

8 Juin 1968 – 7 Septembre 2009,
2009 (installation view).
Photo: © Jean-Claude Planchet,
Centre Pompidou, 2009



If the fact that Philippe Parreno's Pompidou retrospective is but one of four separately curated retrospectives – with others at the Kunsthalle Zurich (May to August), the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (November to January 2010) and Bard College, New York (spring 2010) – seems grossly extravagant, then the nature of his work has not been properly understood. For Parreno's is an exhibition-by-exhibition practice that cannot be merely packed up like a normal retrospective and crated from one site to another: each exhibition is a unique experience. That much is made clear by two aspects of this retrospective: the aggressively homely yet informative catalogue raisonné that accompanies it (the contents of which proved to be quite hard to assemble, given the artist's reluctance to photograph his own ephemeral practice); and this exhibition's exemplary engagement with its space.

Located in the southern gallery of the Pompidou – a single, vast open space flanked on three sides by high floor-to-ceiling windows – the exhibition features seven works, three of which are new. The two dates of the title, *8 Juin 1968 – 7 Septembre 2009*, refer to the funeral procession of presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy and the end of the exhibition. Although the exhibition consists of numerous parts, including a children's book and workshops, the dominant mode is cinematic. The show begins with one of the artist's flickering cinema marquees above the space's entrance. Passing under this, one is suddenly overwhelmed by the voluptuous expanse of red carpet that sprawls throughout the entire space and whose livid splendour is reflected in the silver balloons (speech bubbles) which unevenly sequin the ceiling. Entitled *31 Janvier 1977 (2009)*, after the date of the Pompidou's inauguration, the piece also features a sound component, transmitting via microphones and overhead speakers the museum's immediate, visible exterior to the interior. Rather than breaking down any divisions, this piece, which comes off as a soundtrack, manages to further alienate the space from its urban surroundings, insulating it in a magic cinematic bubble.

Every ten minutes the exhibition transforms itself into a cinema: a series of mechanical blinds come down over the windows, blocking out all light, and a 70mm projector clicks into action and projects onto a large white wall towards the back of the space. The film, evocative of Tarkovsky, Chris Marker and the high production of Hollywood, is entitled *June 8, 1968*. It features a stunning montage of vignettes of lone individuals and crowds solemnly observing a passing train, inspired by American photographer Paul Fusco and his photo-documented journey on the train that transported Kennedy's corpse from New York to Washington in 1968. This redeposition of people straining to observe that which could not be seen – Kennedy's body – enters a complex, highly mediated nod of references, from the Lumière brothers' historic first public projection of film (a train entering a station) to a series of tracking shots in which the extraordinary power of film and its iconic accoutrements (marquee, red carpet) to promise, renew and shape 'reality' is put on centre stage. *Chris Sharp*

Philippe Parreno

8 Juin 1968 – 7 Septembre 2009

Pompidou Centre, Paris
3 June – 7 September