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REVIEWS

View of "Philippe Parreno:
Anywhen," 2016, Tate Modern,
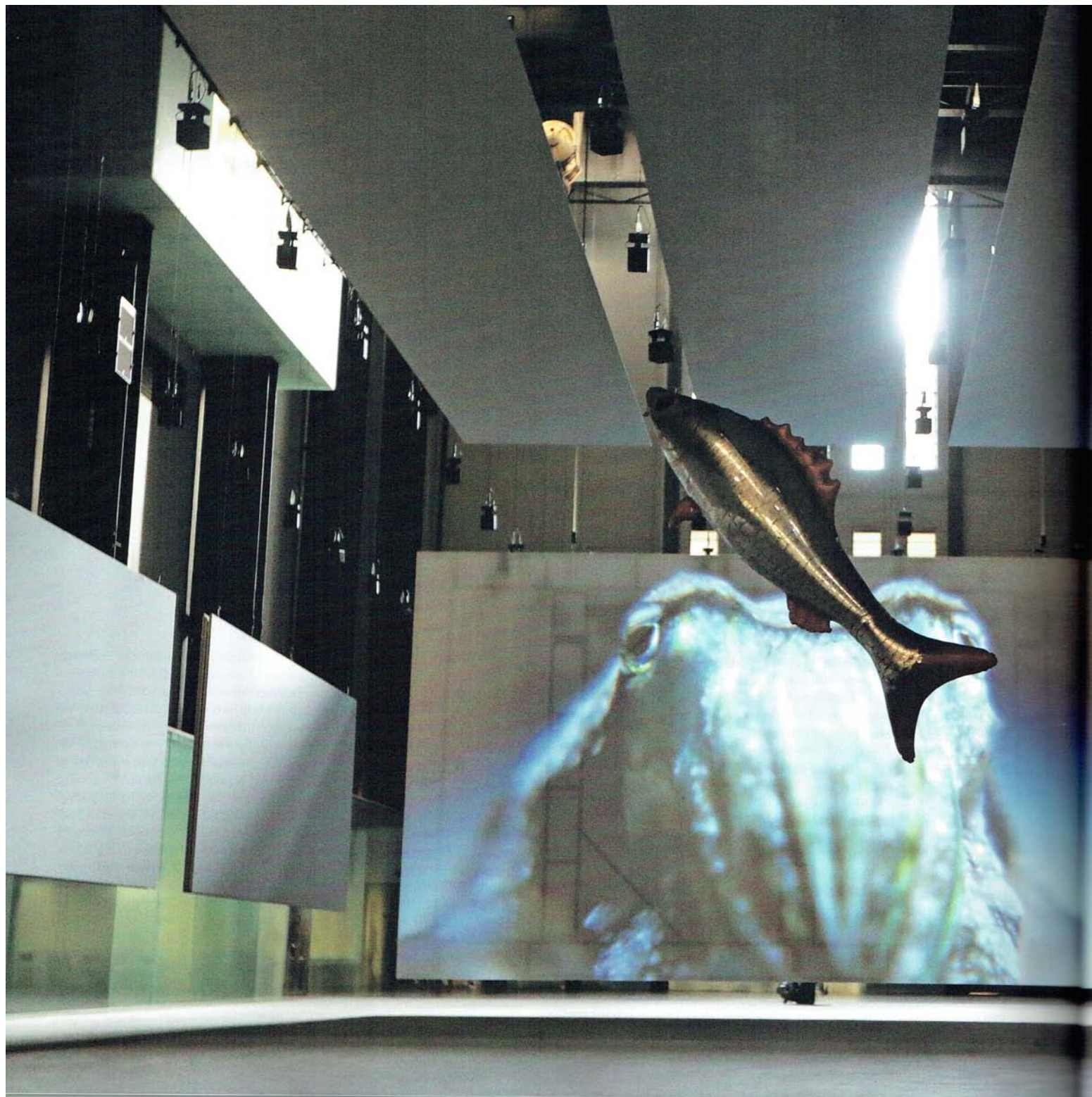London. Background projection:
Anywhen, 2016. Photo: Kirsty
Wigglesworth/AP.

Philippe Parreno

TATE MODERN, LONDON

Erika Balsom

THE ASSUMPTION that the museum is a timeless space of stasis has come under fierce assault in recent years, but few artists have equaled Philippe Parreno's insistence on reconceptualizing it as a responsive site of process and exploring the exhibition as a durational medium. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Anywhen*, 2016, the artist's monumental commission for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, the first since the museum's major expansion last summer.

In its dynamic theatricality, *Anywhen* might be understood as a figuration of the self-image of the "new Tate," incarnating the motto emblazoned on the building's facade, ART CHANGES WE CHANGE. Those acquainted with Parreno's previous work will recognize a familiar vocabulary: an illuminated marquee and lights flashing in timed sequence, drifting Mylar balloons, the evocative use of sound, and—provided one visits at a felicitous hour—the dreamy imagery of the artist's 2011 landscape film *C.H.Z.* In an elegant choreography of absence and presence, a grid of speakers and a set of white panels periodically lower from the ceiling and then retreat. A spotlight on tracks, made in collaboration with Liam Gillick (*Another Day with Another Sun*, 2014), moves across the space,

creating an elaborate shadow play. Yet *Anywhen* is marked by something new; for the first time in a major museum installation, Parreno has embraced stochastic operations. The orchestration of elements occurs not according to predetermined automation, as it did in the artist's 2015 presentations at New York's Park Avenue Armory and Milan's HangarBicocca, but rather in a dance between chance and control. Human and nonhuman agents cooperate to bring the work to life. A colony of microorganisms, an algorithm, and individuals Parreno terms "puppeteers" work together in a corner room, gathering data from the environment and responding in turn. The script has been replaced by a feedback loop of live becoming. Over its six-month display, *Anywhen* will grow and metamorphose; even the artist says he has not yet seen all it has to offer. Art changes; we change.

How exactly does the growth rate of yeast trigger the playing of classical music from BBC Radio 3 or the replacement of those strains by the sound of a rainstorm? The connection is mysterious, but clear explanations are far from the spirit of *Anywhen*. Bafflement as to how a complex system functions is a feeling we heartily accept in our everyday experience of technology: Why demand anything different from an artwork? Even if the causal abilities of the microorganisms remain uncertain, as a form of life lacking cognition they nonetheless point to one of the exhibition's key propositions: that the boundary between the animate and inanimate has never been less sure. *Anywhen* stages the uncanny vitality of technology, eerily enlivening the Turbine Hall. The installation moves according to apparent whims, while a light strip on the massive room's south wall partakes of the same unsettling anthropomorphism found in the "breathing" of sleeping Apple laptops, only now at epic scale. The very architecture of the museum seems possessed by an élan vital, a current of life traversing this former power station. It crosses the organic and inorganic without distinction, enveloping speakers, lights, pulleys, a bioreactor, and fish-shaped balloons alongside weary tourists, "puppeteers," boisterous children, and curious

visitors—all within Tate's cavernous, now carpeted belly.

Be there at the right moment and panels will descend to form the walls and ceiling of a provisional projection room. (In the coming months, a number of Parreno's moving-image works will be shown in the installation.) "The machine is animal," the voice-over of a new video intones, as if appraising the surroundings. Titled *Anywhen*, like the exhibition itself, this work features a ventriloquist and a giant cuttlefish that changes color depending on its environment. Both are mimetic creatures that become other to themselves, muddying the divisions between subject and object, alive and dead.

The machine is animal, but so too, the exhibition suggests, is the animal machine—or, at the very least, inextricable from machinic assemblages. Parreno evokes this condition of reciprocity but leaves open its implications, as the moods of *Anywhen* shift over time to accommodate

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multiple, even contradictory, propositions. One visit might yield a joyful encounter with the charm of the automaton; another might invoke the apocalyptic horror of the coming singularity. *Anywhen* imagines a flat ontology in which machines, algorithms, animals, and fungi share equally in bringing an experience into being, one that exemplifies and amplifies central attributes of our relationship to technology: Parreno's installation is enchanting, unsettling, and always evolving. □

Organized by Andrea Lissoni with Vassilis Oikonomopoulos, "Philippe Parreno: Anywhen" is on view at Tate Modern, London, through April 2, 2017.

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