intentionally away from a postmodern discourse.

Bourriaud describes the Altermodern as going against “cultural standardisation and massification” on the one hand and “against nationalism and cultural relativism” on the other; by placing itself in the middle, in the space between cultures, enabling “translation, wandering and culture-crossing” to be tools for artistic production (Bourriaud, Brochure outline for Exhibtion Altermodern). Through navigation, artists are able to translate culture, cross cultures and move freely between and use the products of their mobility, to produce artworks which reflect society. Translation is the ability to understand two ‘languages’ which can be seen as codes (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 30) in such a way as to be so familiar with one language, that one is able to repeat it in another and be true to the meaning and interpretation of both; yet there are nuances which are lost. This is precisely what Bourriaud is proposing as a level of cultural understanding, and how artists should navigate though different cultures. Bourriaud explores the act of translation and what it can connote, an adaption of codes which signify meaning (pg 30).

For Bourriaud, translation is an act of displacement, the difference between the initial and final position of an object through movement. In this act of displacement and translation, it is the “meaning of text to move from one linguistic form to another” (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 54). Translation is not the mirroring of information. Whether it takes the form of a linguistic or cultural object, something inevitably changes or is altered in the process of translation, much like the act of postproduction. A relationship is able to be established between the initial information, the final version and the remainder. Bourriaud describes the act of translation as “inevitably incomplete and leaves behind an irreducible remainder” (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 30).

To better understand Bourriaud's theory around the Altermodern, it is necessary to understand the title of his book *The Radicant*. *Radicant* is a term used to describe an organism "that grows its roots and adds new ones as it advances" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 22), one that is able to have multiple roots in multiple areas and spaces. This very nature allows a radicant to set "one's roots in motion, staging them in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them of the power to completely define one's identity, translating ideas" (pg 22). It is the radicant who has multiple roots, who denies a singular source of inspiration and rooted understanding to their individual, which characterises this new modern artist. The contemporary artist uses and works within journeys; these become the form for their work and practice, and the artist is able to do this by means of translation. The navigation of a journey with the aid of translation is at the centres of artists of this "precarious era" who Bourriaud describes as "the wanderer" (pg 22). This very artist establishes conversations, creates a dialogue between and among themselves and the world, using translation to navigate their way.

Bourriaud's radicant thought is based on the act of translation a "precarious enrooting coming into contact with a host soil" (The Radicant pg 54), which occurs when traversing different cultures. He goes on to further explain this notion of art as being a "gaseous substance" as opposed to a "closed and self contained" entity, which is able to fill up contrasting "human activities" before it solidifies in a visible form (The Radicant pg 54). This notion of an ephemeral and momentary work of art supports the recurring notion of a dynamic work of art. This concept of a dynamic changing work and the radicant nature of the artist which Bourriaud describes are possible through translation, the roots and different paths formed are all due to the way in which the translation occurs.

The two core characteristics of this new modernity - translation and navigation – give rise to multiple characteristics. The ability to translate allows the artist to traverse time and space which results in a dynamic narrative. The act of translation establishes through a dialogue, a network of interconnected cultures, discourses and aesthetics. The artist has the ability to map this dialogue through his or her own displacement and becomes a r*adicant* establishing multiple journeys. It is clear that these principles of the Altermodern and Radicant thought draw on principles which Bourriaud established in *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction*. Relational aesthetics enabled relations within an artwork to be established through transitivity. This resonates strongly in the Altermodern artist who forms a dialogue in and through his artwork, the way in which he or she navigates different cultures forming radicant roots. It is through these different cultures that the artists becomes a wanderer, using different signs and images from the world around him or her such as the semionaut as outlined in Postproduction.

Kate Paterson, an artist who Bourriaud curated for the *Altermodern* focuses on our own process of understanding and translating sound. In *Earth-Moon-Earth (Moonlight Sonata Reflected from the Surface of the Moon)*, Kate Paterson distorted Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata' by transmitting it to the moon and back in Morse code. The moon's bumpy surface registers as gaps in the information and in what the audience hears and understands as the 'Sonata' or silence (Altermodern: Website). Translation plays a dual role in this work, both in the translation of the 'Sonata' into Morse code and in the process of hearing. Paterson draws attention to the different spaces where these acts of translation occur and their significance. It is through the different relationships which are established in

different spaces that the work takes form. Paterson navigates different spaces and allows the audience to do so too. In another of her works, *Vatnajökull (the sound of)* 2007-8, the audience is able to listen to the sound of a melting glacier in Iceland through a telephone (Altermodern: Website). This very specific act of communication, transferral of information is itself an act of translation via the phone (Altermodern: Website). The relay of information establishes a dialogue and information forms part of a journey. The displacement of the iceberg, as it is literally portrayed sonically and the way in which it is conveyed to the audience, all traverse space and time. In both works, a narrative is developed and formed through the translation of specific information. It is the way in which the information changes and is allowed to navigate which establishes a journey for the audience and for Paterson.

The works of art which emerge as part of the Altermodern unfold as they change and form different trajectories, they are able to "surpass the static forms through which they initially manifest themselves" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 3), emerging in an unfamiliar form. The perception, thematic understanding and demonstration of 'time' are no longer linear. Concepts overlap time and space, forming histories and geographies which cannot be defined and compartmentalised. Bourriaud states that artists identify this and begin to form part of this constantly evolving and changing dynamic. A network of travellers, journeys and cultures is created. A 'collective authorship' is established which defines a new cultural framework. These principles resonate strongly with Bourriaud's initial theory Relation Aesthetics.

The advent of globalisation is the starting point for Bourriaud's theoretical development. He sees it as bringing about, influencing and enabling a very specific change in artistic production, ways of thinking and ways of navigating the cultural landscape. For Bourriaud globalisation has had the same effect on our current context as industrialisation had on modernism. This globalisation which Bourriaud describes is evident from his own experience of the world. In India, Bourriaud observed the development of celebrities and shopping malls, as occurring at "stunning rapidity", the spread of "Western norms within a culture that is nonetheless highly self-sufficient" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 18). This development is nourished by the intricate telecommunication network developed alongside globalisation as a result of capitalism. Bourriaud observes and acknowledges an element of "standardization" (pg 17) which has emerged in global culture as a result of globalisation. It seems that standardisation is inevitability because of globalisation. The ability to commune in at least two languages, and at least two cultures, is a dynamic that the Altermodern facilitates and enables, the ability to be able to translate and navigate through at least two cultures. Bourriaud describes how this global world, with an ever-increasing flow of people and money and, a need to proportionally develop cities with new transport networks and incoming migrants; has resulted in the "fashioning of new transnational cultures" and "angry retreats into ethnic or national identities" (pg 18). Bourriaud is aware of the twofold nature and effect of globalisation and proposes that the Altermodern can encompass both. He is in favour of both being able to exist together.

His aim is to establish an aesthetic and intellectual space in which he claims "contemporary works might be judged according to the same criterion", a space which is open for "discussion" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 27). Moving beyond multiculturalism

requires, no longer seeing the other as 'other', but rather as deserving of an equal critique. That is to say that all works should be interpreted in the same manner, with the same standard "universal decoder" (pg 29), and thus reach a point of translation. Bourriaud describes the system of art resulting from a "construction plan" which historically stems from Western culture (pg 39). Bourriaud questions whether this Western origin is "sufficient grounds for disqualifying this construction plan" (pg 39). His answer is no. His solution is the Altermodern.

The Altermodern does not require the rejection of Western culture of historical placement in order for cultures to continue to co-exist together, in a world "stripped of a centre" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 2). The 'centre' is regarded as the West, a site of all knowledge and cultural production associated with power and authority and those outside this 'centre', are subject to this unfair distribution of power. Rather Bourriaud advocates for "cooperation among a multitude of cultural *semes* and through ongoing translation of singularities" (The Radicant pg 39). The Altermodern would therefore allow for new "intercultural connections" and discussions which go beyond that of the multicultural postmodern and seek to emphasise the dynamics of discourses and forms, as opposed to the origins (pg 40), Bourriaud states that "it is a matter of replacing the question of origin with destination" (pg 40). Through co-operation and discussion Bourriaud proposes a level of understanding and translation among cultures.

Another artist Bourriaud selected for the Altermodern was Subodh Gupta, whose personal journey from the semi-rural countryside in India to the capital city of Delhi influences his works. This mirrors the actual situation in India today, where village life is

quickly being replaced by the culture of the surrounding capitalist cities (Altermodern: Website). This relates directly to Bourriaud's own experience of the country. Through his monumental sculptures and installations Gupta uses his own surroundings and relationship with them to test "colonial/racial guilt and teases the aesthetic/consumerist desires of the 'other' Developed/Western World" (Altermodern: Website). The artwork *Line Of Control (2008)* does precisely this. His sculpture is based on shining stainless steel objects that reflect the short circuit between tradition and change. The title, a phrase associated with disputed borders between territories, is removed from its "limited and limiting geo-political" discourse and is now associated with the difference between "desire and aspiration, realisation and faith, dreams and reality and night and nightmare" (Altermodern: Website). The shape of the sculpture resembles a mushroom cloud and brings a distinct tension to the work. This implied action and association "transcend cultural divides" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 4). Gupta creates a narrative and a journey for the viewer which reference his own journey.

The Altermodern's a global context highlights the increased use of technology and telecommunications on a global scale and their ability to change the way we inhabit and perceive the world and affect artistic practice. In *Postproduction* he discusses and identifies this new 'way of seeing' while in the Altermodern and *The Radicant* these new ways of seeing and thinking are integrated into all aspects of the theory. Process and dynamic forms of artwork become extremely important to the Altermodern as artists begin to combine geographical and historical perspectives (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 12). According to Bourriaud, contemporary works of art trace "lines in a globalised space that now extends to time: history, the last continent to be explored" and exist in a "journey

format" that uses thought processes as "hypertext... one sign directs to a second... creating a chain of mutually interconnected forms, mimicking mouse-clicks on a computer screen" (pg 5).

The starting point for many artists today is this global culture. According to Bourriaud, it is the simple act of negotiating the cultural signs which exist in the present. These journeys and the ability to transcend time and space allow artists to arrive at a specific destination (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 4). In this collective authorship, there is a temporal displacement which Bourriaud describes as existing in our global culture and artistic practice. The artist can "turn cultural nomad" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 3) and sample and acquire different cultures, rather than drawing on merely one single culture. This cultural nomadic nature is present in concepts of the artwork and not just the visual and physical manifestations of the artwork. In the Altermodern, concepts are no longer rooted in a specific place or at a specific time, artists are able to use these concepts freely. Radicant artists navigate time and space, amongst signs forming nomadic journeys which become a "way of learning about the world" (pg 3). Radicant artists in the Altermodern "invent pathways among signs", they exist as "semionauts" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 53).

The Radicant (Altermodern): a critical understanding

To better understand Bourriaud's theory a critical review of it is necessary. This will be based on both critiques of his theory and reviews of the exhibition, *Altermodern*. In the article "Altercritics" for *Frieze* (2009) which reviewed the exhibition, Dan Fox criticised many

critics in mainstream British media for their “cynicism” (Fox). He describes several reviews which led him to question the role of the critic and reviewer as well as Bourriaud’s theory. According to Fox critics of the exhibition were “out of touch with the ways in which young, internationally mobile artists today maintain sophisticated dialogues across a range of media” (Fox). Bourriaud’s theory is not just an indication of artistic practice, but an indication of a global dynamic and proposes how this new modernity and globalisation might be dealt with by artists. In her article “Deriving Knowledge” (2009), Sara Smizz describes the Altermodern, developed by Bourriaud as being the “perfect curatorial framework” (Smizz). Smizz observes that “displacement becomes a methodology and view point as opposed to a style” (Smizz) this can be said of many of the concepts with which the Altermodern deals since it does not necessarily define a specific aesthetic style or ‘trend’ but a way of thinking and perception which becomes an aesthetic. This adds insight to Bishop’s criticism of Relational Aesthetic artists who she describes as being indeterminable.

David Cunningham reviews the *Altermodern* exhibition and catalogue in his essay titled “Returns of the Modern” (2010). Much of Cunningham’s criticisms are based on the fact that he perceives Bourriaud’s theory as being unoriginal, given that it is based on translation and the creolisation of cultures (Cunningham pg 122) with the catalogue revealing an “intellectual vagueness” (pg 123). Cunningham suggests that Bourriaud compounds the problems of postmodernism in his theory and expands these problems by causing conceptual “confusions about the nature of the modern as a structure of time” (pg 123). Yet, Bourriaud is very clear (as Cunningham points out later on in his discussion) in addressing the current situation which Cunningham describes as the “historical novelty of

the present" (pg 123) and conceptualises time as a dynamic form in and around which journeys and practice are formed.

Cunningham notes the change in direction from *Rational Aesthetics* to the Altermodern, with the former being an "identification and description of an art world movement" (pg 124) and the latter, a "dramatically totalizing form of cultural theory" (pg 124). In the Altermodern a large emphasis is placed on both how an artist inhabits the global dynamic and the work which they produce, and how the two are connected. This is all encompassing as Bourriaud describes. Bourriaud explores this 'new world' which artists inhabit and uses his theory to negotiate how they inhabit it and to propose other ways in which to inhabit it. It is a broad theory, covering many aspects and arenas of this 'new modernity', which Cunningham acknowledges. The broadness which Cunningham perceives can be seen as rectified in *The Radicant* where Bourriaud expands on the Altermodern, going into greater detail regarding his theory and his cultural observations.

Smizz adds further insight into the theory of the Altermodern when she suggests that it allows for new media artists, as many can relate to the "hyper linking/hypertext as a thought process" which is connected to the recurring theme 'journey'. Smizz describes how these artists take historical and geographical perspectives which transcend time and space. While many critics have been quick to discard Bourriaud and his theory for many different reasons, Smizz states that dismissing this theory would be an error as "everybody is affected by some sort of element that Altermodern grapples with". She describes the exhibition as connecting "the theory and the making of art", which is precisely Bourriaud's intention.

There are two problematic areas of the Altermodern. The first is that the theory is all encompassing and the second is that Bourriaud writes the theory from the 'centre' about a 'de-centred' global dynamic. The all-encompassing, all-inclusive aspects for Bourriaud's theory cause the Altermodern to be somewhat unrealistic. Bourriaud writes a broad theory from the 'centre' about a global dynamic which he perceives as existing in a 'de-centred' world. Not everyone is able to live in this 'de-centred' world which Bourriaud describes, not everyone is able to live the mobile radicant lifestyle which results in the Altermodern. Some people are forced to migrate, forced to travel across continents are not in a position to be the wandering semionauts which Bourriaud describes. This mobility is different to the one Bourriaud describes. Perhaps the Altermodern is not applicable or relevant to as many people as Bourriaud perceives it to be. Bourriaud's theory covers an extremely dense field of ideas and concepts which seeks to outline framework and propose a way in which to practice and inhabit this new global world. It is for this very reason that he falls into the 'trap' of being interpreted as vague and too general. Yet, the development of his theory has lead to very conclusive and solid answers for artists and practitioners.

Contextualising the Altermodern away from postmodernism and postcolonialism

To accommodate the Altermodern, Bourriaud states that by proposing a 'new modernity', it is necessary to denounce the existing theories surrounding postmodernism, which advocated multiculturalism and "aesthetic courtesy". It is then necessary to engage with postmodernism and postcolonialism in relation to this theory, to understand the Altermodern's starting point and Bourriaud's own definition of these two cultural occurrences.

Postmodernism is synonymous with the advancement of society and culture within a Western framework, the spread of capitalism in different cultures in a post-industrial society. It is seen as a reaction to modernism as David Harvey explores in text *The Condition of Postmodernity* (pg 43). Harvey raises some interesting questions about the exact nature of postmodernism: is it a break from modernism or a "revolt within modernism", against the exclusive nature and stylistic form of 'high modernism' (pg 42)? Is it simply a periodising means, going against the grand narratives and aligning itself with the 'other' and the 'other voice', which was previously unrepresented and silenced (pg 42)? These questions add insight into how postmodernism can be seen as a departure for the Altermodern. Harvey suggests that postmodernists view the world as being divided and defined by cultures and identity and thus that due to this they do not "aspire to any unified representation of the world" or a "totality full of connections and differentiations" (pg 52). Harvey suggests that consequently this makes it difficult to "act coherently with respect to the world" (pg 52).

Bourriaud identifies the movement from modernism to Altermodernism as being away from the "(essentialist) multicultural mode" of postmodernism towards a merging of the ideas and theories of modernism and postcolonialism (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 2), which one could say enable us to "act coherently with respect to the world" (Harvey pg 52). Bourriaud sketches a world that we are able to inhabit equally and comprehensively. For Bourriaud, the end of postmodernism is the starting point for "reading the present" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 2). It has also allowed the world's "historical counters to be reset to zero" (pg 2), owing to postcolonialism's criticism of "Western pretensions to determine the world's direction and the speed of its development" (pg 2).

This has enabled the combination of temporalities and geographies which exist in the new global modernism. Bourriaud describes multiculturalism, for which postmodernism was so renowned, as having failed to offer an alternative to the universalism of twentieth century modernism (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 34).

Multiculturalism considers the context of an artist when interpreting or understanding their work. While in principle this seems fair, Bourriaud explains that this only reinforces a form of colonialism within the art world. It forces the artists into their cultural, ethnic or geographic location. This is problematic when compared with the global culture that Bourriaud has defined for us, where roots are mixed and cross boundaries and borders are temporal. It is this dynamic network of roots (a radicant) which is problematic for the postmodern definition of multiculturalism which seeks to define art based on an artist's roots. It is from this stand point that the Altermodern departs from postmodernism and seeks to establish a postcolonial stance for a modernism in the twenty first century.

A distinguishing characteristic of the postmodern is the defining of cultures and identities; being able to define who you are and where you are from becomes essential when evaluating and critiquing a culture. Cultures are placed against each. In the Altermodern, the ability to have multiple identities and cultures dominates. Bourriaud sees postmodern multiculturalism as being based on similar terms to "classical Western thought... a logic of membership" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 34). Bourriaud observes an increased flow of people across borders. Borders and geographical location no longer define who you are and your cultural heritage. Being a 'member' of one exclusive culture is no longer a requirement or common. The flow of people is more prominent than ever today in

our global society. Bourriaud sees the immigrant, the exile, the tourist, and the urban wanderer as "dominant figures of contemporary culture" (The Radicant pg 51). Contemporary artists are more concerned with exploring the different paths they take "between that tradition and the various contexts they traverse" (The Radicant pg 51), using translation. This change in the perception of identity is indicative of the departure from and movement beyond postmodernism. In Bourriaud's description, a radicant artist (which he compares to a radicant root) can displace itself from its origin and "reacclimate itself" (pg 52) and have consecutive, concurrent origins. For Bourriaud, the radical artist returns to the origin, while radicant artists move and travel – they journey with no end and no source, inventing "pathways amongst signs" (pg 53) as described in *Postproduction*.

Eleanor Byrne points out in her essay "Postmodernism and the Postcolonial World" (2005) that Homi K. Bhabha also attempts to locate postmodernism in relation to "the experiences of colonialism and postcolonial negotiations and struggles" (pg 52). The 'other' effect of colonising, the "civilizing mission... totalizing 'grand narrative'" (pg 52) became postcolonialism, a "cultural courtesy" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 27) and multicultural consideration based on the located context. This almost 'cause and effect' saw the excluded becoming included in a very specific Western cultural discourse resulting in a certain deconstruction. Postcolonial theory deconstructs a society's culture, subtitling one language for another as oppose to translating, which Bourriaud suggests would allow a "dialogue between the past and present" (pg 14), a premise for the Altermodern. Bourriaud states that postmodern thought "presents itself as a decolonizing methodology" and at the centre of this mechanism is deconstruction (pg 15).

Bourriaud sees the Altermodern as reacting to postmodernism and postcolonialism by offering "innovative modes of thought and artistic practices that would this time be directly informed by Africa, Latin America or Asia" (pg 17). Thus given the distinguishing characteristics of the Altermodern such as globalisation, networked journeys and the radicant nature of it, these countries and areas would affect other areas of the world and create a "truly worldwide culture" (pg 17), as opposed to 'other' cultures informing Western cultures and trends. In Bhabha's essay "Postmodernism/Postcolonialism" (1996), he explores this principle and how postmodernism and postcolonialism laid the ground work for a "global cultural perspective" (Bhabha pg 321).

The location of the Altermodern in relation to postcolonialism and postmodernism is crucial to an overall understanding of how Bourriaud envisions artists and the way in which they practice. The Altermodern allows for all cultures to be considered equally and critically. The Altermodern enables artistic discourse and practice in South Africa, which is very much entrenched in postcolonial discourse, to develop and move beyond this framework and into a more global context, into a 'de-centred' global world.

Conclusion

The progression of Bourriaud's theories has led him to provide an adequate framework for artists who practise within this global dynamic. The Altermodern develops around the principle that artists are able to navigate cultures, translating as they go along creating dynamic narratives which form part of their journey. It is within this intricate network of ideas and relations that an artwork forms, resulting in a complex portrayal.

Artists are able to traverse time and space as are their artworks. The two problematic areas of the Altermodern are important to bear in mind.

For the purposes of this research it is necessary to ascertain whether or not these principles are present in the practice and artworks of South African digital artists. The following chapter will explore the relationship between the Altermodern and the digital as an artistic medium and tool by first defining and engaging with current debates around the digital and then align it to the theory outlined by Bourriaud.

Chapter 2:

Digital art, a New Framework

This chapter outlines the field of digital art, which was established during the late 20th century and has become part of our artistic cultural landscape in the 21st century. Determining its roots in relation to the more commonly termed 'new media art' is crucial for this analysis as well as for further and future readings of this field well into the 21st century. The field or genre, of digital art, is problematic due to its nature, particularly with the application of Bourriaud's theories. This chapter seeks to establish a solid framework from which to develop the discussion further.

An overview of digital art and its practice as a tool and a medium

While digital art is defined as art based in a digital medium, it is more than this; it is an engagement with the technology, beyond just its function. Digital art speaks to the medium itself and seeks to conduct a conversation in a very specific way that other mediums do not allow. It creates a contemporary dialogue which the viewer, user, or audience who can participate and interact with and contribute to it. The dialogue created with digital artworks is set in "the contexts in which they are produced" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 8). This text seeks to explore and to contribute to defining this context and exploring it further.

The digital medium is inextricably linked to globalisation through its accessibility. Technology is a global phenomenon and is vital to the way in which the world functions. The digital medium is no longer specific to a certain region or even country. This is a result of global telecommunications and global entertainment media which have facilitated the emergence of a global culture.

There are many different theories and definitions of digital art which are constantly being reassessed by academics and practitioners. The most commonly termed definitions by Lev Manovich, Christiane Paul, Michael Rush and Domenico Quaranta begin with an analysis of 'new media art'. While there are many other definitions, it is preferable to use these solid classifications developed by the above theorists in order to develop a working definition for this paper. Manovich and Rush will be discussed initially because their 'early' definitions can seen as problematic and limiting in light of other theorists and then those of Paul and Quaranta because of their more critical and open discussions around the definition.

Most authors tend to classify digital art within new media, but this can be problematic as will be explained later on. Michael Rush is a curator and writer on digital technology and new media as an art form. In *New Media in Art* (2005) Rush characterises digital art as part of new media art and within that 'digitally altered photography, the digital cinematic, computer art, interactive art (internet based and installation and cinema) and lastly virtual' are categorised. Rush doesn't distinguish between digital technology as a tool (means to an end or rather object) and as a medium (essence or focus of the work), but he does however acknowledge the "pervasive" (New Media in Art (New ed) pg 180) nature of technology in society and the production of art in the twenty first century. He defines digital

art as a “mechanized medium whose potential appears limitless” (pg 180) with digital technology as its driving force. However there is a difference between using digital technology to produce an artwork, such as a film, a photograph or a sound artwork and using digital technology as a medium and its characteristics such as a generative software program or an online website. Paul explores this distinction in *Digital Art* (2003). The former use of technology has had a profound impact on the production of art and on the multiple mediums which already exist such as painting and photography as well on institutions and galleries, it is not dismissible yet the difference between the two should be clear.

Rush draws our attention to the adjective ‘new’, which refers to the latest or most recently made and in this case, the latest technology which is involved in the creation of new media art. He does acknowledge the fact that there is always something newer and that what he has addressed in the book by the time it is published might appear “old fashioned” (Rush pg 183). This seems to indicate that the term ‘new’ to describe this specific genre of art is unnecessary - simply referring to it as media art or even contemporary art still implies an association with technology, one characteristic of which is the fact that it will always be new.

In Lev Manovich’s book *The Language of New Media* (1995), he defines new media in terms of principles instead of categories. He considers the qualities and characteristics of digital work as opposed to the different types of digital media (Manovich, The Language of New Media pg 20). He establishes and elaborates on five main principles of new media: numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding (Manovich, The Language of New Media pg 27 - 36). In *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond*

(2009), Paul describes new media art as “process-orientated, time-based, dynamic, and real-time; participatory, collaborative, and performative; modular, variable, generative, and customizable... interactive” (New Media in the White Cube and Beyond pg 4, 54). Many of the characteristics which the two academics outlined overlap and give a good indication of what constitutes digital art and establish a framework for digital art. Manovich goes on to describe the digital representation of media with three distinct concepts “analog-to-digital conversion (digitization), a common representational code, and numerical representation... [which] turns media into computer data” making it programmable (Manovich, The Language of New Media pg 52). While Manovich’s explorations were written almost two decades ago, his principles still applied. Manovich explores the concept of interactivity hesitantly, fearing its literal interpretation. He equates it to a physical interaction between user and technology (media) object and therefore dismisses a psychological interaction. The context for Manovich’s analysis is very different from the context in which Paul or Quaranta place their arguments. Manovich situates his analysis closely to the development of cinema and the introduction of it into our culture, placing his argument in “the history of modern and visual media cultures” (pg 8).

In *Digital Art* (2003), Paul states that “digital technology has now reached such a stage of development that it offers entirely new possibilities for the creation and experience of art” (Paul, Digital Art pg 7). She observes the varying ways in which digital art has been classified over the past and identifies that it now seems to fall under new media art (pg 7). She explores the problematic nature of the term ‘new media’ more thoroughly in *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond* (2009). According to Paul, the term ‘digital art’ describes a broad range of “artistic works and practices [and] does not describe one unified

set of aesthetics" but rather reflects a "language of aesthetics" (Paul, Digital Art pg 8). Paul highlights the difference between digital technology as a tool and as a medium in a work of art. The former is when digital technology acts as a "tool for the creation of traditional art objects" (pg 8) such as photography, film or sculpture and the latter is when digital technology acts as the medium "being produced, stored, and presented exclusively in the digital format and making use of its interactive and participatory features" (pg 8). Paul distinguishes them through their manifestations and process, while both are process-orientated, the outcome is different and the intension of the work is shifted in focus.

In *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond* (2009), Paul explores the existence of digital art (which she terms 'new media art') in a traditional gallery setting and the implications of this as well as collecting digital art. She explores the various relationships which emerge between traditional galleries and the artist. Paul identifies the assertion of 'newness' within new media art, suggesting that some of the principles explored in digital art refer back to earlier principles explored in more traditional art (Manovich too suggests this through his association with the advent of film). Paul suggests that due to the ever-changing nature of digital art, the term 'new media' art should be abandoned and that the "successful evasion of definitions is one of [its] greatest assets" (pg 3). While this may be a plausible solution, she also further suggests establishing a working definition - dynamic in nature and manifestation - to avoid attaching the adjective 'new' to media art and digital art. A working definition would allow for more fluidity within the definition and compensate for the 'newness' of the medium.

Paul notes that museums, galleries and curators have come to terms with video as an artistic medium and that it has established a valid position within artistic discourse and operations (pg 54). However the same cannot be said for new media (digital) artworks which pose a challenge for curators. Paul suggests that digital artworks are characterised by process rather than a static object. This is due to their dynamic nature and interactive aspects which change and challenge the viewing experience of a work. Paul points out that the time a viewer is required to spend 'with' an artwork differs for different mediums. Paul identifies that new media art is "potentially dynamic and nonlinear" (pg 54) even if it is not interactive. A new media artwork can be driven by "real-time data flow from the internet" which is unable to be repeated or a "database driven project" (pg 54) which alters over time. This aspect of the work implies that if a viewer spends 5 minutes versus 15 minutes with a work, the experience will be different. If viewed for 5 minutes, for example, the viewer will only see "one configuration of an essentially nonlinear project" (New Media in the White Cube and Beyond pg 54). Paul explores the responsibility placed on both the gallery and the viewer in enabling the work to reach its full potential and for the work to be 'exposed' in its entirety. A knowledge of interfaces and navigation paradigms is necessary for this to happen. Paul identifies the gallery space where the work is executed as requiring attention, it should be negotiated "collaboratively by the curator and artist(s)" (pg 56).

The last chapter of *Media, New Media, post Media* (2010) by Domenico Quaranta titled "The Post Media Effect" which was published in English (Quaranta is Italian) on *Rhizome.org*, Quaranta explores media (or 'new media') art in a postmedia world. It is an "attempt to analyze the current positioning of so-called 'New Media Art' in the wider field of contemporary arts, and to explore the historical and sociological and conceptual reasons for

its marginal position and under-recognition in recent art history" (Introduction to Chapter 13 on *Rhizome.org* pg 1). Quaranta states that the definition of new media art cannot be confined merely to a medium-based definition and that even work which is unrelated to technology can be classed as such when "produced, exhibited and discussed in a specific 'art world', the world of New Media Art" (Introduction to Chapter 13 on *Rhizome.org* pg 1). The specific art world which Quaranta describes emerged in the 1980s and 1990s and used new media and explored its artistic potential and developed a form of art which was completely different from the art emerging in the then contemporary art world. Quaranta describes typical products or inhabitants of new media art (such as the works in Ars Electronica) which cross boundaries between "industrial prototype or work of art...toy or generator of meaning" (pg 2). He believes the contemporary art world would regard this as a "vacuous celebration of technology" (pg 2). Quaranta describes the new media art world as providing a space for this type of art and the medium to be "produced, exhibited and discussed" (pg 2).

In his last chapter Quaranta tackles the idea that new media art (of which digital art is a part) is often not considered 'enough' conceptually and is seen as problematic in its manifestations by the contemporary art world. Quaranta suggests that in order to become more sustainable and to "survive" it should establish a "clear identity" and refer back to its 'roots'. Technology research fills the gap between "one creative arena and another" (pg 3) and looks outside of itself as well as beginning a dialogue with contemporary art. This seems to suggest that there is more space in the digital art world for contemporary art than there is in the contemporary art world for digital art.

While Paul and Quaranta seem to have valid interpretations of the definition and classification of digital art, there is a tendency by theorists to 'lump' all digital technology-driven artwork into one category. For the purposes of this paper and the discussion around digital art, a more developed classification model and a working definition of digital art will be presented. The digital art world may have to concede to the use of the term 'new media art', despite its being vague and elusive description that implies the work is 'new'. Perhaps the aspect of 'new' is implied in the novelty of something which is digital and technology-based? Quaranta's definition, description and approach is useful in this regard. He establishes a far more open interpretation which allows for future developments, conceptually and technically, by associating it with contemporary art while retaining a specialized critical approach.

For most of this paper, the reference to digital art is to work which uses digital technology as a medium and not specifically as a tool. Video, photography, animation and sound art should be classified or rather evaluated separately and within their own medium's discourse because they are concerned with a purely visual or sound form, be it moving or still, and not a procedural or interactive form of engagement or use of the digital (unless however it is involved in an interactive aspect of a work which has been programmed with software by the artist). Digitally interactive work, internet art, virtual reality and augmented reality, networked environments and software art can be classified as digital art and will be the major focus of this paper and the works discussed later on. In this case the product is digital as is its production and storage (Paul, Digital Art pg 8). These three characteristics as outlined by Paul, enable the definition of the digital as a medium to be sound. The mediums which seem to be excluded from this form of digital art are goal-orientated which can

remain under the umbrella of new media, which can be called media art while those that remain in digital art are focused on the process and the practice of the medium.

However, works which do use digital technology should not be dismissed entirely. There are examples of works referred to in this paper which use digital technology as a tool (as opposed to a medium). When this is the case, object-driven process will be discussed as will the placement of the artwork (or product) and where the artwork exists, in the result or in the process. It is necessary to not exclude this manifestation entirely because in digital art, the process is as important as the outcome. It is necessary to question where the artwork exists due to the nature of the medium, regardless of the object which is produced. For the purposes of this investigation and argument, the idea that an artwork can exist in an experience, in an interaction is fundamental to the understanding of digital art.

Interactivity as a fundamental

The intrinsic possibilities of digital technology determine specific approaches to the creation, and manifestation of digital art (Paul, Digital Art pg 67). Paul suggests that the medium's differentiating qualities of interactivity and dynamism reflect a "distinct form of aesthetics" (Digital Art pg 67). The way in which the artwork manifests itself has hybrid qualities and can be presented as an "interactive installation with or without networked components, software written by the artists, purely internet-based art or any combination" (pg 67). Paul further suggests that due to the changing nature of the medium, it is difficult to develop discourse and a theoretical framework from which to assess and evaluate the products and processes which transpire from digital technology.

Paul explores specific themes formally in her chapter “Themes in Digital Art” which pertain specifically to the digital medium (pg 139). She describes them as being “more medium specific” (pg 139), and some correspond with Bourriaud’s characteristic themes in the Altermodern such as mapping and networked systems. The dominant theme occurring in the different writings (Paul and others) on digital art is interactivity. It is this specific aspect, both a characteristic of process and an aesthetic, which becomes an integral part of all digital art. This was briefly mentioned earlier on in this paper however, further analysis of this concept is necessary.

Andrew Polaine raises some interesting arguments around interactivity in his article “Lowbrow, High Art: Why Big Fine Art Doesn't Understand Interactivity” (2005) in which he describes the artist as a “facilitator of an experience” and the work as an “experience created and shared by many” (Lowbrow, High Art: Why Big Fine Art Doesn't Understand Interactivity pg 1). Polaine examines the problematic nature of the relationship in this interaction and within the context of the conventional gallery or museum environment. He refers to Pauls’ argument for familiarity in the interaction with the work on behalf of the audience and the need for a lengthy experience of the work in order to view it in its entirety (Paul, New Media in the White Cube and Beyond pg 2). Polaine suggests that Paul views interactivity as enabling the content of the work to be revealed as opposed to being the “work itself” (Lowbrow, High Art: Why Big Fine Art Doesn't Understand Interactivity pg 2). Polaine perceives this interpretation of interactivity as problematic stating that, in interacting with the work, the viewer is able to understand “something about the artist’s comment on the human condition through the content” revealed (pg 3).

Polaine, echoing many other theorists, such as Manovich, holds that all artwork is interactive and that the term ‘interactive’ is not necessarily applicable to a physical one resulting in a reaction, but also refers to a “psychological process of filling-in” (Manovich, The Language of New Media pg 57). While this may be true there is a difference between the interaction which occurs between the a viewer and a painting versus a digital interactive installation and the viewer, the former can be seen as more of a psychological, passive engagement requiring a mental analysis and the latter as more active, physical interaction. In this case, a specific interaction contributes, reveals or becomes the work of art; “engagement comes through interaction” (Polaine pg 2) and then a psychological interaction or engagement is also required (depending on the work).

Polaine identifies another integral aspect of digital art which is related to interactivity, the interface. An interface facilitates an interaction and acts as a site of communication between user and technology. Interactivity can act as an interface to content as a “mechanism of control... to be mastered” (Lowbrow, High Art: Why Big Fine Art Doesn't Understand Interactivity pg 2). This aspect of control, could be described as ‘manipulation’ and is echoed in Manovich’s essay “On Totalitarian Interactivity” (1996) in which he equates an artist to a dictator in a totalitarian regime. This is also suggested in David Rokeby’s essay “Transforming Mirrors: Subjectivity and Control in Interactive Media” (1996). Here Rokeby explores the extent of the artist’s control over the outcome of a digital artwork and the viewer. Polaine defines interaction as an “action with a physical component”, which becomes a mode and not a medium. He states that it acts as a “feedback loop” consisting of two possibilities “action-reaction-interaction or reaction-

action-interaction", and equates this to a conversation between two agents, a process of interaction (Polaine pg 4). He emphasises the importance of weighting the interaction, content and technology equally, in order to create a successful digital artwork (pg 5). The viewer needs to be able to explore the constraints of the interaction in order to see the effect on the parameters set out by the artist.

Polaine suggests that a gallery is not the ideal site for executing the interactivity which digital artworks lend themselves to and that they are not appreciated in their entirety since interactivity as a "young cultural form" is about "action and participation, not soulful contemplation" (pg 8). He suggests that there is no room in contemporary art discourse for such works and that digital art should either relocate or stop trying to be located within this framework. But perhaps it is the other way round, the contemporary art world must accommodate and establish a new framework and space for digital art.

Digital natives and the world they live in, postmedia

Quaranta refers to Rosalind Krauss's use of the word 'post-medium' as opposed to 'post-media' to describe the "decline of the Greenbergian concept of medium-specificity" (1999) and to Peter Weibel who curated the exhibition *Postmedia Condition* (2005) and explored postmedia art as art which comes after "the affirmation of media" (Quaranta pg 7). Quaranta extends this stating that "given that the impact of the media is universal and computers can now simulate all other media, all contemporary art is postmedia" (pg 7). Quaranta describes the three stages which Weibel uses to establish the development of the postmedia condition. The first was when all media (photography, video) achieved

“equivalent status and the same dignity as artistic media”; the second was the combining of these medias so that they lost their “separate identities”, and finally the third stage of the digital revolution when the “computer appropriated all media, and imposed its own operative approach on them” (pg 8).

For Quaranta, it is no longer necessary to refer to new media art as ‘new media’, particularly when referring to art created by a generation which has “never experienced life without computers” (pg 12). He describes a new generation and the societal context of those artists for whom “daily use of the internet is the norm” where they are continuously online, “computers and mobile technologies [such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube] have profoundly impacted their social lives” and the way in which they manage their lives and relationships as “a constant mediated reality” (The Postmedia Perspective pg 12). He describes the line between our public and private lives as constantly being re-evaluated.

According to Quaranta, an abundance of images exist in our society as a result of digital technology which the current generation not only has access to but has the ability to produce and create in both a professional and amateur capacity. This material is then shared, within a community with a familiar confidence. These so-called ‘digital natives’ inhabit a world where new media is no longer ‘new’, it is no longer ‘media’ but ‘post’. He considers art criticism as having to acknowledge current art operates away from “the New Media Art / contemporary art dichotomy, in a fully postmedia perspective” (pg 13). This begins to suggest that all new media art requires a specific “media literacy” or knowledge (Paul, New Media in the White Cube and Beyond pg 5), Quaranta extends this to all contemporary art needing to be “media literate” (Quaranta pg 14).

The Altermodern as a framework for digital art, as a medium and conceptually

The specific interpretation of the Altermodern, as presented in the previous chapter, outlines the core characteristics observed in Bourriaud's writings. It is these characteristics which are paralleled in the description of digital art (new media art) and which have been presented above. The descriptions of digital art and its characteristics outlined by Paul, Polaine and Quaranta and the gap in critical theoretical discourse which they observe in the 'problematic' nature of the interactive medium, raises interesting questions as to the direction in which digital art and artists should be moving. Bourriaud's theoretical writings and contextual placement of the Altermodern, do establish a solid framework for digital art.

Given its automation and variability a digital work of art is never constant, it is always changing. A digital artist makes specific decisions about what the work can or cannot do and uses interaction as a 'mode' for this. In so doing, the work is never the same. It changes each time a viewer interacts with it and "generates forms before, during and after its production" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 4). The idea of a work of art being dynamic is central to both the Altermodern and to digital artwork. The dynamic nature of the digital artwork enables it to create narratives, a network of different outcomes with each engagement.

Bourriaud describes the context for the Altermodern, where digital technology impacts our culture and society in many different ways. It defines and changes the way in which we inhabit the world and how we choose to see our world. It is these changes and

new ways of seeing and new ways of perceiving art which the Altermodern enables. It is also this very context which digital technology defines and which digital art explores. Bourriaud questions whether the World Wide Web and "global hypermobility" have resulted in new ways of "perceiving human space" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 11), stating that the Altermodern combines these two perspectives of time and space, resulting in a geographical and historical exploration of different cultures, by means of a network and dynamic artistic system. This is precisely what the digital medium affords the artist.

As explored previously, the role of interactivity and its specific nature allows digital art to exist in an entirely new artistic space. Polaine refers to interactivity as a mode and not a medium which speaks directly to Bourriaud's emphatic placement of the Altermodern as a non-medium specific theory, with interactivity allowing the digital to become a form. Polaine concludes his paper by describing what happens when interactivity moves beyond a single user to multiple users. It then becomes a "shared, network experience", which he describes as a "conversation between human beings" with the artist shifting from "communicator to facilitator" (Polaine pg 9). This shared experience, the sense of community which is established through an interface and through the artwork, reflects the dynamic narrative which Bourriaud witnesses in our culture and in contemporary artwork. He perceives the role of the artist as being that of a translator of cultural signs so as to establish a dialogue through the artwork.

Paul's development of a dynamic definition of digital art (new media art) reflects this dialogue and dynamic medium. This ever-changing medium requires flexibility and unfortunately cannot be defined and therefore restricted by a definition. The Altermodern

allows for a re-evaluation of the world and the way in which relationships are formed within it, which is precisely what is required for the development of digital technology and specifically digital art.

Quaranta's description of the new generation of contemporary artists and therefore postmedia artists is similar to the global context which Bourriaud outlines in *The Radicant*. Quaranta describes the Altermodern as "a socio-cultural context categorised by globalisation travel and increased opportunities for communication" (Quaranta pg 9). While Quaranta is aware of the parallels between the Altermodern and the characteristics of digital technology, as illustrated by Bourriaud in his writings, he recognises that the Altermodern is a non-medium specific, which works perfectly with his interpretation of contemporary art and postmedia art. Bourriaud states that Radicant art advocates the end of "the medium-specific, the abandonment of any key tendency to exclude certain fields from the realm of art" (Bourriaud, The Radicant pg 53). Quaranta perceives Bourriaud's writings as allowing new media art to be rescued from its "position on the margins" and permits the translation of the postmedia perspective to a "valuable indication for 21st century art" (Quaranta pg 10). Quaranta suggests that digital art, which is acutely "aware of the cultural, social and political consequences of the new media" (pg 10), can become the art which is most relevant to our times and can serve a social function to allow for a more critical outlook and engagement of culture. It is for these precise reasons that Bourriaud's theories lend themselves to critical engagement with digital art work (postmedia work, or contemporary art as Quaranta refers to it).

The combining of these different perspectives is relevant to the analysis of the various artists, their location and their context later on in this paper, and the way in which they approach the digital medium as well as their concepts and themes.

Chapter 3:

South African Digital Art and Practice

This chapter aligns Bourriaud's theories specifically with the field of digital art in South Africa. A description based on observations of the field in South Africa will be presentenced, drawing from the definitions, descriptions and problematic nature of the field, in general as outlined in Chapter 2. This is then followed by a brief contextual placement of the field, away from postcolonial theory. Once these parameters have been set and defined, a level of critical engagement between the field of digital art in South Africa and Bourriaud's theories as outlined in Chapter 1 will be established. This chapter will also address reasons for the use of Bourriaud's non-location specific theory within a specific location. Finally, the case studies will be introduced and selection explained.

A brief overview of the discipline and genre

The contemporary art scene in South Africa is a thriving area of cultural development. However, like other contemporary art scenes around the world, it is not without fault. Every year there are new graduates from academic institutions who are equipped to challenge previously held notions. These graduates are the first generation of South Africans who have grown up in an entirely democratic country, with apartheid as a part of history and living with different races, their reality. This generation, the so-called 'Born Frees', have grown up with mobile telecommunications, the internet and computers.

They are as Quaranta puts it, ‘digital natives’. For them an undemocratic world is one without a computer; for them this is an alternate reality. In South Africa, however this also describes a certain specific income group of which the case studies form a part of. Considering Quaranta’s description of digital and contemporary artists, the emerging generation of contemporary South African artists could be called ‘postmedia artists’ since their work with concepts and their subject matter is often profoundly influenced by technology and the digital medium, yet they don’t often actually use the digital medium.

Two main areas in relation to digital art which require analysis are education and galleries. Education refers to both digital artists and the viewing public, both of which are connected to the art gallery. Artists need galleries to help showcase their work and to gain experience and exposure, while galleries require a viewing public to buy the work. Artists also need a viewing public with a certain level of digitally literacy, an understanding of interaction and interface in order to navigate digital artwork, as was discussed in Chapter 2 by Paul and Polaine, not only to buy the work but to engage with and establish further discourse on it. There is a need to educate artists technically, and also the public so that they understand the artwork. Galleries also require education to equip them to exhibit and store the artworks. All three subjects are dependent on the others.

The field of South African digital art and its practice remains relatively small and exclusive; however, over the past decade there has been an increase in the number of practitioners and artists. Not all of the ‘Born Frees’ in South African are fortunate enough to be regarded as ‘digital natives’ and have the digital knowledge or literacy which is required to interact and appreciate a digital artwork. Yet, the development and accessibility of smart

phones is helping to combat this. Ivan Colic, an art director form Cape Town, has a special interest in creating infographics for his blog *Afrographique*, depicting African and South African statics around the digital medium. Colic released “Mobile Phones in Africa” (2011) which shows statistics for different types of mobile phones in Africa. He shows that in 2011, 3% of all mobile phones in use in Africa were smart phones; a further report estimates that in 2015 this will increase to 15%. This means that in Africa, the average person’s ability to access the internet freely and efficiently via their mobile phone will increase along with the level of communication literacy and digital literacy which is required to use these mobile phones and the internet. Another infographic “South African Internet Users” by Colic shows that in May 2011 20% of users accessing to the internet in South Africa, were doing so via a mobile phone (Colic, South African Internet Users), indicating increasing knowledge about the internet and smart phones. A very specific digital literacy is thus emerging.

Various tertiary institutions in South Africa have digital art departments offering animation and interactive media as study options. The Universities of Witwatersrand, Kwazulu-Natal, Cape Town and Rhodes University have dedicated digital art departments which focus on educating students in the use of technology in creative practice. Digital technology colleges such as Vega, a multimedia-focused school, strives to encourage digital art and enable students to acquire digital program ‘skills’, unlike many traditional fine art academic faculties.

The number of artists using video and digital photography has led to increased interest in the use of the digital as a tool to produce an artwork. While the field of digital art still remains an exclusive medium, the number of artists practising exclusively as digital

artists, where the digital technology is the medium, is also growing. Education is contributing to the growing number of digital artists, but there are other factors which influence these artists' ability to practise with this medium, such as funding and the reception of their work.

The education which is in place has enabled many artists to further their interest in digital art and become part of a small but growing community of digital artists in South Africa, but there is an inevitable referral to the United States and to Europe, not only for inspiration but also for assistance and support. These regions are seen as the 'centre of technology' which many South African artists look to for digital programs, techniques and new ideas, from sites such as makezine.com, arduino.cc and Tom Igoe's site tigoe.net. Digital technology is part of a global culture, one which has shared protocols and methods that cross borders. New ideas and new technologies are rapidly exchanged between countries and people who look for them. South African digital artists are included in this exchange, requiring it even more so than those at the 'centre'. In order for digital artists to improve their knowledge and technical ability, they should access the forums, update to the latest software and the latest hardware which will enable them to practise and produce at the same level as their global counter parts.

The design and creative field in South Africa is booming and is somewhere between the more traditional design graduates and the fine art field from which South African digital artists are emerging. Events such as Design Indaba and the Loeries ensure that creativity is encouraged and that there is an arena in which creatives can participate. The *African Digital Art* network is an online platform to showcase and expose talent across the continent

created and developed by Jepchumba, a Kenyan digital artist living in Chicago, United States. It is focused more towards design, illustration and photography. It is an extremely active platform providing exposure and inspiration to the many South Africans who use it. It facilitates dialogue between the participants.

To engage with a digital artwork, the audience or viewer needs to have a certain level of digital literacy and understanding. It is not just the artists who need to be educated, but the viewing public too. This limits the viewing public as many people are unable to appreciate the technical side of a digital artwork and are then unable to appreciate it conceptually. This has an elitist and exclusive effect. In his article “Systems Imperfect” (2002), Marcus Neustetter explores the way in which members of the viewing public are quick to dismiss digital art as ‘new media’. He suggests that in order to “build this audience” artists may need to adopt an “educational approach when it comes to displaying digital, and electronic art”. This should not be limited to just “gallery-going audiences” but should extend to both urban and rural communities. Such solutions offer alternatives to galleries and artistic approaches and enable a larger audience to be reached.

Artists rely on the art-buying public to purchase the works which they sell. This art-buying public in South Africa is of a very conservative and commercial nature. In order to survive economically, galleries need to generate profits from the works they sell and they inevitably choose more popular, lucrative artists and mediums which are perceived as being commercially ‘safer’ and more easily understood. As explored in Chapter 2, digital art is problematic for galleries in terms of exhibiting and archiving. Digital art is expensive to operate and difficult to sell and thus it often seems as though it is not given as much

attention as other mediums. Commercial galleries do not have the resources or the customer base to support digital artwork and public institutions such as the Johannesburg Art Gallery are severely under funded. In “Systems Imperfect” (2002), Neustetter comments that few galleries are equipped to cope with the medium and the more “complex and expensive technologies are still being dismissed” (Systems Imperfect pg 2). Since this was written in 2002, there has been an increase in both the quality of technology used in galleries and the number of artists using the digital as a medium in their artworks.

The three digital artists to be considered for this research are Tegan Bristow (whose role as a curator/researcher will be explored), Marcus Neustetter and Nathaniel Stern. There are several other established artists who are at the forefront conceptually and technically such as Jaco Spies, and Francois Naude, who both produce online artworks, and Stefanus Rademeyer who exhibits at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg and focuses on work which is extremely code-driven. There are young emerging artists pushing the boundaries. The predicament which galleries and artists then face is whether or not to choose mediums and works which are less likely to sell, or are ‘unsafe’. Internet art and generative programs are very difficult for a gallery to sell as the private collector in South Africa is much more likely to want to invest in a William Kentridge artwork than an interactive artwork. Whether the increase in artist practising is sufficient to warrant full dedication to the medium from certain galleries is probably debatable, perhaps artists need to seek other forms of exposure and exhibition.

The scope for digital art and artists seems limited, the platforms and funding is concentrated on contemporary fine artists. When exhibiting in alternative spaces such as abandoned buildings and public spaces, artists have to seek funding from alternative areas such as individuals and companies in more corporate settings. The three main competitions for young artists are the Spier Contemporary, the Absa L'Atelier Awards and Sasol New Signatures which are each held annually. They provide a platform to showcase new and interesting artwork. However, the rules of the competitions are more suited to contemporary installation, sculpture and painting. The requirements of the Absa L'Atelier Awards state that "the selection panel and/or organisers have the right to refuse to accept or display works that are difficult to hang, install, transport or handle... Artists should provide technical equipment themselves" (VANSA). This means that if a work has a chance of being selected, the artist needs to ensure that it is easy to assemble and dismantle by someone else, which cannot be guaranteed due to limited levels of understanding of technology. It is also necessary to submit physical artworks which excludes online and program-orientated work. The Spier Contemporary is far more amenable to accepting digital art and requires a detailed proposal of technical requirements as does the Sasol New Signatures which accommodates online works and images of proposed installations

The education of both practitioners and viewers is necessary in order for South African digital art discourse to grow. It seems that alternative solutions to the traditional 'art system' are necessary for digital art to develop and grow and as Sarah Cook in her essay "Immaterial and Discontents" describes it, perhaps South African digital artists should look at "locating the experience of the work outside a traditional gallery space" (Cook pg 44).

Placing South African digital art beyond a postcolonial context, within a global context

The existing global state of the world is a departure point for the Altermodern. Bourriaud identifies the shift from modernism to the Altermodern as being away from the "(essentialist) multicultural mode" and a merging of modernism and postcolonialism (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 2). This merger is where the engagement in relation to South Africa will begin. The association is obvious for South Africa to a postcolonial, post apartheid society. South Africa and its artists are relatively recent entrants into the globalised world and are no longer confined to simply following western artistic trends or patterns. The many cultures which influence local South African artists enable them to contribute to a worldwide dynamic. Despite South African interaction with and in a global dynamic, there is often doubt from South Africans as to whether we actually do have a place in the global dynamic. South Africans are often quick to dismiss their inclusion in this dynamic and doubt their capability to be included. This idea is carried forward into the next Chapter.

In order for South African digital artistic discourse to move beyond previous artistic discussions associated with postcolonial discourse, a new framework for South African digital art needs to be established.

The positioning of Africa and African art within Western artistic discourse has always been problematic and a controversial act on behalf of the West. South African artistic discourse has for years been weighed down by heavy readings of postcolonial

representation or misrepresentation and the politics surrounding it. Recurring themes explored in South African culture, due to the political history and social ramifications are reconciliation, land and mapping, traversing borders and identity as highlighted by Kai Easton in his article “Southern Africa” written for *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (2007). Easton suggests that in order to move forward to a truly ‘new’ South Africa there is a “need to engage critically and openly with South Africa’s past” (Easton pg 136). The Altermodern’s trait of traversing time enables this to happen, it allows us to look forward at the same time as we refer back to the past.

South Africa has one of the largest economies in Africa and is ranked alongside countries such as Nigeria and Egypt in terms of economic and social importance (Colic, African Countries by GDP). South Africa holds much of the continent’s power and wealth (political, electrical) and is a successful example of how democracy can work in Africa. This has resulted in a continuous flow of people into the country from Africa and the rest of the globe, and a movement of people within the country. However, globally South Africa is not perceived as being a focal point for movement, wealth and culture. Rather, South Africa is placed outside the ‘centre’, especially regarding technological development. This is a function of the production and manufacturing, and the education surrounding the digital and technology tools. Digital practice and telecommunications are global forms and mediums, neither can be confined to a local context in terms of understanding or production. The origin of technology and digital knowledge exists ‘outside’ South Africa. But South African artists and practitioners have access to this knowledge due to a global networked culture. The global divide is still very much an issue for many artists and digital practitioners located outside of the so-called ‘centre’.

Bourriaud's theory enables the formation of a new discourse surrounding South African art and overrides the previous discourse which proves problematic and is associated with postcolonial and postmodern thinking. The rejection of these theories in favour of something new and fresh enables a global dialogue to begin.

South African digital art in relation to the Altermodern

South African digital art is a small field, consisting of a limited and focused group of distinct players, yet these artists, the way in which they practise and their work resonates strongly with a global form and dynamic which is apparent in the Altermodern and Bourriaud's writings. It is necessary to engage with Bourriaud's theory to contextualise a global form and to frame South African digital art within that global form.

The re-invention of art on a "planetary scale" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 2) is already happening in South African digital art. The development of this field is not specific or particular to South Africa, yet these artists are constantly seeking technical advice, inspiration, engagement and exposure beyond their local context. Through this movement, a global dialogue such as that described by Bourriaud (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 2) forms between different cultures. It is part of the 'new modernism', which Bourriaud observes, which aligns South Africa with the Altermodern. In the Altermodern, concepts are no longer rooted in place or time; artists are able to use them freely. South African artists are not immune to this nomadic acquisition of concepts and the Altermodern allows for this.

The displacement of people and their migration results in a lack of “cultural roots to sustain forms, [with] no exact cultural base to serve as a benchmark for variations” – the flow of people and cultures which Bourriaud observes is fundamental to the establishment of the Altermodern. Borders no longer define who you are and your cultural heritage. South Africa is a place where the inflow of people across its borders is visible through cultural exchange, a network of cultures is created. This situation and the artworks which are being produced in South Africa are aligned with the notion of the Altermodern.

It is important to note that the type of travel, migration and culture-crossing which Bourriaud observes from a ‘centred’ position, is manifested quite differently in South Africa and the global south. Bourriaud’s observations are viewed from a very specific perspective which is quite different from the perspective of Johannesburg, South Africa.

South Africa’s colonial and postcolonial history, appropriation of postmodernism and recent advent into a globalised dynamic, enable parallels to be drawn with the Altermodern. International connectivity, the speed and access that we have to the information of other cultures and a shared technology practice from the internet and television, result in a global interaction and discourse. Consequently, concepts are no longer rooted in place or time; artists are able to use them freely. South African artists are not immune to this ‘wandering’ acquisition of signs and concepts and are participating in the network of global cultures which is being formed.

A non-location specific theory for a specific location

This question seems inevitable: why place a theory which is very specifically written about a global situation and place it in such a specific local location? Well the answer is simple and honest: it is necessary to place South African digital art within this global framework so that the practitioners and their products do not become excluded from this global dynamic and discourse.

The Altermodern is an all-encompassing theory and envisions and observes a dynamic which is not limited to a central focal point or cultural generator. Bourriaud is aware that this is somewhat idealistic and perhaps it is easier for him to envision and observe this dynamic writing from the 'centre'. Bourriaud's theory positions countries like South Africa as having 'equal cultural status' within the global dialogue. Bourriaud puts forward this dialogue, "stripped of a centre" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 2) which enables South Africa to no longer 'look in' and observe the 'centre' or for the 'centre' to 'look out' at South Africa. Rather, all countries and cultures are able to draw from each other, from an equal position.

It is necessary for practising digital artists in South Africa to create and help establish a framework with which to engage. It is important to engage in a discussion on South African digital art and to contribute to the discourse on it. There is very little written on South African digital art, yet theorising around the work and practice needs to be explored and the context established in order for future artists to engage with and participate in the digital arts discourse. An engagement with the global nature of the medium is inevitable and

therefore a global theory such as the Altermodern is suited to establishing such a framework.

A very specific multiplicity exists in South Africa which is paralleled throughout the world and in Africa specifically. This multiplicity has been acknowledged openly since the country became democratic in 1994 with the introduction of eleven official languages. Easton infers that this multiplicity prevents literature from being referred to in the singular, for there are many 'roots' to the literature which is present in South Africa (Easton pg 127). Easton uses the author Alexandra Fuller as an example. She was born in Britain, grew up in Zimbabwe while her parents now live in Zambia and she in the United States of America. In her autobiographical book *Don't let's go to the Dogs Tonight* (2001), she claims an 'African' identity (Easton pg 127). This dynamic is similar to the one that Bourriaud describes in the Altermodern – artists are able to have multiple roots and not one singular origin.

The complex multiplicity which Easton explores in South African literature is not exclusive to this medium of expression. It has a parallel in the visual arts and specifically in the digital arts field. Artists such as Marcus Neustetter and Nathaniel Stern (who will be considered more closely in the following chapter) relocate their practice and with this, comes a certain level of understanding and translation in multiple cultures. This level of understanding is required both in the relocation away from South Africa and within. According to the Altermodern, artists are able to relocate and draw from both their initial cultural location and final cultural location.

An introduction to the case studies

Nathaniel Stern, Marcus Neustetter and Tegan Bristow have been selected for their specific engagement with technology, their own personal approach to the digital medium and their engagement with the discourse. They are not based exclusively in South Africa and have at some point engaged outside the country through their education, practice and production, assisting in the education of others and development of the discourse around digital art. However they still refer to South Africa as a 'base', there is a certain mobility present in the way in which they inhabit their world. The type of work they produce and where it is exhibited will be explored.

Nathaniel Stern

Nathaniel Stern is an "experimental installation and video artist, net.artist, printmaker and writer" (Stern, Nathaniel Stern: Artist) and currently based in Milwaukee, the United States. His various engagements with the digital medium include "interactive and immersive environments, mixed reality art and online interventions" (Stern, Nathaniel Stern: Artist). Originally based in the United States, he moved to Johannesburg, South Africa in 2001 after obtaining a design degree from Cornell University (Stern, Nathaniel Stern: Artist). In Johannesburg, he helped develop the Digital Art department at the University of the Witwatersrand and continued to practise and exhibit while living in the country, contributing greatly to education and development of the discourse surrounding South African digital art. He then completed a studio-based Masters in Art from the Interactive Telecommunications Program (NYU), and a written PhD from Trinity College Dublin (Stern, Nathaniel Stern: Artist). He is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Art and

Design at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. Stern has exhibited internationally, yet still remains in close contact with both the United States and South Africa, being referential sites for his work. He uses both locales to establish a dialogue around the discourse and the medium.

Stern's work *Given Time* (2010) uses the online social networking environment Second Life as a platform for expression. It consists of two avatars that "hover in mid-air, almost completely still, gazing into one another's interface" (Stern). The work is exhibited as two large video projections of the avatars on opposite walls, each from the perspective of the other in Second Life. There is a very personal exchange between the two avatars in a virtual realm which is witnessed by the viewer in the physical world. The viewer is able to walk between the two projections and view each from the perspective of the other. The exchange between the avatars is eternal and undisturbed by the viewer. In this work, Stern initiates a dialogue and addresses a networked system and a digital geography in Second Life which we are able to occupy when the artwork is installed. The viewer acts as a voyeur as time and space are addressed constantly in this work.

Stern's artwork was selected not only for his extensive contribution to the digital art field but because of his own mobility, he has travelled extensively and relocated his practice, giving him exposure to multiple cultures and because of the very specific concepts explored in his work. In *Given Time*, his use of an online social platform as a medium for his work is extremely interesting because he translates his concepts of time and space as a dialogue, into a virtual realm. He has created a world in an 'alter universe' which is distinct and separate from the real, physical world.

Marcus Neustetter

Marcus Neustetter is an "artist, cultural activist and producer" based in Johannesburg, South Africa who exhibits both internationally and locally (Marcus Neustetter: Artist). He has strong connections to Germanic culture, having attended the Deutsche Schule zu Johannesburg and his family origins. His method and approach to practising often involves the intersection of science and art with an experimental nature (Marcus Neustetter: Artist). Neustetter obtained his Masters in Fine Arts from the University of the Witwatersrand (Neustetter, Marcus Neustetter: Artist). He has a continuous engagement with the digital medium through his work process and products. In 2010, he set up "SANMAN" (Southern African New Media Art Network) which sought to engage a network of practitioners in Southern Africa (Neustetter, Systems Imperfect). His artistic practice often refers to the digital medium, which he uses as a tool and medium in production. Neustetter works in a multi-disciplinary manner through experimentation. He draws on his own experience of his surroundings and collaborations. While he is based in Johannesburg, his artistic practice and his process often takes him to other countries such as Senegal and Kenya. Neustetter is co-director with Stephen Hobbs of the Trinity Session, a public art curation company based in Johannesburg. He collaborates frequently with Hobbs as Hobbs/Neustetter.

Two of Neustetter's works will be discussed *Mount Teide Google Earth Trace* (2009) and *relation IV* (detail) (2010). The former was part of the exhibition *One Moment* which was held at Gallery AOP in Johannesburg, it is a digital print from a Google earth trace which Neustetter created after returning from his trip to the Canary Islands where he climbed Mount Teide. The second is from the exhibition *In Motion* which was also held at Gallery

AOP. It is a digital print, a line drawing based on performances and light sensitive software which results in a digital light drawing. Neustetter addresses the virtual in reality; the digital becomes physically represented through each artwork and through the process. He creates journeys and narratives through a translation within the medium.

Neustetter was selected because of his continued engagement within a global dynamic and for the way in which he uses the digital as a tool for his artworks. This influences his practice and process, and his interactions with the global dynamic.

Tegan Bristow

Tegan Bristow is a lecturer, researcher, artist and curator based in Johannesburg, South Africa, where she practises as an artist. She obtained a Fine Arts Degree from Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, after which she travelled to Japan where she taught briefly. On her return to Johannesburg she completed her Masters in Digital Interactive Media at the University of the Witwatersrand, where she currently lecturers and co-ordinates the interactive media stream in the Digital Art Division's postgraduate program. Bristow's critical involvement in the digital arts and culture in South Africa and Africa is noted in her research in the field. Bristow started the Remote Lecture Series at the University of the Witwatersrand, a series of lectures with artists across Africa, conducted via Skype. She is currently doing her PhD by correspondence through the Plantery Collegium at Plymouth University (Bristow, Tegan Bristow: Artist) where she is exploring "Technology Arts and Culture Practice in South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Senegal" under the supervision of Roy Ascott. As a curator, artist and researcher, Bristow is able to provide valuable insight into both her work and that of others.

For the purposes of this paper, Bristow's role will be regarded as both a curator and researcher as she describes herself as both, her curation can be seen as a product of her research (Bristow, Appendix 3: Interview pg 1). For the Joburg Art Fair in 2009, Bristow curated the online exhibition *Internet Art in the Global South*. The exhibition is a series of internet artworks from the Global South, mainly South America, India, Korea and South Africa, which have been selected owing to their thematic similarities. It is one of the first noteworthy collections of internet art in the Global South. In her paper "Rephrasing Protocol: Internet Art in the Global South" Bristow describes the practice of "new media and technology arts in the Global South", with specific reference to internet art as a medium, as being embedded in issues surrounding "marginalisation and first world advances" (Bristow). Bristow states the internet is a self-critical artistic form. This criticality can be attributed to globalisation which is "considered a threat through its forms of gentrification and homogenising effects on culture" (Bristow, Rephrasing Protocol: Internet Art in the Global South). According to Bristow, the practice of these internet artists goes beyond the previously established history of internet art which revolved around political criticism, activism and hactivism particularly in relation to "marginalisation and globalisation" (Bristow, Rephrasing Protocol: Internet Art in the Global South). Bristow does however identify that while there are distinct "methods and distinct themes" of Global South internet art practitioners such as "the exploration of voice... terrorisms and destabilisation... [and] ownership and remapping" on which the exhibition is focused, they can be considered offshoots of an extended global practice (Bristow).

Bristow's paper and exhibition offer a substantial beginning to the documentation of and critical engagement with internet art in the Global South of which there is little, let alone with a specific focus on South Africa. Her continued engagement with a local dynamic and her curatorial/researcher role were important reasons for her selection as thorough her research she provides artists with a platform for exposure and experience.

Conclusion

The South African digital art field, while small and seemingly exclusive, is growing. An increase in practitioners and the viewing public indicates that there is a growing interest. The field is still reliant on seeking a form of education and support outside of its own institutions, yet this is indicative of the field and does enable the South African digital art field to grow.

Initial observations indicate these artists and curator/researcher have done exactly what Bourriaud's theory suggests: while distancing themselves from previous discourse and theories surrounding postmodernism and postcolonialism, they have created their own paths and journeys within multiple cultures. Their own mobility and ways of practising reflect this. An analysis of the interviews will be discussed in the following chapter to attain a more solid view on the digital art field in South Africa.

Chapter 4:

Case Studies

This chapter is an extension of the previous chapter which outlined the overall field of digital art in South Africa as it relates to the findings in the Altermodern as set out by Nicolas Bourriaud. The question which this report will investigate is whether or not the Altermodern resonates with digital artists in South Africa and whether or not it can be used as a framework for their work and practice. So far the theory has been defined, the medium explored and the overall view of South African digital art provided. This chapter extends this research by considering specific South African digital art case studies. There are three case studies, Nathaniel Stern and Marcus Neustetter whose artistic practices will be the focus, and Tegan Bristow, who will be regarded as a curator/researcher (of digital artworks) for this paper.

The questions for the interviews have a specific focus and direction based on the Altermodern, and the research in the previous chapters. It is necessary to establish how the artists themselves understand the global dynamic, how they interpret their position in it, how influential their location or mobility is in relation to this, their opinion of the digital in relation to the global, and if any of these factors have influenced their conceptual development and process.

The answers and discussions which have emerged from the interviews will enable the primary question to be answered: is the Altermodern an adequate framework for South African digital art? The following sections are based on the questions and the answers given. The interviewees have all at some point relocated their practice or the context of their work geographically and have participated in multiple cultures. It is important to note that they come from privileged wealthy backgrounds which have enabled them to travel and to be exposed to the digital medium. Their circumstances are directly connected to their ability to practice in this manner.

The global dynamic and its relationship to the artists and the curator/researcher

How we communicate and inhabit the world is greatly affected by technological advancements and the digital age. Bourriaud observes that these not only affect how we exist in the world, but how we travel and engage with it. An understanding of how the interviewees perceive their own global context is necessary and how this is influenced by their relationship to South Africa in order to identify if they and their practice align with the Altermodern.

It is interesting to note how the relocation of Stern's practice between two countries has affected his artistic practice and how he views his global positioning. Stern currently resides in Milwaukee, the Unites States, but calls both Johannesburg and New York "home" (Stern, Appendix 1: Interview (email) pg 1) and considers both cities when critically examining his work and practice, stating that it is necessary for his practice and research "to be in dialogue with [both] these places" (pg 1).

The collaborative nature of his practice results in multiple places and people affecting his work and practice (Appendix 1: Interview (email) pg 2). Stern queries the term 'global artist', yet his art practice is of a global nature and he is internationally exhibited, travels continuously and always considers his audience contextually "sometimes that's geographic, other times it's a conceptual or aesthetic frame, etc" (Appendix 1: Interview (email) pg 2). His work is not isolated or located in one specific context (Appendix 1: Interview (email) pg 2). This can be seen in his work *Given Time*, in which he uses a visual environment to locate his work, which can be interpreted as a relocation into a virtual culture. He literally relocates his practice from the physical realm and conceptualises it in a virtual realm.

Stern's reasons for being influenced by the relocating of his practice are slightly different for Neustetter's relocation. He describes a specific shift in his work owing to the medium and its context. Neustetter felt compelled to relocate his work from a local, South African context, to a global context in order to reach an audience that was more digitally informed and therefore better equipped to understand his work (Neustetter, Appendix 2: Interview pg 1). Neustetter states that initially there was international interest in his work, since its context (South African) was one which the international audience had "no information" on (pg 4). Over time, his practice shifted to "less digitally focused work" (pg 4) because he realised that in the "international media art circuit, very often engagement with technology loses its relation to context". He began to draw more on technology as inspiration for his practice and methodology. Locally his work has become "more physical,

installation-based" (pg 4). This is indicative of the lack of digital knowledge and literacy in an audience in South Africa and the effect that this can have on a digital artist's practice.

Curation offers an opportunity to showcase and expose artists such as Neustetter and Stern, who were co-incidentally both curated by Bristow for the exhibition *Internet Art in the Global South* (2009). Their project, getawayexperiment.net (2005), which "proposes a dialogue between virtual and physical processes of sign and site design", is an online collaborative work which seeks to redefine popular, global signs such as Google Images, joburg.org.za and Turbulence (Bristow, Internet Art in the Global South (Online Exhibition)).

Bristow does not perceive herself as a 'curator' but rather as a "researcher more than as a curator" (Bristow, Appendix 3: Interview pg 1). Bristow used the exhibition *Internet Art in the Global South* (2009) as a research opportunity, to identify and showcase "digital arts practice in South Africa; Southern Africa with regard to how it is received in the global context" (pg 1). Bristow perceives the field of digital arts as being "based on previous practice and concepts emanating from Europe and North America" (Appendix 3: Interview pg 2). Part of her research includes identifying South African "practice as something different" (pg 2) from these pre-established norms and in so doing, contributing to the digital art discourse. For Bristow, although her role as a curator/researcher is based in South Africa, given the medium – the internet – that role exists within a global context. She particularly chose to curate/research this medium for the exhibition *Internet Art in the Global South.* For her, the digital medium links "to a global form" (pg 2). She states that she sees herself "as a curator dealing with the content of South Africa" (pg 2), within a global form.

Bristow's specific role as a South African and her own mobility in the curating/research process is interesting in terms of how she understands concepts and the medium. Bristow found that her context has affected and influenced the works selected for the exhibition. For example, she comments on the different aesthetics used in the artworks from different countries. She states that many viewers found it difficult to understand the Korean work in the exhibition and that she potentially had a better understanding of the work since having lived in Asia, she "had an understanding of the kind of humour and bizarity that comes with that culture" (Appendix 3: Interview pg 12).

Unlike Stern and Bristow, Neustetter perceives himself as both a 'global' and 'local' artist. He draws inspiration from his "local context, but also from the global debate... the one is not separated from the other anymore" (Neustetter, Appendix 2: Interview pg 5). This acknowledgement of both may be due to the shift in his art practice which was a function of the medium with which he chose to engage, a decision which ultimately affected his engagement with the medium. Similarly with Stern, whose relocation was by choice and not influenced by the medium, draws from his specific location. Given the medium of Bristow's choice, her practice is inextricably linked to the global form. She views the local and the global as one within the other, with her placement primarily in the local – South Africa - and secondarily in the global. According to Neustetter, the connected nature of the globe, due to the internet, enables an artist to be defined as a "global citizen in some form or another" (pg 4), which is much like Bristow's perception of the medium as a global form. Neustetter reiterates Stern's opinion of the influences of travel which enables artists to move "beyond local issues to international issues" (pg 5), which is the case with all three interviewees.

The artists highlight how their relocation, travel and ability to traverse cultures, their mobility, affects and influences their artistic practice. For Bristow, as a curator/researcher she is affected in two separate ways; her curatorial/research methods are affected by her own mobility and the artworks which she curates are affected by the respective artists' travel (such as that of Neustetter and Stern), a very specific network of movement is set up in this system.

South Africa as part of a networked global culture

Bourriaud describes a very specific global world, where standardisation is becoming the norm, and where translating allows people to commune between more than one culture. The artists and curator/researcher have expressed their specific relationships to the global, but examining whether they perceive South Africa as being part of this networked global culture is necessary.

Stern is aware of how South African art is perceived in the global context and states that an investment and engagement with "global discourses" will bring "South African artists and artworks to the fore" (Stern, Appendix 1: Interview (email) pg 3). This applies to himself as well as Neustetter and Bristow. According to Stern, there is a global awareness of the South African artworks as "good" and he suggests that this will "eventually [lead] to more growth in the scene, and thus all forms" (pg 4).

Neustetter considers the fact that South Africa features in multiple media debates on multiple platforms (more often than not over contentious issues) as an indication of our global position and involvement. Neustetter adds an interesting point “that we as South Africans don’t always perceive ourselves as being part of it” (Neustetter, Appendix 2: Interview pg 7).

Neustetter explores the postapartheid era which saw a “boom of connectivity where suddenly artists were spread throughout the world; representing and speaking about South Africa in various ways” (Appendix 2: Interview pg 7) in contrast to the present when “we are trying to fight for ourselves in that global market, not only in the art market but also in the international context of the discourse” (Appendix 2: Interview pg 7). Neustetter defines the very specific role which he believes South Africans are playing in the global culture associated with preconceived notions of the country, the people and the artists. This is due to the volume of media which exists “out there... that already frames the context” (Appendix 2: Interview pg 8). Neustetter adds that we have little control over the situation and how “we really are part of this global culture” (Appendix 2: Interview pg 8) but that this situation is not particular to South Africa.

For Bristow, through the internet as a medium and the global form of the computer “we are able to understand and connect with other cultures and other ways of doing things” (Bristow, Appendix 3: Interview pg 2) in a similar manner and form. For her the global nature of the medium adds an interesting angle when looking at “the context of a specific situation in the globe” (pg 4). She elaborates, saying that “South African or South American artists working with a global medium will identify themselves and situate themselves

differently from how North American or European artists might" (Appendix 3: Interview pg 3). This extends into addressing "the relationship of power plays and ownership of information" (pg 4).

Given the nature of the global medium of the internet, media and technology, South Africa can be seen as part of a global networked culture. The medium surpasses borders, yet does not overlook cultural identities and sets up an interesting dynamic around the 'centre' which Bristow and Neustetter are aware.

The digital as a medium in relation to the global dynamic

The Altermodern acknowledges the increased use of technology and telecommunications and the effect they have had on the way we inhabit the world and how artists practise. Bristow's understanding of this relationship has already been explored; her understanding of a global context is connected to the digital as a medium which should be addressed in relation to the artist's own understanding of the global context and how it affects their participation in a global dialogue.

For Stern the digital is a "cultural layer of what technology affords once we forget it is there: from object to post-object" (Stern, Appendix 1: Interview (email) pg 2). Stern discusses how he has changed the way in which he uses the digital. He views it as a "material with its own agencies" (pg 2). He attributes this change in his work and approach to the medium, to the influences of South Africa. While Stern acknowledges that the "community of digital artists is... global" (pg 4) due to its dispersed nature, he points out this

does not necessarily make the community bigger. Stern states that working with technology enables him to "distribute and dialogue" (pg 3) his work, and that this results in him reaching a "much larger audience" (pg 3).

For Neustetter the digital as a platform "is about connectivity and interaction" (Neustetter, Appendix 2: Interview pg 4) and therefore it does influence his understanding of a global context. Neustetter states that "the very nature of the connected digital medium, via networks and media platforms" (pg 7) allows him to both "access and contribute to [this global] dialogue" (pg 7). Through the use of the digital, Neustetter suggests that artists are able to understand multiple contexts and achieve a broader perspective when practising from a specific location.

It is clear that the artists' and curator/researcher's use of the digital affects their understanding of a global dynamic and allows them to participate in this dynamic. It is also affects how they interact with other practitioners (each other) and enables creative networks to form formally (such as with Bristow's use of Upgrade International) and informally (such as with Stern and Neustetter's own collaborations).

Technical engagement with the specific works from the artists perspective

The interviewees were chosen for very specific reasons, based on the type of digital work they produce and engage with. As identified in Chapter 2, there are parallels between the Altermodern and digital art. The medium lends itself to dynamic interactive works which establish a narrative with which Bourriaud engages directly in his theory. An artwork

“generates forms before, during and after its production” (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 4). In the work of the two artists selected, they engage with the formation of narrative though information, and connections are formed in the artwork which transport the viewer on a journey over a specific space and time

Stern’s work *Given Time* (2010) was influenced by Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* and Derrida's book *Given Time*. Gonzalez-Torres’s work consists of two identical battery operated clocks set to the same time, they ultimately fall out of alignment and one ‘dies’ before the other. Gonzalez-Torres created this work on the same day that he found out his partner was HIV positive. His work raises issues around “time, flesh and mortality” (Stern, Appendix 1: Interview (email) pg 3). Stern says that Derrida's book questions what a true gift is, “he poses that only when we have nothing to give – not time, not money, not bodies, nothing – can we truly give of ourselves” (pg 5). Both works feed into the concept of *Given Time* which uses Second Life (an online social network based on a virtual environment) as a platform, a conceptual space “that has no time, no space, and no bodies... all the lovers can give is each other, and their reciprocal being-with” (pg 4), each other. This virtual space and virtual time, creates a narrative for the viewer.

Stern describes the role of Second Life as “more of a material than a medium or tool” (pg 4). Stern describes it as a space “made up entirely of relations between people, and people and technology... [it] could not exist without us and our bodies, without the matter of hardware and electronics and telecommunications” (pg 6). The virtual world which he participates in through the avatars is dependent on him. The avatars are like “actors” (pg 6) and Second Life is their stage, their platform for their gaze. The avatars are continuously

logged in on two computers in Stern's studio, so the work exists outside of the exhibiting framework. A dialogue is established between the two avatars which is entirely removed from the physical realm, yet the viewer is placed directly in between the two avatars when it is installed, which adds an interesting contrast to the virtual space. The viewer intrudes on the avatars' space. Two lovers are divided by a physical realm which the viewer is able to enter.

Neustetter's work could be described as being a more object-driven process than Stern's *Given Time*, which is about an isolated virtual moment witnessed by the viewer. This is true of Neustetter's *Mount Teide Google Earth Trace* (from the exhibition *One Moment*) (2009), which was influenced by Neustetter's attempt to **"**re-enact that moment of inspiration" when he climbed Kilimanjaro. While the artwork is a print, an object, it is inextricably linked to Neustetter's process. His process began with re-enacting his climbing of Kilimanjaro. Neustetter reflected on his experience and drew connections to Google Earth. For Neustetter there was a contrast between the actual physical assent of the mountain, and his own experience of the landscape, versus the image of it on Google Earth. Both allowed him to "zoom out and move away from [the] realities... [he] was facing" (Neustetter, Appendix 2: Interview pg 6). When Neustetter returned from his climb, he compared his own drawings of Teide to Google Earth images and a relationship between space and geography started to emerge. He created a vector trace of the Google Earth image, deleted the "superfluous information" based on his own experience of the mountain which resulted in the "bare basic minimum" of what Neustetter chose to represent as his "Mount Teide experience". The work represents Neustetter's process which can be divided

into three parts: ‘climb’, reflection and application; which ultimately forms a dynamic narrative between the three parts of his process.

Neustetter describes Google Earth as a “technological interface” (Appendix 2: Interview pg 7) which enables us to use someone else’s system, “manipulating it to suit ourselves” (pg 7). Yet it does not offer a clear view, the images are always pixilated, “we can never look deep enough” (pg 7). Recurring concepts in Neustetter’s work include the vertical gaze which translates to “looking back in time by looking at the stars and about looking back in time by looking at the earth’s surface in archaeological terms” (pg 10). Neustetter uses Google Earth to “look at the surface” (pg 11), yet there is curiosity with “what’s beneath it, what’s its history... it’s context... the people” (pg 11). Neustetter uses his traces to “go beyond pixilated, two-dimensional surfaces to go deeper down”. Neustetter uses his own interaction and journey resulting in ‘one moment’, and draws from the digital in order to translate this, forming journeys and narratives for his viewer

Again in *relation IV* (detail) (from the exhibition *In Motion*)(2010), Neustetter uses the digital to translate his ideas and concepts. He had a program developed by Bristow, which uses computer vision to track light and draw a line from the brightest light to the next, creating a ‘light drawing’. As experimented, he realised she was “drawing the space... around things” (pg 11) because of the reflective and refractive nature of light. The idea that the light source could “connect” (pg 12) was important to Neustetter conceptually and he became fascinated by this way of “capturing time and space by looking at the negative space around” (pg 12) objects. For Neustetter the light became “symbolic for connections, relations, sound travelling [and] light travelling” which is what the *Relation Series* is about,

the different facets between “two things in a space that allow movement between them”. It is as though the line forms connections and a journey through the software is translated.

Neustetter’s experiences, reflection, and engagement with Google Earth and digital drawing or trace are all part of the process, and the final printed image is the outcome. For Neustetter the work of art exists regardless of what the final product is, it is in the process, the making and the outcome, whatever it may be. The use of the digital as a tool provides a complex situation, the object seems to be circumstantial. He constantly addresses how to show process and outcome “without the outcome being influenced by the process” (pg 19).

For a curator, engagement with the medium is more logistical and dependent on the works selected. *Internet Art in the Global South* (2009) is an online showcase of existing artworks such as *getawayexperiment.net* (2005) and commissioned works which were based on a request by Bristow to artists in South Africa in particular. It began initially as a “research project” (Bristow, Appendix 3: Interview pg 4) investigating digital art practitioners in South Africa. Bristow used the Upgrade International Network (a global network of digital arts organisers and artists) as a platform to invite artists to submit artworks, this networking and method of curating works indicates how the medium allows for a global dialogue to be established.

Bristow points out that the internet as a medium is an “interesting global medium where people can create and showcase without necessarily going through a gallery or any kind of normal means” (Appendix 3: Interview pg 3), yet it is “very rarely dealt with by galleries or public institutions because it is a difficult medium” (pg 5). The exhibition was

constructed on a “framing website [where] the purposes of the exhibition were explained”. The artworks were grouped into different categories and displayed on several iMacs at Joburg art Fair (pg 5). How and where the exhibition took place was also a “mechanism for educating the public in what internet art is... the actual medium being used as a creative tool” (pg 4). The categorising by country and genre of the artworks in this exhibition enabled people to compare the works, “to understand the different aesthetics that are coming from different places, the different interests and how people are addressing the global network from those different places” (pg 8). For Bristow, the criticality of the medium is “reflected in the concepts and what the artists have made” (pg 9). Bristow echoes Neustetter’s sentiments about audience reception, stating it was challenging for people to understand that the exhibition art and an exploration of the medium, but there was interest despite it being shown at a very commercially driven fair. Bristow comments on the South African art world, stating that it “is very much driven by a commercial form rather than a critical creative form” (pg 8), which makes it very difficult to cultivate internet art. Outside of the fair, Bristow states that “anybody who’s interested in digital art or internet art has found the website [exhibition] to be a very interesting resource for understanding potentially what [the medium] can be” (pg 8). For Bristow, a digital artwork is “always reflective of its own medium just as much as when you paint, you think a lot about the colour” (pg 5). The process is affected by the medium “in terms of conceptualising it... the geographical location of global versus local is very much prevalent” (pg 8) in the works which were selected for the exhibition.

Each artwork and the exhibition as a whole, use the digital medium in different ways, either as a medium or a tool and use different specific types of digital media. Stern engages

with an online social network in order to create a virtual scene, Neustetter uses Google Maps as part of his process to visualise landscape while Bristow curates an online exhibition which engages with the internet in a critical way. The level of digital knowledge or literacy an audience has is something which curators of digital art and artists have to consider.

Concepts in relation to the medium and the global

Key themes emerge in the Altermodern and are manifested in the artworks. Concepts such as mapping, displacement, network, dynamic narratives, journeys and translation dominate the radicant way of thought and practice. The parallels between these themes and the medium were outlined in Chapter 2 and the potential existence of a relationship with the location of South Africa, explored in Chapter 3. Of interest is whether the artists and the curator/researcher make the connection between concepts and medium, and if these are connected to a global dynamic.

In Stern's *Given Time,* these core themes do emerge, Stern goes on to say that these specific themes mapping, displacement, network, dynamic narratives, journeys and translation emerge because of his "South African experience" (Stern, Appendix 1: Interview (email) pg 5) and the medium he uses. For Stern, the 'work of art' exists "*with* its viewers" (pg 8) and not the final outcomes. The viewer becomes part of his process which involves "time in the studio, with studio visits, doing viewings to watch and see how people watch and see" (pg 8) which allows for "feed back in to a given piece" (pg 8). For Stern, this helps to position his work within a global context. In contemporary art it helps "to understand that we are all moving along a trajectory, various trajectories, of thinking and making" and

therefore we must be aware of how we converse “across global and local art history as well as global and local popular culture” (pg 9).

Neustetter also attributes these concepts to his South Africa context, however, they are not particular to this context. Concepts such as mapping, displacement and networks emerge “because of the global issues of forced migration and the influence of foreigners in different contexts” which he sees as being a “global citizen nowadays” (Neustetter, Appendix 2: Interview pg 16). He began exploring many of these concepts, early on in his career; yet recent reflection allows him to make sense of them now. He states that “globally there’s a shift towards a merging of all of these terms, to say that it is part of who we are as citizens of the world” (pg 16). We therefore deal with it on a daily basis whether we like it or not, and whether we can move across borders or not, we still deal with it.

In terms of Neustetter’s process he appropriates a medium which is best suited for his idea, using a “tool to translate” the idea. Using the digital as a tool means that “you step into the space of and the context of the digital” (pg 17), which does, as he concedes, affect the “outcome of the work and essentially it does affect the concept, because it influences you one way or another” (pg 17). In accessing the internet, Neustetter states that one is “bombarded by imagery, stories, narratives, by translations, by maps, by dynamic narratives, by displacements that are going to shift the way that you think”. This action of connecting, the more it happens, “the more we are connected, the more we tap into other people’s thinking and the more we engage in the digital medium” (pg 18). For his process, he suggests that he is not “producing in isolation”; in producing he is automatically “[embedded] in a context; that digital context or that technological context and in this case,

it's the networked context" (pg 21). This is evident in the way he uses Goggle Maps as part of his artistic process. Despite not using the digital network at the moment, Neustetter says that "there is already a network around" (pg 21) what he is producing: "just by feeling the global system of our digital art works or art practice in general, just by feeling, it we are naturally networking in that way and we are part of the network medium" (pg 21). Neustetter's process is also about a network of ideas and about drawing relationships between his own concepts and separates parts of his process and culminates in a final object. He states "that one always has to question one's position in relation to a global audience" (pg 23) no matter the extent of your involvement. This idea of a relationship between two entities is exactly what he was exploring in his *relation IV* series. It is interesting to see this translated to a local global specificity.

Neustetter extends this further by stating that if considering "the critical questions about how art is being accepted in this [global] context, you start asking whether you should be positioning yourself in a global context" (pg 24) or if you should rather position yourself and ask these questions in your local context. However due to the medium, the network engaged with, in practice is "most likely not a local one" (pg 25). Neustetter acknowledges that the "connectivity to the global market or peer group" comes with the digital arts scene.

This connection to the global market is something which Bristow also witnessed in her curation/research process. As a curator/researcher, Bristow engaged "with an online community in the process of developing creative innovation" (Bristow, Appendix 3: Interview pg 13). For her, the more exciting part was the process of networking. Bristow understands digital art as "always moving between states". She understands that there is a

"criticality in the use of the network [the internet] and what it means and how it's placed in a bigger, global form" (pg 14). It is important for her as a curator/researcher to address this. For Bristow, the "reflections that the artists made" in their respective artworks were from very specific places and "need to be understood in a global context and need to be seen in a global context because they speak of a global context" (pg 14).

The specific concepts (mapping, displacement, network, dynamic narratives, journeys and translation) for Bristow were all connected to the works which were curated for *Internet Art in the Global South* (2009). Bristow saw the works exploring mapping, as being connected to her context in South Africa, the medium and her global context. Exploring mapping on the internet is possible and becomes a "tool through the internet" (pg 9) due to Goggle Maps and GPS (Global Positioning System), it creates a "dynamic form that's easy to use" (pg 9). Works such as Ismail Farouk's *Soweto Uprising* project which is "location based, [the riots] happened at a specific location, but [are] historical" (pg 9). The project allows the public to "reflect on the historical form and uses a map as a way to tell a story of something that happened" (pg 9). Bristow notes that through her research she realised that "there's something about territory in Africa which is very specific to the politics of Africa" (pg 6). For her the works which explore displacement, focus on the concept of the 'centre', "the first world versus the third world is a displacement" (pg 9). For Bristow, the "the idea of a journey and displacement are very closely linked together" (pg 9). Works such as Farouk's create a narrative and journey over time and space using the internet as mechanism to translate this. Network, for Bristow is a function of the medium. In terms of translation, linguistically speaking, this is an issue for the South American countries who are very concerned that the internet is a very English-driven entity. The themes which are

explored by the selected works also seem to engage with 'something bigger'. There is a distinct acknowledgment of the global through the medium, Bristow comments that "it's not just about being here, it's about being located in something much bigger" (pg 9).

Stern initiates a specific relationship with his viewer as part of his process while engaging with a global conversation. Neustetter understands the connected nature of the digital medium and that it initiates a conversation within a global dialogue while enabling him to engage with specific concepts. Neustetter looks at the local in relation to the global which is precisely what Bristow acknowledges. Bristow connects the medium and platform she engaged with directly to the concepts within a global dynamic. There is a distinct relationship between the types of concepts explored by these artists and curator/researcher practicing with the digital and how this medium affects and influences their ideas, how they approach their practice and their own understanding of global networked culture.

Conclusion

From these findings and more direct observations obtained from the interviews and questionnaires, it is clear that the engagement of the interviewees with the digital medium, the concepts resulting from their work and their vision of the networked global culture, are interlinked and is in some ways dependant on each other. This parallels Bourriaud's discussion of globalisation and the effect that telecommunications and digital networks have on different cultures. These practitioners deliberately and specifically engage with a global dynamic.

The influence of travel and different cultures on the artists and the curator/researcher is clear as is the fact that they are able to travel and therefore to experience other cultures. This clearly illustrates the exclusive and limiting nature of the Altermodern. As explored in Chapter 3 previously, the nature of the medium too is exclusive as it limits who practices and who is able to view the artworks in South Africa. The combination of the two makes for an interesting dynamic and perhaps forces us to re-think both the engagement of the medium and the theory.

These ideas and key concepts will be carried forward to a final discussion and conclusion on the primary question, whether or not the Altermodern can be used as a framework for South African digital art.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Altermodern is an all-encompassing, global artistic theory which accommodates and allows for multiple cultures to exist as equals. Bourriaud's theory, which is based on his observations of the global dynamic and contemporary artistic practice, is located in a 'de-centred' world dominated by globalisation. Bourriaud's theory acts as a departure point for artists moving away from postmodernism and postcolonialism. The Altermodern and Radicant theory rejects the multicultural models which postmodernism and postcolonialism stood for in favour of a new modernism which allows cultures to be translated equally with none being regarded as the 'other'.

Participants of the Altermodern are able to traverse cultures, in time and space. They navigate different cultures using translation which enables them to understand and use different signs, acting as Semionauts. Bourriaud describes the movement of the Radicant artist who is able to develop multiple roots along his journey, the origin of which is no longer regarded as the focal point. The focal point is the destination. Overall, Bourriaud perceives this 'de-centred' world as allowing for an artist's practice to thrive in a new direction.

The question this research paper attempted to investigate was whether or not Bourriaud's theory, the Altermodern, is aligned with the practice of South African digital artists and whether or not it could be used as a framework for their work.

Based on the research presented in Chapter 2, it is apparent that the theory outlined in Chapter 1 can be aligned with digital art. The digital medium is closely linked to globalisation and is not necessarily restricted to a specific culture, region or country. The most fundamental aspect of digital art is its interactivity. This is present in both the process and the aesthetic of the digital artist, resulting in dynamic narratives and artworks which align with Bourriaud's theory. This interaction is not confined to a physical interaction; a psychological interaction is required in digital artworks too.

Given the problematic nature of digital artwork, a function of its close association with new technology, this field of art does not fit comfortably in contemporary art discourse. However, Bourriaud's theory provides a solid framework for this medium and allows it to develop its own discourse. Digital art often explores the new ways in which digital technologies enable us to see and interpret our world. The digital medium offers artists an alternative means of exploring different cultures, both geographically and historically. The suggestion that a digital artist is a facilitator and the digital artwork a shared network of ideas resonates strongly with Bourriaud's notion of the artist as a navigator and translator and the artwork as a dynamic entity. The Altermodern allows the digital as an artistic medium to be included in artistic discourse.

Bourriaud's description of digital art can also be applied to the field in South Africa. However, the field of South African digital art is much smaller, contained and exclusive compared to digital art internationally. The medium has exclusive tendencies, both for those practising and for those viewing, who are able to understand and appreciate the work because a certain level of technical/digital knowledge is required. This requirement of the

viewer was acknowledged by both Neustetter and Bristow in their interviews and was seen as being problematic for the artist and curator/researcher. This 'exclusivity' is amplified in South Africa. The Altermodern as an all-encompassing, broad theory of a global dynamic, automatically allows South African digital art to be included, considered and to contribute to the discourse around digital art.

The case studies are an extension of South African digital art and, based on observations and interviews, distinct ways of practising emerge and characteristics aligned with the Altermodern. The questionnaires compiled for these case studies explored the interviewees understanding of the global dynamic and their own relationship to it, South Africa's role as part of a networked global culture, the digital medium in relation to the global dynamic, and whether the concepts observed in their works (which resonate in the Altermodern) were connected specifically to the medium and the global dynamic.

All three case studies move beyond just an engagement with the digital as a medium, towards what it signifies in relation to the global. There is an interesting relationship and network established between the artists and the curator's individual mobility. Bristow is affected by both her own movement and traversing of different cultures and that of the artists she curates, while the artists are affected only by their own mobility. This networked relationship is paralleled in the way in which both artists work, through collaboration with their context, and allows them to contribute and to access the global network culture.

Stern and Neustetter's processes are as crucial to their practice as to the final exhibition of 'a work'. Their process and practice is inextricably linked to the medium they

use and the medium is connected closely to a global networked culture which they acknowledge. In many respects, they could be regarded as Quaranta defines it, postmedia artists (Chapter 2), as technology and the digital seem to infiltrate the way in which they view the world. This aligns with Bourriaud's observation of the influence of technology on our thinking.

Bourriaud highlights specific themes and concepts which emerge from the Altermodern. In *Given Tim*e, *relation IV* and in specific works in *Internet Art in the Global South*, concepts such as mapping, displacement, network, dynamic narratives, journeys and translation emerge. The artists traverse space and time, exploring and journeying through their processes to create a dialogue within their respective artworks.

Bristow's role as a curator/researcher parallels Bourriaud's interpretation of the role of a curator, as outlined in Chapter 1, as being to prevent signs from being lost or forgotten (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 1). The aim of Bristow's research as a curator is to determine who is practising digital art in the Global South and the significance of the work being produced. Her direct engagement with the medium is directly linked to her engagement with a global networked culture.

Bourriaud's theory is a complex framework for contemporary artistic practice and provides solutions enabling artists, and specifically in this case, South African digital artists, to inhabit the global digital art world. The theory of the Altermodern, however, is problematic because Bourriaud has written his theory from the 'centre' (Europe and the United States, the Western world) about a 'de-centred' world. He is aware of his 'centred'

approach and position, which is not problematic when applied to his own examples. The Altermodern becomes problematic when it is applied from a 'de-centred' perspective, such as South Africa. This makes the Altermodern problematic from the start.

Bourriaud observes a specific movement of people among different cultures from a certain perspective and suggests that his theory encompasses all perspectives. Yet when his theory is applied to South African digital art, which is positioned outside the 'centre', it is clear that he is placed at the 'centre' and the movement of people is in and around his context. This perspective changes when his theory is applied to South Africa, where the movement of people manifests differently.

The artists selected for analysis are not all South African residents. They exhibit and travel extensively; however, the country (among many) has been a specific site of influence for them in their artistic practice and development. It is the place from where many of the concepts present in their work have emerged. This principle speaks directly to Bourriaud's theory of the artist as a cultural nomad, both conceptually and geographically, and describes a global society without borders which is clearly present in South Africa. However, the very characteristics which align the case studies to Bourriaud's theory are a function of their privileged backgrounds which enabled the artists to travel, to establish roots in other cultures and to expose them to the digital as an artistic medium. It is not necessary to view the theory solely from the perspective of exclusion. Rather this theory can be seen as an opportunity to frame artistic practice and not to limit it.

Despite Bourriaud's efforts, the theory does seem to lend itself to the wealthy, privileged people of the world, who are able to travel, who are educated and informed. Without travel and knowledge, Bourriaud's theory seems to have no basis. For many people living in South Africa, the immigrants and refugees who do have no money and who are not technologically skilled, the Altermodern has no meaning. Bourriaud's theory seems far more applicable to those who are able to and choose to travel and cross cultures voluntarily as opposed to those who are forced to. This begs the question, is the Altermodern more suited to a certain type of artist?

Yet despite these faults, the theory and its specific application to digital art provide a solid framework for the development of South African digital art. The Altermodern considers the artist as much as the work produced as part of the theory, thus enabling discourse on the subject to develop. But it cannot be seen as the only option for South African digital art and artists.

According to Bourriaud the global networked culture which exists enables a global dialogue to be formed. It affords South African digital artists the opportunity to engage with their own location in relation to the global. Bristow and Neustetter highlighted this in their interviews. Neustetter suggested that as South Africans it was important to acknowledge our global position and to constantly re-evaluate it. By using Bourriaud's theory, artists can be categorised in a global dynamic. As a curator/researcher it is important for Bristow to identify her own position locally in relation to the global dynamic, which she does through her research.

It is the role played by South Africa in this global culture which should be discussed further, defined and re-evaluated, with reference to its position both within global and local 'consciousness', and specifically in relation to digital art. Often South Africans are quick to dismiss their global impact and to underestimate their ability to be involved in global dialogue. It is important that South African digital artists continually assess their actual and potential role in this networked global culture in order to continue to develop the field of digital arts.

Bourriaud perceives a 'de-centred' world where "temporalities intersect and weave a complex network" (Bourriaud, Introduction: Prologue 1 pg 2). South African artists are doing just this, they are not doing so in a 'de-centred' world. The artists discussed here and their artworks, their practice and knowledge of the medium are still very much outside of this 'centre'. Based on this research and a final analysis of the Altermodern, perhaps Bourriaud's theory should be re-contextualised for South African digital art.

Just as Bourriaud writes from a very specific part of the globe, so have I in this report. This research aims to re-theorise the Altermodern in order to make digital art more accessible as an artistic medium. By aligning South African digital art with the Altermodern, South African digital artists are placed within a very specific local and global context. This discussion of digital artists and digital art with the Altermodern and Bourriaud's thoughts on the Radicant is by no means a finite analysis of South African digital art. This research should be seen as the beginning of a conversation about these artworks and this field of art. It is important to continue this conversation and develop this framework further so as to enable the field to grow and to engage future South African digital artists theoretically. The onus is

on the artist to adapt Bourriaud's theory and to extend the Altermodern to enable the field of South African digital art to grow and to contribute meaningfully to both the local and global discourse on digital art.

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