No Ghost*

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The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever representation takes on an independent existence, the spectacle reestablishes its rule.

—Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

It is an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world. . . .

—Karl Marx, *Capital*

Pierre Huyghe has described his installation *The Third Memory* (2000) as "perhaps the most straightforward, the most didactic of all my works. The first time I saw it myself I was sure it should be shown in the education department of museums."[1] Inspired by the 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon*, a fictionalized account of an infamous, bungled robbery of a Brooklyn bank that had taken place a few years earlier,[2] *The Third Memory* consists centrally of a two-channel video projection in which images of Al Pacino's character, Sonny Wortzik, are juxtaposed with images filmed by Huyghe of John Wojtowicz, the model for Wortzik, retelling his story on a set which re-creates that of the bank seen in the film. This video projection is

* This essay owes a first debt to three friends whose conversation prompted my thoughts on the work of Pierre Huyghe: George Baker, Aruna D'Souza, and Linda Nochlin. I would also like to thank Baker, D'Souza, and Hal Foster for their editorial suggestions, and audiences at the 2004 annual meeting of the College Art Association and at the Rhode Island School of Design who heard earlier versions of this paper.

1. Huyghe quoted in Adrian Dannatt, "Where Fact and Fiction Meet," *The Art Newspaper* (2002), http://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/article.asp?idart=4510.

2. The most compelling reading of this film remains Fredric Jameson's "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film" (1977), in *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 35–54.

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Pierre Huyghe. The Third Memory. *2000. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.*

accompanied by newspaper clippings and archival news footage of the actual bank robbery and its aftermath, including a response to the film on the part of Wojtowicz himself (which he wrote while in prison). If indeed Huyghe's presentation of this event, twenty-five years after the fact, assumes a decidedly didactic air, the question remains, however, just what his latter-day *Lehrstücke* aims to teach its audience.

Critical consensus would have it that the lesson is one of emancipation, that *The Third Memory*, by returning narrative agency to Wojtowicz himself, provides its subject with a means to reassert control over his own image and life history. This is the conclusion of Jean-Charles Masséra, for example, in his essay "The Lesson of Stains" (named after the Parisian suburb where Huyghe produced his video). There Masséra characterizes Huyghe's work as

> an enterprise (an attempt) of reappropriating the representations that speak in our place and name, an enterprise where the subject represented—or figured—is invited to take back his place at the very heart of the spectacular machinery that has dispossessed him of his own identity. . . . An invitation to comment on his own gestures and deeds, to reappropriate them, to speak up once again, to regain his own image.[3]

That description is echoed in even stronger terms by Nicolas Bourriaud in his recent book *Postproduction*: "Reality," he writes, "takes revenge on fiction." For Bourriaud, the program adumbrated in Huyghe's work may be summarized in an

3. Jean-Charles Masséra, "The Lesson of Stains," trans. Brian Holmes, in *Pierre Huyghe: The Third Memory* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2000), p. 95.

aesthetic paraphrase of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "We must stop interpreting the world, stop playing walk-on parts in a script written by power. We must become," Bourriaud grandly proclaims, "its actors or co-writers."[4] These readings, while certainly attractive for their ethical clarity, reduce *The Third Memory* to an all-too-familiar variety of ideological critique, whereby the artist unmasks the "reality" behind the "script of power," allowing the repressed voice of the marginalized subject (doubly marginalized, in the case of Wojtowicz, as both lumpen and homosexual) to be heard.[5] But the "lesson of Stains," as Masséra would have it, is hardly so affirmative.

What is most striking about Wojtowicz's recounting of his botched holdup is its conflation with its subsequent cinematic reimagination. Huyghe himself has noted:

> I decided to ask him to explain how it happened, but what is interesting today is that, of course, his memory is affected by the fiction itself. He had to integrate the fiction of *Dog Day Afternoon* into the fact of his life. He is always shifting between these two things, the memory of the fact and his memory of the fiction.[6]

But even "the fact of his life" was itself mediated by "fiction": at one point in the video, Wojtowicz tellingly mentions that on the day before the attempted robbery, he and his accomplices watched *The Godfather* (also starring Pacino) for inspiration. At another point, he describes an exchange of gunfire that had taken place during the heist as having occurred in "the real movie." What we witness in *The Third Memory*, then, is not one subject's reassertion of control over his "gestures and deeds," nor the revenge of "reality" on the "fictions" of spectacle-culture. It is rather the ever-increasing conscription of the subject by the mechanisms of that culture, the culmination of more than a half-century of attempts to colonize everyday life down to its most minute aspects.[7] This is the sense in which Wojtowicz has become exemplary of a broader condition of subjectivity, a condition whose historical determinations were clearly established by Guy Debord in his analysis of a society in which "all that once was directly lived" has deteriorated into "representation."[8] Perhaps, in contrast to Bourriaud and company's optimistic vision of Huyghe as an artist concerned with the preservation of (obsolete) notions

4. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), pp. 45–46. The eleventh thesis reads: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it." See Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 145.
5. An exception to this critical consensus on Huyghe's work is found in the writings of Hamza Walker; see his "Thanks for the Memories," in *Image Stream*, ed. Helen Molesworth (Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2003), pp. 59–67.
6. Huyghe quoted in Dannatt, "Where Fact and Fiction Meet."
7. On the periodization of spectacle-culture, see Jonathan Crary, "Eclipse of the Spectacle," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), pp. 283–94.
8. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), p. 12.

of an integral subject, as an heroic *maquisard* combating the occupation of the spectacle, we should understand him—more modestly—as one concerned with how this condition is inhabited today, with exploring the topography of the spectacle from within. Huyghe himself would seem to disclaim any overt critical intent in *The Third Memory*: "it is never about referencing or deconstructing a film or the nature of Hollywood. I am speaking about the story of a man and about representation. It is about how you create an image and have that image represent you."[9]

In his classic *Lehrstücke*, Brecht was determined to show that no representation was fixed and final, to examine critically the mechanisms of identification by disturbing the Imaginary mirror-relation between the spectator and the theatrical (read ideological) image. They were a form of what he called *eingreifendes Denken*, "interventionist thinking," whose aim was to make the spectator recognize the "fictional" elements in his or her own existence—i.e., the predetermined positions to which the ideology of representation has assigned the subject.[10] *The Third Memory* may, at first glance, appear to follow this model rather closely, even down to its use of the techniques of *Verfremdung*, or "distantiation," in its refusal of the codes of cinematic realism. If film typically cuts the spectator off from the conditions of its own production and performance, Huyghe's video continually returns us to the artificiality of the studio and to the staged quality of Wojtowicz's "performance." He shifts easily between speaking directly in the present moment to off-screen spectators and reenacting the events of 1972 with a cast of extras. No attempt is made at period costume or at more than a schematic re-creation of the Brooklyn bank in which the robbery took place, and the lights, cameras, and equipment of the soundstage are often visible. Moreover the act of seeing this video is framed by Huyghe's collection of texts relating to the heist, the subsequent history of its protagonists, and its Hollywood retelling, displayed like so many movie posters outside the black box of the screening room—just the sort of interruptions that might remind us that representations are never simply given but are *produced*. Yet *The Third Memory* makes use of these Brechtian practices to demonstrate precisely the difficulty of dislodging the Imaginary ego installed by ideology, of disrupting those identifications fostered by contemporary culture. In the congealed world of the spectacle, intervention in the form of critical seeing proves increasingly attenuated, devoted to documenting the seeming impregnability of the social order. Such a project evokes a rather different characterization than Bourriaud's confident rewriting of Marx's eleventh thesis; instead we might recall a passage by Debord, who rephrased Marx's *Holy Family* for the era of spectacle-culture: "For one to whom the real world becomes real images," Debord wrote, "mere images are transformed into real beings—tangible figments which are the efficient mirror of trancelike behavior."[11] In other words, there is no longer any hierarchy of

9. Huyghe quoted in Dannatt, "Where Fact and Fiction Meet."
10. Here I follow the argument of Stephen Heath, "Lessons from Brecht," *Screen* 15, no. 2 (1974), pp. 103–28.
11. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 17.

"direct" experience that might privilege the lived experience over its later recountings or memories; alienation is now mediated by and within representation. Pierre Huyghe is the phenomenologist of this upside-down world.

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If *The Third Memory* may be said to be his Brechtian "learning-play" in its absolute clarity of exposition, the more recent *No Ghost Just a Shell* (begun in 1999 in collaboration with Philippe Parreno) treats a parallel theme—the reversibility of images and entities—with operatic complexity. For this work Huyghe and Parreno bought the digital files and copyright for "AnnLee," a generic Japanese *manga* character, from a company that develops stock figures for use in cartoons, advertisements, video games, and the like. The character's inexpensive price (around $400) indicates of the simplicity of its "identity," which is suitable for a minor figure but lacks the more developed "personality" of a narrative lead. In the operations of digital animation, AnnLee would have been used as a background character in a few frames, then been set aside forever. But Huyghe and Parreno undertook extensive retouching and three-dimensional development of AnnLee's image, and produced several short videos in which it was provided with different "personas." Later the image was made available to other artists, before being permanently retired from use in 2002.

Once again, the rhetoric around this work has generally been one of emancipation. By acquiring the rights to this character, it is claimed, Huyghe and Parreno removed it from the commercial cycle, thereby freeing it from the ruthless economics of the *manga* industry. The computer code constituting the image of "AnnLee" is seen as being "brought to life" through its appropriation by these artists. The two artists themselves, it should be noted, have encouraged this naive set of assumptions. "The idea," Parreno has said, "was to free a character that doesn't have any chance to produce a storyline. The expensive ones have everything and they don't need us [to be freed]."[12] But in spite of these claims, the logic of *No Ghost Just a Shell* is anything but redemptory; what we witness in this collective work is less the transposition of the class struggle onto the plane of images than what Adorno once presciently termed the "illusion of the absolute reality of the unreal."[13] Indeed the work's title itself provides us with a strong indication of just what attitude Huyghe and Parreno have adopted toward their purchased "character."

That title, as many have noted, is derived from a well-known *manga* film, *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), whose narrative revolves around a conventional science-fiction trope: the uncertain line between the human and the inanimate as figured

12. Philippe Parreno quoted in Kendra Mayfield, "Art Explores Cartoon as Commodity," *Wired* 14 (December 2002).
13. Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: New Left Books, 1981), p. 90.

in the (not incidentally female-gendered) cyborg.[14] Yet this particular theme seems not to have particularly interested the artists. For AnnLee is no Eve of the future, and our experience of this figure contains none of that frisson of the uncanny that motivated an earlier modernist fascination with the automaton or mannequin. (When a critic purported to see a flicker of humanity in its eyes, Huyghe scolded, "Don't make it romantic.")[15] In other words, we should take the first half of the work's title quite literally: *No Ghost*, no haunting, only "a fictional character with a copyright designed by a company and proposed for sale. That's it . . . ," as Huyghe himself has AnnLee remind us in his film *Two Minutes Out of Time* (2000). What Huyghe and Parreno appear to be signaling here is the demise of one of the great figures of modern oppositional culture—the obsession with specters and the phantasmagoric, the untimely and the unhomely, activated by the Surrealists some eighty years ago as the return of what bourgeois society resolutely had repressed. It is the uncanny itself whose critical force seems to have become exhausted.

Even the briefest comparison of AnnLee to that fascination with the mannequin so characteristic of Surrealism suffices to reveal the cultural transformation—indeed, the absolute historical break—that separates the present from that earlier moment of avant-garde contestation. As Fredric Jameson has remarked, the mannequin may be considered a

> veritable emblem of the sensibility of a whole age . . . [the] supreme totem of the Surrealist transformation of life—in which the human body itself comes before us as a product, where the nagging awareness of another presence, as in the terror of the blue gaze that meets us from the doll's eyes, the secret premonition of a lifeless voice somehow about to address us, all figure emblematically the central discovery by Surrealism of the properties of the objects that surrounded us.[16]

Jameson goes on to specify the historical condition of these experiences of the uncanny as bound to an earlier moment of capitalist development, to the moment of crisis capitalism—the passage from a liberal economy to one of cartels and monopolies—which had nevertheless not yet succeeded in fully industrializing or systematizing all of society, certainly not in France. At that moment "the properties of the objects" that made up the human milieu still consisted in their appearance as "mysterious things," as objects in which the social character of human labor might yet make itself known in the manner of the return of the repressed, "the nagging awareness" of which Jameson speaks, or what we should

14. For an account of this film, see Philip Nobel, "Sign of the Times," *Artforum* 41, no. 5 (January 2003), pp. 105–06.
15. Ibid., p. 106.
16. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 104–05.

properly call in this context the *revenant*. What returned was indeed a premonition of the use value that capitalist production had been in the process of systematically destroying in favor of the commodity as pure value, as mere token of exchange. AnnLee exists at the other side of this divide; it is pure exchange value, "a fictional character with a copyright . . . and proposed for sale. That's it." To imagine that Huyghe and Parreno's purchase of the rights to its use somehow freed it from the commercial cycle is sheer fantasy—AnnLee was made for just this purpose. "That's it": utterly without depth, and (wide eyes notwithstanding) incapable of sustaining the sort of libinal investment that had made the Surrealist mannequin such a powerful allegorical figure of modernity.

The critical force of the spectral was linked ultimately to a project of rational enlightenment. The world of commodities might present itself as a phantasmagoria, alternately terrifying and seductive, but the mechanisms of such false appearance and illusion could be revealed for what they were; what Marx called the "religion of everyday life" could be shown to be the product of mere human labor and the social relations between producers. Even the Surrealist interest in the uncanny was less a means of reenchanting a rationalized world than of figuring the alienated labor that lay behind the false appearance of the commodity. In each case, the dispelling of mirages and hallucinations unveiled the human intercourse, the subjects, that had been occluded by capital. That critical project has been rendered obsolete by the transformations of capital itself; indeed, what has been called the contemporary "immaterial labor" of post-Fordism has seen the conscription of the category of subjectivity itself into the relations of production. "The prescription of tasks" along the assembly line, in which the worker was subject to the coordination of the various functions of production "as simple command," has given way in the postindustrial economy to "a prescription of subjectivities," in which the worker is expected to become a participating agent in processes of control, the handling of information, and decision-making. "The new slogan of Western societies," Maurizio Lazzarato has written in his account of this restructured worker, "is that we should all 'become subjects.' Participative management is a technology of power, a technology for creating and controlling the 'subjective processes.'"[17] Subjectivity, in other words, has been put to work and, no less than economic value, the subject is now the product of the regime of immaterial labor. If this site was once considered a locus of potential resistance to capitalist production, or at least a space of interiority not yet subject to the discipline of the workplace, today its colonization is complete.[18] AnnLee has not been "freed" from

17. Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emory, in *Radical Thought in Italy*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 135.

18. On this subject, see also the important essay by Herbert Marcuse, "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man," in *Five Lectures*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shierry M. Weber (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 44–61. One should keep in mind, however, Hal Foster's caution that such a model of the shattering of the subject necessarily presupposes "a prior moment or model in which the subject is whole and complete," and that such a concept is problematic, not least for the danger it runs of nostalgically preserving "the old pragmatic, patriarchal" bourgeois self—a charge to which the

the production of value by being imbued with an ephemeral "subjectivity." Rather, such individuality is the very condition of its existence as a commodity and is the token of its isomorphic position to the capital relation.

"*Don't make it romantic.*" If AnnLee is not a ghost, what does it mean to describe the image as "just a shell?" This phrase from the work's title, too, needs to be interrogated. It is tempting, of course, to read it as referring to the character as an empty sign, a kind of digital avatar that the artists involved in this project could appropriate, just as certain crustaceans come to inhabit the vacant shells of other species. Such an interpretation presupposes in turn the replete subjectivity of those participants, who "fill" the otherwise empty shell of the commodity-form; as we have seen, however, subjectivity no longer constitutes some outside to the system of production but has been wholly hollowed out and internalized to its logic. Moreover this reading simply fails to correspond to our experience of the work. Huyghe and Parreno's digital animations of AnnLee do not strike the viewer as some advanced form of puppet-theater; the artists are not hidden illusionists manipulating the phantasmagoria seen by the audience. Indeed, what is striking about these films is their inhuman quality. This is particularly the case in Huyghe's *Two Minutes Out of Time*, in which AnnLee appears before the viewer as some sort of alien, with buglike eyes—blank and slightly projecting—disproportionately large compared with her mouth and nose. Her skin is modeled in shades of gray, hardly distinct from the indeterminate backdrop against which she appears, and her narration shifts so that she sometimes speaks from her own point of view, sometimes from that of the viewer. Huyghe seems determined to remove the image from any identification; it remains, in some sense, beyond recognition. In this light, a rather different connotation of the phrase "just a shell" becomes apparent, in which we may hear the echo of Sartre's account of the dehumanization of reality, what he called the "petrification" of the human, in one influential strand of modern cultural production.

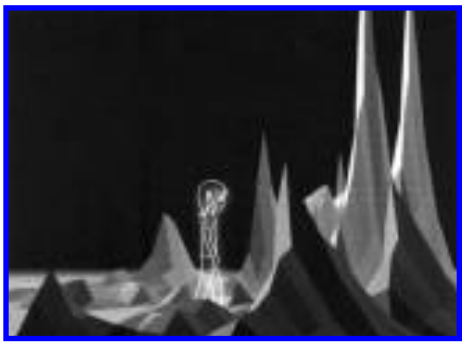
In his essay on the poetry of Francis Ponge, "Man and Things," Sartre wrote of Ponge's assimilation of language to a kind of shell, a material envelope secreted by the individual as a protective carapace. Ponge, the philosopher wrote, imagined those shells emptied, as if "after the disappearance of our species, in the hands of other species that look at them as we look at shells on the sand."[19] There was in fact a persistent necrological fantasy at work here in the form of an entropic

Frankfurt School, Marcuse included, is particularly susceptible. See Hal Foster, *Recodings* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1985), pp. 132, 134.

19. Jean-Paul Sartre, "L'Homme et les choses," in *Situations I* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1947), p. 252.

Huyghe. Two Minues Out of Time. *2000.*
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

scenario worthy of science fiction, whereby Ponge's ultimate wish was "that this entire civilization should one day appear," in Sartre's words, "as a vast necropolis of shells in the eyes of some higher ape . . . who will distractedly leaf through these remains of our glory."[20] *No Ghost Just a Shell* proposes an analogous project of separating the signifying object (images now, rather than language proper) from its anthropocentric context. Nowhere is this clearer than in Huyghe's film *One Million Kingdoms* (2001), in which AnnLee's voice maps out the very landscape through which the figure walks. That voice is an electronically altered version of that of Neil Armstong, derived from his transmissions from the first moon landing, and the vista produced by those sound waves is a barren lunar terrain. Here, too, the world is divested of any properly human significance, the voice separated from its speaker and transformed into a frozen panorama. AnnLee is reduced to a glowing blue outline wandering across an artificial gray moonscape (the digital animation here being notably crude). It is as if image and speech have become mere things among other things that might acquire their own meaning and resonance apart from any human use to which they may be put; "thus eluding the man who has produced it," Sartre wrote of Ponge's language, "the word becomes an absolute."[21] It is in just this sense that AnnLee may be described as a veritable shell, and we viewers are placed in the curious position of that post-apocalyptic ape who looks down with curiosity on this petrified remain of an unknown civilization.



For Sartre such a view entails an inversion of the a priori human perception of the world as a setting for purposeful intentions. Objects appear to us first as full of meaning, as instruments that refer us to human ends and intentions, and only later as things-in-themselves. "In the Heideggerian world," Sartre explains,

> the existent is first *Zeug*, tool. To see in it *das Ding*, the temporo-spatial object, one must be willing to practice a neutralization upon oneself. One pauses, one embraces the project of suspending all projects, one adopts the posture of *nur verweilen bei*. . . . Then the object, which is, in short, only a secondary aspect of the tool—an aspect that is founded in the last instance on usefulness—will appear. . . .[22]

20. Ibid., pp. 287–88.
21. Ibid., p. 252.
22. Ibid., pp. 257–58. Jameson has glossed this argument: "For human reality, involved in its projects, each object is primarily a frozen project, an immobile imperative, a thing-to-be-used-in-a-certain-way—*zuhanden*, available, lying to hand in case of need," as opposed to the thing or object "as *vorhanden*, as simply being there, as an entity with no evident relationship to myself" (Fredric Jameson, "Three Methods in Sartre's Literary Criticism," in *Critical Essays on Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Robert Wilcocks [Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988], p. 104).

Huyghe. One Million Kingdoms (AnnLee). *2001*.
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

Ponge turned this Heideggerian distinction upside-down, so that the object existed first, "in its inhuman solitude," and humanity came second as "the object that transformed other objects into instruments."[23] So AnnLee, relegated to the lunar surface, tells us, "I have become animated . . . not by a story with a plot, no. . . . See, I'm not here for your amusement. . . . You are here for mine!" Extracting AnnLee from narrative is less an act of freeing this figure from the commercial constraints of its origin than of stripping the image of its usefulness, its socialized significations, of seizing it at the very moment it is about to become an independent object. Of course, for Sartre, such a displacement of the properly human significance of the world was a travesty, the pathetic dream of an "inoffensive and radical catastrophe" that Ponge had shared with contemporaries like Blanchot or Bataille. Over a half-century later, however, that catastrophe appears precisely to have overtaken us, not in the dramatic form supposed by Sartre but as the gradual subsumption of the human subject to the logic of an integrated spectacle-culture. Huyghe describes this world, one experienced no longer as "hodological" space—i.e., "a complex organization of means and ends and projects, unveiled through the movement of my own adventures and desires"—but instead as entropic space, "motionless space spread out before me," infinite and beyond meaning.[24] *No Ghost Just a Shell* does not appropriate the figure of AnnLee as a means, but through a process of purification (of what Sartre called "*décrassagé*") places it before us as an end in itself, strangely autonomous and independent of human will.

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Such an argument flies directly in the face of what stands as the most developed and widely accepted reading of Huyghe's work: that of Parisian critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud in his aforementioned *Postproduction* (which is tellingly subtitled *Art as Screenplay*, and even more tellingly subsubtitled *How Art Reprograms the World*). At the heart of this book are two claims about contemporary artistic production, one weak and one strong. The weak claim is simply descriptive: that over the past decade "an ever-increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of preexisting works," that "more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products."[25] Even this point, it seems to me, is debatable, eliding as it does the full array of allegorical practices that reopened questions of representation beginning in the later 1970s with the "Pictures" generation of American postmodernists. Such an exclusion is no mere Gallic chauvinism, nor is it simply the kind of dehistoricized reading of contemporary art that market-bound criticism has made all too common. This lacuna is rather the crucial absence around which the rest of Bourriaud's argument will turn: the renunciation of the politics of representation is the very basis

23. Sartre, "L'Homme et les choses," p. 258.
24 Jameson, "Three Methods in Sartre's Literary Criticism," p. 104.
25. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p. 7.

of Bourriaud's strong claim, namely that the art work today partakes of "a culture of use or a culture of activity" through which it "challenges passive culture, composed of merchandise and consumers. It makes the forms and cultural objects of our daily lives *function*."[26]

He arrives at this argument by recourse to a passage from Marx's *Grundrisse* concerning the dyad of production and consumption. Specifically, Bourriaud cites a remark to the effect that the manufacture of an object is senseless unless it is subsequently used; hence consumption produces production. Marx wrote that

> a product becomes a real product only by being consumed. For example, a garment becomes a real garment only in the act of being worn; a house where no one lives is in fact not a real house; thus the product, unlike a mere natural object, proves itself to be, *becomes*, a product only through consumption.[27]

In other words, a garment that is never worn or a house that stands forever empty—that is not used up in the act of consumption—remain an item of clothing or a dwelling only in potentiality, not in reality. For Marx, the dissipation of the product enacted in its consumption is paradoxically the final stage of the production process, its "last finish" or "finishing touch," in the industrial vocabulary of the nineteenth century. "The product," he concluded, "is production not as objectified activity, but rather only as object for the active subject"[28]—i.e., as *Zeug, ustensile*, or tool for immediate use. Bourriaud will read this passage through the lens of Michel de Certeau's examination of everyday life's *arts de faire*, the particular "art of doing" through which individuals produce their daily experience. This transition from Marx to de Certeau is theoretically significant, for it radically amplifies the citation from the *Grundrisse* and underwrites Bourriaud's concomitant shift in emphasis away from the producer toward the consumer. Of course, other scholars have also underwritten such a shift (in his concluding chapter, for example, Bourriaud cites Roland Barthes's famous essay on "The Death of the Author"),[29] but perhaps none have done so as thoroughly as de Certeau, who would discard altogether the distinction between production and consumption.

At the heart of de Certeau's argument lies the assertion that consumption is a site of resistance, in which the "weak" make use of the "strong" and produce for themselves a provisional sphere of autonomous action and self-determination (if only within the limits imposed upon them). Consumption, in other words, constitutes the very model of what he will call a "tactic," the infinitesimal practice of resistance against apparatuses of control: a tactic, he writes, "must constantly contend with events in order to turn them into 'opportunities.' The weak must

26. Ibid., pp. 13–14.
27. Marx, "The *Grundrisse*," p. 229. See Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, pp. 17–18, for his use of this text.
28. Marx, "The *Grundrisse*," p. 229.
29. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p. 82.

unceasingly turn forces foreign to them to account."[30] This manipulation takes the form of *bricolage*, the combination of heterogeneous elements into a new synthesis, an act of reappropriation or creative diversion patterned ultimately after the speech act, in which speakers manipulate, elaborate, and invent upon the preexisting material of language. Bourriaud adopts this schema wholesale and, somewhat paradoxically if not perversely, returns it to the artistic realm where it originated. While de Certeau's scholarly practice would appear to bestow the freedom traditionally accorded the singular, heroic artist onto "ordinary" individuals in an egalitarian gesture, Bourriaud restores that freedom to the restricted realm from which it derived. Hence, we are told, "starting with the language imposed upon us (the *system* of production), we construct our own sentences (*acts* of everyday life), thereby reappropriating for ourselves, through these clandestine microbricolages, the last word in the productive chain."[31] Consumption is thus figured as a potentially (even, *pace* de Certeau, an inherently) subversive act, a tactic of resistance to the commodity system; the term "postproduction" emphasizes this active quality of reappropriation, the refusal of a passive position toward the "system of production." The postproducer's or *microbricoleur*'s finishing touch is the key to Bourriaud's utopia of "the use of objects" (as he titles the opening chapter of his book).

But his collation of Marx and de Certeau into twin foundations of a "culture of use" is unstable. First, it is based on a patent misreading of the relevant passage in the *Grundrisse*: far from establishing the priority of consumption over production, Marx was actually attempting to demonstrate their mutual dependence, or better, the dialectical determination each exerts upon the other.[32] And the product, moreover, can only be understood in its historical specificity—that is, in the particular forms it assumes under differing modes of production. As Marx himself noted in *Capital*,

> Every product of labor is, in all states of society, a use-value, but it is only at a definite historical epoch in a society's development that such product becomes a commodity, viz., at the epoch when the labor spent on the production of a useful article becomes expressed as one of the objective qualities of that article, *i.e.*, as its value.[33]

30. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. xix (trans. modified).
31. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p. 18.
32. Marx went on to note that "just as consumption gave the product its finish as product, so does production give finish to consumption"—removes consumption, that is, from mere potentiality and provides it with a specificity, a particular character: "The object is not an object in general, but a specific object which must be consumed in a specific manner, to be mediated in its turn by production itself. . . . Production thus produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but subjectively. Production thus creates the consumer" (Marx, "The *Grundrisse*," p. 230).
33. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1909), p. 71.

What Bourriaud fails to acknowledge, then—what his theory in fact absolutely forbids him to acknowledge—is precisely this determination on his utopia of use: what we should properly call the logic of reification. Instead, he chooses to remain comfortably within an understanding of consumption as an act of self-determination and assertion of autonomy on the part of the individual, rather than allowing that—in the capitalist mode of production—it is the *product itself* that assumes the mantle of these human attributes; that, in other words, the product-as-commodity consists in nothing less than "the personification of things and conversion of production relations into entities."[34] The theory of postproduction hopes to ignore this fundamental condition of the object, explicitly proclaiming the triumph of functionality at the very moment its factual reality has utterly disintegrated in the face of exchange value.[35]

But what of de Certeau's claim that regardless of the authorized or sanctioned modes of consumption, individuals in their specific appropriation of the commodities in the marketplace resist the logic of reification? Does the latter's *bricoleur* provide a convincing model for Bourriaud's "postproducer"? One could be forgiven for answering in the affirmative, for de Certeau's analysis of "the invention of the everyday" (as his volume was originally titled in French) offers a rather seductive model of cultural subversion, whereby

> a rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production faces an entirely different kind of production, called "consumption," that is characterized by its ruses, its weakening as opportunities come and go, its poaching, its secrecy, its tireless murmur, in short a quasi-invisibility since it hardly is distinguished by its own products . . . but by an art of using those imposed on it.[36]

The lingering spirit of May '68 is still quite evident in this text, published in 1980, and indeed throughout de Certeau's book one can hear echoes of the Debordian critique of the "society of the spectacle" and resistance to it in the form of Situationist *détournement*—what cultural historian Brian Rigby has succinctly characterized as the "selective and cunning (mis)appropriation" of elements from the dominant culture that could then be put to critical or subversive use.[37] De Certeau, in the wake of May '68's revaluation of "popular culture," transmutes this practice from an avant-garde legacy (inherited by the Situationists from their predecessors, the Surrealists) into a common, everyday occurrence, a "tireless but quiet activity" that resists the logic of reification from within. He in fact returns

34. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 809.
35. The suppression of use by exchange value under advanced capitalism is the subject of a number of Debord's theses in *The Society of the Spectacle*; see especially pp. 31–32.
36. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 31 (trans. modified).
37. Brian Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France: A Study of Cultural Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 156. For example, in addition to the passage just cited, see de Certeau's characterization of contemporary social life as a "society of the spectacle" (de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. xxi) or his discussion of workplace resistance as a "practice of *détournement*" (ibid., pp. 24–28).

continually to a powerful metaphor that expresses the average individual's refusal of passivity and domination in the face of what are described as increasingly totalitarian networks of control: poaching, a term that inevitably invokes the feudal image of the anonymous peasant trespassing on the lord's property in order to steal his fish or game. "The everyday," de Certeau states at the opening of his text, "is invented through a thousand different ways of *poaching*."[38]

But already in the repeated use of this metaphor we can detect the pacifying quality of de Certeau's characterization, its very distance from *détournement*. For if we must concede that poaching constitutes an act of popular resistance, we may nevertheless note that it is a largely private and atomized form of opposition, and one that is content to leave existing power relations intact. It is, as de Certeau would designate it, a means of "making do" within a dominant, in fact practically invulnerable, culture.[39] In the end, any sense of conscious criticality or subversion disappears and poaching becomes simply the way each of us seeks his or her own private pleasure amid the objects given to us by the various systems of production. The particular quality of this act becomes clearest when characterized as a practice of reading:

> [The reader] insinuates the ruses of pleasure and of a reappropriation into the text of the other: he poaches on it, he is transported into it, he is made plural in it like the sounds of the body. Ruse, metaphor, *combinatoire*, this production is also an "invention" of memory. It makes words the outlets of mute histories. The readable is changed into the memorable.[40]

He will cite two exemplars of this privatized reading as production of memory: on one hand, Barthes's notion of the "inter-text" as a kind of circular memory that continually returns reading to some matrixial, anterior text;[41] and on the other hand, the viewer before the television screen who nostalgically "reads the passing of his childhood in the reporting of the news."[42] In each case, whether high or

38. Ibid., p. xii (trans. modified).
39. De Certeau is generally considered to have located his theoretical problematic—the analysis of how the "weak" make use of the "strong"—in the margins of Michel Foucault's microphysics of power (see ibid., p. xiv). But his recourse to an analogy of poaching seems precisely to miss the point of the historical schema that Foucault set out in *Discipline and Punish*, whereby the particular mechanisms of royal power that defined the Classical age (i.e., the public exhibition of violence as a means of social control) were replaced with a new disciplinary regime by the early nineteenth century (whose effectiveness relied on the production of subjects who would internalize power). The inevitably feudal overtones of "poaching," which presupposes a margin of autonomous action free from the ideological binds of the panoptic system, would appear an anachronistic model of resistance. Whatever opposition our current regime generates (and, beyond Foucault, one might refer to Erving Goffman's analysis of "total institutions" for some clues), it will certainly not be along the lines of this model.
40. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. xxi (trans. modified); see also p. 174 for a restatement of this theme.
41. See Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Noonday Press, 1975), pp. 35–36.
42. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 174 (trans. modified); see also p. xxi.

low, the text is read against the grain as a site of singular associations and cathexes, one in which meaning is generated from the recollections of the reader rather than by the dictates of an author. Whatever ground this practice of reading might share with Situationist *détournement*, whatever subterranean links might exist between them, their differences should be clear, for the latter was conceived as a resolutely public and, at least implicitly, collective practice, a form not merely of trespass on private cultural property but of reappropriating that property for explicitly critical ends—even of abolishing any sense whatsoever of private property in this realm. Such a distinction finally elucidates de Certeau's distance from, even rejection of, the legacy of May '68: as Rigby notes, to the extent that it signaled a retreat from the public, political sphere, de Certeau's thought was part of a more general process of depoliticization in these years.[43]

Bourriaud is in a sense a faithful inheritor of de Certeau's depoliticized *gauchisme*, echoing the latter when he writes that "to use an object is necessarily to interpret it. To use a product is to betray its concept. To read, to view, to envision a work is to know how to divert it: use is an act of micropirating that constitutes postproduction."[44] Both share a vision of what I have been calling a "utopia of use" that resists the logic of reification only by recourse to a kind of petit-bourgeois fantasy of consumption as realm of personal autonomy. Ultimately, however, it is less a question of resisting reification than of simply denying its very existence. De Certeau is more explicit on this point, rejecting the validity of the distinction between use value and exchange value (which he would reduce to the cruder distinction between "true" and "false" needs) as fundamentally elitist. Renouncing

43. See Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France*, p. 21. And yet in another sense de Certeau's theorization has very direct roots in the Situationist conception of *détournement*; this becomes apparent if we examine the writings, not of Debord, but of his colleague Raoul Vaneigem. In his *Revolution of Everyday Life*, the latter confided that *détournement* "has gradually spread to every area touched by social decomposition." In other words, under the conditions imposed by consumer society, it was becoming universalized as a practice:

> —As more and more things rot and fall apart, *détournement* appears spontaneously. Consumer society plays into the hands of those who want to create new significant wholes.
> —Culture is no longer a particularly privileged theater. The art of *détournement* can be an integral part of all forms of resistance to the organization of everyday life.

For Vaneigem, there was nothing inherently problematic in the commodity-object itself, rather it was only "the ideology of consumerism" that transformed "what could be the material basis of happiness into a new form of slavery." Appropriation interrupted that ideological circuit by inventing new ways of using commodities, ones that furthered the freedom of the individual instead of his or her subjugation. The entire problem of revolutionary strategy, according to Vaneigem, now revolved around the question of "how to turn against capitalism the weapons that commercial necessity has forced it to distribute. We need," he concluded, "a manual of *détournement*—a 'Consumer's Guide to Not Consuming.'" See Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, 1983), pp. 205–06 (trans. modified). In many respects, de Certeau's volume on "the invention of the everyday" constituted the guide that Vaneigem had called for many years earlier, one that inadvertently revealed precisely the weaknesses of Vaneigem's utopian formulations.

44. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p. 18.

the tenor of much Leftist criticism, and particularly that of the Frankfurt School, de Certeau locates needs "in and through the everyday practices and desires of consumers themselves."[45] Bourriaud, for his part, ignores the question altogether, confidently asserting that contemporary artists have ceased to merely interpret the world, and are now, as "postproducers," actively changing it through practices of reappropriation, diversion, *détournement*, and so forth. In this manner, he constructs a seamless continuity from the Situationist experiences of the 1960s to the present. But what must strike one is the historical gap that separates the present from this moment of the recent past. For *détournement* not only engaged specifically with the reification of the cultural commodity (precisely what Bourriaud must disavow in his theoretical program); as such it was believed to be an integral part of a global contestation of the dominant economic system.[46] But the attempt to change the world to which this practice of diversion belonged, a practice that reached its climax in May '68, miscarried, and any attempt to simply prolong it into the present is condemned to failure in advance. We might wish to give the final word to Adorno, who reminds us that "a practice indefinitely delayed is no longer the forum for appeals against self-satisfied speculation; it is mostly the pretext used by executive authorities to choke, as vain, whatever critical thoughts the practical change would require."[47]

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That Huyghe has proved to be so sensitive both to the closure of the radical project of *détournement* and to the possibilities of the new conditions of representation should come as little surprise. Born in 1962, he is after all a member of the first generation that, as Debord once wrote, was molded entirely by spectacle-culture. "The extraordinary new conditions in which this entire generation has effectively lived," he noted, "constitute a precise and comprehensive summary of all that, henceforth, the spectacle will forbid; and also all that it will permit."[48] It is just this terrain and its limits that Huyghe's work explores with the most careful attention. Although a full accounting of its genesis and development is beyond the scope of this essay, we can indicate summarily the two lines of practice whose convergence would appear to be the necessary condition for its appearance. On one hand, we have *détournement*, the Situationist International, and beyond them the entire constellation of cultural-political practices (Althusserian, Maoist) that marked the years of post-'68 agitation in France. In fact one could describe much of Huyghe's work of

45. As described by Michael E. Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 171.
46. See Jean-Marie Apostolidès, "Du Surréalisme à l'Internationale situationniste: la question de l'image," *MLN* 105, no. 4 (September 1990), pp. 727–49.
47. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), p. 3. Hal Foster glosses this passage in a recent essay, remarking that "just as philosophy missed its moment of realization, so the avant-garde missed its moment. . . . " (Foster, *Design and Crime* [London: Verso, 2002], p. 129).
48. Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990), p. 7.

the 1990s as an extended working-through of these practices, often with explicit reference back to Situationist precedent. For instance, we might consider the *Association des Temps Libérés* (the *Freed Time Association*), which Huyghe founded in 1995 with the aim of "promoting unproductive time, reflecting on leisure time, and developing a society without work," to be a (somewhat abortive) continuation of the S.I.'s own concern with the critique of leisure as a commodified form of free time and its replacement by a social form of generalized play;[49] or the pirate format of *Mobile TV* (1995 and 1998) might be seen to recall René Viénet's 1967 exhortation *"to promote guerilla warfare in the mass-media"* through precisely such means;[50] other examples could be multiplied at will. (A similar exploration took place in the work of Huyghe's colleague and sometimes collaborator Parreno. His *Workbench* (1995), an installation at Cologne's Galerie Schipper & Krome, revisited the discourse of post-'68 Maoism in France, and in particular the interest of many intellectuals to "serve the people" by working anonymously in the factories;[51] and *Speech Bubbles* (1997), balloons whose obvious reference for a North American audience may be Warhol's *Silver Clouds* (1966), but that also evoke Viénet's contemporaneous call to

49. See texts such as "Notes éditoriales: Contribution à une définition situationniste du jeu," *Internationale situationniste* 1 (June 1958), pp. 9–10; and "Notes éditoriales: Sur l'emploi du temps libre," *I.S.* 4 (June 1960), pp. 3–5.
50. René Viénet, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action Directed Against Politics and Art" (1967), trans. Tom McDonough, in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), p. 182. See also the contemporaneous text by Umberto Eco (perhaps an influence on Viénet's theses), "Towards a Semiological Guerilla Warfare" (1967), in *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 135–144.
51. On this exhibition, see "Philippe Parreno: The Audience Is Listening," *Le Printemps de Cahors* (1997), p. 65ff. The classic account of French Maoism remains Michèle Manceaux, *Les Maos en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).

Philippe Parreno. Speech Bubbles. *1997. Courtesy Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.*

"make the subversive speech *bubbles* . . . burst to the surface" of consciousness by defacing advertising posters and the like.[52] In this regard it is significant that Parreno originally made *Speech Bubbles* for the CGT, a French labor union closely linked to the PCF; he has described it as "a modest tool for a demo on which you could write your own slogans, and stand out from the group, and therefore from the image used to represent it.")[53] In each case Huyghe or Parreno has made use of the earlier operation, citing varieties of *détournement*, but most always in a somewhat desultory manner, invoking the very impossibility of its unproblematic "revival." So, for example, *A.T.L.*—which initially appeared to invoke the Situationists' own desire to, as Debord famously scrawled along a Parisian wall in 1953, "never work"—is immediately recuperated into the bureaucratic structures of the state apparatus by being registered as an officially recognized association at the police prefecture. Similarly, *The Workbench* alluded to the populist valorization of labor and the working class among certain elements of the intelligentsia after '68, but now in the parodic form of weekend pastimes and hobbies.[54]

On the other hand, beyond these echoes of radical practices from the later 1960s and early '70s, Huyghe's work also develops out of a set of more recent precedents within French artistic production of the last twenty years. For example, his interest in collaboration, in the (relative) anonymity of the authorial position, and in the integration of cultural production with larger networks of commodity production all find a model in the work of Philippe Thomas (1951–1995). In 1983 Thomas founded the collective IFP (Information, Fiction, Publicité) with Jean-François Brun and Dominique Pasqualini with the aim of producing works that would strive to be free from the idea of authorship; to this end, individual signatures were effaced in favor a "tertiarized" conception of artistic labor. IFP was, in a sense, a local French parallel to the post-Conceptual explo-

52. Viénet, "The Situationists," p. 182.

53. Philippe Parreno quoted in Philippe Vergne, "Philippe Parreno: la représentation en question," *Artpress* 264 (January 2001), pp. 26–27. Although I have here been concerned with elaborating a set of politico-cultural practices from the moment of '68 that seem to stand behind Huyghe and Parreno's work, the punctuality of their reanimation should also be noted. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore the question, it would appear to be no coincidence that these various projects coincide roughly with the massive strikes in the winter of 1995–96, the largest in France since May–June 1968. Here the reactivation of a set of contestatory cultural operations was enabled precisely by a political conjuncture that placed (or, at minimum, appeared to place) the legacy of '68 back in play.

54. Bourriaud, who to some extent provided the inspiration for these works, singularly misconstrues their import by failing to see the very distance separating Parreno's gesture from its source: "When I lent you a book by Robert Linhart, *L'établi* . . . I was sure that you would react to it immediately because the experience of Maoists going to infiltrate the factories is in fact the same claim for the real experienced on a political level. Art will not only rediscover a project . . . but also, simply, a reason to exist on the condition that it introduces itself, in one way or another, to the wheels of the politico-economic system." It would seem to be more accurate to claim, as I have, that Parreno is concerned with precisely the obstacles in the present to making any naive "claim for the real experienced on a political level." See the revealing dialogue published as "Correspondence: Nicolas Bourriaud/Philippe Parreno," *Paletten* 223 (March 1996), pp. 26–36.

rations taking place simultaneously in New York; it shared the same set of aesthetic references—to Duchamp, Manzoni, and Broodthaers in particular (of whose work Thomas had direct knowledge through Galerie Ghislain Mollet-Vieville, which specialized in Minimalist and Conceptual art and also exhibited the three members of IFP)—and it shared a similar set of philosophico-literary references around the "death of the author" concept articulated by Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida (as well as by Borges and Pessoa). Thomas would later dissolve IFP and in 1987 center his work around a fictional agency named "readymades belong to everyone ®," which for a fee allowed collectors to produce an art work under its rubric. Here, too, Thomas continued to assert his conviction that "today the time has come for a complete revision of authors' copyright," a phrase not without its own echoes of Situationist practice (each issue of its journal opened with an explicit refusal of copyright: "All texts published in *Internationale situationniste* may be freely reproduced, translated or adapted, even without indication of origin"), but now tending to imply the exact opposite significance. If, that is, the S.I. rejected copyright precisely because it refused to assign any exchange value to its texts—if they were a gift, in the sense that Marcel Mauss used this term, and hence elicited from the ideal reader a countergift, their *détournement*—Thomas instead called for a revision of copyright so that the text would become *pure* exchange value, available for lease (if not purchase) on the open market. This is the meaning of his description of "readymades belong to everyone ®" as "a fiction in search of its characters": one need only pay Thomas in order to become part of this story or, better, to write a chapter oneself. We are at the very opposite pole from *détournement*, then: the complete synthesis of the art work with the circuits of commodity exchange.

Pierre Huyghe has, over the past decade, worked through these diverging positions as the horizons for a possible contemporary practice while keeping his distance from both, refusing the cynical reason of Philippe Thomas, as well as the unproblematic revival of the S.I.'s radicalism. A work like *No Ghost Just a Shell* makes use of the latter's strategy of appropriation; in *Two Minutes Out of Time* the AnnLee animation, speaking of herself in the third person, announces that, "while waiting to be dropped into a story, she has been diverted [in French, *détourné*] from a fictional existence and has become what she is now, a deviant sign." It is deviant precisely to the extent that its re-presentation by Huyghe and his collaborators refuses conscription into the narrative fictions of the *manga* industry, that it is torn away from those who would "misuse" it. (This is precisely thematized in Parreno's *Anywhere Out of the World*, in which the stripped-down, dehumanized, "alien" AnnLee image at one point holds up to the camera an animated still of the *manga* AnnLee, with doe eyes appearing to glisten with tears, a melancholy hood of hair, and a mouth poised between introversion and invitation. All those sites of possible identification, of libidinal cathexis, have been removed in order to present us with a world lacking intentionality, absent human meaning.) Huyghe sees this image not as a tool, but as a *thing*, and he does so, to

return to Sartre's analytic, by considering it "without that prejudice that burdens men's faces and gestures with signs. One refrains from sticking on their back the habitual labels 'top' and 'bottom,' from presupposing them a consciousness, from considering them, in short, as bewitched dolls."[55] AnnLee is not made more human, in other words, through this becoming-deviant, rather it is exactly stripped of its too-human significations, the meanings in which its "fictional existence" had first adorned it. In these animations, we are briefly allowed to see AnnLee, if not with the eyes of Sartre's postapocalyptic ape, then at least with the eyes of some extraterrestrial being, an alien for whom human projects have no import.

Parreno. Anywhere Out of the World. *2000. Courtesy Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.*

And it may be in just this act of stripping away practical or useful meanings from the image that the critical charge of this work lay, for these "practical meanings" are nothing other than the reflection of a detestable social order within the image itself. This process of *décrassage*, however, is no mere escape from reification but something closer to its radical parody. Huyghe seems to propose breaking through the commodity character of the image precisely by carrying its objectification to an extreme, in a paradoxical gesture that recalls an earlier valorization of human figures of reification like the prostitute, clown, or acrobat. In the later 1930s Marcuse, for one, believed that these types could preserve, at the margins of bourgeois society, an "anticipatory memory" of a future state of generalized happiness:

> When the body has completely become an object, a beautiful thing, it can foreshadow a new happiness. In suffering the most extreme reification, man triumphs over reification. The artistry of the beautiful body, its effortless agility and relaxation . . . herald the joy to which people will attain in being liberated from the ideal, once humanity, having become a true subject, succeeds in the mastery of nature.[56]

But the circus, vaudeville, or burlesque performances that Marcuse had in mind have disappeared, long ago "hunted down," as Horkheimer and Adorno noted in

55. Sartre, *L'homme et les choses*, p. 256.
56. Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture" (1937), in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 116.

their analysis of the culture industry, "by a schematic reason which compels everything to prove its significance and effect."[57] So Huyghe pursues this corporeal artistry further, into the realm of the nonhuman and the digitalized body of the *manga* character, where for the time being, significance and effect—*use*, to return to our key term—may be held at bay thanks to his rigorous refusal of the "prejudice" that would ascribe meaning and intention to all objects in the life-world. Yet to align *No Ghost Just a Shell* with this critical project of the Frankfurt School is in some sense patently absurd: the animation of AnnLee possesses none of the "artistry of the beautiful body," or the "self-justifying and nonsensical skill"[58] of the circus performer, upon which the earlier critical notion was based. It heralds no joy, proffers no "*promesse de bonheur*," but merely confronts us with its radical autonomy: a deviant sign, a simple object, *das Ding*, both commodity and noncommodity at once.

Or perhaps we might more accurately call it an "*absolute* commodity," one in which fetishization has been pushed to its very limit, thereby paradoxically abolishing the commodity-character of the work. That is, in purchasing this animated figure, Huyghe has precisely followed "the inexorable paths of indifference and commercial equivalence," has reinforced "the formal and fetishized abstraction" of the commodity, by moving continually further from use value while at the same time radicalizing "the enchantment of exchange-value."[59] These two terms thereby cancel out each other, and only the pure object denuded of value remains. Baudelaire in the mid-nineteenth century, confronted by the spectacle of the first universal expositions, had already foreseen this strategy as a possible response to "the power of attraction that [commodification] would inevitably have on the work of art." As Giorgio Agamben has written,

> the absolute commodification of the work of art is also the most radical abolition of the commodity. Baudelaire understood that if art wished to survive industrial civilization, the artist had to attempt to reproduce that destruction of use-value and traditional intelligibility that was at the origin of the experience of shock.[60]

This is indeed the self-negation of art, but not as the Situationist practitioners of *détournement* had imagined it; not, that is, as art's simultaneous abolition and realization in a revolutionary *Aufhebung*, but as its assumption of all the most

57. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), p. 143. Another lineage, with reference to puppets rather than such corporeal artistry, could be traced through Benjamin and Adorno; see, for example, Hal Foster, "Dada Mime," *October* 105 (Summer 2003), especially pp. 174–76.
58. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Englightenment*, p. 143.
59. The terms are derived from Jean Baudrillard, "Beyond the Vanishing Point of Art," in *Post-Pop Art*, ed. Paul Taylor (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 173–74.
60. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 42–43. Is this not precisely the significance of Parreno's use of the Baudelairian injunction to flee "anywhere out of the world" as the title for his AnnLee digital animation?

disturbing characteristics of the commodity—its shock, surprise, liquidity, its "aura of frozen intangibility."[61] This is how AnnLee confronts us in *No Ghost*, as a *monstrously strange* figure—not uncanny, not disquieting, but grotesque to the degree that it appears before us *décrassé*, as a pure object, a pure event.

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In the end, Sartre could only be critical of Ponge's writing and its "necrological dream" of humanity's ultimate disappearance: "We have already met a hundred times with this attempt to be seen by the eyes of an unknown species, to at last take a rest from the painful duty to be a subject, in different forms in Bataille, in Blanchot, in the Surrealists."[62] But in a world where the duty to be a subject is no longer the burden imposed by existential responsibility, but has become the very slogan of the regime of immaterial labor, the contemporary realm of unfreedom, Ponge's fantasy of depersonalization may offer a potential route for resistance and critique. For Sartre, as Denis Hollier has pointed out, the "fantasy of an earth without men, a posthuman world . . . is linked to the program of a literature without an addressee."[63] Such a self-contained literature, a writing that is its own end, would logically find its setting on a deserted planet or perhaps, Pierre Huyghe might add, on the moon, from which AnnLee speaks these telling words to the "consumers" of *Two Minutes Out of Time*: "See, I'm not here for your amusement. . . . You are here for mine!" But as effective as this strategy of objectification might be when its subject is an already decontextualized, commodified image, it is not without its limits, particularly when the image has deeper historical resonances.

We should conclude, then, with a brief examination of Huyghe's *Grands ensembles* (1994/2001), a work that quite neatly figures the horizon of this given approach. In this film, models of two public-housing towers appear to communicate with one another via the blinking lights of their windows. The atmosphere is vaguely sinister, if not gothic, with a rather bleak landscape of concrete plazas and barren trees and an ever-thickening fog clinging to the ground. The artist has described it as "a re-creation of an urban landscape in the late '70s" and as "the hallucinated image of a moment without representation."[64] As viewers we once again feel excluded from the scene, as if these buildings had taken on a life of their own, as if they had somehow become sentient in the absence of their human inhabitants. This feeling is heightened by the accompanying sound track, which evokes early experiments in electronic music from the postwar years; the result is a merging of architecture, light, and sound in an ironic reversal of the dreams of

61. Ibid., p. 42.
62. Sartre, *L'homme et les choses*, pp. 288–89.
63. Denis Hollier, *The Politics of Prose*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 100.
64. Pierre Huyghe, *Le Château de Turing* (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2001), p. 17. See also Parreno's related work, *Credits* (2000), which focuses on the landscape around a similar housing estate from the late 1970s.

modernist synesthesia, now appearing not as the ultimate accommodation of the built environment to its users but as precisely a world that has no need for them.[65] But what does it mean to see the *banlieue* as an alien landscape, a site as distant and forbidding as the lunar surface? What histories are occluded in this hallucinatory re-creation? One answer is provided by Huyghe's emphasis on the rather specific historical moment his tableau is meant to evoke: the final years of the 1970s, which on one hand coincide with the artist's adolescence (and this work, as with many others, certainly is rife with opaque personal associations), but on the other marks the end of what in France is called the *Trente Glorieuses*, the thirty glorious years of economic boom that began with the closing of World War II. Those years had also seen, as part of a larger project of modernization, the growth of modernist housing developments in the suburbs of major cities; they were promoted by the state as offering to all the norms of a middle-class social life, a life founded on the treble alliance of work, family, and civic solidarity. By the end of the 1970s that social contract was splintering and these peripheral cities were

65. One thinks, for example, of Le Corbusier's Philips Electric Co. pavilion for the 1958 world exposition in Brussels, the interior of which was animated by constantly changing colored lighting keyed to a sound track by Edgar Varèse.

Huyghe. Les Grands ensembles. *2001.*
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

becoming urban anti-models, deserted by the middle class, where residents increasingly isolated themselves inside their apartments as the discourse of insecurity and the suspicion of foreigners became more and more common.

Huyghe locates his film, then, at a moment of rupture and transition, as the housing projects were mutating from being symbols (ambivalent ones, no doubt) of the promise of postwar industrial society to the periurban ghettoes they are today. He captures a precise point in time when this landscape was disappearing, or better yet was being removed from dominant forms of representation, for a particular segment of French society, as these developments became ever more marginal and separated from the rest of the city. These seem to me the historical conditions necessary for the depersonalized vision of his *Grands ensembles*,[66] but in themselves they are not sufficient. Huyghe's revived attention to that moment and its representation cannot be understood apart from the highly mediatized violence that gripped the *banlieue* in the early 1990s in places like Vaulx-en-Velin, Sartrouville, or Mantes-la-Jolie, and the state's subsequent decision to begin demolishing many failed high-rise housing projects, events that immediately preceded his first conception of this film in 1994.[67] For all the talk of "a moment without representation," Huyghe was working amid a surfeit of images of just such buildings; more crucially, he was working amid an entire population's violent efforts to become visible, to insist on their very existence within a society that had rigorously excluded them. To adopt the strategy of objectification, to cast back to a time prior to the troubled present, to look at the *banlieue* through the eyes of some higher ape at that conjuncture could only be explained as a desire for escape from the present in favor of the certainties of an obsolete social contract that was premised on the relegation of immigrants and guest-workers to the slums of the *bidonvilles*. Here the phenomenology of the "enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world" of the spectacle reaches its internal limit and another practice, yet to be formulated, awaits its articulation.

66. Parreno, in discussing *Credits*, has been rather more forthright about these conditions: "It is as if people were shrugging off responsibility for this townscape that nobody owns up to. A void, an architectural, social and human failure. A total fiasco and a total absence of images. For me, the question was: how to produce an image of all that now?" Parreno, quoted in Vergne, *Philippe Parreno*, p. 28.

67. In that same year Debord completed his "anti-televisual documentary" *Guy Debord, son art et son temps* with the director Brigitte Cornand, which was screened on the French cable channel Canal+ soon after its author-subject's suicide. This film featured, among other things, repeated images of suburban housing projects outside of Paris collapsing into clouds of dust and piles of rubble, marking the societal failure of the postwar welfare state and its long-maintained promises of well-being through an architectural program of housing reform.