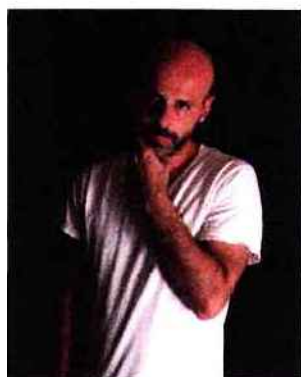


# Perennial Parreno

*The artist's play within a play*



ANNA SANSONI

In radically transforming the monumental space inside the Palais de Tokyo, Philippe Parreno is responding with verve to the wide-open invitation he has been given. In the process of devising this exhibition, Parreno took a brief time-out to have a chat with DAMN°. Driven by his dialogue with architecture and with the notion of the exhibition as a medium in its own right, the artist's works, ideas, and approach are orchestrated along the lines of a dramatic composition, with the spectral presence of objects, music, lights, and films serving as veritable guides. A monologue is translated into a polyphony.

For an artist to be given carte blanche for a solo exhibition not only provides the opportunity to fill a space but to transform its architecture into a kind of choreography. Philippe Parreno has answered this invitation from the Palais de Tokyo (it is the first time that an artist has been given free reign in the French institution since its enlarged renovation by Lacaton & Vassal in 2012) in a meandering way. It's as if the exhibition has become a landscaped scenario in perpetual evolution that visitors wander through.

"The idea to be able to produce a choreography of tension in the space – a bit like how you look out at the countryside and daydream a bit when you're in a car", explains the Algerian-born, Paris-based artist. "It's to produce the sensation of drifting, in a temporal or psychogeographical sense, like the Situationists' concept of the *derive* [drifting]", he adds, referring to the ideas propounded by Guy Debord.

We are meeting in Parreno's studio in Paris, down a leafy courtyard, just next to a nursery school. Compared to the seductive nature of much of his work,

his studio is remarkably pared down. Innumerable files of documents chronicling his ideas fill the bookshelves lining the far wall. It's a few weeks before his exhibition is to open, and Parreno is articulating how it is taking shape. "At the beginning of the project, I worked with a landscape artist on the logic of displacement", he says. "It's a parasitical idea, to transform the architecture and effectively restructure its usage. A bit like in being in a park, where one moment you're attracted by perspectives, then by sound."

## BODIES IN MOTION

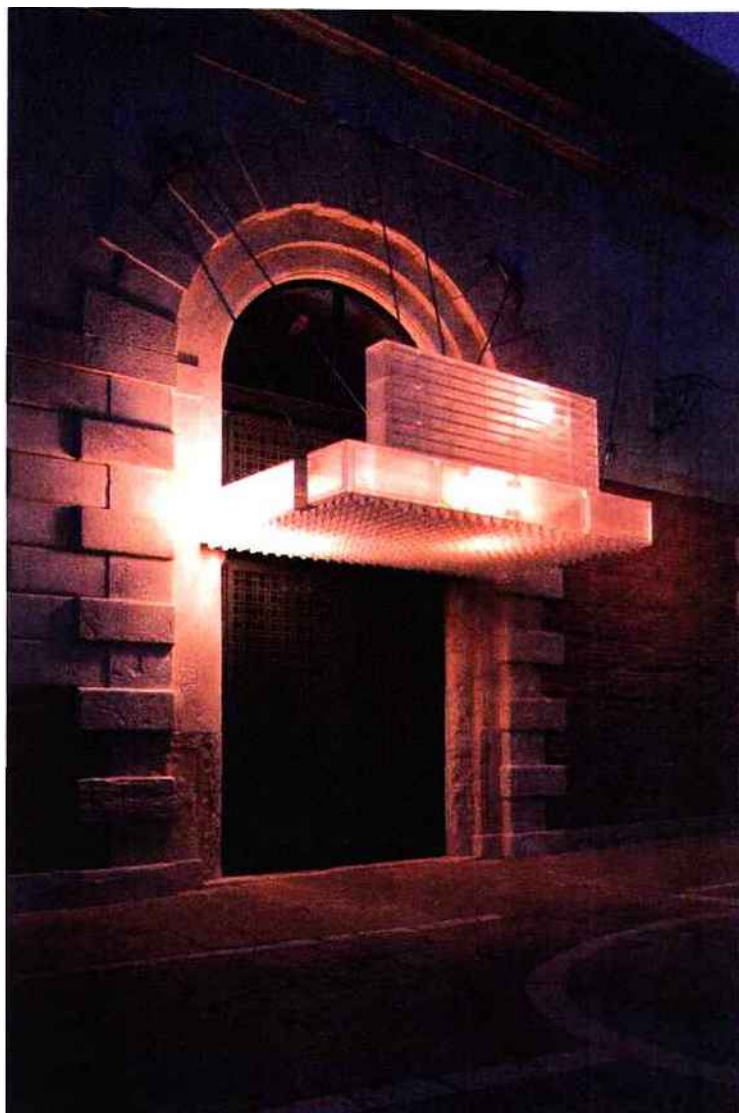
Imagine suspended ceilings, felted windows, and an automatic piano originally made by Liam Gillick and reconfigured for Parreno to play the Petrushka ballet music by Stravinsky. The music will link the artworks in the space, like a guide. "It's a bit like the idea of a play within a play – Petrushka was a puppet made of straw that comes to life", says Parreno, 49. "In Petrushka, there are scenes of a crowd watching something – the guiding of the automation is very present in Stravinsky's work. Effectively, I needed a

PHILIPPE PARRENO  
Photo: Claudio Cassano



MARILYN, 2012  
Installation with artificial snowdrifts  
Colour, sound mix: 5.1  
Aspect ratio: 2.39:1  
Duration: 19'49"  
Garage Center for Contemporary  
Culture, Moscow, 2013  
© Denis Sinyakov, Garage Center for  
Contemporary Culture





MARQUEE, 2013 (1)  
At the entrance of Punta della  
Dogana

DANCING AROUND THE BRIDE,  
2012 (2)  
Light sculpture: translucent acrylic  
glass, diffused acrylic glass (white  
satin finish), frosted pyrex tubes,  
light bulbs  
260 x 260 x 70cm



(2002), which was conceived after he and Pierre Huyghe co-bought the copyright for the Japanese Manga character Annlee. Twenty-eight works about Annlee were subsequently made by 18 artists, resulting in *No Ghost Just a Shell* – so-called because Annlee, a purchased product, belonged to whomever was able to fill her with any kind of imaginary material. Two years later, Tino Sehgal voluntarily re-incarnated Annlee by making a live, sculptural work featuring a girl personifying the manga character.

#### PAS DE DEUX

Parreno's own film about Annlee is included in the exhibition. Each screening will be directly followed by Sehgal's live piece "I've asked Tino to put this on stage and it'll alternate with the film I made", explains Parreno. "When the film stops, this small character will come out of the screen, a girl aged between nine and twelve, who walks and talks in a bit of a detached way, as if she's elsewhere. It's an attempt at invocation, of a book in a body."

guide to hang onto. In a random manner, following certain notes and motifs, things are going to appear in the space."

Parreno envisions his exhibition space as being "a bit like Kafka". As he says, "What interests me is how the bodies traverse the space, how one body is seen by another body, and how the exhibition can create silhouettes of one person looking at another who is looking at something." This concept of chain reactions, of things leading into each other, has always been evident in Parreno's work. He traces it back to his upbringing in Grenoble, which he describes as "an experimental, open town" where he started seeing contemporary dance rehearsals at just 12 or 13 years old, and became friends with the artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foster.

As a young artist, Parreno was heavily involved in collaborating with other artists. One of his best-known collaborations was *No Ghost Just a Shell*

The exhibition is intended to constantly change, by interweaving collaborative projects "like a tapestry". As Parreno says, "Ten times a day, there'll be the manifestation of *No More Reality* [film stills of children holding banners] on all the screens and loud-speakers, as if these phantom children are traversing the space. And once a day, someone will come and change a picture by John Cage and replace it with a picture by Merce Cunningham – it's a re-enactment, one body for another, one drawing for another." (His picture-swapping idea follows on from Parreno's *miss-en-scène* for the exhibitions *The Bride* and *The Bachelors*, Duchamp with Cage, Cunningham, Rauschenberg and Johns at The Barbican Art Gallery in London earlier this year and *Dancing around the Bride*, Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg and Duchamp at the Philadelphia Museum of Art). Disrupting perceptions is very much what Parreno

is about – just take his Christmas-tree sculpture, *Fraught Times: For Eleven Months of the Year it's an Artwork* and in December it's *Christmas (2009)* – questioning the temporal function of an object.

Another aspect of Parreno's work is celebration. His *Marquees* – white neon cube canopies lit underneath by light bulbs that are suspended from glass chains – will mark the entrance to the exhibition and punctuate the space. The *Marquees* (which have been extensively exhibited, from the Guggenheim in New York to Fondation Beyer in Basel) conjure nostalgic reverie and denote another of Parreno's interests, that of cinema.

#### ZIDANE AND MONROE

Indeed, Parreno is probably best known for his black-and-white film *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, made with British artist Douglas Gordon in 2006. Composed of footage shot from 17 cameras, it captures in scrutinising detail the former football player Zinedine Zidane for the entire duration of a single match between Real Madrid and Villarreal. Produced at the height of Zidane's fame, it features his voice narrating what kinds of things he might think about at various moments during a match, both personalising and demystifying his celebrity.

Several other films are included too, such as *Marilyn (2102)* and *CHZ (2011)*. *Marilyn* is a 20-minute film that illusively imagines Marilyn Monroe observing and describing her room at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. The camera becomes her eyes looking around the fictitious evocation of her room, while her voice and her handwriting are generated by machines. The mechanisms of the film are therefore robotic, revealing how Parreno increasingly uses the tools of digital technology, hiring experts to help him make more sophisticated works.



"I saw Marilyn Monroe's notes in a book of her texts and I liked her handwriting", explains Parreno. "I thought it was interesting to create a geometric character – recreate the voice and recreate a ghost of the unconscious that was killed at one moment. The film is like this phantasmagory, an image that killed her own body. At the moment of celebrating her death [the film was made in the year marking the 50th anniversary of Monroe's death], it's interesting. The room at the Astoria that I have recreated is basically an exhibition space." At the Palais de Tokyo, this will have a double effect, seeing the recreated space in the film within the framework of the overall exhibition.

#### CREATIVE GRATIFICATION

For *CHZ*, standing for *Continuously Habitable Zones*, Parreno created a garden of black plants, with the sound coming from microphones that had been inserted into the plants and buried in the earth. Parreno describes this black garden – which was ar-

FILM STILLS FROM ZIDANE:  
A 21ST CENTURY PORTRAIT, 2006 (1/2)  
With Douglas Gordon  
35mm, colour, sound  
Duration: 90 minutes  
© Philippe Parreno, Douglas Gordon  
© ADAGP, Paris

C.H.Z., 2011 (3)  
Installation views  
Solo exhibition at Fondation  
Beyerle Riehen/Basel, 2012  
Colour, sound mix: 5.1  
Aspect ratio: 1.77:1  
Duration: 12'49"  
© Serge Hasenbichler  
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FILM STILLS FROM ANYWHERE OUT  
OF THE WORLD, 2000 (4)  
3D animation, Digital Betacam  
Colour, sound  
Duration: 4'0"



DAMN 81 | 01/11/13 | PHILIPPE PARRENO



**SPEECH BUBBLES, 2009** (1)  
Centre Pompidou, Paris

**FRAUGHT TIMES: FOR ELEVEN MONTHS OF THE YEAR IT'S AN ARTWORK AND IN DECEMBER IT'S CHRISTMAS, 2009** (2)  
Centre Pompidou, Paris

Photos: Clémentine Baudet, Philippe Gillick, Christof Wosner  
Courtesy of Esther Schoppe, Gallery Bonn

**WATER LILIES, 2012-13**  
Installation view  
Solo exhibition at Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2012  
12 speakers made of metal and plexiglass, and 6 amplifiers  
© 2013 Fondation Beyeler  
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on the exhibitions *The Trial of Do Pot* in 1998 and *To The Moon Via The Beach* in the Arles Amphitheatre (France) last year. Both experimental projects involved the two artists commissioning their peers. "We've been exchanging emails and images for the last few weeks in order to start producing this new film and once we have the framework we'll invite other artists to work with us, and from that we'll produce a kind of script."

ODE TO CURIOSITY

Certainly, if much of Parreno's early career centred on his collaborative spirit, the *Palais de Tokyo* exhibition sees him resolutely striking out on his own. Yet, as Gillick says, the show is very much a crystallisation of ideas that have been fermenting in Parreno's mind for some time. "Philippe always wanted to do a big screen piece or a piano that could be linked to a lighting system and function in a certain way. These are ideas we talked about 20 years ago and now the technology has caught up with him." Referring to his own piano piece that Parreno is re-utilising, Gillick adds: "If it's useful for him to borrow something, like a tool, it's fine by me – it's not really a question of trust but of unity."

Parreno is as anticipative as the rest of us are about how his new exhibition will pan out. Musing over it all, he says, "It's hard to say how this will be predated, it's more about curiosity, actually."

officially made in Porto, Portugal – as a "Frankenstein-like creature". Although the film is complete, the landscape itself lives on, having taken on an autonomous existence beyond its creator's invention. "The garden continues to exist and I'm going to expose the web-camera and the films of this garden in the exhibition," adds Parreno.

After the *Palais de Tokyo* show, Parreno is keen to make a film about Frankenstein, "the essence of creation and what it means to create. "I've started writing it, but it's too early to talk about it – for two years this story has eluded me", he says, sighing. "It's the fatal chain of creation that's interesting – it's Mary Shelley who creates Doctor Frankenstein, who creates the monster."

Looking ahead, Parreno is also in the early stages of working on a new film with Gillick, which has the working title *Vicinity 3*. "It's the third in a series of films where somebody takes the initiative to start the process", says Gillick, who also worked with Parreno

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