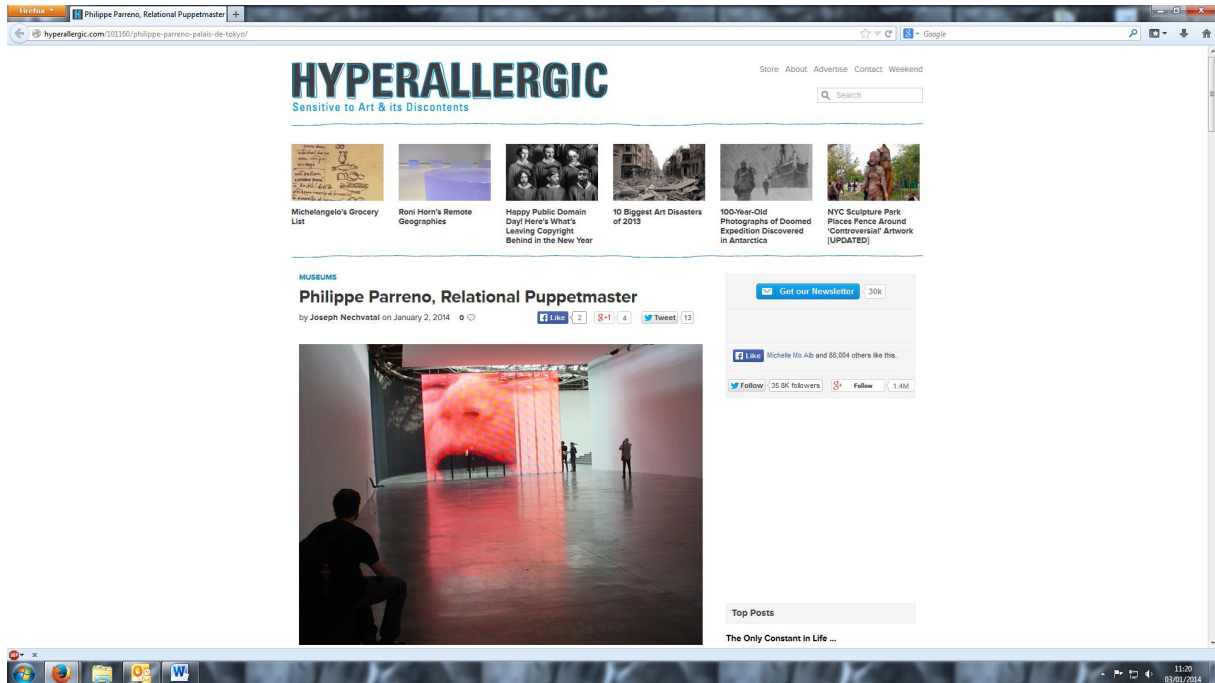


HYPERALLERGIC / Philippe Parreno, Relational Puppetmaster

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Joseph Nechvatal



Installation view, Philippe Parreno's 'Anywhere, Anywhere, Out Of The World' at the Palais de Tokyo (all photographs by the author for Hyperallergic)

PARIS — My long encounter with Philippe Parreno's vast but fey exposition *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out Of The World* was anything but otherworldly. Rather, I related to it by way of a psychic thump

into an obtuse obstruction. That might sound peculiar, given the blow-up [relational art](#) is treated to here (to the scale of 22,000 square metres), but it is precise. With his Palais de Tokyo retrospective, Philippe Parreno's once breezily mischievous art of relational ambiance has now become top-heavy official art that functions in a domineering relationship to the (rather passive) audience.

With the officially sanctioned support and celebration of relational dematerialization, the relational aesthetic ([established](#) by [Nicolas Bourriaud](#), now director of the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts) is no longer the idealized mode of art activity that (supposedly) accepted the full range of all human relations as art in opposition to private objects and spaces. No, that semi-shamanistic idea is now exhausted and has turned cold and empty. With relational officialdom (other current prime examples being Pierre Huyghe's [retrospective at Le Centre Pompidou](#), The Dia Art Foundation-sponsored [Gramsci Monument](#) by Thomas Hirschhorn, and Tino Sehgal's [win of the Golden Lion](#) for best artist in the *International Exhibition II Palazzo Enciclopedico* in the Venice Biennale) an exploration of the full range of *all* human relations is clearly untenable — and human intimacy pays the price.

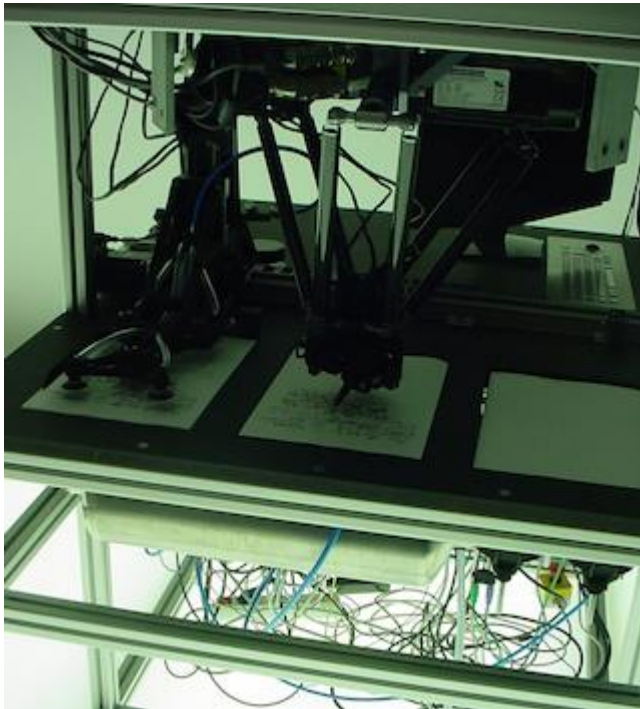


Parreno's "lame, fun-house-laboratory work"

The institutionalization of Parreno's flighty creations of intentionally slight works that fluctuate between sculpture, music, film clips, and small Fluxus-like events has turned this successful relational artist into a star-impresario-entrepreneur: a very specific, limiting and quasi-domineering human relation. Coupled with lame, fun-house-laboratory work, based in an aesthetic paradigm of aloofness that is so cool it verges on cold, the relational art star is placed firmly back at the center of things and torn *away* from artworks that create a social environment in which people come together to participate in a private/shared activity that is open-ended, interactive, and resistant to closure. The inherent detachment of pretentious work-in-progress post-medium practice, shorn of any deep

commitment to medium specificity, seems to inscribe this condition of superficiality on Parreno while aggrandizing him.

Underlying this aim was once a miasmatic ideal that questioned linear and hierarchical structures and sought to replace them with atmospheric loose structures, keyed to a penetrable, reciprocal flow of events. This ideal suggested a consideration of the enlargement of the audience's normal participation, both in regard to the spectator's ocular aptitude to instigate variations in the perceived optic, as well as her capability to produce kinetic and aggregate exchanges on or within the work of art itself.



Of course this was — and continues to be — the basis of Kinetic Art. Indeed Kinetic Art ideals play an unacknowledged, but important, part in relational aesthetics by pioneering the unambiguous use of movement and by fashioning links between science, technology and art relating to the notion of the environment. This linking set the stage for whose relational artist, like Parreno, that blur and hybridize traditional categories and genres. This historical link was well exemplified by Palais de Tokyo's last mega-show, that of a precursor of Kinetic Art and Op Art, founding member of GRAV (Visual Art Research Group): [Julio Le Parc](#).

As the blending between the artist and spectator took on greater and greater emphasis during the period of the late 1960s, new forms of aesthetic immersion opened up. It is precisely in this blending that the question of *art as ambiance* arises. With both Op Art (which is kinetic in that op situations employ optical illusion which effect an appearance of motion) and Kinetic Art (both conceptual descendants of the shifting perceptions initiated in 20th century painting with Impressionism, Cubism, and Futurism) the artwork under consideration is no longer merely a categorical system but increasingly a relational aesthetic act.



In Parreno's version of playful "poetic" relational art (what I found as louche stage set, designed with "staged seeing" in mind) spectators take up consecutive positions inside faux displays in hopes of detecting emotion within the shifting time frames. That means a lot of walking and waiting around — as the empty time and space has its due. Indeed, the boredom of dead time and empty space seem dominantly linked here, as various pauses and visual lines of sight offer themselves up from within the vast void, lending equal weight to contrary and incompatible angles.

This idea of placing the audience in loose and shifting time and points-of-view was once envisaged as the basis of forming community, but when institutional wealth and power intervene, one cannot but help but coolly watch this detached mode of art fall feebly into a ditch of hubris, further enabled by the internet and its narcissistic social technologies.

The sad irony of this is the nostalgic good intentions, based on the 1960s-70s humanist lost dream of the decline in the art object's sequestered, fetishistic standing as *object d'art*. But dematerialized linked relations have now turned de-humanist, superficial, and a little robotic.



Jumbotrons played various clips culled from popular media or produced by Parreno himself

Parreno views the exhibition as a post-disciplinary medium, an event/object in its own right, an experience whose every possibility he seeks to explore — and I take him at his word. In *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out Of The World* there were flicking lights (that resembled Le Corbusier lamps) that choreographed/corralled me through the network of vast galleries on three floors. Parreno's choice of a Jumbotron (a/k/a Jumbovision a/k/a Jumbowank) a huge-screen digital-visual technology typically used in major commercial intersection like New York's Times Square and in sports stadiums and concert venues immediately makes my point about forms of relational power. As does his installing an overwhelming huge wall of blinding white light located behind the reception desk. It assaulted my retinas as I passively waited in a strict line to visit *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out Of The World*.

The choice of a Jumbotron as vehicle for exhibiting a collection of Parreno's rather undemanding and almost flippant video clips — such as a fake protesting throng of school children shouting and waving banners in support of "No More Reality" — could even be, if I wanted to be nasty, theorized as a form of relational aggression. Also known as covert bullying, it's a type of social aggression in which harm is caused by damaging someone's psychic relationship to themselves via the other. This was almost so, as Parreno appeared to try to intimidate me with his display of empty grandeur, signifying luxury, mystification, and wealth.



One of four player pianos playing Igor Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* (1911)

Such bogus grandiosity by the puppetmaster is encountered over and over through the extravagant exhibition of objects, such as human-less player pianos, one taking up an entire room (there are a total of four player pianos, all playing *Petrouchka* (1911) by Igor Stravinsky). This spurious splendor is especially evident in some of his video soundtracks, which call to mind the worst moments of sham solemnity and kitsch romanticism found in the epic space opera franchise *Star Trek*.

While such bombastic relations with the visitor seem a hypocritical inconsistency within relational aesthetics (and laughable) I am certain that it will not harm Parreno, for Parreno is now a celeb-artist and so it matters little what he does. To be fair, I was at times nodding in accord with this freedom, and in the next moment aggravated, shaking my head wondering how it all ties in together. But I like to have my prejudices exposed and challenged and it seems that this exhibition did just that.

[Philippe Parreno: Anywhere, Anywhere, Out Of The World](#) continues at the Palais de Tokyo (13 Avenue du Président Wilson, Paris) through January 12.