

Philippe Parreno's Turbine Hall review - mesmerising and unmissable

Tate Modern Turbine Hall

Anywhen is one of the very best Turbine Hall commissions, filling the space with sounds and furies, stillness and movement

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The length and height of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall is alive with ripples and rivers of pulsing light. High above, the box-like viewing balconies on the side walls throb and wink as light travels from one end of the building to the other, reflected and multiplying on glass walls and casting aberrant forms on the concrete. Here comes a plane, droning invisibly through the hall's indoor sky. And then it is gone.

Shall I tell you about the shoal of inflated mylar fish? Or the football game, or the talking squid, the ventriloquist or the barking dogs? What about the yeast?

Like an army of robotic marionettes, row after row of speakers descend from the roof, each suspended from a wire. Then they rise again, back into the darkness, as their amplified motors whirr and squeak. Along with them comes a large projector, a huge screen and a number of other white rectangles, ascending and descending in their own time, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, sometimes together, sometimes alone.

They reconfigure as floating walls, a floor or a ceiling, or as steps and planes floating in an abstract geometry, flying up like Suprematist kites into the darkness above, descending into a new position with an expectant and theatrical sense of occasion.

As we linger on the grey-carpeted concrete, and wander on to the bridge crossing the middle of the hall, a succession of events and unexpected interruptions unfold through the day, and will continue unfolding in the months ahead, from now till next April in Philippe Parreno's Anywhen, the latest Hyundai Turbine Hall commission.

Anywhen is astonishing, mesmerising, magnificent and unmissable. It is filled with constant surprise. But superlatives aren't sufficient. Over this weekend, I spent five or six hours here during technical rehearsals and run-throughs, and still can't say that I have seen and heard everything.

At one point, the sound of rain filled the Turbine Hall, the wires suspending the forest of speakers shimmering in accidental mimicry of the deluge. Then, the speakers lowered to hover

just above our heads, a casual football game among north London kids is taking place, the invisible action moving through the space around us, a sort of aural sculpture in motion.

Suddenly we are amidst the game, imagining ourselves in the place of Zinedine Zidane, in the film Parreno made with Douglas Gordon about the Real Madrid player. And then the silhouetted speakers become a mute shadow-puppetry, projected on to the dead white screen.

Electrified with light and sound, the entire Turbine Hall becomes a living theatre. One of Parreno's marquees, a sort of floating canopy studded with lights, dances with light and crackling noise over the bridge, its pulsing illumination syncopated with a voice that erupts from nowhere.

The voice belongs to actor and ventriloquist Nina Conti, her sorrowful, raddled dummy in hand, in the film from which the commission takes its name. Mostly, she's off-camera (like Peter Brough, a ventriloquist who, absurdly, used to perform with his dummy on the radio). "It is a stupid idea," Parreno observed. "But it is all about belief, right?" Much of the film focuses on a small Mediterranean cephalopod that Parreno kept in a tank in his studio. Colours ripple through the squid's body, as it makes graceful, delicate gestures with its tentacles, and looks back at us with an incomprehensible eye.

Every annual project in the Turbine Hall (previously sponsored by Unilever) somehow has to raise the bar on what went before and work against the memory of all those artificial sunrises, the slides and sunflower seeds and Doris Salcedo's seismic crack. The last project, by Mexican artist Abraham Cruzvillegas, was among the dullest. "This space," said Juan Muñoz, before his 2001 Double Bind opened here, "is a killer."

Anywhen is one of the very best Turbine Hall commissions, filling the space with sounds and furies, grand and small events, stillness and movement, noises and light and silence. Parreno likens it to a public park, where different events and a constantly changing tempo orchestrates the day. He also likens the commission to a kind of instrument that he is only now beginning to learn to play.

Parreno plans to spend a lot of time here, adding films and sounds, reworking the rhythms, adding elements and taking them away. "I am building a library of scenes and events," the artist told me. "We even have a seismographer in the building, monitoring the movement of the tectonic plates beneath."

At times, a doomy, clanging roar fills the vault, an aural ghost of the building's industrial past. Then the piped-in sound of the river flowing by, the backwash of boats slapping at the gravel shore. Parreno has miked-up the building and the area between Tate Modern and the river. Sensors on the roof relay temperature, wind speed and humidity back to a computer, which conveys information into a flagon of yeast, visible through a glass door at the far end of the hall, where it sits, connected up to tubes and probes and an array of computers.

Like some kind of alien intelligence, the yeast controls what we experience out in the hall. Or, at least, that's what Parreno told me as we walked through it a few days ago. The yeast, real though it is, might be a McGuffin, or an artful bit of misdirection on Parreno's part. It is, at the

very least, an indication of the collision between the biological and the technological that informs much of what he does.

There was the snow that fell outside the Serpentine gallery in his show there in 2010. The sounds of invisible dancers thumping around an empty floor in his choreography for an exhibition about the influence of Marcel Duchamp at London's Barbican in 2013, in his more recent large-scale interventions at Paris's Palais de Tokyo, in Milan and at New York's Park Avenue Armory.

The French artist frequently creates ensembles of individual films, sculptures in scenographies, creating journeys and evolving situations. You can take a film, a sound work, a performance or a sculpture on its own terms, or as part of something larger. Often working with collaborators - with Douglas Gordon on Zidane, with Pierre Huyghe in the development of the Manga character AnnLee, with Liam Gillick on collaborative sculptures, with Tino Sehgal (who had his own Turbine Hall commission in 2012). Sehgal was back this weekend, helping choreograph elements of Anywhen.

Making his Hyundai commission, Parreno was also thinking about Duchamp and John Cage, and the floating screens in Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore's 1955 Man, Machine and Motion, recently reconstructed at London's ICA. His script for Nina Conti is a melange of Parreno's own writing and fragments of James Joyce.

Through the day, everything changes and keeps on changing. Something is always happening, in response to the world outside - a passing airplane, a busker by the river, rain or birdsong - as well as a programmed repertoire of interruptions. Everything at a given moment is both the main event and an entr'acte.

In the Turbine Hall we find and lose ourselves from moment to moment, always caught between one thing and the next. At the end of the film Conti reappears in the film, far away under one of Parreno's illuminated marquees. "Eternity in perpetuity," she says. "There's no way to stop the upcoming tragedy." The line is the vanishing point of Parreno's project, both a premonition and a promise, an intimation of the precipice.

● *Hyundai Commission 2016: Philippe Parreno is at Tate Modern from 4 October 2016 to 2 April 2017*

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