

A Single Piano Note and a Giant Snowflake

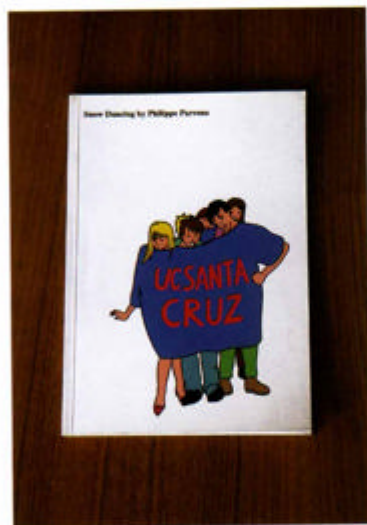
LIAM GILLICK

The entire world is the domain where the creative impulse of the party and the festival can be deployed. This is the key to the revolutionary impulse of the event. You must think about the re-soled shoes. The most literal example of the revolutionary quality of the event but approached with a sense of play. You can look at this event and start to imagine that the whole community is linked together by a set of ideals. But they are not clearly articulated. The way work is organized gives some clue, for it seems as if the impulse of the people is to devote all their energy to the creation of an idea of community. It seems to be the only rule. Their creation of a group apart provokes potential for the implosion of society as a whole.

—Philippe Parreno¹⁾

Everything within Philippe's work is connected to a sense of political obligation. This does not mean a didactic returning of evidence to those already in the know. It is a social work that is rooted in relations between people and phantoms—phantoms of the past and the future, of control and letting go. It is a permanent soft-attack on institutional structure combined with a series of evasive "contents" that are also

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PHILIPPE PARRENO, *Snow Dancing*, 1995,
GW Press London, Cover / Umschlag.

designed to confuse and critique the status of an artwork within society and, importantly, among artists. The location of the meaningful moment often falls between the structure, the effect, and the person in the room. The uncomfortable word "non-critiqueable" used to come up a lot, but so did the word "bar." The evasive sense of the work was embedded in its self-conscious relation to what can be critiqued, and the evasion extended to escaping to places already set up in the culture—to hang out, talk, and forget.

New art versus modernism and its legacies is a crucial subplot here. How art should be new is a given



PHILIPPE PARRENO, *DO*
SNOW DANCING, 1995; installation view,
Le Consortium, Dijon /
SCHNEETANZ, Installationsansicht.



obligation, meaning art should address what is taking place, what is being referred to, and what is possible within the broader culture. Fragments are turned around and moments are made into concrete form. Stubborn structures are rendered into phantoms that carry doubt and reveal afterimages of power, desire, and restraint. A piano note and a snowflake are a new form of advertising. A political banner and a child are a revised method of complaint. But all this happens without pedagogy, in the standard sense. This is an attack on modernism but there is also a skeptical rethinking of the tenets of post-modernism. It is work rooted in the present that contains only the barest traces of the past. But as with the best work, without trying too hard it embodies an inherent critical con-

sciousness both of the present institutions of art and what has happened in the past. Normally this would not amount to a surprise unless it also led towards a continual pointing to the day after tomorrow. To a continuous dialogue. Asking other people. Always asking questions. Retelling stories and discoveries via the work. Trying to find other forms for these stories. The artist as a conduit not between things and people but between ideas and reception.

This is all connected to Philippe's determination to work with people who are hard to work with. This involves fighting the desire to give all the best ideas to friends alone and instead searching for forms to carry information that cannot be pinned down. Taking the implications of an exchange with an ar-



PHILIPPE PARRENO,
SNOW DANCING, 1995,
installation view, Le Consortium, Dijon /
SCHNEETANZ, Installationsansicht.

chitect, scientist, or thinker and leaving out those aspects that can be written or read.

Philippe is permanently moving. This has had an effect on the way people try to find him. A sense that he can't possibly be located. There is no stability here. A sense of constant movement and dissatisfaction with the way artists have traditionally been told to work or behave. A general and specific agitation. Constant shifting from one scene to another. Then a long, slow look at something specific. This may be why we have seen an increasing turn to cinema within his work. Cinema, rather than just art that uses the codes of cinema. This is connected to a sense that everything can be told in a sequence of stories and pans and cuts. Pre-production and post-production become the dominant modes even when the film is being directed. This is beginning to result in a body of work that attacks the values of cinema just as it had previously picked away at one's certainties with art. Yet, there is a careful approach here that remains embedded within a critical art practice. Moving away, looking back, stepping back, moving away again. Here it is possible to see a critical methodology that can be described as a storyboard.

Parreno is relating to cinema and television, thinking of them as common ground. The notion of being connected to cinema and television as locations where people who don't think so much about art can find a territory of reference. Within much of the work there are moments when access to the ideas occurs via precise reference to cinematic or televisual moments but this is not reflected in the technique or what you see on the screen. Art as a permanent test broadcast whose subject is not appropriated or reflected, but redirected.

In 1995 there was SNOW DANCING—a book and something like an event. The book of the event predated the event itself. The book was "told" to Jack Wendler and myself over a few days in London. It was a typical turning of structure. The artist speaks and the publisher writes. The book stands as the description of what might take place at some point because it is embedded as a potential within the social body. The event itself should not replace the pre-definition; the two are intertwined. The script and the "film" are the same. They merge and replace each other. SNOW

DANCING was a test of subjects both in the way it was written and the way it finally found multiple forms. It was a setting at Le Consortium in Dijon where specific moments were provided and set up. Signs pointed to the place. And people came. They did not need the book to know how to behave. They did not ask for instructions to know it might be time to get slogans cut into the soles of their shoes. This was the key to the event. He said it would be "something like a humanitarian festival." I am not so sure. SNOW DANCING was a way to invite others into a contemporary art space and suggest that they might already know how to disrupt, disturb, and collide with codes of art that are perpetually in a state of reform. The text described a potential and the potential transformed into a new set of exchanges. What things looked like was overdetermined within the book and played out in the space. Yet what would be said, saved, and discussed was left to the privilege of the users, viewers, and passers-by. This is an art of generosity that makes participation a right, not a choice; it is a practice that is as skeptical of its own potential as those Dijon visitors were as they wandered off into the night.

The even quality of the light is connected to an ideology that allows everyone to participate in this party on an equal level. If shadows predominated, a sense of mystery would be heightened. Characters and participants would be definable.

—Philippe Parreno²⁾

We are in a place that has all the elements required to create a community. The architecture is like a T-shirt you can wear. Big T-shirts that are worn by a lot of people at the same time. A shirt covered in logos and heavily printed with slogans. "University of CALIFORNIA—Santa Cruz," "I'm with stupid," or some other phrase that affirms the collective desires of the city. Different sizes have been made, for five, ten or fifteen people to occupy. The largest size bears the slogan "I'm with stupid." People are linked together under these big shirts, and as one they move through the space.

—Philippe Parreno³⁾

1) Philippe Parreno, *Snow Dancing*, published by Liam Gillick and Jack Wendler (London: GW Press Ltd, 1995), unpaginated.

2) Ibid.

3) Ibid.