

Philippe Parreno

PALAIS DE TOKYO, PARIS

Jeff Rian



“View of Philippe Parreno: *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World*,” 2013. Sconces: 56
Flickering Lights (detail), 2013. Windows: *Out of Focus Windows* (detail), 2013.

PHILIPPE PARRENO'S ambitious semiretrospective “Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World” is the first exhibition to fill the entire Palais de Tokyo. The artist has transformed the galleries into a total artwork—*cum*—*mise-en-scène*: a sensuously complex atmosphere of space, sound, and images, called a “dramaturgy” by its curators, Jean de Loisy and Mouna Mekouar. Parreno’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* is scripted around a score, pianist Mikhail Rudy’s rendition of Stravinsky’s ballet *Petrushka* (1910–11), which tells the tale of a puppet come to life and here functions as a model for making an exhibition do the same. Excerpts from the composition emanate from four Yamaha Disklavier player pianos, dispersed across two of the levels, and this eerily automated sound track “puts everything into swing, into operation,” as Parreno has stated, its musical cues acting in concert with various digitally programmed audiovisual effects to entice and propel visitors through the space. Per the artist, “I wanted people to enter a robot’s lair and feel that something has taken charge of them.”

The show’s oddly escapist title comes from a Thomas Hood poem, which Baudelaire borrowed first. As if to facilitate a kind of fin-de-siècle synesthesia, Parreno addresses the senses from every angle. A wall of light behind the reception counter dramatically silhouettes the ticket takers, and neon sconces, installed throughout, sporadically light up in time with the score, while plastic film blurs the windows and hidden speakers pipe in sounds—rain, street life outside—that mingle with the piano music.

The exhibition includes works dating from 1987 to the present, many of them collaborative. Near the entrance is *TV Channel*, 2013, a series of five short videos—depicting flowers, a children’s demonstration, a newborn baby, a cephalopod that changes color with its environment, and Pierre Jaquet-Droz’s eighteenth-century writing automaton, here seen scrawling, “What do you believe, your eyes or my words?”—displayed on a floor-to-ceiling LED screen. As the viewer approaches, the screen fades into invisibility, its evanescence revealing a black metal grid. The work functions as a kind of key to the show, conveying a romantic, near-kitsch, sci-fi sensibility; a cinematic sweep. It’s a cipher for Parreno’s preoccupation with perceptual ambiguity and the porous boundaries between the organic and the mechanized, kinesis and stasis, subject and object.

Up a few stairs, Liam Gillick’s *Factories in the Snow*, 2007, consists of a sprinkling of black plastic “snow” strewn across the open top of one of the Disklaviers, which stands near the entrance to a gallery housing another of the four pianos as well as a writing machine and *Fade to Black*, 2013, an array of sheets of Day-Glo paper dispersed high on the wall. Periodically, the lights suddenly turn off and the colored papers reveal glow-in-the-dark images of works Parreno has produced but never exhibited. A revolving door doubles as a bookshelf holding one of Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster’s libraries, *La Bibliothèque clandestine*, 2013 (Nabokov, Salinger, Bret Easton Ellis, Lovecraft, Verne, etc.). Through this Hitchcockian portal, viewers enter a remake of a show Parreno saw in 2002 at New York’s Margarete Roeder Gallery, featuring elegant framed drawings by John Cage and Merce Cunningham. At the Palais de Tokyo, as in the original show, the drawings are reinstalled in different permutations each day. In a darkened room one floor

down hang eighteen big, boxy illuminated movie marquees that turn on and off to the score, and from a white platform in the next gallery comes the sound of foot stomps—a recording of a performance by Cunningham’s troupe. Next to that is the command center, the machine behind the curtain: a grand piano as well as banks of computers coordinating the sounds and lights via Cage-like algorithms.

The moving image has always been at the core of Parreno’s work—he entered the Parisian art world in the 1990s, and like many artists in the city at that time, he forged a practice driven to a significant degree by an engagement with cinema. At the Palais de Tokyo, in addition to *TV Channel*, four longer moving-image works are on view. *C.H.Z. (Continuously Habitable Zones)*, 2011, shows an eerie “black garden” in Portugal laid out by landscape architect Bas Smets. In the very well made *Marilyn*, 2012, the digitized voice of Marilyn Monroe is heard listing, in a Robbe-Grillet-like voice-over, the contents of her sitting room at the Waldorf-Astoria; we see the room and a pen scrawling notes on hotel stationery, but at the end, the camera pulls back to reveal not Marilyn but a writing machine (the same one installed in this show). Then the lights in the gallery turn on, and an enormous dirty snowdrift, evocative of a New York February, is revealed behind the scrim-like screen. An unmistakable drop in temperature, experienced on entering the gallery, enhances the meteorological effect. The anomie, the dispersal and evaporation of body into image, is refracted across the other well-known works gathered nearby: *Anywhere Out of the World*, 2000, features Parreno and Pierre Huyghe’s famous appropriation of the manga heroine Annlee (the artists bought the rights to the character in 1999) performing a Pirandelloesque actor-in-search-of-an-author monologue. In the same room a young girl performs Tino Sehgal’s live version, *Annlee*, 2011. Finally, the Parreno–Douglas Gordon film *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, 2006, is showing on seventeen screens—one for each of the cameras that trailed the extraordinary footballer during a game in 2005.

Marshall McLuhan said that when one technology eclipses another, the latter becomes an art form. Movies themselves show few signs of going the way of the buggy whip, but movie *theaters* are a different story: Increasingly, film is something we download to the no-place of our computer screens, rather than something we go out to see. Parreno’s unnervingly blank, glowing marquees seem to elegiacally acknowledge the likely demise of the movie theater, one of the chief sites where the subjects of industrial modernity were able to leave the here and now behind—where spectators could sit down in the dark, fix their eyes on a monumental screen, and find themselves transported almost anywhere, anywhere out of the world. The sputtering sconces at the Palais de Tokyo obliquely recall the decor of Art Deco movie palaces. And not only the automatons and player pianos but also the cinematic screen itself—at once ephemeral image, permeable membrane, and architectural form—seem charged with *unheimlich* resonance. Indeed, if in some respects the show suggests a ’90s club—everywhere, lights and images flash, surfaces become transparent, sound suddenly synchronizes across different rooms and works—its atmosphere at times recalls that of one of those old theaters, which, with their velvet curtains and gilded interiors, often deliberately evoked a long tradition of theatrical architecture, and which, in the age of mall multiplexes, became nearly as quaint as the player piano.

Parreno was born in 1964 and came of age when multiplexes were ascendant. He studied at the Beaux-Arts in Grenoble under Ange Leccia and Jean-Luc Vilmouth, who taught their pupils (among them Gonzalez-Foerster, Bernard Joisten, and Pierre Joseph) to think about exhibitions not as inert showcases but as complex spatial and durational environments. Such an approach can be traced to Minimalism, “the art that made it necessary to recognize the space you were in,” as Vito Acconci put it when reflecting on the movement. This quality—a capacity to force viewers to recognize their own physical positions with respect to art, to implicate subject and artwork in a shared situation—was of course pejoratively called *theatricality* by Michael Fried, and it is a condition that, perhaps surprisingly, shares much with the cinematic theatricality that Parreno also invokes. Both modes of theater seem very much in play and in tension with each other at the Palais de Tokyo—oscillating between the obdurate and the gossamer, the palpable and the virtual, the reflexive and the spectacular. And both modes of experience are, arguably, outmoded today—yet they are somehow revived in the intimate, small-scale interplay between the haptic and the optic in our era of portable devices and touch screens. A single, sensitive, networked structure subsuming and orchestrating the convergence of diversely sourced images, historical references, information, and pulsing sensory outputs, Parreno’s dramaturgy incorporates increasingly ghostly spectatorial regimes and innovatively registers the advent of a new one.

“Philippe Parreno: Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World” is on view at the Palais de Tokyo through January 12.

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