

Philippe Parreno

This month Philippe Parreno becomes the first artist to take over the entirety of Paris's Palais de Tokyo for a solo exhibition. Although for Parreno, many of whose works involve collaborations with other artists, this doesn't mean that the exhibition features his art alone.

And like many of the Frenchman's works, the exhibition will unfold in time as well as space. Given all that, and the fact that he has (in collaboration with Rirkrit Tiravanija) created the cover artwork for this year's Power 100 issue, *ArtReview* decided to track him down and find out what he thinks the business of making art and showing it to other people is all about

Interview by Christopher Mooney

ARTREVIEW *So you're doing the cover for our Power 100 issue.*

PHILIPPE PARRENO *Am I? Oh, right, the out-of-focus cover.*

AR *I don't know the details.*

PP *Neither do I. [laughs]*

AR *I'm told it'll be based on Rirkrit Tiravanija's cover for the ArtReview Asia cover, which I have here.*

AR opens computer and shows PP an email with the subject 'From Studio Tiravanija'. The contents are a photo of hands holding an open copy of Calvin Tomkins's book Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews (2013). Below the image are four texts: 'Power Eats the Soul', 'Power Is Hungry', 'Pay Attention' and 'Resist'.

PP *So this is from Rirkrit?*

AR *Yes. And he suggests you put these out of focus according to his eyeglass prescription, his lens power, which is -4.50. Something like that.*

PP *I did this out-of-focus book for an exhibition in Dublin.*

He shows a copy of a catalogue: All Hawaii Entrées/Lunar Reggae (2010).

AR *I see. The vision of power, the power of vision. I have a sense of power in a broader sense after having spent the last two days at the Paris prefecture trying to get my work papers renewed. But, power in the artworld; how is it exercised? Does it have a capital 'P'?*

PP *In an art context I'm not sure what power is. I mean, I understand the need and the reasons for this type of classification, but I'm very far away from it. I've always been concerned more by the project of art than the object of art. From the very beginning, from 1988 or so, I've worked with other artists, making exhibitions where each of us negotiates a presence within a space. And the space is a reflection of our conversations. 'Supremacy' or whatever is never really the issue. The question is always, 'What is the project behind the object?' And we push this equation to its paroxysm, to the idea of 'What if there were*

a project with no object?' The relations to power are not really there because everything was conversational. There's a need for a certain flux in the conversation, not for, say, an authorship

*or a leading role. It's true, I've always tried to choreograph attention, which is what art can do – it can focus attention in a place. My show at the Serpentine [Philippe Parreno, 2011] was like that. So was *Postman Time* [*Il Tempo del Postino*, a time piece/opera/group exhibition curated by Parreno and Hans Ulrich Obrist, which premiered at the Manchester International Festival in 2007] and *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* [a collaboration with Douglas Gordon, 2006], and my *Palais de Tokyo* show will be too. But it's a nonauthoritarian process. You don't tell people, 'Look there and then there' and so on. You engage them in a *parcours*. It's a bit like travelling without moving.*

AR *What role do art and the artist play in the broader social conversation today?*

PP *Well, I believe of course that art can be quite powerful, that it can change the world. Most of the time it doesn't, but it can. The French philosopher Michel Serres wrote a book in the 1980s called *The Parasite*, in which appears this quite beautiful and astonishing notion of the quasi-object. He takes the metaphor of a football, which creates a form of community around it.*

AR *Football as a game?*

PP *No, the object – the ball itself. You know – gesture, movement, position. You have to negotiate with it, and with the other. It's not*

above Douglas Gordon & Philippe Parreno, Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait (film still), 2006, 35mm, colour, sound, 90 min. © the artists/ADAGP, Paris

complete as an object, but it does produce collectivity around it. I think sometimes art can function like this. Which is a paradox, because it assumes that an art object is completed, you know, when in fact it

is not. So perhaps you can replace the object with the opus, in the way, for example, that the work of Pasolini still functions as a vector for understanding. There are other vectors, other forces of resistance. I think art can also be a way for an art producer to articulate desires differently. You know, in physics, we say that to understand the world you have to simplify it. For example,

we say that the force of gravity is measured at 9.8 metres per second squared, so therefore the rate of the falling object is constant. But in fact it isn't, it undulates, which makes it more complicated. To simplify it, in order to understand the world, we ignore the force of resistance. I believe that art is what stops people from completely understanding the world, because there are forces of resistance in it that make the universe much more complex. Did I answer your question?

AR *Not at all. Or maybe I'm not sure, but it was very good. Let's go back to football, briefly, and that would allow us to talk about Zidane. Is your reading of Serres linked to the documentary you made with Douglas Gordon about the French footballer?*

PP No, *Zidane*, again, came from a conversation with Douglas. We had been playing football in Haifa Stadium and I started talking about, you know, what if we followed one football player we liked rather than the ball and the factual events of the game? When I was a kid, I was always trying to get closer to the TV to see what my hero was doing, why he didn't have the ball, and Douglas was doing the same thing in Glasgow. It was a shared memory. And the conversation grew into this film with 17 cameras all trained on Zinedine Zidane during a match. It wasn't conceptual at the start. It became that, of course, but it started because I wanted to see his face in closeup. It's also, of course, about portraiture.

Funny. We had to make a film to talk about portraiture. Cinema always needs two characters to make a story. *Zidane* remains an artwork because it was only about one person.

AR *Zidane is an example of a work of yours that has reached a much wider audience. Was that by accident or design?*

PP I think it was conscious. There was, of course, the fact that Zidane was famous. But it was also wanting to bring the feeling of art, you know, into the place where people maybe don't have that.

AR *You've said before that a lot of conceptual art doesn't actually need to be seen. But yours does. To exist, it needs to be experienced. It doesn't exist purely as concept.*

PP Once again, this is the predominance of the

project over the object, which is a bit like a score, you know, its needs to be played, played out, reinvented. Two years ago, I was looking at Boli sculptures from Mali, these objects that are used in rituals. In between ceremonies, the priest or whoever, the guy who takes care of the objects, he feeds them or whatever, so each time when they return to the ritual, their form is slightly different. So people believe that they are alive. I think there is something quite similar in art. When you see, for example, *Zidane*, first in the cinema and then in a kunsthalle and then in the Palais de Tokyo, where it will appear as a forest of images on 17 different screens, one for each camera, with the sound moving from one screen to another, following the original edit of the film, it's never the same. It's quasi-alive. So, yes, there's always, for me, the pleasure of taking an object and not reinventing it but renegotiating the way it becomes public. Which is what I think the idea of the exhibition is all about. It's the negotiation that allows a form to become public. A negotiation with the architecture, with the people in charge of it, and so on.

AR *In your collaborations with other artists – your 'Annlee' project [No Ghost Just a Shell, 1999–2002],*

for example – you play with the idea of authorship and you share power. Is this a form of resistance, a strategy to oppose power in its broader, more traditional sense?

PP Yes. For Annlee, Pierre [Huyghe] and I bought a character from a manga agency, and said, 'OK, it's a sign'. A sign that preexists to a community that can be formed around it. 'Or is it?' It started like that. Then we decided, 'OK, and now we're all going to share the same image', and with no copyright, we're going to make it become 'copyleft'. In the end we decided to give the copyright to the character itself – to give her control. I think Annlee might be the most conceptually determined project dealing with copyright ever. *Postman Time* was, in a way, also engaging with the same idea – how to be together in the same space, and how to share time. It's always the same construction, I guess. One is behind the next. Annlee, of course, is still very vivid and present for me. Two years ago, Tino Sehgal told me that he had worked again with Annlee, without asking me or Pierre, which is fine because he doesn't use any pictures in his work. He played it for me in a gallery space, and I really liked it. It was strange, of course, because this little kid [a child actor

playing Annlee] was haunted by an old project of mine. I thought this project stopped, and in fact it came back to me, which is nice. So

above *Marquee*, 2013, Punta della Dogana, Venice. © the artist

facing page *Anywhere out of the World* (film still), 2000, 3D animation, Digital Betacam, colour, sound, 4 min
all images Courtesy the artist'

I bought Tino's work, which is the first time I have bought a work from an artist. And I thought it was important to buy it, rather than to make an exchange.

AR *Why?*

PP Because of the nature of Tino's work.

You know, I think it requires this kind of money exchange. He's an interesting artist, in that buying the work is part of the work. Now I'm going to show it in the Palais de Tokyo show, along with my Annlee film.

AR *Where does the work live otherwise?*

PP In my head. I'm going to be trained

now by Tino, to learn how to do it when he comes to Paris to work with me on the Palais de Tokyo show.

AR *Is art today for a few insiders, or for the many?*

PP That I don't know. I mean, for me, I never ask myself the question of the audience. I'm interested by the way in which a form becomes public. So, public, yes, but not audience. *Zidane* was, for me, extremely experimental, but it did reach a large audience. When I create shows, I try to do the best that I can. You know, develop an idea and be as experimental as possible. And people come and, well, like it or not. I'm not so old, but when I started making art, art centres didn't have collections, they were all about producing ideas. Now there are many more people into art, and that's good. But we shouldn't be basing our work on this. We shouldn't have to deal with the culture of the festival. Somebody running an art institution should give their best, you know, if we can still use this terminology. For me, the audience is... well, I don't know what it is. It's a beast. ar

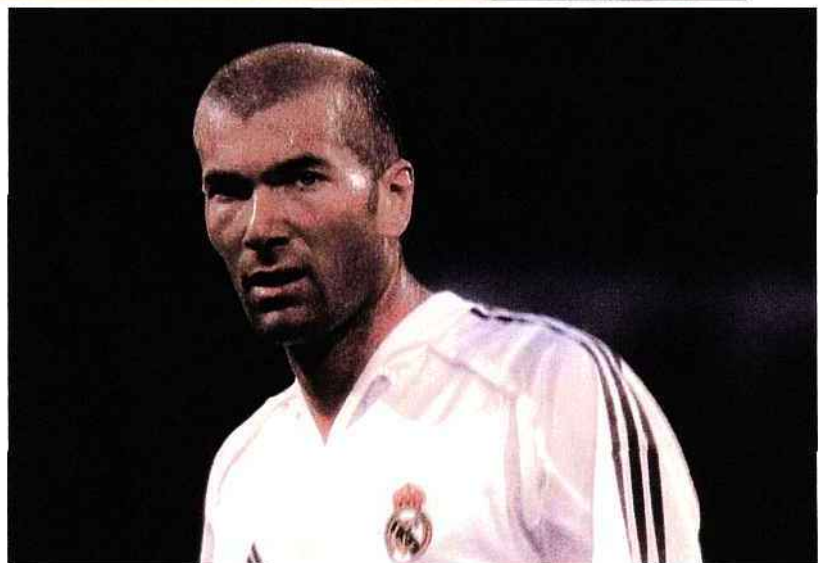
Philippe Parreno: *Anywhere, Anywhere out of the World* is on show at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, through 12 January



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No More Reality (La Manifestation) (film still),
1991, Betacam, colour, sound, 4 min



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