

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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PHILIPPE PARRENO

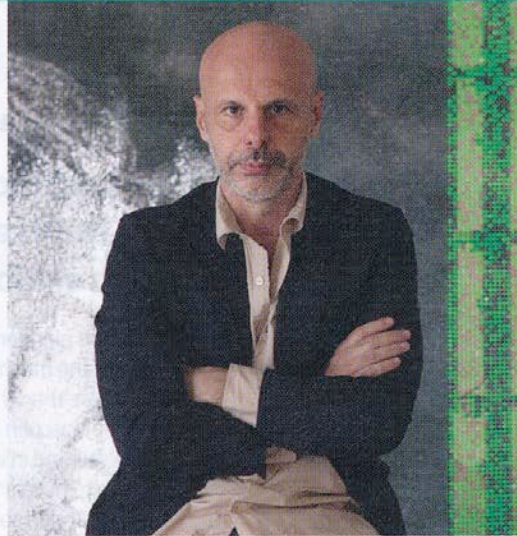
ARTIST

"It's a machine that produces form, and form produces collectivity"

Beaubourg opened in 1977 and I am 52, so you can imagine that I literally grew up with Beaubourg and what it represented. I used to hang around Beaubourg all the time. There is the Café Beaubourg nearby and Gilbert Costes the owner was nice to me when I did not have much. He proposed that I made a table for him; a table where I would scratch things and write things. He would keep the table as an artwork, and in exchange I would have free coffee and free food. So I used to spend a lot of time at Beaubourg, because it was a place where I could live. Beaubourg gave its name to a neighbourhood.

And then Beaubourg is also a public space, a place where you go in for free, whether or not you decide to go and see a show. It had all those ingredients of what I like in art, meaning the idea that it's a public space and it's a machine that produces form, and form produces collectivity—so there's a sort of chain of sense in it. There was the idea that the building will be completely open to different contingencies and situations, a modular architectural space where the walls appear and disappear. The museum was a place not only to collect and present a collection, but to produce exhibitions. And one exhibition changed my life, *Les Immatériaux* by Lyotard. I am still haunted by that show, by the way it was made, the way it was produced, the fact that it was an exhibition not as a display of objects but a place to think, to produce thought.

More recently, Beaubourg became a monument to its own prestige, which is a very French thing; the French are very good at making their own statues.



When I did a show there, it was really hard even to move a wall, so it had become static. The idea of Piano and Rogers was that it [Galerie Sud, the ground floor space] was completely open to the street—it was literally in the street except for windows, so people could see what was inside. But over time the Pompidou started to put in filters because they want people to pay to get inside, and it became an aberration. So what I did was the opposite: I cleared out the entire plateau, because it was polluted with walls that couldn't move, to make it accessible to the street once again. So the blinds would go up and down as part of the show, but people would be able to see the exhibition from outside. All these things were ideas embodied within the architecture; it is full of ideas like that.

When I was given the Turbine Hall commission [Parreno's *Anywhen* is at Tate Modern until 2 April] one of the first things I did was to go to see Herzog & de Meuron. And strangely enough, they told me that the starting point of the Tate Modern and the Turbine Hall was precisely the open space of Beaubourg. So Beaubourg still echoes, it has a really big resonance, even today.