

[paris]
The Snake and the Snail
by Barbara Sirieix

Billed as two of the best exhibitions of the year, the simultaneous exhibitions by Philippe Parreno at the Palais de Tokyo and Pierre Huyghe at the Centre Pompidou constituted an art world moment that has kept everyone talking

The simultaneous shows by Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe at the Palais de Tokyo and the Centre Pompidou have generated a lot of discussion; I hadn't seen such excitement in Paris for a long time. Generally, there was a lot of speculation around the synchronicity, whether it was chance or strategy; many relished the idea of a fierce duel. This anecdote is not relevant. Nevertheless, this conjunction enables us to observe works correlated at one point in time.

Associations necessarily come to mind, as Nicolas Bourriaud defined the concept of the relational aesthetics using Parreno and Huyghe as references (among other artists Parreno collaborated with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Carsten Holler, Liam Gillick, Rikrit Tiravanija). The artwork was "a soil for collaboration".¹ This was particularly the case for Parreno, as he was always seeking discussion in exhibition-making to the extent that it was difficult for him to consider a solo exhibition at all.² Things have changed: he seems quite comfortable in the position of the 'conductor' at the Palais de Tokyo. AnnLee, the manga character Parreno and Huyghe bought together, is present in both exhibitions as a reminder, *No Ghost Just a Shell*, 1999-2002. But where did the animals go?

In Pierre Huyghe's exhibition, like the sea creature inhabiting the *Sleeping Muse* of Brancusi (*Zoodrama 4*, 2011), the viewer experiences the space as a foldable material, with different expansions inwards and outwards like a house of leaves. A multitude of layers are encompassed: the walls have been reused from the former exhibition of Mike Kelley, and *Timekeeper*, 1999, reveals the scratched convolutions of different coats of paint used in former exhibitions. Some structures are awkwardly set or overlapping: the *Blanche Neige Lucie*, 1997, screen is placed at the edge of the space, like in a service corridor; a corner of the black ice rink, *L'expédition scintillante, Acte: Untitled (Black Ice Stage)*, 2002, disappears behind a wall. The works contaminate each other and let parasites develop. The sudden barking of the pink-legged dog from *Untitled*, 2012, overlaps with the chorus of the Kate Bush song coming from the film *The Host and the Cloud*, 2010. Various elements are dovetailed organically and shape the exhibition into an ecosystem.

Huyghe's project manages to be understood long after an ephemeral visit. After the exhibition was finished, I longed for it like a familiar place. It had grown roots like a garden or taken shelter like a gastropod in my memory. This impression is related to the inherent serendipity of the activation of the works. As it will be different for each viewer depending



on the hour, the day of the week or even the weather, there is always something more to expect. Tristan Garcia, in his essay on the exhibition, speaks about the contemporary necessity to be "more" present than the present as a quest to "intensify time".³ Like living elements in an ecosystem, the works have the randomness of nature in the present. The viewer has to be on the lookout.

Anywhere Anywhere, Out of the World at the Palais de Tokyo is titanic by comparison. It unfolds linearly through the numerous plateaus of the 22,000 m² building, in the shape of a path snaking through junctions and revolutions punctuated by events of various intensities. This form defines the main difference in the typology of exhibition. Parreno creates a complex narrative using the properties of the architecture – massive empty spaces with bare walls (visible ligaments and cement skin). The atmosphere is spooky: neon lights blink intermittently (*56 Flickering Lights; Marquees*, 2013), pianos play (*Petrouchka*, 2013), walls move by themselves (*Bibliothèque clandestine* with Dominique Gonzalez Foerster) and cartels appear and disappear (*Flickering Labels*, 2013). The absence of the human figure signifies the presence of the machine in relation to language. The hand of an automat writes: "What Do You Believe, Your Eyes or My Words?" as a robot counterfeits Marilyn Monroe's writing (*Marilyn*, 2013). Then, a child appears like a ghost to tell us about the existential thoughts of AnnLee. The other children from *No More Reality*, 1995, and Zinedine Zidane (from *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, 2006, with Doulas Gordon) are the spectral shapes of memories.

The script is very important. In this progressive construction of a drama, the visitor is constantly reinforced in his position as the viewer. The exhibition is contingent on the polarity



ABOVE: Exhibition view, Philippe Parreno, *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out Of The World*, Palais de Tokyo, 2013
Philippe Parreno, *TV Channel*, 2013 (detail). Courtesy of Pilar Corrias Gallery
On screen: *No More Reality, La manifestation*, 1991. Courtesy of Air de Paris. Photo by Aurélien Mole
LEFT PAGE: Pierre Huyghe installation view at Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2013, Photo by Marina Fokidis

between the audience and the staged set. It also refers to the apparatus of cinema with a succession of sequences with narrative disruptions, but the viewer can feel trapped in the cavern of simulacra. Parreno's exhibition leaves a narrative memory whereas Huyghe's memory is spatial.

Also the narrativity of *Anywhere Anywhere, Out of the World*, made me wonder about the backstory, which brings us to something very idiosyncratic. *Pierre Huyghe* puzzles with the detachment of the subjectivity. The human's absence allows the exhibition to become an organism in itself. I stand at the periphery with all the other viewers I don't know; the ones I talked with or the ones who came with me. Synchronicity, rhythm, minute movements shape a shared experience within the community of the audience.

If we consider that all exhibitions are the making of a public, the imagination of a world⁴, Huyghe manages to reconsider the mode of address to the public in contrast to Parreno, despite the quality of the story. He maintains a certain traditional idea of the spectacle based on drama: there is not enough imagination focused on how the public will interact with the exhibition, despite the 'interactive' displays. The ecosystem of Huyghe leaves the experience to chance and escapes, in a way, a commodification of time. In this sense, it extends on his early work on institutional critique around the allowance of free time (*L'Association des temps libérés*, 1995).

Even so, I have the feeling that this unanimous judgment that 'Pierre Huyghe beat Philippe Parreno' is connected to the present attraction towards speculative realism, which also influenced Huyghe. The subtle macabre procession at the Palais de Tokyo reminds me of the character of Orlando reading Sir Thomas Browne: Parreno's solipsistic approach is also an attempt to address mortality in the language of a Modern. Huyghe's vitalist approach, as Tristan Garcia concludes in his text for the exhibition, is more in connection with the contemporary spirit: "This nebulous contemporary spirit inhabits the work of Pierre Huyghe (...), it is asking: who am I really? the echo of his own voice answers: neutralised you are nothing; you're just intensity."⁵

1. Maria Lind, "Complications; On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art," *Public 39*, New Communities, Spring 2009.

2. Interview with Jean-Christophe Royoux in *Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1998.

3. Tristan Garcia, *Qu'est-ce qu'être intense? Pierre Huyghe*, dir. Emma Lavigne, Centre Pompidou, 25 September, 2013 – 6 January, 2014, Editions Centre Pompidou, 2013.

4. Simon Sheikh, *Constitutive effects: the techniques of the curator in Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O'Neill, Open Editions, 2007.

5. Tristan Garcia, 2013-2014.