

Mónica Amor
From Plasticity to Elasticity: Philippe Parreno's Permanent Revolution

Abstract

This essay focuses on French artist Philippe Parreno's 2013-2014 Palais de Tokyo exhibition *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of this World* to explore how the artist utilizes the exhibition format to produce an aesthetic imaginary concerned with intermediality, collaboration, spectatorial attention and distraction. It examines the forms of object and image dissipation that Parreno and his collaborators mobilised through a digital network that activated ghostly environments in the spatiality of this unique exhibition space. Utilising the exhibition as a controlled dispositif that interfaced with viewers, *Anywhere* repurposed the normative structure of the exhibitionary complex to stage alternative relations between objects and subjects within the spectral conditions of the digital. The exhibition, rather than a framework that contains art, was used by the artist to stage relations and query contemporary rituals of artistic integration. The essay concludes that Parreno's techno-environment and its anti-instrumentalising itinerary, posed, but didn't resolve, recurring concerns with agency and publicness under intensified regimes of biotechnological integration.

Keywords

Philippe Parreno, Exhibitions, Palais de Tokyo, Techno-environments, Technosphere, Integration of the Arts, Exhibition as form.

From Plasticity to Elasticity: Philippe Parreno's Permanent Revolution.¹

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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.

Philippe Parreno, 2013.

Constructing on a large scale means moving toward vulnerability; thus, synthesis requires courage—the audacity of the frail [...] I would like to make a construction at the limits of fragility, since relations are sometimes extremely labile, extremely unstable, often living or turbulent like breaths of wind.

Michel Serres, 1990.

A translucent trapezoidal device lit with light bulbs lingers over the entrance to the famed Palais de Tokyo in Paris (hereafter PdT)—the contemporary art center which occupies the west wing of the 1937 building constructed on the occasion of the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques de la Vie Moderne*. Originally meant to house two separate museums of modern art, the Palais de Tokyo, as it was already known at the time, is a stark, mammoth building with two distinct wings adjoined by a central patio framed by a colonnade. The effect is distinctly monumental, a clear reminder of the pompous architecture that would be privileged by the pre-WWII nationalisms that populated Europe in the late 1930s and against which architects in postwar France would voice their objections.² The luminous elegant object exudes an aura of high-end design and could belong at the entrance of one of the many luxurious buildings that populate Paris' 16th arrondissement. But for those entering the Palais de Tokyo any day between October 23, 2013 and January 12, 2014, the stylised shape might have been recognised as one of Philippe Parreno's marquees—his own version of those projecting canopies over the entrance

1

I want to thank the OBOE editors for their invitation to submit a text for publication and Larry Busbea for his reading of the text. His work is a source of constant inspiration.

2

It is important to note that despite these formal similarities the Palais de Tokyo was itself realised under the aegis of the left wing Popular Front government in place between 1934-38. It was designed by the architects Jean-Claude Dondel, André Aubert, Paul Viard and Marcel Dastugue.

of theatres which display the titles of a play or a movie and the names of the main performers. Parreno's 2013 marquee jutting out onto the steps that lead into the PdT looks little like the traditional (and these days almost extinct) objects. Around eighty marquees bear Parreno's name as author, while his actual name, or anything resembling a signature, is absent. This accords with a number of other transformations that the conventional marquee undergoes in Parreno's work: size, material and shape all divert from functionality and specificity to signify mainly by virtue of their location. Following this logic *Marquee* (2013) [fig. 1] announces another kind of show, one which overlaps with theater and film in many ways but which, despite the collaborative endeavor that produced it, remains Parreno's own and is rooted within a certain French plastic tradition and a reflection on modern techno-spatial configurations that date back to the 19th century. Or so, I will suggest by associating the artist's 2013-14 experimental approach to the form of the exhibition with efforts to produce a synthesis of the arts which aimed to interject emerging technological horizons, while rejecting normative models of object production, display and spectatorial interaction.

fig. 1
Philippe Parreno, *Marquee*,
2013. Exhibition view:
*Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the
World*. Palais de Tokyo, Paris
2013. Photo: Andrea Rossetti



It was precisely the 1937 expo that gave impulse to the notion of a synthesis of the arts which most famously materialised in Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's *Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux*: a 1500 m² tent structure that featured murals and photomurals by Fernand Léger and Roberto Matta—aided by the young Asger Jorn—promoting modern technology and urban culture. This prototype for a museum of contemporary art, which the pavilion exemplified, aimed to bring together architects, painters and sculptors, following the theme of the “integration of urbanism, architecture, and art in modern life”³ proposed by the 1937 event. Several elements of this highly heterogeneous historical project are of interest when thinking about Parreno's own intermedial practice. To supporters of the collaboration between artists and architects, such as architectural historian Siegfried Giedion and Léger, such an endeavor would counteract the extreme specialisation prompted by the 19th century while at the same time acknowledging and being shaped by recent developments in technology, science, philosophy, and culture at large (it would also reinvigorate the decayed notion of monumentality by positioning centre stage the civic relevance of large-scale collaborations between artists and architects in public space).⁴ In 1937 Jeanneret and Le Corbusier's structure would explore this through the idea of a temporary exhibition space and their attention to the interrelation between the constitutive elements of the Pavilion and the spectators. The initial building, to be made of panels, was replaced by canvas—a material Jeanneret had been working with and that is associated with ephemeral architectures. A visual constellation of images (involving urbanism, sculpture and painting) was developed for the interior. It incorporated artworks, images, text, graphic elements, and a dynamic use of colour. The exterior, in the meantime, like a cinematic screen, caught the shadows of the surrounding trees, adding to the overall transient effect.

Fast-forward seventy-six years. We cross the entrance of another, more static effort at a synthesis of the arts: the PdT itself with its mythological architectural decoration and static sculptural program. Inside, however, the rather dark reception area contrasts with the luminous panel behind the ticket desk against which the bodies of staff and visitors stand out—almost like black silhouettes in an animated film. We have entered the elusive world of images that has guided so many of Parreno's projects. His is not a synthesis of the major arts, as Le Corbusier proposed in a text reprising the 1937 theme of an integration of architecture and art published in the French resistance paper *Volontés* in December 1944—then rooted in an epochal desire for post-war reconstruction whose catchwords were harmony, community, monumentality and collaboration.⁵ Yet collaboration as a strategy of artistic production has indeed become a trademark of Parreno's practice almost as much as his defiant marquees. *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of This World*, as the 2013-14 PdT monumental installation-cum-exhibition, occupying the 22,000 m² of the institution, was entitled, was precisely an interdisciplinary tour de force that involved artists, musicians, architects, and lighting, sound and set designers. This accords with an early tendency to co-produce and co-sign works with a generation of artists sceptical of conventional notions of authorship and raised alongside a proliferation of cultural templates of re-mixing facilitated by the internet, digital

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Danilo Udovicki-Sleb, “Le Corbusier and the Paris Exhibition of 1937: The Temps Nouveaux Pavilion”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56, no. 1 (March 1997): 42-63.

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Jose Luis Sert, Fernand Léger and Siegfried Giedion, “Nine Points on Monumentality” [1943] in Siegfried Giedion (ed.), *Architecture, You and Me. The Diary of a Development* (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 1958), 49.

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Collaboration had gained momentum in France with the formation of the Union for Art (1936). This was mainly thanks to the work of Algerian-born French artist André Bloc, founding editor of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, who more than anyone rallied untiringly around a collaboration between painters, sculptors and architects. See Joan Ockman, “A Plastic Epic: The Synthesis of the Arts Discourse in France in the Mid-Twentieth Century”, in Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen and Esa Laaksonen (eds.), *Architecture + Art. New Visions, New Strategies* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Academy, 2007), 35. Collaboration also resonated with the socialist agenda of the French Popular Front (led by Léon Blum) in power between 1936 through 1939.

technologies and the entropic nature of reproducibility and appropriation.⁶ At PdT, collaboration is subsumed under the directorial skills of Parreno and the large scale of the architecture, which becomes the integrative element around which a series of visual and sound elements, objects and images coalesce. Organised with the help of choreographer Randall Peacock, as a number of scenes, each encompassing its own image or object, sound and space, the exhibition featured works by other artists, including a large piano by Liam Gillick entitled *Factories in the Snow* (2007). The latter, along with three other Disklavier pianos situated across the building, played Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1910-11), the musical score of one of the most famous Ballets Russes productions. It tells the story of three puppets, brought to life by a charlatan during a folk festival, one of which kills Petrushka after duelling for the love of the ballerina. Petrushka returns as a ghost only to undergo a second death. This intersection of phantom, puppet, and spectacle, firmly rooted within the enchanted technological environments of the 19th century and related forms of entertainment, looms over Parreno's vast scenario. Indeed, Stravinsky's score, in dialogue with a central computer, generates the digital programs to which lights, soundscapes and the appearance of images, or the behaviour of objects, is set. Accordingly, contributions by sound designer Nicholas Becher, or dialogues with landscape designer Bas Smets, while shaping the *parcours* of the show, are fully integrated into the spectacle and not appreciated as individual elements or categorisable as specific works.

The issue of integration versus synthesis has been at the centre of 20th century debates concerning the dialogue between art and architecture. In theory, synthesis suggested autonomy within unity, but in practice, it tended to relegate painting and sculpture to a supplementary status. In contrast to integration, this vision sustained the idea of competing mediums. In 1956, Pierre Francastel's *Art et Technique* aimed instead to theorise "plastic thought" in terms of a shared "plastic valuation" between the arts. In architectural historian Larry Busbea's precise analysis, 'plastic thought' lay latent in all works of art and thus integration would not happen among the various arts but in relation to plastic values and concerns. Most importantly, integration would be shaped by the arts' affinities with advances in technology and science. "Thus", writes Busbea, for Francastel, "integration is not a matter of a rapprochement between art and architecture but a more profound structural connection between plastic activity in general and the techno-scientific social base".⁷ If this gave way to the "multidisciplinary 'team' mentality that characterised avant-garde collectives in the sixties", and to "interdisciplinary integration" to be realised at the scale of the city, as Busbea writes, for Parreno, at the turn of the century, collaborative practices "are made of games and desires [...] interwoven relations, transfers of strength and authority".⁸ They are a way, in other words, to undermine categories and disciplinary boundaries, to undo the tyranny of centralised knowledge and bring some disorder to the abstract, virtual and algorithmic trajectories of the all-encompassing technospheres that shape everyday life. However, rather than posit *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of This World*, as an emancipatory techno-utopian landscape of ludic distraction, my aim is to explore the forms of dissipation that Parreno and his collaborators mobilised through the digital network that activated their ghostly objects and environments in the spatiality of the exhibition space. Utilising the exhibition as a controlled technique that interfaced with viewers, *Anywhere...* repurposed the normative structure of the exhibitionary complex to stage alternative relations between objects and subjects within the spectral conditions of the digital. I propose here that the exhibition, rather than a

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Early collaborators included artists Bernard Joisten, Pierre Joseph, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster but many more (Pierre Huygue, Carsten Höller, Lyam Gillick, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Douglas Gordon) joined in subsequent years.

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Larry Busbea, *Topologies. The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970* (Cambridge [MA] and London: The MIT Press, 2007), 174-175.

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"Interview I—Hard to Defragment Myself. Café de Flore, Paris, 2000-2002", in *Philippe Parreno. Hans Ulrich Obrist. The Conversation Series* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007), 30.

framework that contains the art, was used by the artist to stage relations and probe contemporary rituals of integration. In short, Parreno's techno-environment and its anti-instrumentalising itinerary, posed, but didn't resolve, recurring concerns with agency and publicness under intensified regimes of biotechnological integration.

Architectural Shells

Thoughts on how a collaboration between the arts could best take place were considered by Le Corbusier in an unrealised project for an exhibition space aimed at testing—laboratory style—the synthesis of the arts. The Porte Maillot Pavilion, which takes its name after the south-western corner of the 17th arrondissement, was first conceived in 1949 as a permanent structure composed of “covered and semi-covered” elements that would retain the park-like aspect of the site.⁹ Lack of funding and the passing of time led to a reprise of the initial idea which in 1952 consisted of a series of pavilions that would house traveling exhibitions and would encourage constant change of the material components (architecture and works) through multifarious forms of interaction with the public and a focus on the architectural promenade. The emphasis was on fluid interactions between inside and outside and a dynamic flow around the exhibition panels housed below the “umbrella-like structural system”.¹⁰ According to Le Corbusier a passive situation would be transformed into an active one through the elusive concept of “workshops”. These would provide a framework for the interactions between artists and the public, yielding works that would be sold or destroyed to guarantee constant change. They could eventually also incorporate music and dance.¹¹

As Ann Koll observes, it was this version of the Port Maillot Pavilion, comprising two umbrella roof structures covering two superimposed orthogonal floors, which became Le Corbusier's prototype for a series of exhibition pavilions in the post-war period. What interests me here the most is the concept of a flexible architectural shell conducive to temporal interactions and assorted artistic activities. The Swiss architect had channeled this concept through the notion of a “box of miracles” and that of “spontaneous theatre” inspired by Brazilian carnival and street theatre in Venice.¹² A simple cubic architectural structure could be conducive to formal and conceptual flexibility, aimed here at humanist-infused forms of interactivity and creativity. In 1995 Parreno described a postmodern version of such a shell in a short book entitled *Snow Dancing* [fig. 2], which narrates the one-and-a-half hour event of the same name. Situated in a former factory building of 4000 m² in the outskirts of Dijon, the erratic and elusive party convened by Parreno lacked purpose and clarity (though it was said to be a book launch). Like the space in which it took place, the identity of the event was uncertain. “There are traces of trade exhibitions and fairs that have taken place”, wrote Parreno, “outlines of things that have existed and activities that have taken place”. Multi-purpose here may be an equivocal qualifier and the ephemeral community summoned by the event, exposed to aural, visual and theatrical registers interwoven with forms of advertising, promotional materials, and leisurely activities such as reading and dancing, failed to coalesce. Parreno made several allusions to the political implica-

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Ann Koll, *The Synthesis of the Arts in the Context of Post-World War II: A Study of Le Corbusier's Ideas and His Porte Maillot Pavilion* (PhD Diss.: The City University of New York, 1999).

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Ibid., 197-98.

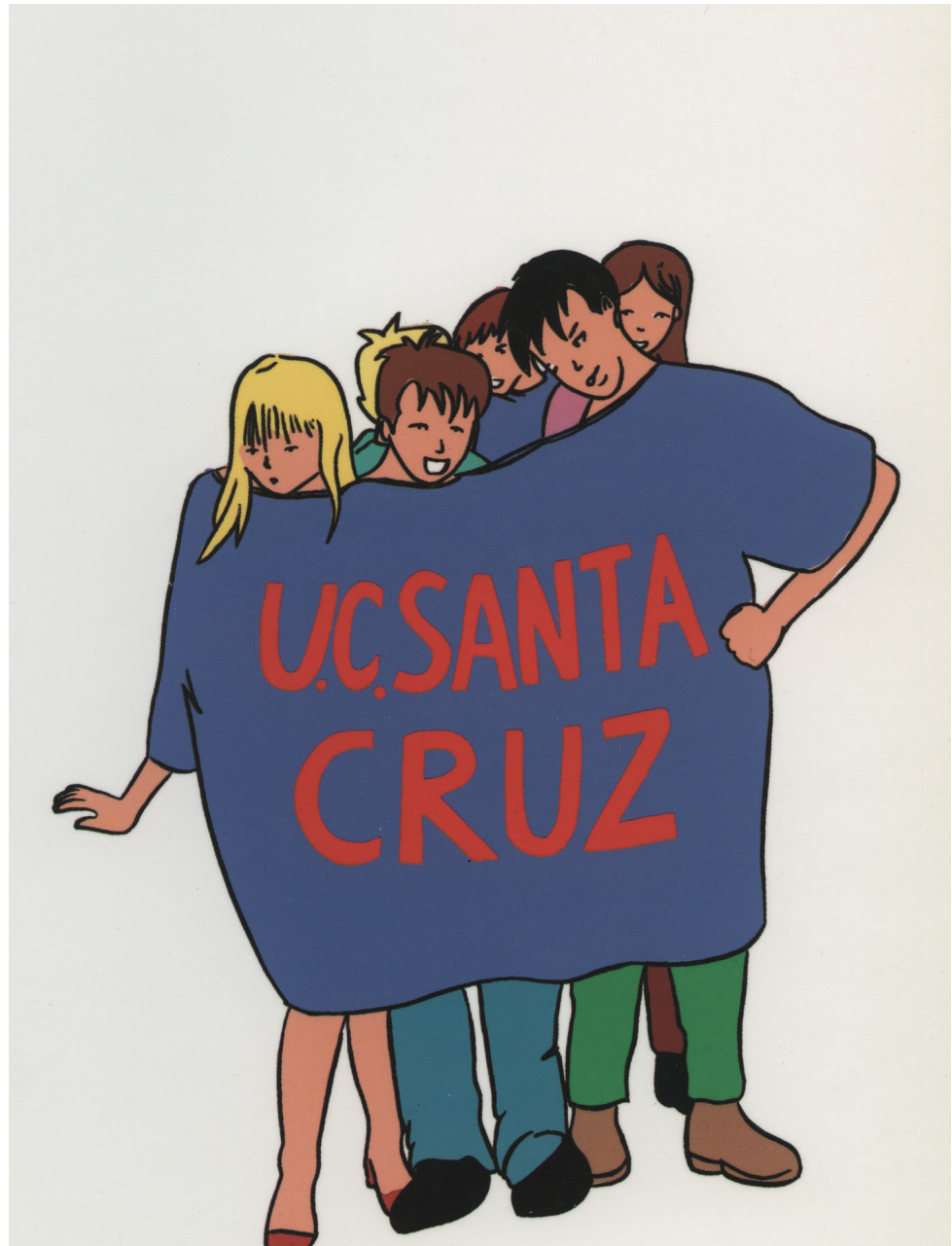
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Ibid., 199.

12

Ibid., 135.

fig. 2
Philippe Parreno, *Snow
Dancing*, 1995. GW Press
London. Book cover



tions and possibilities of this coming together under an undefined program and space but in the end the only gesture of resistance was a refusal of domestication: “To reinvent continually a form of the social is to avoid domestication”,¹³ wrote the artist in the short book. This was done through images, sounds, “and other atmospheric effects”. Recalling Situationist events such as the 1959 *Cavern of Antimatter* (*Cavern de l'anti-matière*), featuring 144 meters of industrial painting by the artist Pinot Gallizio covering the walls of the Gallerie René Drouin in Paris, Parreno highlights the architectural *détournements* facilitated by these repurposed shells. At Drouin, Gallizio, with the aid of Guy Debord, produced a synesthetic environment that involved olfactory, sonic and visual elements aimed at foregrounding play and experimentation against instrumentalisation and specialisation. It was a critical response to the rhetoric of humanist harmony of the immediate post-war period represented, precisely, by the then exhausted project of a synthesis of the

13

Philippe Parreno, *Snow Dancing* (London: GW Press LTD, 1995), passim.

arts. Situationist strategies, such as unitary urbanism, had rejected the fallacy of modernist functionalism and compartmentalised areas of competence that widened the gap between the fine arts and culture at large. But Parreno's generation, and Parreno's *Snow Dancing* (with its myriad participants, purposeless activities and throw-away products) seemed to be both symptomatic of and a response to what two years later the critic Sanford Kwinter would call the "efficient but one-dimensional marketplace world in which we live". One in which design is the umbrella term for a wide variety of activities destined to shape image identity into hyper-stylised products. "Together", Kwinter wrote regarding the proliferation of art directors, lifestyle magazine advertising, homepages, logos, "[these] form a seamless performative mesh, a cultural project in the fullest sense of the word, one of nonstop modulation and adrenalated *display*".¹⁴

Parreno's more recent displays foreground the materiality of the site, the entropic nature of images and the integrated nature of our senses with (and against) the "electronic disciplinary apparatus" that regulates our everyday routines. He often refers to factories and warehouses refurbished as art galleries as the places where he first encountered work bound to notions of site-specificity and intermediality. Le Magasin in Grenoble, where he grew up and attended art school, proves exemplary as a direct influence on the *Snow Dancing* event of 1995. The original structure consisted of a 3,000 m² industrial hall built by the Gustave Eiffel workshop for the 1900 Paris World Fair. Acquired later by a hydroelectric equipment company from Grenoble, the iron structure was dismantled and reassembled in Parreno's city where it functioned, among other things, as a warehouse. In 1986 it reopened after an architectural renovation designed by architect Patrick Bouchain, aimed to restore much of the building to its original state. The large nave of the structure, covered by a pitched glass roof and flanked by a double clerestory, is the central element of the building. Aside from large-scale, site-specific works, the space and the ensuing institution has embraced, in more recent years, a paradigm of interactivity and interdisciplinarity while seeing itself as "a generator of exhibitions, events, shows, encounters [and] performances". Workshops and a school complement the event and experience-oriented agenda of Le Magasin and resonate with Bouchain's penchant for researching the site of his projects by establishing social situations in which a network of collaborators and users inform the final result. Accordingly, a description of Bouchain's architectural practice by the website Spatial Agency, is a distant echo of Parreno's own work and that of his contemporaries, famously dubbed "Relational Aesthetics" by curator Nicolas Bourriaud:

most of [Bouchain's] projects begin with establishing a network of interested people, collaborators, residents, local government officials, neighbourhood groups etc. Once this network is in place, the site is activated socially, usually through opening a small space that functions as a restaurant, site office and consultation area where passers-by and interested people can find out about the project, give their views, or simply watch a film.¹⁵

14

Sandford Kwinter, *Far from Equilibrium. Essays in Technology and Design Culture*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (Barcelona and New York: Actar, 2007), 38.

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See website: <http://www.spatialagency.net/database/why/political/bouchain>, accessed February 2017. It is beyond the scope of this essay to parse the debate on *Relational Aesthetics*. Instead I want to call attention to the focus on community life that Giedion, deeply attached to a humanist élan, proposed in "The Need for a New Monumentality" (1944). For Giedion, contemporary architecture, with its interest in the honesty ("naked and rough") of market halls, factories and "the bold vaults of the great exhibition buildings", led the way towards a "language of our time". He called for art to occupy public spaces and be brought back into contact with the community, for artists to build "centers of social life". In "The Need for a New Monumentality", in *Architecture, You and Me. The Diary of a Development*, 26, 31. For reasons of space I can't explore this, at times contradictory text further, yet it is highly relevant in thinking about a number of contemporary artistic practices concerned with sociability.

Additionally, “with a background in theatre, circuses and urban festivals, Bouchain approaches architecture as event, creating maximum impact through a mixture of illusion, clever use of materials and innovative programming”.¹⁶ This resonates too with the original program for a “Site for Contemporary Arts” as the PdT was conceived for its 2002 opening led by Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans. With an interest in experimentation, events, flexibility and a dialogue between cinema, music, architecture, design, fashion and the visual arts they privileged the idea of the “pavilion” as a creative laboratory.¹⁷ Invoking the “non-stop modulation” unleashed by global neoliberal markets and the digital environments of the turn of the 20th century, such dissolution of boundaries signalled an interdisciplinary freedom alongside unsustainable collective encounters mediated by the contingency of available forms.

In the 1990s, Kwinter warned about the “comprehensive cultural system of management” and “engineering of human affect” that may be seen to have foreground the about-face the relational playground PdT incarnated in the early 2000s. “Like the coils of anaconda”, he wrote, “loop after loop of the soft-infrastructural mesh is drawn daily around us, not to crush us, but merely to restrict expansion in unsanctioned directions”.¹⁸ By 2013 Parreno’s *Anywhere...* would use the exhibition to stage and probe the hypermediated reality of the digital and the illusory individualism sanctioned by the vast possibilities of cyberspace. Following the entropic materiality and social dispersion of *Snow Dancing*, he reprised the question of display-cum-exhibition now under the accelerating conditions of cognitive computation. His two-fold preoccupation with reinventing the social (in order to avoid domestication) and renegotiating form (in order to make it public) manifested itself on an unprecedented scale and was more ambitious than ever in its attempt to disrupt entrenched habits of artistic and digital consumption.¹⁹

Time Code

In 2002 Parreno expressed renewed interest in the event-category as a substitute for the conventional organisation of the exhibition as a container of objects in order to explore “unsanctioned directions”. He began to deploy the concept of the time code as “an electronic indexing method”²⁰ structuring the tempo of the exhibition (its various visual and aural components) as one would script or score a musical performance or theatre piece. On the occasion of a 2002 exhibition at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris the artist utilised a show controller as a centralising device that orchestrated five different sequences of the film *Alien Seasons*, a main component of the show. In rapport with these sequences the controller also determined the timing of several other elements, including the covering of windows to create a cinematic space for the film *El Sueño de una cosa* (2002) as well as a project-

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Ibid.

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Interview with Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans, “A Site to Inhabit” in *Palais 15*, (Special issue on *The History of Palais de Tokyo since 1937* (Spring 2012): 131.

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Kwinter, *Far from Equilibrium*, 39.

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In 1943, the same year “Nine Points on Monumentality” was published, the anthropologist Margaret Mead wrote about the opposing approaches to art in pre-scientific and modern societies. The short text, which Parreno has acknowledged as influential, highlighted the integrated quality of Balinese culture and how a relational logic (between dance, design, music, etc.) appealed to all the senses: “For Art to be Reality, the whole sensuous being must be caught up in the experience”. Advancing issues that would preoccupy artists in the decades following the 1960s, she added: “we need to break down the present dichotomy between the artist, the work of art, and the spectator, and realise that any patterned activity of a people—a football match, the group of bowlers in a bowling alley—is closer to an art form than a group of dubiously reverent attendants at an art gallery or in a concert hall”. See Margaret Mead, “Art and Reality. From the Standpoint of Cultural Anthropology”, *College Art Journal* 2, no. 4, Part 1 (May 1943): 119.

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Philippe Parreno, “Sitcom Ghost”, in *Rirkrit Tiravanija (Tomorrow is Another Day)*, exh. cat. (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2004), 97-116.

ed colour sequence *Mont Analogue* (2001), to be seen only from the outside of the building between 10pm and 6am. The realisation that the electronic signal could orchestrate the environment of the exhibition was reprised at Palais de Tokyo in 2013. In the monumental space, the score of Petrushka was set in dialogue with digital automation technology that structured the pace of the show with multi-sensorial effects that contrasted with the complex digital opacity (below the threshold of human perception) of the controlling apparatus. Parreno and sound designer Nicolas Becker divided the complex score into segments. Pianist Mikhail Rudy played the four scenes selected in thirty-one minutes and the entire exhibition was encrypted using these as a code: “I wanted,” said Parreno in an interview, “to link each event or work in the show to the piano [...] Things happen to be in sync in an uncanny way, and you don’t know why, but at the end you can feel the overall logic coming into play”.²¹ This intensified a conversation between the figure of the automaton, the puppet and the ghost as the organising matrix of the show and a multi-layered reflection on technology, spectacle and collectivity that has its roots in 19th century techniques of visuality and entertainment and would continue to preoccupy the likes of Giedion and Le Corbusier.²² Moreover, this amusement-park-effect orchestrated by the time-code of Petrushka was facilitated by the architectural shell that is the PdT. Accordingly, in regards to his approach to the 2013 exhibition, Parreno declared: “I started to think in terms of architecture and landscape design”.²³

The building that was now offered to the artist was the closest analogue to an industrial park of the kind Giedion found inspirational in thinking about the “new monumentality” the post-war period called for. A 2010-2012 renovation tripled the space of the institution and led *artdaily* to call it the “dustiest”²⁴ contemporary arts centre in Europe. This unfinished aspect, the remnants of past uses, the “in-progress look and feel”, the rawness of the walls and columns, the cavernous basement, the diversity of spaces, all contribute to a sense of endless elasticity where form can’t settle comfortably as objects would on the walls of a white cube. “My wish”, Anne Lacaton, from the architectural firm in charge of the overhaul, Lacaton & Vassal, told *Wallpaper* magazine, “is that after every exhibition, [the space] would become empty and then recomposed again [...] there is a real freedom of use”.²⁵ But what if recomposition were to happen continuously within the spatiotemporal frame of one exhibition? What if its elements were recycled from previous shows? What if its identity morphed and changed due to the unstable web of relations in which elements appeared and disappeared? As if to punctuate rather than conquer this vast indomitable architectural shell, its pliant spaces and shifting vistas, Parreno marked the *parcours* of the exhibition with fifty-six flickering lamps programmed to respond to the fifty-six movements of the music. Additionally, flickering wall labels made with electronic-paper-display technology did not merely identify the works in the space. Instead, while continuously changing, they featured textual fragments from *Snow Dancing*, making one architectural spectral shell and its multiple stories inhabit another.

21

Darius Khondji and Carlos Basualdo (eds.), *Philippe Parreno. Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of this World* (London: Koenig Books Ltd; Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 2014), 38.

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Critics would take note. As Anaël Pigeat observed in an interview with the artist: “with Petrushka, you become interested in themes related to the circus and the carnival that are very present at the end of the 19th century”. See Anaël Pigeat’s interview “Philippe Parreno, un fantôme est un livre oublié qu’on réinvente”, *Art Press* (October 21, 2013), <https://www.artpress.com/2013/10/21/philippe-parreno-un-fantome-est-un-livre-oublie-quin-reinvente/>, accessed January 2021. See also Mouna Mekouar, “Exhibition as Automaton,” in *Philippe Parreno, Anywhere, Anywhere*, 143.

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Philippe Parreno. Anywhere, Anywhere, 41.

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Thomas Adamson “The Palais de Tokyo in Paris: Europe’s biggest contemporary art center opens”, *artdaily.com* (April 14, 2012), <http://artdaily.com/news/54735/The-Palais-de-Tokyo-in-Paris--Europe-s-biggest-contemporary-art-center-opens>, accessed February 2017.

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Amy Verner, “Paris’ Palais de Tokyo reopens”, *Wallpaper* (April 18, 2012), <http://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/paris-palais-de-tokyo-reopens>, accessed February 2017.

This *mise-en-abyme* effect threaded through the overall structure of the show, not only because most of the spatial vignettes that constituted the exhibition had as a point of departure previous works by the artist, but also because most of them involved the work of others. Thus, this dual structure, in which the subject (author) and the object (artwork) is inhabited by another, is paramount for understanding their inherent instability, barely kept in check by another figure of alterity: the automaton that the time code, here defined by Petrushka, represents.

fig. 3
Philippe Parreno, *TV Channel*,
2013. Exhibition view:
*Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the
World*. Palais de Tokyo, Paris
2013. Photo: Andrea Rossetti



Or take the first work we encounter as we enter the vast gallery that serves as the proper entrance to the exhibition. *TV Channel* (2013) [fig. 3] consists of a wall-like LED screen that showed five short films produced by Parreno in the span of twenty-nine years. The LED screen, used mainly in stadiums in the late 1990s, offered definition and dissolution of the image depending on the vantage point of the viewer. It is a fitting metaphor for the volatility of the visual transformed into electronic signals. As spectators approach the screen, the images of the films disintegrate into thousands of particles scattered across the units that composed it. But immateriality comes to a halt when we find ourselves face to face with the device, laid bare, as it were, and buzzing “with the varying electronic interferences and sonic vibrations that the sounds and visuals in the film have now become”.²⁶ Two of the films in this continuous loop could be said to bracket this confrontation between materiality and ethereality, body and technology that the work, and the overall exhibition, staged. In *The Writer* (2007), the famous 1772 Jacquet-Droz automaton from the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire in Neuchâtel (Switzerland) clumsily writes on white paper with a feather pen: “What Do You Believe, Your Eyes or My Words?”. This simultaneously raises doubts about perceptual accuracy and literal representation, the automaton’s words, and by default Petrushka and the show’s time code, while setting in motion what the artist has referred to as the production of “machines without mechanisms”.²⁷ What seems initially to be a reflection on a historical lineage of technological automation that today finds its apex in the total networked, task-oriented environments of the city and the fully colonised

26

“CAC Málaga presents *TV Channel*: Philippe Parreno’s first solo exhibition in Spain,” *artdaily.org* (July 28, 2014), <https://artdaily.cc/news/71560/CAC-M-laga-presents-TV-Channel--Philippe-Parreno-s-first-solo-exhibition-in-Spain#.YQIHetMzbow>, accessed January 2021.

27

Philippe Parreno. *Anywhere, Anywhere*, 45.

(by corporate capital) virtual identities of the digital, is also an attempt to generate excess, glitches, viscosity, doubts, and to add sensoriality to the algorithmic matrix that generates the exhibition.

Ghosts, Automatons and Puppets

Automatons became popular in the age of Enlightenment. Produced to magically recreate human traits and to mesmerise audiences with their life-like qualities, these androids raised the issue of the powerful intersection between human and machine that looms large over modern debates on subject/object relations, art and technology. Parreno has of course been concerned with these inherent contaminations and imbrications during much of his career. The inhabitation of the subject by the ghosts unleashed by reproducibility and digital technologies, is at the core of several projects, such as the celebrated *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999–2003), *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait* (2006), and *Marilyn* (2012). The first work, an element of which is featured in one of the cavernous small galleries that constitute the basement-level of the PdT, is a short and profoundly moving film entitled *Anywhere Out of The World* (2000). It features a manga character (Annlee)—purchased by Parreno and his collaborator Pierre Huyghe in 1999—who, under copyleft, was shared with artists, friends and colleagues to be used in a variety of artistic endeavours. At PdT, Annlee melancholically ponders the identity vacuum that, as a generic product for sale, she represents, and on the multiple spectres for which she is a receptacle. As such, she speaks to mechanisms of authorial production involving silenced methods of citation and disguised appropriation, to technologies of reproducibility and the techniques of open theft, sampling, recycling and remixing that edit-based creativity exemplifies. She also instantiates the programmed regimes of subjectivation that underpin the delusion of networked individuality. “I have no voice”, says Annlee, in the short four-minute-film, and she concludes, invoking the title of the whole project: “I am no ghost just a shell”. Here, architectural shells are occupied by subject shells. This is further confirmed by artist Tino Sehgal’s own late contribution to filling the void that Annlee represents. At PdT, upon the conclusion of the film, we are confronted by a little girl meticulously trained by Sehgal who enacted and embodied Annlee while effectively and affectively meditating on the grand themes that the exhibition addressed, such as the nature of communications, relations, subjectivity, technology and reality. Here is Kwinter again prophetically encapsulating in the mid-1990s an epochal concern with technological progress and the perceptual and communicational regimes that it imposes on the subject: “communications, networks, computers, microprocessor control systems are socially toxic entities primarily when used ‘correctly’, that is, in their capacity to routinise interactions with people and processes in increasingly engineered, confined, and deterministic spaces”. He continues, suggesting that there is no outside of the digital interface, that

it is our duty and mandate to refuse this new, pseudo-material space entirely, and to follow the ‘minor,’ archaic path through the microchip, that is, to make the electronic world work for us to reimpair the rich indeterminacy and magic of matter out of the arid, cruel, and numericalised world of the reductionist-mechanical and the disciplinary-electronic.²⁸

Optimistic but vague, Kwinter’s statement puts an emphasis on ‘indeterminacy’, since a networked structure opposes binaries and dialectics (such as reality against virtuality) and thus clear pathways. *No More Reality* is precisely the title of that second film which brackets the theoretical meanderings of Parreno’s exhibition in

TV Channel. Subtitled “la manifestation”, the four-minute video is the result of a workshop realised by the artist in an elementary school in Nice in 1999. Asked to demonstrate in favour of demands they deemed desirable (for example, Christmas in September!), the moving images and four photographs produced in conjunction with the workshop feature seven and eight-year old kids parading the school yard on a sunny day while carrying banners and posters prominently and clearly displaying the adopted slogan: “No More Reality”. In the closest publication we have to a Parreno-catalogue-*raisonnée*, readers encounter maddening catalogue entries (written under the strict supervision of the artist) that attest to the unstable material formats that he favours. There, this version of the work is said to allude to a ‘disenchanted era’ shaped by reality effects produced by television, which Parreno has signalled as profoundly formative to his work. The gesture of substituting kids for adults, the catalogue entry states, derealises further the historically charged figure of the demonstration.²⁹ In France, demonstration conjures May 1968 and by default—since we are dealing with images here—the imperatives of the spectacle (firmly rooted in the colonisation of leisure by capital). Filmed more than fifteen years apart, *No More Reality* and *The Writer*, set the background for a narrative of displacements in which subjects and objects are neither grounded by truth nor in reality but whose forms technology has split open and unhinged from the confines of the body and the space of the screen. Take, for example, *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait* conceived in collaboration with Douglas Gordon in 2006 [fig. 4]. The ninety-minute-long film famously tracks the French soccer star as he moves across the field during a game between Real Madrid and Villareal, played in the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium in Madrid. The filming was done with seventeen 35mm cameras that never lose sight of Zidane. At PdT these seventeen points of view become literal as the film is projected on seventeen screens scattered across another underground, unfinished-looking gallery, which create endless replications of Zidane’s image. As if in a forest of mirrors, portraiture and its representational function, as well as the presupposition of subjecthood that it implies, leak towards dissolution, making the star player a ghost untethered from his shell.

fig. 4
Philippe Parreno, *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, 2006.
Exhibition view, *Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World*.
Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2013.
Photo: Andrea Rossetti



Reference to one more film, displayed prominently in one of the main galleries and available to viewers after traversing and lingering in a space half covered with fake snow, places the spectator firmly within the realm of the spectral and the phantasmatic that haunt the technoscapes we occupy daily. The film is entitled *Marilyn* (2012) [fig. 5] and the setting in which we encounter it is more traditionally cinematic: a large dark room with seating to encourage a proper audience arrangement. In the film, the camera embodies the famed actress' point of view while her voice describes the contents of a domestic interior room—arguably her room at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, which the setting recreates. But her descriptions only match what we see sporadically, which is enough to initially convince us that these meticulous accounts are verbal representations of what is displayed on the screen. Soon after, we see a pen writing, and then doodling intensely, on the stationary of the hotel: this experience of déjà vu conjoined with manual clumsiness links Marilyn to *The Writer*. The images alternate with views of the surroundings, jumpy close-ups and smooth pans that aim to embody the soma figured forth by the film. Music plays, a storm rages, a phone rings, water drips and an unsettling repetition creeps in when the voice-over describes again an unseen closet and coat rack. Rain alternates with views (and sounds) of the clunky retracing of words by what is now clearly an automated movement. As the camera withdraws slowly, the set is revealed: cameras, cables, cinematographers populate a film setting now divested of the talented actress who, for the last eighteen minutes or so, has led us through the space. But nothing is really missing. As Parreno clarified in an interview shortly after featuring the film at the Beyeler Foundation in Switzerland, the ghostly presence of Monroe is automated, produced by a series of algorithms. He has used biometry (voice, handwriting and eye recognition) to concoct Monroe's persona while a "three-axis delta robot" (displayed at PdT in a nearby gallery recreating Parreno's own signature) simulated Monroe's handwriting.³⁰

fig. 5
Philippe Parreno, *Marilyn*, 2012.
Exhibition view: *Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World*,
Palais de Tokyo, Paris 2013.
Photo: Andrea Rossetti



As the unpacking of a work such as *Marilyn* might suggest, the last twenty years have witnessed an aggressive interface between the body and the screen-based techniques of cyberspace. Thanks to the escalation of biotechnology the machine has been internalised, intensifying the forms of extension that

30

Louisa Buck, "The uncanny world of Philippe Parreno", *The Art Newspaper*, no. 236 (June 2012): 59.

Marshall McLuhan saw electronic circuits facilitating.³¹ However, these are deeply historical processes, and thus, as if to foreground the above, Parreno alludes to a confluence of the cinematic and the phantasmatic that invokes certain conditions of early cinema: its supernatural dimension, fantastic registers and hallucinatory potential. In *Marilyn* he induces some of these without a concrete image. Instead, the immaterial subject that advances or halts the narrative is here defined by its absence. “Her image killed her”, Parreno stated in the above interview, so as to justify the lack thereof.³² And so the film is structured around effects rather than presence. As Tom Gunning observes, early cinema (before 1906-07) was not narrative in the sense that we associate today with feature films. Constructed scenarios, tableaux, stage effects and tricks supported the illusion rather than advanced the story: cinema was an “act of showing and exhibition”. This cinema was one of “magical attractions” that favoured the production of scenes with “little connection and no characterisation.” It relied on off-screen effects—a strategy advanced by Parreno when one hears the ringing phone from the film throughout the spaces of the exhibition—and exploited surprising occurrences. This could well define a crucial vector of Parreno’s overall installation—more than once the artist has said that he sees exhibitions as films. At PdT soundscapes and light effects overlap, leak and connect, while the spectator panoramically perceives a space of constant transformation and jolt. Additionally, Gunning calls attention to the fact that early cinema offered “a new sort of stimulus for an audience not acculturated to the traditional arts”, thereby suggesting that a cinema of attractions was closer to the fairgrounds and the amusement park than the fine arts. He adds: “I believe that it was the exhibitionist quality of turn-of-the-century popular art that made it attractive to the avant-garde—its freedom from the creation of diegesis, its accent on direct stimulation”.³³ In turn, Parreno produces the exhibition as a mechanism of illusions that is revealed as an apparatus, putting the accent not on the story, but on the effect.

Interrelations

The premise that illusion is produced to be revealed situates us in ambiguous territory, which is exactly where I think Parreno wants to be. References to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in interviews and reviews of the artist’s use of the exhibition as a medium of sorts, for example, may contradict the structure of astonishment that a cinema of attractions deploys. Generally coined as a placeholder for practices that are predicated on a relaxed interdisciplinarity and/or intermediality, the term usually contrasts with the aesthetics of self-containment that characterise modernist painting and sculpture, and the cherished notion of medium-specificity. In a recent study entitled *Modernism After Wagner*, Juliet Koss warns of the ahistorical vacuum in which the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* operates. Severed from the specific context of 1849 when Wagner, in two texts written that year, advocated for a “unification of

31

Busbea tackles this in a recent study on responsive environments in the 1970s—a context that could very well be invoked to illuminate Parreno’s exhibitionary environments: “McLuhan’s conception of environment would even infiltrate one of his key concepts: extension. If older media had functioned primarily by extending or augmenting the functioning of a single sense organ...the new electronic environment of networks and computation extended humanity in an entirely new way”. Thus, three years after publishing *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), McLuhan wrote: “With circuitry we have, instead of extensions of hand or foot, or back, or arm, a kind of involvement of the whole nervous system, an extension of the nervous system itself, a most profoundly involving operation”. Marshall McLuhan, “The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion”, *Perspecta* 11 (1967): 166. Quoted in Larry Busbea, *The Responsive Environment. Design, Aesthetics, and the Human in the 1970s* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 38.

32

Ibid.

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Gunning borrows the term “attraction” from Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein, to define a theatre not of illusory absorption but impact. He writes: “then, as now, the ‘attraction’ was a term of the fairground, and for Eisenstein and his friend Yutkevich it primarily represented their favourite fairground attraction, the roller coaster, or as it was known then in Russia, the American Mountains”. See Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde”, in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (eds.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: BFI Pub., 1990), 59.

the sister arts”, the concept of the “total work of art”, she argues, has been decoupled from its revolutionary origins. Shaped by a German fascination with Greek classical ideals, Wagner had in mind socio-political transformation through the communal viewing experience of the musical drama. This viewing was to be active, political and ultimately utopian, with the *Gesamtkunstwerk* a model for the democratic culture Wagner projected for the future German nation. Instead, according to Koss, in 20th century discussions of art, “loosely associated with synesthesia, phantasmagoria, and psychedelia, *Gesamtkunstwerk* often stands for an artistic environment or performance in which spectators are expertly maneuvered into dumbfounded passivity by a sinister and powerful creative force”.³⁴

Parreno’s allegiances to spectatorial conditions that oscillate between the poles of absorption and estrangement muddle with corresponding notions of passivity and active engagement. His intermedia environments are not interested in synthesising the arts or creating strong unitary experiences that summon a communal audience (as the proponents of a synthesis of the arts also hoped). Instead, I want to suggest that Parreno’s event-oriented exhibitions foster the relational dynamics which are constitutive of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a synthesis of the arts and theatre to probe contemporary technical mediation and put pressure on the identity of forms. As Koss observes, reminding us of Michael Fried’s 1967 charge against Minimalism, “beyond being merely another potential intruder in the house of modernism, theatre represented the idea of an incursion past the carefully policed borders of the individual art forms. Thorny questions of quality aside, ‘theatre’ would appear to be a code for the very idea of interrelation”.³⁵

Architectural shell, screen, time code and bodies intersected and overlapped at PdT to get interrelations going, to avoid representational stasis and to encourage unsettling tensions between attention and distraction. Accordingly, Parreno’s automated environments figured the glitch, which might disrupt the flow of the time code, or imply unpredictability, to depart from smooth transitions and unified wholes. Nowhere is the potential glitch best thematised, both visually and aurally, than in one of the low-ceilinged basement galleries. At moments totally dark, the large space was illuminated by fourteen flashing marquees of different shapes and sizes, some made with white acrylic glass, some with translucent glass. The sporadic but recurrent electric buzz of these non-functional devices was accentuated by atonal electronic music. Like the flickering lights that punctuated the visitor’s parcourse, they too responded to the score, but failure to operate consequently was not detected by the spectator. Entitled *Danny the Street* (2013), the installation could be seen as an assaulting sign that conflated the worlds of theatre, cinema, and fairgrounds to produce those effects of surprise and stimulation that Gunning calls “attractions”. Against the customary association with spell that cinematic diegesis and filmic black boxes encourage, the glitch, the flicker, the LED screen, the fake snow, the ringing phone, the multiple screens, and the flesh and bone Annlee all functioned as attractions, as opaque disruptions that provided thickness to the thinness of the image.

If television proved formative in the 1990s and digital technologies in the 2000s, maybe theatre (and theatricality), as a sort of nostalgic revisitation, did as much in the 2010s. Asked to stage the exhibition *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp* curated by Carlos Basualdo in 2012 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art [fig. 6], Parreno developed a series of display strategies, sound pieces and support devices that aimed at weaving and highlighting the shared imagery, literal collaborations and affective relations that defined the rapprochement between these artists. Parreno, who did not participate in the show as an artist, was called by Basualdo a “*metteur-en-scène*”. The artist has expressed in several interviews how decisive the Philadelphia experience was for his approach to the exhibition at PdT. He refers to both as efforts to stage attention, to guide the

34

Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xii-xiii.

35

Ibid., xxiii.

viewer in a non-authoritarian way through the space of the exhibition.³⁶ However, in Philadelphia, asked to stage relations between the works and the artists in order to accentuate meaningful connections, the marquee, vitrines, display cases, sound pieces, and a Disklavier phantom piano playing Cage compositions, provided the interstitial, relational tissue that delivered the art works as something more than a series of discrete objects³⁷

fig. 6
Dancing around the Bride:
Cage, Cunningham, Johns,
Rauschenberg, and Duchamp,
2012, exhibition view,
Philadelphia Museum of Art.
Photo: Constance Mensh



While contributing to developing and advancing the enunciative structure of the Philadelphia exhibition, Parreno engaged in operations traditionally associated with curatorial agency. It is this choreographing effort that Parreno imported at the PdT.³⁸ Hence, elements from the Philadelphia exhibition showed up in Paris as direct citations—an operation which Parreno, as observed above, is quite fond of. Take for example *How Can We Know the Dancer from the Dance?* (2012), which consists of a circular dance floor partially surrounded by curved, thick moving walls as if bracketing the empty space. Upon closer inspection we hear the footsteps of dancers vigorously activating the visual void—a pre-recorded performance of Cunningham dancers that in Philadelphia was played in the absence of the real bodies which graced the stage only at certain hours. No shell, just a ghost, the bodiless performance reverted the digital dictum that Annlee represents as if to allude to the diaphanous relation participants sustain with the real (and memory). Elsewhere in the exhibition, another thick, movable wall filled with books chosen by artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster (*La Bibliothèque Clandestine*, 2013) revealed, when pushed, a small gallery where Cunningham and Cage reappear. Inside the intimate and well-lit gallery, Parreno re-staged an exhibition of the composer's

36

Céline Piettre, "Philippe Parreno's New Megashow Fills the Palais de Tokyo," *Blouin Artinfo* (October 26, 2013).

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Carlos Basualdo, "In the Absence of a Name", in Karen Marta (ed.), *Philippe Parreno, "Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World"*, exh. cat. (London: Koenig Books; Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 2014), 19.

38

Parreno acknowledges the importance of his participation in the Philadelphia exhibition for his exhibition at PdT. See *Blouin-Artinfo*, October 26, 2013 (Cf. footnote 33); Cyril Béghin, "A Matter of Synchronization", *Mousse*, no. 37 (February 13, 2013); Emmanuelle Lequeux, "Entretien avec un maître de l'illusion", *Beaux Arts* (September 19, 2013); "Un fantôme est un livre oublié que'on reinvente"; Parreno. *Anywhere, Anywhere*, 41.

drawings which took place at Margarete Roeder Gallery in New York in 2002. In that show, and equally at PdT, a Cage drawing was replaced by a Cunningham drawing every day, enacting the logic of ghostly alterity which informed the structure of the show.

Elasticity

Parreno's obsession with the split self, ghosts, automatons, shells, substitutes, ventriloquists, puppets and, one might add, collaborators, is a sustained reflection on identity, subjectivity and authorship produced by historical conditions. It takes spectators back to a 19th century imaginary concerned with modes of visibility and perception shaped by technology, reproducibility, and the urban conditions of modernity. This begins with the title of the show, shared with his Annlee film, which echoes 19th century French symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire's "Anywhere Out of This World", an 1869 ode to modern nomadism, the power of images, and the impossibility of transcendence.³⁹ At the core of Parreno's efforts one recognises a pressure on boundaries, the probing of a synthesis destined to willingly fail, to never attain wholeness or unity—thus, what his exhibition-environments underline is modulating forms that foreground the fluid intersections between subjects and objects, bodies and machines, images and reality. In fact, as early as 1997 Parreno had written that the object was "more or less a complex situation which can be transformed into another. By deforming it, by pushing it to its limits, we discover its affinities with what exists outside of it, in situ". Placing emphasis on "in-scription", he insisted on displacing attention from object to event: "and we accompany it never at its origins but always along its trajectory".⁴⁰ In the process, rather than productive mechanisms, Parreno's electro-tempered exhibitions resist the "reticular domination" that computational regimes impose on users, to explore alternatives to the forms of affect launched by the cycles of perpetual modernisation and consumption to which the privileged subjects of the experience economy are exposed.

Contra normative museological, cinematic, and theatrical structures of display, *Anywhere* was conceived as an interface in which a multisensorial environment countered the characteristic instrumentality of the digital apparatus around which the whole spectacle revolves. The overlapping materialities of this environment were predicated on the opacity of digital technologies, but yielded complex optical, aural, tactile and perceptual sensations that scoffed at the centrality of one sense over another, as well as the stubborn emphasis on object production and disciplinary restrictions. Perceptual refraction and the dispersal and disjunction of form were deployed to undo the limits between work and exhibition, while mobilising technological enchantment as a crucial historical vector that shapes our relationship to the bewitching flows of data that glide through our screens. The singular entity is nowhere to be found in these spaces where the time code's main objective was to replace rationality with relationality. Parreno thus cannibalised the role of the curator whose job is precisely to establish relations in space.⁴¹ And relations in time that undo visions of linear progress. As Jonathan Crary proposes at the end of his study on 19th century painting and visual culture, at

39

Baudelaire himself had borrowed the title from the English poet Thomas Hood, who in his poem "The Bridge of Sighs" (1844) tells the story of a woman who commits suicide and describes her plunge into death, as an *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World*. Parreno borrows the original doubling of the word "anywhere" which disappears in Baudelaire's title and may allude to a double absence of location and consciousness which accords with the figure of the puppet and the automaton.

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Philippe Parreno, "Evidences to be submitted to the free time litigation", in Pierre Huyghe, *The Trial*, exh. cat. (Munich, Kunstverein Munchen / Zurich, Kunsthalle Zurich Vienna, Secession / Dijon, Le Consortium), (Munich: Kunstverein, 2000), 5-9.

41

As Cyril Béghin observed in a recent interview with the artist: "This is how you have learned to think about objects, and films in particular with this elasticity—the possibility of their changing in the context of display". Béghin, "A Matter of Synchronization".

the turn of the century new technologies delivered flickering images projected on façades-cumscreens in public piazzas, defying classical monumentality long before an architectural postwar concern with the same term. Although foretelling “spectacular society” these new environments of images and mediatory devices were not totalitarian. Instead, their “fluctuating effects”, observes Crary, allowed for constant collective and individual reconstitution within the “spellbound” conditions of image proliferation.⁴² Accordingly, Parreno’s aesthetic kernel puts the emphasis on pliancy:

To get back to the idea of elasticity, it is as if the object rested attached to something it has produced and, at the same time, has not completely emerged from its shell [...] This is the thing that interests me the most: to produce diffractions of the object that will develop, to become its pollution, its project, its screenplay without ever ceasing to change [...] The permanent revolution⁴³: if you stop, you die.⁴⁴

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Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge [MA] and London: The MIT Press, 1999), 370.

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The “permanent revolution” is a term associated mainly with Leon Trotsky’s multi-step, global and heterogeneous class and political platform for achieving socialism. It was developed in essays published in 1905 and in book form in 1929.

44

Béghin, “A Matter of Synchronization”. This idea has recurred in interviews with the artist. In 2007 he told curator Hans Ulrich Obrist: “Art schools ask their students to resolve their ideas into a form. Whereas to me, it’s exciting when the content overflows beyond the form or the other way around. It’s the irresolution that is interesting. The dynamic of fluids is interesting because they question equilibrium”. Hans Ulrich Obrist and Philippe Parreno (eds.), *The Conversation Series*, vol. 14 (Köln: Walther Koenig, 2007), 10.

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