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# Nouveau Réalisme, 1960s France, and the Neo-avant-garde

Topographies of Chance and Return

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ASHGATE

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### Restaging Commodity Spectacle

I would love to decorate the windows of the Globus store. I would build a very beautiful machine, something like a scorpion, a proud, black monster – and there would be a conveyor belt which would bring two to three thousand teapots a day to the machine with mechanical precision, complete regularity (one every 80 cm.) and whoops and crash, the tea-pots would be absolutely destroyed, annihilated, for weeks on end (until the shop was bankrupt)!<sup>1</sup>

Jean Tinguely (1967)

From the 1950s onwards, Jean Tinguely drew up plans for a giant product-smashing machine to be built in a shop window. Despite the artist's attempts to convince stores to commission the sculpture, Pontus Hulten recounts, it took until 1969 for one to finally agree.<sup>2</sup> Tinguely built his eight-metre long mechanical monster in the display window of a Swiss department store in Bern called Victor Loeb. He equipped it with a conveyor belt, assembly-line assistants and a giant hammer, then set the machine in motion to ritualistically destroy one by one, 12,000 of Victor Loeb's stock of brand new plates.<sup>3</sup>

Nouveau Réalisme's occasionally provocative restagings of commodity display are the subject of the following discussion. Commentators such as the International Situationists accused the Nouveaux Réalistes of being window-dressers and salesmen for France's new consumer society. Viewed today, however, Nouveau Réalisme's relation to post-war consumerism appears far more complicated than its early detractors suggested. This chapter examines how certain Nouveau Réaliste works might both illustrate and resist aspects of post-war commodity spectacle. My discussion is divided into three sections. The first, 'Nouveau Réaliste Shop Fronts', investigates shop-window imagery in works by Raysse, Christo, Speerri and Tinguely. The second, 'The Situationist Shop Front', considers the Situationist International's characterizations of Nouveau Réalisme. The last section, 'Detritus and the Outmoded', spotlights the emergence of uncanny topographies of repetition in Arman's *Accumulations*. Although Nouveau

Realiste presentations of objects frequently call to mind the material topography of spectacle (once described by Guy Debord in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* as 'a continuous superimposition of geological layers of commodities'), I argue that they also evoke topographies of memory and the return of the repressed.<sup>4</sup> Through reference to theories of unassimilated knowledge and the cultural politics of the outmoded, I explore how certain of Arman's *Accumulations* re-stage imageries from the past. These include scenes of early or unfashionable consumer spectacle, and scenes of objects associated with historical catastrophe.

### Nouveau Réaliste Shop Fronts

Dubbed by critics as the 'Prismatic Matisse', Martial Rayasse enthusiastically welcomed the visual excitement of modern supermarkets and sought to reproduce their colourful, antiseptic displays of products in his work. His Prismatic-inspired works of 1959 to 1962, equipped with titles such as *Etalage de Prismatic (Prismatic Display)*, *Hygiène de la Vision n.1 (Hygiene of Vision)* (1961) or *Supermarché magie multicolore (Supermarket Multicolored Magic)* (1960), addressed French society's fast-growing appetite for new 'up-to-date' mass-marketed commodities. As Richard Kuisel has noted, by the 1960s 'American-style' consumerism was embraced by large numbers of French consumers, despite the vocal resistance of a small number of French intellectuals.<sup>5</sup> Nouveau Réalisme, Rayasse argued, celebrated this new consumerist objectscape and functioned as 'a sort of apologia of consumer society'.<sup>6</sup>

Critics responded by comparing his work to shop-window décor. Herta Wescher for example, described Rayasse's showcased supermarket trinkets and products as 'types of sculptures for vitrines or display cases, similar to those which are usually better achieved by professional shop decorators'.<sup>7</sup> If such a comparison was intended to dismiss his work as shallow and unconvincing, Rayasse, as we saw in Chapter 1, attempted to reverse traditional aesthetic hierarchies of 'high' and 'low' culture by equating supermarkets with modern art museums. As he put it: 'What interests me is the colourful profusion of mass-produced articles, the quantitative afflux of displays, the tide of new products in the department stores. Art today is a rocket in space. The Prismatics are museums of modern art'.<sup>8</sup>

Where Rayasse turned to the supermarket as a consumerist cornucopia and emblem of utopian modernity, Daniel Spoerri looked to the grocery store. In October 1961, Spoerri transformed the Addi Koepcke Gallery in Copenhagen into *L'Épicerie (The Grocery Store)*. He lined the gallery's bench with bottles, packets, cans and other foodstuffs, then proceeded to sell each item for precisely the amount he had paid for it. As he recounts:

In the 'Grocery Store' at the Galerie KOEPCKE ... groceries were recognized as individual works of art without being incorporated into an assemblage. They were stamped 'Caution, Work of Art' and bore my certifying signature. Nothing else about them was changed, and the price was the current market price of each article.<sup>9</sup>

Rebelling against fine-art fetishism, Spoerri deliberately 'polluted' the gallery space by staging 'petty' commercial transactions within its walls, and by presenting mundane materials and rubbish, the latter baked in bread rolls and handed out at the opening, as art. Through such gestures, he challenged the market value of conventional art commodities, and playfully interrogated notions of use value, exchange value and artistic aura.

Spoerri's questioning of use value and exchange value was reported by Lucy Lippard:

'Does a tomato cease to be a tomato merely because it is named a work of art?' demands Spoerri. 'To buy a tomato while realizing that it's a work of art that one is buying is participating in a great spectacle. In a spectacle what is false becomes true, provided one enters into the game.'<sup>10</sup>

Despite the Situationist ring to such observations, Spoerri retrospectively emphasized that 'It was unnecessary to read Debord to say such things', because 'at this time in the Sixties, fake reality began to become more evident through the impact of television and other media'.<sup>11</sup> Spoerri's emphasis on the theatrical games and illusions that underpin commodity fetishism can be compared with similar Fluxist concerns.<sup>12</sup>

Spoerri's *Épicerie* can be contrasted with another gallery-store created two years later in New York. In 1964, the Paul Bianchini Gallery presented an exhibition of Pop Art in a setting that simulated a supermarket environment. Its 'products' included not only Pop depictions of food, but 'authentic' groceries such as actual Campbell's soup cans. Andy Warhol allegedly bought the cans for two for 35 cents, signed them, and re-sold them for \$6 or \$6.50 each at the gallery. In Lucy Lippard's opinion, the Bianchini Gallery's motif was 'purely commercial'.<sup>13</sup> Warhol's signed cans indeed borrowed their inflated aura from Jasper Johns's crafted bronze ale cans, Robert Watts's chromium eggs and Warhol's paintings of Campbell's soup arranged around them. In contrast, Spoerri's stamped artworks maintained a more radical equivalence with their non-aesthetic 'originals'. As Spoerri noted in *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*: 'What is an artwork worth? Why not admit that an artwork has scarcely any value, apart from one that you might give it?'<sup>14</sup>

Christo's store fronts present a different example again of Nouveau Réaliste negotiations of commercial imagery. Between 1963 and 1964, Christo created a number of store-front facades and display cases. The interiors of the displays, mysteriously back-lit and veiled, are screened from sight. *Show Window* of 1966, for example, presents a window partially masked by brown paper

pressed against the pane. *Purple Store Front* of 1964 consists of a full-sized shop front. Its old-fashioned nineteenth-century-looking architectural facade is painted mauve pink, but unmarked by any sign or identificatory lettering. The windows are veiled with fabric resembling old draped sheets.

Each of these works suggests abandonment and desolation, offering partial glimpses onto screened-off, indistinct spaces of melancholic emptiness. The empty interiors call to mind vacated premises and undesired goods rather than consumer glamour and stylishness, and imply a zone of failure, tenuousness and bankruptcy. Christo's store fronts and display cases appear to have been left behind, remainders and reminders of earlier moments of capitalist retailing.

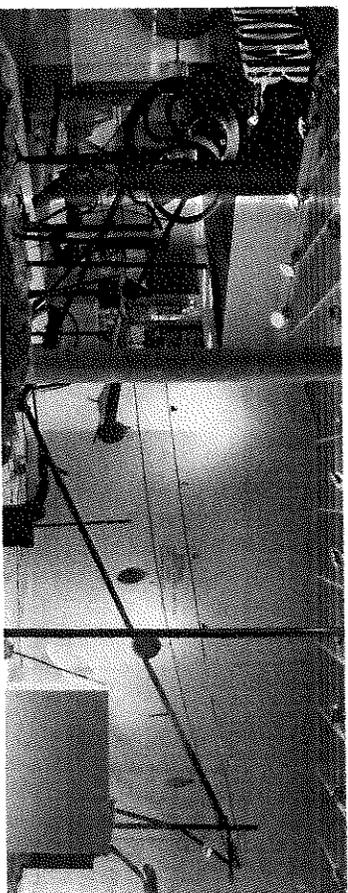
In presenting cases and shop fronts as artistic readymades, Christo shifted attention from the commodity fetish to its mechanics of display. His store works highlight the framing function of commercial props. Although his vitrines emphasize the parergonic trappings of an emptied space or 'void', they do so without the metaphysical pretensions of Yves Klein's better-known 'Immaterial' works. The auratic space of a store front is here borrowed and manipulated in ways that expose (rather than mystify) the instability of value. In triggering what Christo once described as a 'sense of territory, of obstacle, of frontier, of border and separation', the store works challenge and unfix the framing devices that construct aesthetic and commercial value.<sup>15</sup>

### TINGUELY: *ROTOZAZA III*

Dear Mr. Stanley Marcus,

This is what I think, and what I would like to do for you. It would be a fantastic relief of 10–12 metres, a hallucinating (and I hope fascinating) spectacle, which would 'joyously' destroy, everyday, the same object ... The ensemble would be made of machine parts – motors – elements of electrical equipment – colour – feathers – bells – saws – drills etc. ... I believe it would be both a beautiful piece and – a good spectacle. I would undertake the construction in Dallas, in 2–3 weeks of work, approximately. Best wishes, Jean Tinguely.<sup>16</sup>

Tinguely's proposals to build a monstrous machine in a department store were sent not only to Globus in Bâle (where Tinguely had apprenticed as a window decorator before being sacked), but Galleries Lafayette in Paris and Nieman Marcus in Dallas. Tinguely's letter to Mr Marcus includes a sketch showing a dark contraption of wheels and pulleys, with a conveyor belt transporting a series of indeterminate blobs. Potential fodder for the machine (identified in a crossed-out list) include 'straw hats', 'ice-cream', 'Coca-Cola' and 'alarm clocks'. The machine's destruction of 'Maurice Chevalier'-style boater straw hats could be accompanied, Tinguely suggested, by a piped recording of Chevalier's cheery French chansons.<sup>17</sup> In a further parody of respectability, the machine in the sketch comically wields a long-handled broom, presumably



3.1 Jean Tinguely, *Rotozaza III*, Victor Loeb department store window, Bern 1969.  
© Succession Jean Tinguely/SODRAC 2009. Photo by Fredo Meyer-Henn

with which to industriously sweep up (or spread around) its self-generated wreckage.

Tinguely's carnivalesque satire of industrial production calls to mind the giant machine featured in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. Not incidentally, this film was one of Tinguely's favourites. Where Chaplin's Taylorist monster accidentally swallowed then regurgitated its factory worker, however, Tinguely's imaginary machine methodically consumed and destroyed finished commercial products.

Tinguely's 'fantastic' monster was finally built in Bern's Victor Loeb department store and christened *Rotozaza III*. Photographs show the sculpture amidst a sea of broken plates (Figure 3.1). A wall text in the background announces: 'FAMOUS BERN ARTIST CREATED OUR SHOW-WINDOW'. According to Portus Hutten, the sign also announced: 'Come in and buy before Tinguely smashes everything'.<sup>18</sup>

Tinguely's ironic machine thus doubled as a marketing device. *Rotozaza III*'s knife-edge dance between commerce and capitalist critique was carefully negotiated by Victor Loeb. The store's in-house magazine, *Loeb Personalzeitung*, preserved in its archives, took pains to reassure its 1969 readers of the artistic, non-'anarchistic' qualities of Tinguely's work:

If one has the luck to speak with Jean Tinguely about his work and oeuvre, one notices that his creative force emanates not only – as it might, perhaps, first appear – from destructive and anarchist thinking. Rather, positive elements like *humour*, *joie de vivre* and *fruitful self-directed laughter* emerge. By the sweat of his brow, he builds a machine which is there for nothing at all, which has no purpose and has to fulfil no task in the proper sense. That the machine, however, almost incidentally smashes china (a working process one could more easily achieve with bare hands), is justified by the artist as follows: Man discovered technology and hence the machine. Today, however, man himself is mastered and dominated by it.

(the tram, car, television, refrigerator, airplane). Hence, it is essential to rediscover a freedom that is original and impartial. It is essential to bring the technology which we developed and which dominates us, into correct proportion. I hope to bring this about with healthy irony. From a psychological point of view, this project has great value. Who already thinks today: what is tomorrow? Hence, the voices of the true avant-gardists shouldn't remain unheard or misunderstood. They were always, and will be again, the ones who opened for us a little window onto the future. Sometimes cautionary or demonstrative, but always revelatory.<sup>19</sup>

Having aligned itself with the future and 'avant-garde' progressiveness, the magazine article concludes by citing Tinguely's own argument concerning consumption: 'On the *Problem of Consumption*, Tinguely explains: "The machines which we build today produce much more than we can possibly consume. I solve this problem of abundance in my own way!"<sup>20</sup>

Tinguely test-tried his 'solution' to over-abundance in two prototypes: *Rotozaza I* and *Rotozaza II* of 1967. *Rotozaza I*, an interactive machine that swallowed and regurgitated black and white balls tossed at it by its audience, was exhibited at the Alexander Iolas Gallery in Paris in 1967. For commentators such as Michel Conil Lacoste, the piece offered an 'unmistakable metaphor of ejaculation' while commenting on 'the production process'.<sup>21</sup> Museum director Pontus Hulten proposed a more political reading of *Rotozaza's* symbolism: 'His products (symbolized, let us clarify, by the gurgitated and regurgitated balls) must be returned to the machine. It insists on and lives off this. It participates in that sterile process of overproduction that constitutes the capitalist system's greatest menace.'<sup>22</sup> This emphasis on a critique of capitalism becomes more obvious in Tinguely's next *Rotozaza*, which was less playful and more pedagogical.

Tinguely constructed *Rotozaza II* at New York University in the United States in October 1967. The machine was set in motion at the Loeb Student Center during a conference titled 'Vision 67: Second World Congress on Communication in a Changing World'. The New York University News Bureau billed it as a 'Demonstration about Automation and Mass Products'.<sup>23</sup>

The event was reported in the *New York Times* in a somewhat sardonic article titled 'Tinguely's Smashing Machine Deals Blow to Overproduction':

While ... [Tinguely] toiled with wheels and girders, he had a girl in a red and blue dress sing to the accompaniment of a trombonist a song that wandered on with lines like these:

*Too many telephones*

*Too many cars*

*Too many cigars*

*Too many guns*

*Too much of everything ...*

Then Mr. Tinguely escorted an elderly Chinese man with a long white beard to the center of the stage on which he had erected the fearsome assemblage of

steel. The ancient equipped with a dustpan and broom, soon had work to do as brown bottles emerged from behind a green screen hanging on a chain and went to doom beneath a foot-high hammer. Beer cascaded and glass flew ...<sup>24</sup>

To the journalists' evident disapproval, 'three hundred participants' in the conference, 'half of them educators' and many 'from abroad', 'stood up and applauded'.<sup>25</sup> Tinguely's beer-smashing demonstration, he observed, had held the international communications congress 'spell-bound'.<sup>26</sup>

*Rotozaza II* coincided with a number of other destruction-oriented protest pieces presented in New York in the same month. Jon Hendricks, for example, coordinated a series of 'destructionist art' events that included Carolee Schneemann's anti-Vietnam war piece *Discussion and Rubble* (described by Schneemann as an 'environment which people will have to destroy to enter').<sup>27</sup> *Rotozaza II* also followed other New York activist art exhibitions and events such as the 1967 *Collage of Indignation*.<sup>28</sup>

One of the observers of *Rotozaza II* at New York University was American sculptor John Chamberlain. Chamberlain, according to Restany, expressed reservations concerning *Rotozaza's* political effectiveness. As Mimmo Rotella reported to Restany: 'I met Chamberlain at Tinguely's *Rotozaza* session. His reaction: *old fashioned*. We need *another kind of protest now*'.<sup>29</sup> Tinguely's own radical political credentials had been emphasized to anglophone audiences through texts such as Frank Popper's article 'Inspired Anarchist', published in *Art and Artists* magazine in 1966. In Popper's words:

Tinguely benefited from the reading of Kropotkin, Bakunin, Gustav Lanauer and Willy Schlämm ... which led him ... to the adoption of a permanent and personal revolutionary attitude. Now how could this protest be best demonstrated in visual and plastic terms? Tinguely gradually accumulated the elements of his vocabulary ... Literary notions such as Gide's *acte gratuit* and the interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus by Camus could be added. But Tinguely wanted to go further. For him a true demonstration would at least have to be doubly absurd, before reaching the *summit of absurdity* by its own logic. So he conceived machines which would 'work for nothing' (*pour des pommes*, Tinguely says) and secondly these machines would have to *destroy themselves*.<sup>30</sup>

Tinguely, for his part, linked his *Rotozaza* project to irony, resistance and provocation. 'Nonsense,' he argued in his Globus department store-window proposal, 'is a dimension that irony can be built into ... Much freedom and the "acte gratuit" are made possible via nonsense ... it introduces both the provocative and the Sisyphian side of man into my constructions'.<sup>31</sup>

By positioning *Rotozaza III* in the actual setting of a busy shop, Tinguely indeed introduced 'another kind of protest' (to requote Chamberlain). *Rotozaza III* forced its viewers to pose new questions concerning the shifting nature of artistic strategies of subversion, neutralization and commercial recuperation in an age of expanding consumer capitalism. Responses, as we have seen,

varied. Victor Loeb acknowledged the satirical dimensions of its window display while simultaneously seeking to neutralize Tinguely's potentially 'anarchic' act of resistance in the pages of its employees' magazine. Other commentators such as Pontus Hulten, on the contrary, celebrated *Rotozazza's* ability to 'stir up panic and spread it about'.<sup>32</sup> And some other critics again – chief among them the International Situationists – rejected Tinguely's interventions as ineffectual.

### The Situationist Shop Front

#### THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATIONIST

In the spectacle of abundance, so-called objects of consumption cease to be objects of pleasure in order to become *objects of contemplation*, becoming ever-more radically foreign to those whose needs they are supposed to be satisfying.<sup>33</sup>

Jean Gaunault (1966)

Commodity fetishism's ties to spectacle were explored by Guy Debord in his analysis of post-war France's 'Society of the Spectacle'. The term 'Society of the Spectacle' was employed by the Situationists to denote 1950s and 1960s consumer society: a society allegedly transfixated by its amorous gaze upon merchandise, consumed by false desires orchestrated by advertising, and dominated by the reign of the commodity fetish on the one hand, and a repressive technocratic government on the other. Situationism portrayed consumer-subjects as ruled over by a dream-spectacle of objects for sale. As the journal *Internationale Situationniste* put it in the passage cited above, commodities could even evolve into reified '*objects of contemplation*'.

#### 'REVOLT AGAINST MERCHANDISE'

The Situationists proposed various strategies against the 'Spectacle', targeting both commodity aesthetics (for example, advertising) and aesthetic commodities (for example, objects on the art market). The pages of the *Internationale Situationniste*, for example, contain acerbic references to 'artistic expression stocked under the form of merchandise', and to advertising's 'marketing spectacle' (negatively portrayed as a combination of 'fetishism of merchandise and fetishism of the work of art').<sup>34</sup> One strategy of resistance the Situationists suggested was *détournement*, the 're-use of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble'.<sup>35</sup> Another proposed strategy – somewhat more direct – was looting. A photograph in the *Internationale Situationniste* of an American supermarket set alight during the Los Angeles/Watts riots of 1965 illustrates the latter option. The image appeared in a March 1966 *Internationale*

*Situationniste* article titled 'The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy'.<sup>36</sup> Below the black and white photograph, a caption states with dry reserve: 'CRITIQUE OF URBANISM (Los Angeles Supermarket, August 1965)'.<sup>37</sup>

For the Situationists, this burning shop front functioned as an emblem of consumer revolt. As the *Internationale Situationniste* noted: 'The Los Angeles revolt is a revolt against merchandise, against the world of merchandise and the world of the worker-consumer *hierarchically* subjected to the rules of merchandise.'<sup>38</sup> The journal continued:

Looting is the *natural* response to the society of abundance – the society not of natural and human abundance, but of the abundance only of commodities [...] The looting of the Watts district was the most direct realization of the distorted principle, 'To each according to his false needs' ... [but] real desires are already finding expression in festival, in judic affirmation, in the *politics* of destruction.<sup>39</sup>

Unlike most of the Nouveaux Réalistes, the Situationists thus openly advocated an overturning of consumer spectacle and the destruction or redistribution of capitalist goods.

#### SITUATIONIST CRITIQUES OF NOUVEAU RÉALISME

Situationist writers attacked Nouveau Réalisme with unrestrained relish. They denounced Nouveau Réalisme's rejection of Dadaist 'negativity', and dismissed its self-proclaimed acts of transgression as toothless and 'neo'. Dada, Guy Debord noted in June 1963, had illustrated modern art's 'revolutionary role', namely 'the destruction of all conventions in art, language, or actions'.<sup>40</sup> Since then, however, the movement had been appropriated as a conventional 'cultural style':

Indeed dada form was recently turned into reactionary advertisement by neo-dadaists making a career by taking up the style invented before 1920 and exploiting each detail in enormously exaggerated fashion, thereby making this style serve the acceptance and decoration of the present world. ... Whereas the neo-dadaists speak of recharging Marcel Duchamp's earlier plastic refusal with (aesthetic) positivity, we are sure that everything that the world offers us today as positive can only serve to recharge limitlessly the negativity of the currently sanctioned forms of expression and in this manner constitute the *only representational art of this time*. The Situationists know that real positivity will come from elsewhere and that at the moment this negativity will help bring it about.<sup>41</sup>

Restany's call to recharge the Duchampian readymade with 'positivity' in his '40° above Dada' manifesto was also the target of an August 1961 *Internationale Situationniste* article titled 'Once again, on Decomposition'.<sup>42</sup> The article mingles cursory praise of Tinguely and Saint-Phalle with crushing

dismissal of Restany, the latter conveyed with the aid of quoted phrases from his catalogue essay:

In Paris, this spring, a new gallery, founded on this [Toronto] aesthetic, exhibits the rubbish assembled by nine 'new realist' artists, determined to redo Dada, but at '40° above,' and who have nevertheless made the mistake of being too legibly introduced and justified by a sententious critic several degrees below, since he has found nothing better than to have them 'consider the World as a Painting,' calling even upon sociology 'to aid consciousness and chance,' in order stupidly to rediscover 'emotion, sentiment and finally, once more, poetry.' Indeed, Nikl de Saint-Phalle fortunately goes further, with her target-paintings painted with a carbine ... Tinguely, more inspired [than his contemporary Nicolas Schoffer], has unveiled, in full operation in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a machine skillfully programmed to destroy itself.<sup>45</sup>

While Restany's art criticism is dismissed as senseless and ridiculous, Saint-Phalle and Tinguely's works are singled out as more promising. Even their gestures of provocation, however, are ultimately dismissed as follows:

The truth is that even when they exhibit a certain sense of humor, all these inventors get quite excited, with an air of discovering the destruction of art, the reduction of a whole culture to onomatopoeia and silence like an unknown phenomenon, a new idea, and which was only waiting for them to come along. They all dig up corpses to kill them again, in a cultural no-man's-land beyond which they can imagine nothing. Yet they are precisely the artists of today, though without seeing how. They truly express our time of obsolete ideas solemnly proclaimed to be new, this time of planned incoherence, of isolation and deafness assured by the means of mass communication, of higher forms of illiteracy taught in the university, of scientifically guaranteed lies, and of overwhelming technical power at the disposal of ruling mental incompetence. The incomprehensible history that they incomprehensibly translate is indeed this planetary spectacle, as ludicrous as it is bloody ...<sup>46</sup>

The article's imagery here is vivid and uncompromising: first, the Nouveaux Réalistes and fellow artists are cast as farcical grave-robbers disintering and attacking non-living adversaries; and second, as naive and 'uncomprehending' translators of the 'planetary spectacle' itself. This final charge of collusion is the most serious. Not only is Nouveau Réaliste theory and practice mocked, but also the broader social agendas and power structures informing it. Restany's technocracy appears at issue here, as is the violence attributed to capitalist governments, media and education systems.

Against Restany's proposal of an art of 'realism' and modern life, therefore, the Situationists proposed a biting critique of the *unrealism* of 'everyday life' as lived in the spectacle. Rather than anoint the everyday as art, they advocated a revolutionary *transformation* of the everyday. For both Debord and other Situationists such as Vaneigem, Viénet, Martin and Strijbosch, Nouveau Réalisme thus functioned as outright 'propaganda'. It promoted, they asserted, not only capitalist 'products', but 'behavioral models'.<sup>45</sup>

The Situationists' characterization of Nouveau Réalisme as a celebratory mirror and interpellative tool of commodity spectacle, however, calls out for critical reassessment. Rather than retain the Situationists' rigid model of aesthetic radicality and reaction, it is possible to challenge their occasionally simplistic self-positioning on the 'critical' side of cultural production, and most other post-war groups on the side of the 'complacent' or duped. While less direct than the Situationists, with their literal depictions of the 'Society of the Spectacle' going up in smoke, the Nouveaux Réalistes occasionally offered their own subversive visions of the spectacle of commercial goods before them.

### Detritus and the Outmoded

Every work by Arman appears as a shop-window  
... the shop-window of everyday life<sup>46</sup>

Alain Jouffroy (1963)

Arman's *Accumulations* from the early 1960s consist of imprisoned objects crammed behind thick display windows or massed together in wooden, glass or plastic display cases. The similar or serial objects on show in each piece range from dog combs to crucifixes, perfume dispensers to padlocks, and broken dolls to human hair. Unlike their glamorous counterparts in the actual world of commerce, many of these displays appear to exhibit stockpiles of unwanted, unfashionable or hoarded goods. While the *Accumulations* undoubtedly participated in the culture of the spectacle condemned by Debord, analysis of their resonant, richly layered imagery requires new interpretative strategies more attuned to their unsettling ambiguities and haunting effects.

Associations between Nouveau Réaliste works and commodity display, as we have seen, were emphasized by many commentators during the 1960s. While critic Alain Jouffroy, cited above, pointed out the resemblance of Arman's work to commercial vitrines, Arman was even more blunt about his sources of inspiration. As he noted in 1965, the *Accumulations* 'already existed. They existed in the display windows of shops, they existed in the "reserves" of every society.'<sup>47</sup> Arman's accumulations of battered alarm clocks, abandoned gas masks or unwanted dolls, however, not only referenced contemporary notions of everyday life and shop-window spectacle, but directly contravened modern aesthetic canons of their period.

### 'QUALITY REPLACES QUANTITY': SHIFTS IN FRENCH SHOP DISPLAY

In their presentation of overcrowded, outmoded or pre-used goods, Arman's displays entered into dialogue with historical traditions of shop display in

France. Many of his *Accumulations* and *Poubelles* hark back to earlier visual modes of retailing. As Molly Nesbit has pointed out in her study of Arget's photographs of early twentieth-century Parisian shop windows, the display of heaped piles of goods such as old clothes, scrap metal and food was associated, during the 1910s, with working-class areas, and as such was occasionally legislated against by administrators concerned with promoting a bourgeois public image of the city.<sup>48</sup> Hence, in 1913, certain city authorities ruled that: 'It is forbidden, in the interest of cleanliness and the good image of the public thoroughfare, to put old or used objects on display, such as: secondhand clothes, rags, scrap metal, etc.'<sup>49</sup>

While this ruling formalized an implicit distinction between 'messy' proletariat display spilling onto the streets and 'acceptable' bourgeois department-store display, by the 1920s a new distinction was being drawn between 'modern' and 'non-modern' forms of product display. Fernand Léger, the French modernist artist who would go on to create his own self-titled 'Nouveau Réaliste' art inspired by objects and shop-window display,<sup>50</sup> commented on the phenomenon as follows: 'Window-display spectacle has become a major concern in retailing activity. The violent desire to be more seen than one's neighbor animates our streets.'<sup>51</sup> He expanded:

The shopkeeper has understood that the object he is selling has artistic value in itself, if he knows how to show it to advantage. ... The street is becoming organized. By this I mean that the vitrines, the displays are becoming spectacular. A desire for order is taking hold. Instead of a thousand objects stacked against each other, ten are being exhibited, carefully presented, valorized. And they are as attractive, if not more so, than the old arrangement. Quality replaces quantity...<sup>52</sup>

Léger's modernist 'Nouveau Réalisme' sprang from an optimistic faith in technology, mechanized production and social progress. His depictions of new, beautiful, functional objects during the 1920s, however, offer a sharp contrast to the massed objects in post-war Nouveau Réalisme.

Where Léger pioneered a hygienic modernism tied to technological utopianism and avant-garde techniques of abstraction, the Nouveaux Réalistes more often looked to pre- or anti-modernist modes of display. At the level of aesthetics, for example, Arman's lumpy arrangements of objects are more suggestive of nineteenth-century *horror vacui* than of 1960s modernism's aesthetics of clarity and focus. And at the level of class connotation, they suggest earlier working-class practices of display associated with the reselling of second-hand goods rather than bourgeois department store imagery.

Léger's commercially inspired maxim of 'quality' over 'quantity' was eventually taken up by French museums. In 1938, for example, Paris's ethnographic museum reopened its doors with a radically reconfigured set of display practices. As the Assistant Curator of the newly named '*Musée de l'Homme*' explained:

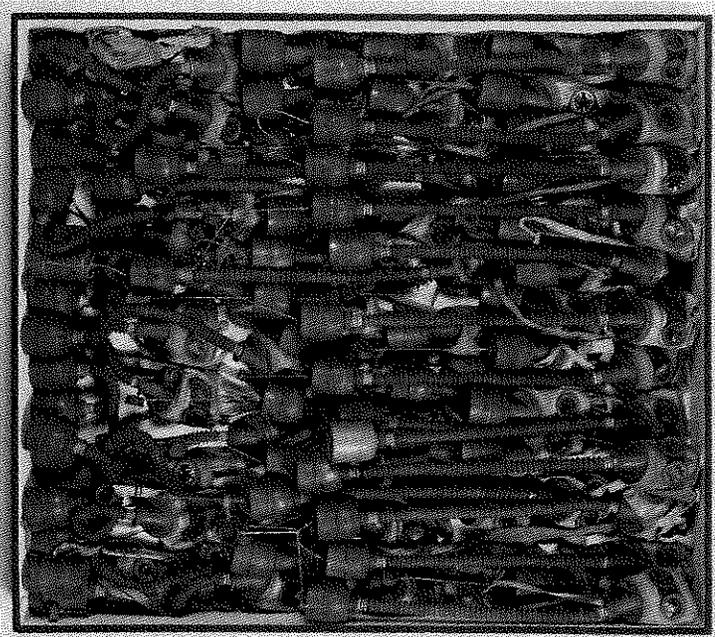
Against the old museums' system, in which all possessed objects were obligatorily placed on display because of an inability to put them elsewhere, we are deliberately substituting the principle of choice, of selection; severe selection, difficult choice, given that from a series of ten or twenty masks, for example, all of them interesting or beautiful, one must extract two or three specimens for presentation to the public ... [T]hese necessary eliminations pose arduous problems. But it does not otherwise seem possible to avoid the cramming together and disorder that were fatally produced by the old method.<sup>53</sup>

Arman's embrace of piling-up and 'disorder' represents a deliberate turning away from the modern and modernist ideals of aesthetic progress described above. Produced though they were in the face of celebratory mid-twentieth-century ideologies of modernity, the *Accumulations* appear to intertwine visions of the past and future into a reconfigured temporality or tense characteristic of what one might now loosely name the 'future-recursive'. Viewed today, his *Accumulations* evoke less the bold futuristic commercial icons that inspired Léger than their desolate scrap-heap destiny.

#### HOME SWEET HOME

*Home Sweet Home* (1960) consists of a mass of abandoned gas masks clustered together in an exhibition case (Figure 3.2). The masks' monstrous dehumanized faces anthropomorphically confront the viewer with glazed goggle eyes, mechanical proboscises and dangling oesophaguses. Locked in frozen museumification, the musty, antiquated technology generates a number of threatening and macabre effects. Its shifting associations oscillate between the familiar and unfamiliar, the animate and inanimate, humour and horror. Hence, for example, at one moment the objects call up the terrors of gas warfare in early twentieth-century Europe, and at another, nineteenth- or early twentieth-century ethnographic collections and their displays of 'foreign' non-Western masks.<sup>54</sup>

The gas masks themselves were relics or *revenants* of an expected yet averted catastrophe. Despite the masks' evocation of the trench warfare of World War I (more than one critic mistakenly claimed the masks were from this period), the gas masks in *Home Sweet Home* were fabricated in response to more recent French fears experienced closer to home. Known as the 'ANP 31' (the *Appareil Normal de Protection 31* – Normal Protection Apparatus 31) or simply 'Type 31', the masks were produced in France during the 1930s and into World War II. As Figure 3.3 demonstrates, masks such as these were prepared for distribution to Parisian citizens during World War II to protect against possible chemical warfare. The features of the ANP 31 were in part derived from an earlier mask used during World War I, but were remodeled (or on occasions simply refitted) to include



3.2 Arman, *Home Sweet Home*, 1960. © Arman Fernandez/SODRAC 2009.  
Photo courtesy of Armand P. Arman Revocable Trust

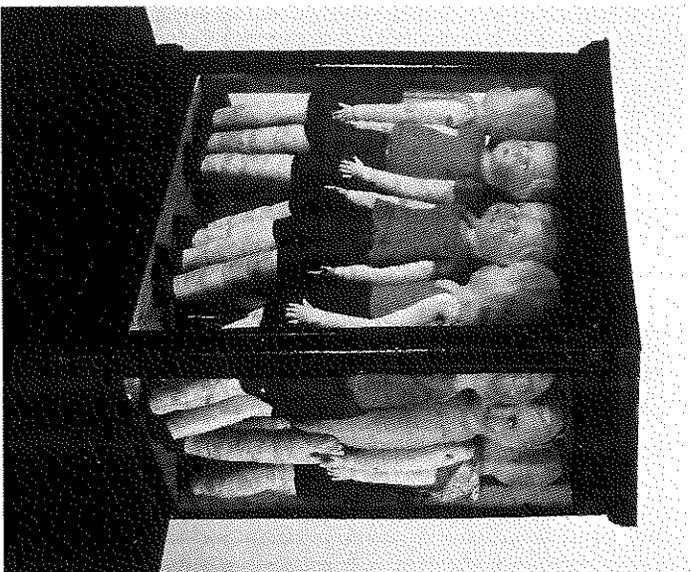


3.3 *Wartime Paris*, 1940. © Getty Images, 2009. Fox Photos

a distinctive corrugated respiratory tube and metal canister.<sup>55</sup> Arman's 1960 presentation of these masks evokes the massed seriality of unwanted objects awaiting destruction. It also enacts repetitive features associated with their production. The photograph in Figure 3.3, taken in 1940 before the fall of Paris, shows a series of ANP 31s lined up for inspection. Their assembly-line arrangement suggests not only techniques of factory mass-production, but a military inspection of armed soldiers. Set up on dummy human heads, the masks cover over the inanimate qualities of their support and allow for an imagining of possible human presence. This screening and blurring of distinctions between life and lifelessness reappears in Arman's accumulation through the masks' overt anthropomorphic features.

The topographic layers that constitute *Home Sweet Home* can be approached through simultaneous reference to their object-based materiality and metaphoric association. On one level, for example, the crammed arrangement of the masks is strongly suggestive of suffocation. On another level, however, the smothering evoked here might also suggest other forms of burial or blockage associated with suppression or repression, compacted repetition figuring again and again in the *Accumulations'* topographic build-up. Compressed, condensed and compositionally suspended between disorder and equilibrium, the serial uniformity of Arman's obsolete remnants evokes not only industrialized mechanical reproduction, but impersonality, invisibility and mechanized death.

Arman described his serial accumulation technique as a means of heightening the assertive force of an object. As he put it: "The obsessional and emphatic aspect of the multiplicity of an object renders it similar to an even granulation, an expression of the collective conscience of this same object."<sup>56</sup> For Arman, in other words, 'self-multiplication' heightened both the fetishistic, emotional impact of an object, and the compositional, formal impact of an artwork as an 'evenly' structured whole. Seeking to further elucidate the 'emphatic' effect produced by accumulation, he also drew parallels between his works and African nkisi or nail 'fetish' figurines.<sup>57</sup> *Home Sweet Home* indeed reflects not only his interest in African art, but also his keen awareness of the fetishistic power of multiplied objects, whether Western or non-Western. *Home Sweet Home* evokes a range of fetishistic references, including Western notions of the so-called 'primitive' fetish, the fetishistic practices of Western ethnography (with its display cases filled with fragments of cultural otherness), and Western collecting fetishism in general (with its Freudian associations of hoarding and obsession). The protective function of the masks, moreover – their talismanic ability to ward off danger – is itself ironically referenced through the piece's joke-like title. Whether fetish or repository of other projections, however, *Home Sweet Home*'s startling presentation of the uncanny dramatically undercuts its title's reassuring promise of 'home'.



3.4 Arman, *Le Village des damnés*, 1962. © Arman Fernandez/SODRAC 2009.  
Photo courtesy of Armand P. Arman Revocable Trust

#### THE VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED

In *Le Village des damnés* (*The Village of the Damned*) (1962) giant cloth dolls, over 45 cms high, stare out from an old-fashioned glass-sided box and confront the viewer with an uncanny image of seriality and repetition (Figure 3.4). Each doll sports an identical cast head – androgynous, blonde-haired and childlike – attached to a lumpen body. The bodies – unfinished, straw-filled and the size of a small child – are partially adorned with pinned-on pink and black undergarments.

Like most of Arman's early *Accumulations*, *Le Village des damnés* consists of objects that were already outmoded by the early 1960s. Of the first 231 *Accumulations* created by Arman between 1960 and 1962, according to Pierre Baracca, 96 per cent contain objects that existed before World War II, and some from the nineteenth and even eighteenth centuries.<sup>58</sup> Positioned at the border between craft production and serial industrial production, the dolls present a striking example of the auratic-outmoded. The dolls' size, moulded heads and soft bodies can be compared to those of handmade

dolls produced by French companies such as *SFBJ* (a company founded in 1899 that went out of business between 1959 and 1960, as new plastic mass-produced dolls rose in market popularity).<sup>59</sup> The dolls in Arman's accumulation, however, are in fact examples of a considerably more downmarket toy. Produced by a company called Huard, they were sold in charity venues such as church fêtes and date from the 1940s. Their heads were made of papier maché, and their bodies left for assembly by their buyers.<sup>60</sup> The Huard dolls in *Le Village des damnés* are clearly incomplete, lacking costumes and in some cases even undergarments. Like the auratic abandoned objects described in Walter Benjamin's writings on commodity phantasmagoria, they appear to refer back to products, procedures and people left behind by capitalism's new fashions and production methods.

In his discussions of Surrealist objects, Hal Foster has argued that 'fragile relics' of capitalism can at times 'confront the bourgeois order with tokens of its repressed past'.<sup>61</sup> 'The capitalist outmoded,' he suggests, 'relativizes bourgeois culture, denies its pretense to the natural and the eternal, opens it up to its own history, indeed its own historicity' and challenges it 'with its own forfeited dreams'.<sup>62</sup> Foster's theorization of the outmoded suggests important avenues for investigating Arman's *Accumulations*. Not only can the outmoded trigger historical memory, he suggests, it can also trigger individual memory through the operations of the uncanny. Fusing Marx, Freud and Walter Benjamin, Foster argues that Freud's uncanny is at times structurally analogous to the outmoded. Both, he emphasizes, re-present repressed material from the past. Foster's rereading of the uncanny as the subjective dimension of the outmoded helps elucidate some of the more sinister, disquieting aspects of Arman's *Accumulations* by illuminating the uncanny affects that arise alongside capitalist cycles of production, consumption and destruction.

*Le Village des damnés* is named after a horror-science-fiction film of 1960 featuring a brood of evil, mutant, almost identical blonde-haired children, based on the 1957 book *The Mithraic Cuckoos* by John Wyncham. Through their emphasis on replication, they all readily evoke Freud's concept of the 'uncanny' and its Gothic connotations. Freud described the uncanny as that which provokes sensations of fateful inescapability, doubling or haunting. As he notes, it can be figured through 'wax work figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata',<sup>63</sup> or via other phenomena ranging from *déjà vu* to dismembered limbs, to thoughts of being buried alive. Each of these phenomena, he argues, can evoke the sense of an unsettling return of the same. Freud further defines the uncanny as 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'.<sup>64</sup> The uncanny or 'unheimlich', he specifies, 'is something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it'.<sup>65</sup> For

Freud, therefore, the uncanny arises through repression and is manifested through repetition. It occurs when the forgotten-familiar is re-clothed by the unconscious in the guise of the gloomy, demonic or unfamiliar. The dolls in Arman's *Le Village des damnés* similarly weave estranged familiarity with unnerving recurrence.

A reading of these old-fashioned childhood toys as tokens of outdated commodity production and figures of repressed memory appears supported by Arman's own views. As Arman noted in interview in 1968:

I have been quite fascinated by the transformation of the object through civilization and of the history of art. A hundred years ago the object had a very strong personality just by the fact it was made by human hand. Every chair was a little bit different even if they were alike. Every clock was different ... Those objects that were made by hand were passed on to the son, and the son passed it on to his son. They were repaired with love ... And because they were really created by hand, these objects got part of the individuality of the people who created them.<sup>66</sup>

Such objects, Arman argued, possessed a more 'human' quality than their later mass-produced successors. Asked in 1983 whether he attempted to 'accentuate' a 'sense of humanity in objects', he responded: 'Yes, because they have that sense for me, and I want to use it and make it more apparent.'<sup>67</sup> Arman's intuition of an individual, independent quality within handmade, pre-industrial objects appears in keeping with Walter Benjamin's theories of the outmoded. For both Benjamin and theorists following him, such as Hal Foster, Frederic Jameson and Andreas Huyssen, the early hand-crafted object or outmoded commodity relic may function as an auratic site of 'memory value'. As Foster argues in his 1993 book on Surrealism, *Compulsive Beauty*, outmoded, pre-industrial and early industrial objects can potentially re-awaken repressed historical memory. In his words, 'outmoded images may challenge the capitalist object with images either repressed in its past or outside its purview, as when an old or exotic object, redolent of a different productive mode, social formation, and structure of feeling, is recalled, as it were, in protest.'<sup>68</sup> This concept of an uncanny, disturbing contestatory power within the *objet démodé* can be traced from the writings of Walter Benjamin and the Surrealists to the present.

#### COMMODITY FETTERISM, AURA AND THE OUTMODED

Foster's readings of the outmoded are built upon Walter Benjamin's theories of aura and the outmoded, which are themselves partly derived from Karl Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. Where Marx theorized the commodity fetish as an illusory representation of pristine wholeness masking an absent or 'emptied' narrative of relations of production, Walter Benjamin theorized

the auratic-outmoded as a potentially volatile, legible text inscribed with narratives of history and human relations.

In volume one of *Capital* (1867), Karl Marx argued that the different processes of production that lie behind the fabrication of a commodity object are frequently masked in the final product.<sup>69</sup> Not only is the specificity of human labour spent in its production rendered invisible, but so too are other social relations and conditions surrounding its making, including relations of exploitation. Thus, as he notes in 'The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof', the commodity fetish appears on the market fully formed. Like a religious icon or 'primitive' fetish sculpture, he suggests, it is misconstrued by its Western audience as a seemingly autonomous entity endowed with life-like, human qualities.

Where Marx's theory of commodity fetishism emphasized the objectification of the human worker, Walter Benjamin's theories of fetishistic aura focused primarily on the 'human' quality of objects. Auratic experience, Benjamin argued, involves the projection of human attributes: 'To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.'<sup>70</sup> Benjamin proposed the work of art, the commodity fetish and the outmoded and mundane as examples of the auratic. Referring specifically to the outmoded, he cited as examples 'the gloomy beauty of unsaleable articles such as may still be found in arcades', and the 'charm' of 'damaged and decaying goods' associated with once 'radiant' but now unfashionable 'places of pilgrimage to the fetish Commodity'.<sup>71</sup> Drawing upon Marcel Proust's conception of the '*mémoire involontaire*' and Sigmund Freud's conception of the memory trace, Benjamin linked aura with the triggering of both collective and personal memory. Collective history, he suggested, could be read in the traces of the human maker or user left on abandoned objects.

Benjamin's theories of the auratic-outmoded were heavily inspired by the Surrealists' interest in the flea-market or arcade object. For the Surrealists, the outmoded could trigger the 'marvelous', a realm of personal freedom, poetry and dreaming outside the confines of everyday life. As Breton noted, fragments from the past, whether 'romantic ruins, the modern mannequin' or unusable flea-market items, could engender a 'sort of general revelation'.<sup>72</sup> Such experience was tied neither to possession nor to works of art; indeed the *objet démodé* could even be left in the flea-market or arcade where it was found. Benjamin elaborated on the Surrealists' vision of the outmoded in his essay 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European *Intelligentsia*'. The Surrealist André Breton, Benjamin noted:

was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded', in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the

dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution – no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution – not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism ... They bring the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in these things to the point of explosion.<sup>72</sup>

Benjamin sought to identify a 'revolutionary', contradictory force within the repressed substrata of capitalism's devalued flotsam and jetsam.

Walter Benjamin and André Breton's 'Gothic Marxism', as Margaret Cohen names it, has spawned a rich, provocative body of theory that posits intersections between Freudian and Marxist theories of repression.<sup>74</sup> Both Hal Foster, as we have seen, and other theorists such as Andreas Huyssen and Frederic Jameson have each turned their attention to the outmoded to theorize the critical potential of the commodity relic. In his 1995 book *Twilight Memories*, Huyssen argues that museumified 'anti-exchange' fetishes offer the possibility of awakening 'twilight memories' suppressed by the spectacle's 'culture of amnesia'.<sup>75</sup> Preserved or 'mummified' objects, he suggests, can function as auratic sites of 'memory value' that communicate 'generational memories on the wane due to the passing of time and the continuing speed of technological modernization'.<sup>76</sup> Foster has examined Surrealism's fascination with mementos of pre- or early capitalist relations. Surrealist collections of hand-crafted objects and other signs of "'dead labor" come back to haunt the living', he notes, query 'the dominant system of commodity exchange'.<sup>77</sup> For Frederic Jameson, these same Surrealist objects – redolent with 'the half-sketched, uneffaced mark of human labor, of the human gesture, on them' – spark psychic and revolutionary energies.<sup>78</sup> For each of these theorists, the auratic-outmoded unleashes a disruptive force that challenges the pristine commodity fetish's 'missing' narratives of human production and use.

#### 'FORCE OF THE REAL'

In July 1960, Arman spelt out elements of his theory of accumulation in his manifesto 'The Realism of Accumulations'. His text, steeped in fetishistic language, refers to a 'force of the real' embedded in his accumulations:

To every manufactured object there corresponds a precise series of operations that are all fully contained in its form and destination. Multiplied by the number of subjects chosen, these operations are liberated in the accumulative surfaces.

This work procedure correlates with contemporary methods: automation, assembly-line production, and also serial discarding, creating strata and geological layers full of all the force of the real.<sup>79</sup>

Arman's theorization of an explosive-convulsive force in his accumulated objects appears partially indebted to both Marx and the Surrealists. In a seeming nod to Marxist theories of reification, for example, he argued that his *Accumulations* embodied refined gestures or procedures of production. Thus in 1960 he referred to 'contained movements' in manufactured goods, noting: 'The object, our manufactured object, through all the gestures necessary for its elaboration, liberates all these contained movements with a great force.'<sup>80</sup> The tensions that Arman evokes here between production, containment and release seen associated less with the outmoded, therefore, than with the fetishized and fetishizing forces of industrial production. As the 1960s progressed, Arman recounts, his focus shifted significantly from outmoded objects to new mass-produced goods. As he noted of his first visit to New York:

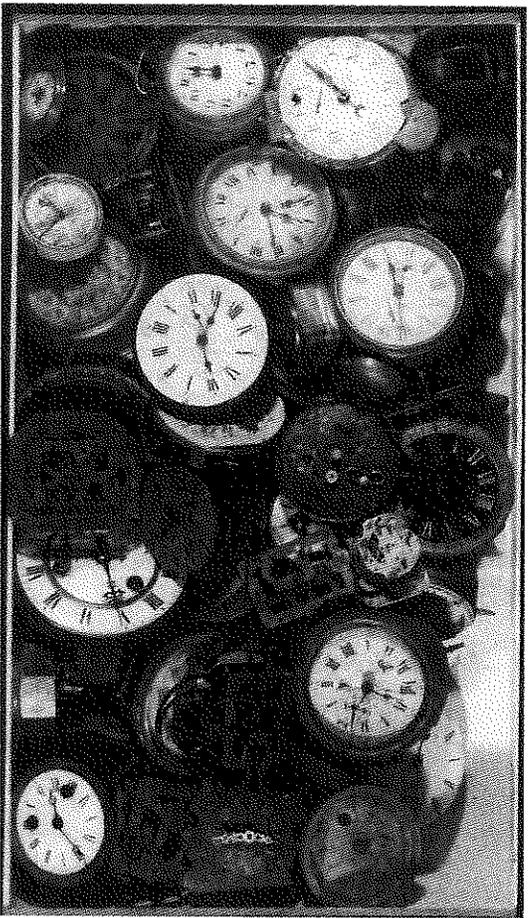
1961–1962: ... I land and find myself in the center of my dreams, vitrines of vitrines, a profusion of windowed crystals on the rock of Manhattan. So I say to the past: Au revoir, bye bye to archeological harvesting in public dumps, to anemic buys at the flea-market. The empire of production stretches out before the hand and eye.<sup>81</sup>

By 1964, he observed, his works had become 'sleeker' and less 'antique'.<sup>82</sup> Arman's turn to the pristine commodity fetish rather than the auratic flea-market object, however, was never as clear-cut as his comments above suggest. The outmoded, the serial, and the unwanted resurfaced in his work as recurring themes.

#### THE PARADOX OF TIME

Arman's *Le Paradoxe du temps* (1961) (*The Paradox of Time*) (Figure 3.5) consists of a mass grave of alarm clocks piled on top of each other in a shallow box-like wooden showcase. The clocks, dilapidated, broken and rusty, are pressed claustrophobically against a windowpane. Peering within this secular reliquary, one can discern a motley collection of clocks and dismembered clock parts: alarm bells, haemorrhaged springs, cracked panes of glass. The 'paradox of time' of the title appears to signal a suspension of time's flight. Read as a commentary on modernity, the work suggests conflicting notions of modern progress and its failures. Modernity's 'legacy' of defunct serial products – here the very disciplinary tools used to help ensure production – are frozen in a melancholic display of extinguished use value.

When questioned on his work, Arman responded: 'I'm attracted by celestial mechanics. Clocks, dials, watches, cogs come back in my work like the cult-objects of a universe subjected to time.'<sup>83</sup> Arman also, however, emphasized memory over time. As he put it in a 1968 interview: 'I'm more obsessed (upset) by memory than by time ... Time doesn't exist. I believe in



3.5 Arman, *Le Paradaxe du temps*, 1961. © Arman Feriandez/SODRAC 2009. Photo courtesy of Armand P. Arman Revocable Trust

memory. Memory is the real inspiration. Memory creates time.<sup>86</sup> Arman's references to 'upset' memory, repetition and obsession offer useful keys for reassessing his works. Viewed retrospectively, his allegorical tableau of arrested time simultaneously evokes the slow *durée* of entropy, and the more punctual freeze-frame of traumatic seizure or arrest. Freud, in his writings on memory and traumatic neurosis, emphasized the ways in which memory may freeze around the site of unassimilated knowledge. That which is repressed from memory, he suggests, may manifest itself after the fact via unconscious actions of repetition-compulsion and the return of the repressed.<sup>87</sup> Freud termed these returns *Nachträglichkeit* or deferred action, a term re-translated by Lacan as *après coup*. Following Freud, Cathy Caruth has elaborated on the ways in which an unexpected shock triggers traumatic returns. Trauma arises, she proposes, from a temporal split between sight and understanding: 'a break in the mind's experience of time'.<sup>88</sup> Hence, she argues, it can be experienced as an ungrasped 'missed event' where one 'saw nothing'. Nouveau Réaliste traumatic realism, I shall suggest, manifests itself via similar acts of amnesic mimetic repetition. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that certain works by Arman appear to re-stage historically earlier scenes of objects when viewed retrospectively through a cultural politics of the outmoded. These scenes from the past, however, include not only pre-modern imageries of consumer spectacle, but haunting scenes of historical disaster.

#### OBJECTSCAPES OF CATASTROPHE

In reality, I commit always the same act of conservation:  
I show the condition of catastrophe.<sup>89</sup>

Arman

Links between catastrophe, historical disavowal and Arman's *Accumulations* and *Poubelles* are explored by Benjamin Buchloh in his essay 'Plenty or Nothing: From Yves Klein's *Le Vide* to Arman's *Le Plein*'. Buchloh argues that France's post-war consumer culture occurred in tandem with processes of historical repression. French 1960s visual art, he suggests, was shaped by an imbrication of forces of modernization and amnesia.<sup>88</sup>

Government-sanctioned programmes of modernization indeed helped to suppress or erase unwelcome memories. Key amongst the experiences to be left 'behind' were memories of World War II, France's defeat and Vichy France's active collaboration with Nazi Germany, including the rounding up of French Jews by French police.

Buchloh observes that Arman's *Accumulations* of particular objects such as eyeglasses, gas masks and dentures 'seem to echo' the accumulations of personal materials and possessions hoarded in concentration camps. Following an interview with Arman in 1998, he confirmed that Arman saw Alain Resnais's 1955 film *Nuit et brouillard* 'upon its release and remembers it as having had a profound impact on him'.<sup>89</sup> Buchloh thus identifies Renais's filmed images of massed objects belonging to Holocaust victims as possible sources for Arman's 'memory images' of the 'recent past'.

Ziva Amishai-Maisels has also noted the correspondence of Arman's works with media-disseminated images of the Holocaust. In her 1993 book, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts*, she argues that the appearance of 'eyeglasses, shoes and dentures' in Arman's *Accumulations* precisely paralleled Adolf Eichmann's capture, trial and execution between 1960 and mid-1962.<sup>90</sup> Specific works referred to by Amishai-Maisels include *La Vie à pleines dents* (1960), *Le Massacre des innocents* (1961) and *Maison Avenue* (1962).

*La Vie à pleines dents* (1960) consists of a macabre accumulation of discarded false teeth (Figure 3.6). The simulated body parts include pink flesh-like areas of the palate, and rusty and non-rusty metal fittings. As in many of Arman's early works, an uneasy tension arises between the piece's disconcertingly evocative materials and its playful, witty title. *La Poubelle du coiffeur* (1960) (*The Hairdresser's Dustbin*) consists of a wooden display case or drawer filled with human hair and stained, dirty cotton wool. Nestled amongst this refuse swept up from a hairdresser's floor are hairpins and a discarded bottle. Arman's *Argus extra-myope* of 1961, named after the Greek mythological monster with a hundred eyes, consists of an



3.6 Arman, *La Vie à pleines dents*, 1960. © Arman Fernandez/SODRAC 2009. Photo Credit: CNAC/MNAM/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY. Photo by Philippe Migaut

accumulation of reading spectacles. *Madison Avenue* (1962), whose title evokes New York's high-end shopping street, consists of a display of scuffed, used women's high-heeled shoes. *Le Massacre des innocents I and II* (1961) present battered dolls' parts, and *Ainsi, font, font* (1960), a collection of disembodied dolls' hands.

*La Vie à pleines dents*, or 'life with full teeth', is a French expression meaning 'life lived to the full'. Its striking title and imagery can be compared with another Nouveau Réaliste work featuring false teeth by Daniel Spoerri. Spoerri created his work a year after Arman's and named it *Achat de vieux dentiers* (*Ici on peut essayer*) or 'Sale of Old Dentures (Here You Can Try Them On)'. He humorously recounts negotiating with a sceptical second-hand dentures vendor at the Saint-Ouen flea-market to buy the latter's entire sales display (complete with sign and overhanging doomsday trumpet). Once acquired, he attempted to maintain the vendor's original display in the manner of a *Snake Picture*. Spoerri characterized his presentation as a part-absurd, part-tragic, part-sociological testimonial to a type of small commerce 'on its way to disappearance'.<sup>91</sup> Arman, on the contrary, intervened directly with his materials, choosing, washing and arranging the teeth in his display case. Reflecting on such differences, Spoerri noted that to frame his own assemblage under glass would be to 'make it acceptable (that's the secret of Arman)'.<sup>92</sup> While Arman indeed frequently sought to create formal and aesthetic effects through his accumulation technique, Spoerri's characterization of Arman's use of glass as a way to neutralize the disturbing

impact of his found materials can be challenged. Rather than deflect their horror, Arman's accumulation technique occasionally condenses it. This occurs despite the light-hearted or punning titles of the works. Asked in 1983 about the humour in his titles, Arman responded: 'Humour is like an exercise in bad or good taste ... You know the definition of humour from Ambrose Bierce: "Humour is the politeness of despair."<sup>93</sup> He added: 'I don't feel that kind of despair', and elaborated: 'the presence of death can be found in my work. But not with an attitude of despair – rather with one of calm acceptance.'<sup>94</sup>

#### 'IT WAS DISCONNECTED'

It is striking to observe how few commentators in France during the early 1960s explicitly referred to this 'presence of death' in Arman's work. One rare exception was Robert Benayoun, interviewed in conversation with critic José Pierre in the Surrealist journal *La Brèche* in 1962. Benayoun noted: 'I can't help thinking despite myself of those mountains of combs and of hair that were refound at Büchenwald: is it possible to derive an aesthetic from this?'<sup>95</sup> For most French critics writing on the *Accumulations* during the 1960s, such associations were either unprintable, unthinkable, or both.

Arman generally avoided interpreting his work as referencing the Holocaust. When asked by Tita Reut in 2004 about the associations of his bronze sculpture of accumulated suitcases *Consigne à vie* (1985), for example, he responded: 'As for the suitcases, there was absolutely no correlation with any kind of exodus, whether the Shoah or whatever. It was disconnected.'<sup>96</sup> Reut responded: 'Would you accept, nonetheless, this second reading a posteriori, even if it escapes you?'<sup>97</sup> Arman replied:

I continue to not endorse it because, if I had wanted to evoke the exodus, I wouldn't have done it like that. I remember the exodus: I was on the road. The exodus passed by my grandfather's large field. I've seen what an exodus is. There's a great disorder, no: suitcases but mostly bundles and a sort of accumulation of things being carried. It can range from beds to suitcases, sometimes, naturally, and the whole in an unbelievable confusion on vehicles that are not always cars. I've seen exoduses and I can speak about them ... It's always the same thing. I always have the same image in mind, and it isn't an accumulation of suitcases.<sup>98</sup>

The conversation continued, with no mention of Arman's other grandfather, a Sephardic Jew.<sup>99</sup> Arman elaborated that, unlike Christian Boltanski, whose work 'sadly celebrates the Shoah', and 'makes me think ... he felt guilty for not having been in it', his own early work was tied to 'a certain denunciation of the mass production that was going to crush us'.<sup>100</sup>

In 2007, Didier Semin addressed the possibility of repressed imagery in Nouveau Réaliste works by emphasizing their association with archeological metaphors. After reminding his readers of Freud's characterization of Pompeii

as 'a theatre of sudden return into light of unconscious knowledge',<sup>101</sup> he cites a passage from Freud's 1925 text 'Negation': 'There is no stronger evidence that the unconscious has successfully been uncovered than when the patient reacts with the words: "That's not what I was thinking", or "I wasn't thinking (have never thought) any such thing".'<sup>102</sup> Semlin's suggestion that negation may colour the Nouveau Réalistes' own vision of their art opens up interesting counter-perspectives on Arman's work. These reinforce interpretations of Arman's *Accumulations* as both sites of the uncanny, and as examples of 'traumatic realism'.

#### TRAUMATIC REALISM

Nouveau Réalisme's complex relations to temporality are performed through the repetitive restagings of traumatic realism. I define 'traumatic realism' as a form of amnesic repetition that may retroactively provoke memory for future viewers. Such a definition can be distinguished from Michael Rothberg's use of the term in his 2000 book, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, in which he attributes an educational goal to traumatic realism, arguing that it seeks 'to instruct' or 'produce the traumatic event as an object of knowledge'.<sup>103</sup> While such a reading helps elucidate the testimonial writings of Holocaust survivors investigated in his book, it differs from the present chapter's use of the term to emphasize Nouveau Réalisme's refusals of knowledge and undidactic acting out of the past.

The term 'traumatic realism' has been employed by several theorists to designate possible relationships between visual representation and psychoanalytic theories of unassimilated knowledge and repetition. In his 1996 book *The Return of the Real*, for example, Hal Foster has referred to 'a complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts' in post-war neo-avant-gardes, noting:

On this analogy the avant-garde work is never historically effective or fully significant in its initial moments. It cannot be because it is traumatic – a hole in the symbolic order of its time that is not prepared for it, that cannot receive it; at least not immediately, at least not without structural change.<sup>104</sup>

This 'failure to signify' – a *trou de mémoire*, or memory lapse, or blank – possibly underpins not only certain of Arman's *Accumulations*, but other Nouveau Réaliste neo-dada repetitions as well.

Foster argues that traumatic realism in art may both articulate a traumatic event through repetition compulsion, and also rehearse solutions by rendering 'invisible' knowledge of the period retrospectively visible.<sup>105</sup> The latter operation functions retroactively, through the eyes of future viewers. Traumatic realism can arise, Foster suggests, when a shocked subject 'takes on the nature of what shocks him as a mimetic defense against this shock'. He cites as an

example the work of Andy Warhol.<sup>106</sup> For Foster, the serial repetition figured in Warhol's 1960s prints of mass-produced commodities or contemporary 'Disasters' suggests both 'a draining of significance and a defending against affect'.<sup>107</sup> Thus, he notes: 'More than a patient release from the object in mourning,' Warhol's repetitions 'suggest an obsessive fixation on the object in melancholy'.<sup>108</sup> Dominick LaCapra has referred to somewhat similar effects of trauma-induced repetition in the actions of the melancholic: 'In acting-out, the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed.'<sup>109</sup> For both theorists, the return of unassimilated knowledge arises from a 'missed encounter' with the 'real', understood in the Lacanian sense as the (unknowable) experience of death and source of future anxiety.<sup>110</sup>

Traumatic realism frequently emerges in the intersection, as Michael Rothberg puts it, 'of the everyday and the extreme'.<sup>111</sup> In a 2006 study of *nouveau roman* and *nouvelle vague* imagery, titled 'Horror and the Everyday in Post-Holocaust France', Max Silverman has explored this folding together of horror and the banal in the work of poet, novelist and *Nuit et brouillard* scenarist Jean Cayrol.<sup>112</sup> Cayrol not only theorized the presence of everyday objects in his own filmed depiction of the Holocaust, Silverman notes, but described the emergence of a thematics of concentration and repetition in post-war art. Cayrol labelled the trend '*art concentrationnaire*' (Concentrationary art) and describes it thus: 'One can foresee, and already we can observe it in some young painters, a certain concentrationary or lazarian current in the inspiration of numerous exhibited paintings (continuous repetition of the same formulas, hypnotic state of forms and volumes, colour tension, panic world of objects, etc.)'.<sup>113</sup> Silverman's evocation of a 'concentrationary imaginary' at work in French post-war art and contemporary popular culture sheds new light on Arman's *Accumulations*. Arman's imagery can be read as symptomatic of broader trends in post-war artistic production scarred by collective historical repression. These include both the object-focused images of *nouveau roman* and *nouvelle vague* texts, and the paintings referred to above by Cayrol.

Silverman suggests that certain scenes of everyday objects offer 'a palimpsest-like effect in which one scene is visible behind, or within, another'.<sup>114</sup> This haunting effect, he proposes, is conveyed in Andrew Hebard's observation that the existence of a culturally repressed past within the present is not one where they coexist within the same temporality, but rather where the past interrupts and unsettles the present, challenging ideas of both closure and progress.<sup>115</sup>

In light of these metaphors of layering and disruption, it is possible to reconsider the significance of Arman's topographies of traumatic realism. On the one hand, the obsessive repetition of objects in the showcases suggests a fetishistic denial of the past. On the other hand, through their refiguring of the past, they offer a terrain of possible future-anterior rediscovery. This

interruption of the present by the past is not always, however, articulated in these terms.

WITNESS OF THE TIMES

In figuring archival material as evidence there is the dangerous potential that the archive will stand in for memory as a form of complacent closure, the closure of merely stating 'this happened' without negotiating its implications.<sup>116</sup>

Andrew Hebard (1997)

Throughout his career, Arman positioned himself as a passionate archivist and 'witness of the times'. 'I have the impression,' he stated to Alain Joffroy in a 1966 interview in *L'Œil*, 'that artists are always witnesses of their times. We are the product of the period, moment and place in which we live.'<sup>117</sup> Arman's object-documents indeed invoke a world crammed to overflowing with objects. As he noted in 1960: 'In our world, in our system, consumer goods are produced by assembly line, presented, and rejected. Quantitatively, this phenomenon of industrial or domestic refuse, of unused, outmoded things, caught my attention and my care. I propose a vision of this piled up compartmentalized universe.'<sup>118</sup> He elaborated:

I didn't discover the principle of accumulation, it discovered me ... society feeds its sense of security with a pack-rat instinct demonstrated in its window displays, its assembly lines, its garbage piles. As a witness of my society, I have always been very much involved in the pseudo-biological cycle of production, consumption and destruction ... I have been anguished by the fact that one of the most conspicuous material results is the flooding of our world with junk and rejected ... objects.<sup>119</sup>

Arman's ambivalent attitude towards post-war production, consumerism and waste has been a topic of debate for many commentators. During the 1960s, a majority of critics on the left dismissed his work as an uncritical illustration of commodity spectacle. His work, they announced, merged effortlessly with the commercial display it evoked.

Arman's later career trajectory, moreover (one part of which was built upon the slick production of sliced violins, sliced Venus de Milo statuettes, and sliced or boxed commodity gadgets), helped lead to his characterization as Nouveau Réalisme's very own Salvador Dalí: the 'Avida Dollars' of the artworld.<sup>120</sup>

One critic, however – Alain Joffroy – stood out for his more nuanced engagement with Arman's work. In his catalogue essay 'The Objectors' of 1965, Joffroy billed Arman as an 'objector' to consumerism, alongside other artists making object-focused art such as Daniel Spoerri, Jean Pierre Raynaud and Tetsumi Kudo. This text, however, does not deny the ambiguous nature of Arman's stance towards mass-produced objects. In a passage subtitled 'Arman's Conquest', Joffroy writes:

Arman attempts to conjure away, to dam the flood. His works suggest those barricades of overturned cars and tanks that poor peoples sometimes erect when trying to keep a powerful army at bay. The 'army', from this perspective, is the production of industrial societies, their dictatorial plethora, their pretension to regulate the planet through accumulation, the capital of material goods. But, at the same time, for Arman it is a question of making this accumulation his own ... Arman thesaurizes the richness of objects, after coveting it with the fanaticism of a butterfly collector or collector of rare plants. Through the indefinite repetition of this act – 'the accumulation of identical objects in boxes' – he puts his conquests on display. His works resemble hunting pictures. Revolt fades from sight behind such pride ... [Arman attempts] to avoid being crushed by recuperating the arms of the enemy.<sup>121</sup>

As Joffroy notes above, Arman appears to adopt the role of an over-zealous consumer and collector. His attempts to register and/or resist consumerist waste, indeed pose intriguing paradoxes. Jaimey Hamilton, for one, has argued that Arman simultaneously enacted the role of 'detached observer, fetishistic consumer, and engaged demystifier of capitalism all at once'.<sup>122</sup> This slippage between resistance, critique and complicity testifies to the shifting instability and complex multi-layering of Arman's various subject-positions.

Dissonance and ambiguity characterized Arman's early productions, allowing them to signify in opposing ways – both during the 1960s and now. As we have seen, the accumulations were viewed during the 1960s as both a rebellion against the world of industrial production and commercial display, and conversely, as a celebration of the commodity form and exemplar of its 'logic'. This ambiguity was due in part to a specifically French context of reception of the object that was itself in a state of flux. At the aesthetic level, this context was fractured between Surrealist and 'modernist' views of the object, and at the social level, between attitudes of enthusiasm and deep ambivalence towards the new 'American' culture of the 'throw-away' consumer object.

Andrew Hebard, as cited earlier, warned of the danger that 'in figuring archival material as evidence', an archive may 'stand in for memory as a form of complacent closure'.<sup>123</sup> Hebard's warning echoes the Narrative Figuratonists' concern that Nouveau Réalisme presented mere 'statements of fact'. Does Nouveau Réaliste art perform such an act of fetishistic closure? Aesthetic realisms, as Michael Rothberg has pointed out, all too often attempt to fetishistically deny 'the scars that mark the relationship of discourse to the real'.<sup>124</sup> Restany's conception of realism as a factual, material, even indexical, discourse, I would suggest, clearly corresponds with such a 'facile embrace of closure and coherence'.<sup>125</sup> If a fetishistic operation is at work in Restany's rhetoric, therefore, it may well lie in the latter's denial of trauma. As we have seen, however, where Restany's theories of Nouveau Réalisme attempted to fetishize the new and deny the past, the force of the uncanny in Arman's *Accumulations* all too often interrupts 'perfect' closure.

## Notes

1. Pontus Hulten, *Jean Tinguely: 'Méta'* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), p. 327.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 332.
3. Jean Tinguely, *Rotozaza III* (1969).
4. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983).
5. Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
6. Martial Rayasse, quoted in *Martial Rayasse* (Paris: Editions du Jeu de Palme, 1992), p. 36: 'une sorte d'apologie de la société de consommation.'
7. Henri Meschonnet, 'Quoi de neuf chez les nouveaux réalistes?', *Cinéma* 64, 10/2 (March/June 1963): p. 42: 'des sortes de sculptures pour vitrines ou des boîtes d'étalage ressemblant à celles que les décorateurs professionnels ... réussissent généralement mieux.' Niké de Saint-Phalle incurred similar comments. In 1963, for example, Edouard Roditi claimed that a 'gigantic human figure' by Saint-Phalle not only 'revealed too much feminine good taste' but 'looked like something cooked up by an elegant department store's display-artist to attract crowds before Christmas sales-windows'. In Edouard Roditi, 'The Critic as Baby-Sitter', *Arts Magazine*, 38/2 (November 1963): p. 49.
8. Martial Rayasse, quoted in *Martial Rayasse*, p. 36: 'Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est la profusion colorée de l'article en série, l'afflux quantitatif des étalages, la maree de produits neufs dans les grands magasins. L'art actuel, c'est une fusée dans l'espace. Les Prismatics sont les musées de l'art moderne.'
9. Daniel Spoerri, *An Anarchist's Topography of Chance* (London: Atlas Press, 1995), p. 205.
10. Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 181.
11. Daniel Spoerri, interview with author (Paris, 1996).
12. Spoerri became active in Fluxus following its inception in 1962. *L'Épicerie's* attempt to fuse art with everyday life and to divorce art from its prestige market value became common themes in Fluxus art.
13. Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art*, p. 181.
14. Daniel Spoerri, *Anarchist's Topography*, p. 204.
15. *Christie Works 1959-1989 from the Lija Collection*, ed. Per Horvdenakk (Oslo: The Henrik-Onstad Arts Centre, 1990), p. 19.
16. Pontus Hulten, *Jean Tinguely: Méta*, p. 332. I have slightly modified Hulten's English translation to correspond to extra wording in Tinguely's sketch. Long de 10-12 metres', 'un spectacle hallucinant', 'l'ensemble serait fait avec des parties de machine - des moteurs - de élément de déquement électrique, sic.
17. Jean-Pierre Keller, *Tinguely et le mystère de la roue manquante* (Genève: Editions Zoé, 1992), p. 106.
18. Pontus Hulten, *Jean Tinguely: Méta*, p. 332.
19. Peter Knudsen, *Rotozaza Nr. 3*, in *Loeb Personalization*, in-house magazine (Bern, 1969). 'Wenn man das Glück hat mit Jean Tinguely über seine Arbeit und sein Werk zu diskutieren, merkt man, dass seine Schöpferkraft nicht nur - wie es vielleicht vorerst scheinen mag - aus einem anarchisierenden und destruktiven Denken kommt. Vielmehr hauchen positive Elemente des Denkens wie *Humor*, *Lebensfreude* und das *Fruchtbar Sich-Selbst-Bekähen* auf. Er erobert eine Maschine im Schwesche seines Angesichts, die für rein gar nichts da ist, die überhaupt keinen Zweck haben soll und keine Aufgabe im eigentlichen Sinne erfüllen muss. Dass aber die Maschine wie fast neuberbei Porzellan zerschlägt (ein Arbeitsprozess, den man mit blossen Händen viel bequemer ausführen könnte), begründet der Künstler wie folgt: Der Mensch hat die Technik und somit die Maschine entdeckt. Er wird aber heute von ihr beherrscht (Iran, Auto, TV, Eisstrank, Flugzeug), also gilt es in ursprünglichen, unbefangenen Freiheit zurückzuführen. Es gilt, die wons uns entwickelnde und uns beherrschende Technik in die richtige Proportion zu rücken. Das erhoffe ich mit einer gesunden Ironie zustandezubringen. Psychologisch gesehen, ist dieses Sinnen von hohem Wert. Wer denkt heute schon: Was ist morgen? Darum sollten die Stimmen der echten Avantgardisten nicht ungehört oder unverstanden bleiben. Sie waren immer diejenigen, und

werden es weiter sein, die uns ein Fensterchen in die Zukunft öffnen. Manchmal während oder hinweisend, immer aber offenbarnd.'

20. *Ibid.*: 'Zum Problem der Konsumtion erklärte Tinguely: Die Maschinen, die wir heute bauen, produzieren viel mehr, als wir überhaupt verbrauchen können. Ich löse dieses Problem des Überflusses auf meine Art.'

21. Michel Conil Lacroix, *Tinguely: L'Énergie de l'insolence* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1989), p. 38.

22. *Ibid.*: Pontus Hulten: 'Ses produits (précisions symbolisées par les ballons ingurgités et dégonflés) doivent être restitués à la machine, elle les exige et en vit. Elle participe à ce processus stérile de surproduction qui constitue la plus grande menace du système capitaliste.'

23. 'Jean Tinguely', *Niwas Release*, New York University News Bureau, 30 November 1967.

24. Harry Gittroy, 'Tinguely's Smashing Machine Deals Blow to Overproduction', *New York Times*, 20 October 1967. [Spelling and grammar as given.]

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. Francis Fraesina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Strides America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 131.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Pierre Restany, *60/90. Trente Ans de Nouveau Réalisme* (Paris: La Différence, 1990), pp. 58-9: 'J'ai rencontré Chamberlain à la séance du Rotozaza de Tinguely. Sa réaction: *old fashioned. We need another kind of protest now.*'

30. Frank Popper, 'Inspired Anarchist', *Art and Artists*, 1/5 (August 1966): p. 14.

31. Pontus Hulten, *Jean Tinguely: Méta*, p. 327.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 332.

33. Jean Gaunault, 'Les structures élémentaires de la réification', *International Situationniste*, 10 (March 1966), p. 40: 'Dans le spectacle de l'abondance, les objets dits de consommation cessent d'être des objets de jouissance pour devenir objets de contemplation, de plus en plus radicalement étrangers à ceux dont ils sont censés satisfaire les besoins.'

34. Guy Debord, 'Perspectives de modifications conscientes dans la vie quotidienne', *Internationale Situationniste*, 6 (August 1961), p. 27; Jean Gaunault, 'Les structures élémentaires de la réification', p. 36.

35. Guy Debord, 'Dévoilement as Negation and Prelude' (1959), in Paul Taylor (ed.), *Post-Pop Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p. 7.

36. 'Le déclin et la chute de l'économie spectaculaire-marchande', *Internationale Situationniste*, 10 (March 1966), pp. 3-11.

37. *Ibid.*: p. 5: CRITIQUE DE L'URBANISME (Supermarket à Los Angeles, août 1965).

38. *Ibid.*: p. 4: 'La révolte de Los Angeles est une révolte contre la marchandise, contre le monde de la marchandise' et du travailleur-consuméteur *hiérarchiquement* soumis aux mesures de la marchandise.'

39. *Ibid.*: pp. 5-6. This citation also appears in Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 178: 'La société de l'abondance trouve sa réponse *naturelle* dans le pillage, mais elle n'a été aucunement abondance naturelle et humaine, elle était abondance de marchandises ... Le pillage du quartier de Watts manifestait la réalisation la plus sommaire du principe bâlard "A chacun selon ses faux besoins" ... [mais] les vrais désirs s'expriment déjà dans la fête, dans l'affirmation ludique, dans le *pollutch* de destruction.'

40. Guy Debord, 'The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics on Art' (1963), Thomas Y. Levin (trans.), in Peter Wolfen and Elisabeth Susman, *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International 1957-1972* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p. 151.

41. *Ibid.*: p. 153. As Situationists Vaneigem, Viénet, Martin and Strijbosch further noted: '"New Realism," drawing heavily on the form of Dadaism (but not on its spirit), is an *apologetic* trashcan art. It fits quite well in the margin of pseudo-freedom offered by a society of gadgets and waste.'

- Ken Knabb (ed.), 'Response to a Questionnaire from the Center for Socio-Experimental Art' (1964), in *Situationist International Anthropology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 144.
42. 'Bicore une fois, sur la décomposition', *Internationale Situationniste*, 6 (August 1961), pp. 12-13.
43. 'Editorial Notes: Once Again, on Decomposition', *October*, 79 (Winter 1997), pp. 121-2.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Ken Knabb (ed.), 'Response to a Questionnaire from the Center for Socio-Experimental Art', pp. 143-4.
46. Alain Jouffroy, *Arman*, Carina Bolongaro (trans.) (Milano, 6-29 November 1963), unpaginated.
47. Alain Jouffroy, 'Arman', *L'Œil*, 126 (June 1965), p. 48; elles existaient déjà. Elles existaient dans les vitrines des magasins, elles existaient dans les "réserves" de toute société. For a discussion of the French word 'vitrine', which I have variously translated as shop window, vitrine or show case, see Martin Roberts, 'Mutations of the Spectacle: Vitrines, Arcades, Mamequins', *French Cultural Studies*, 2/6 (1991), pp. 211-49.
48. Molly Nesbit, *Alger's Seven Albums* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
49. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
50. Fernand Léger, 'Towards a New Realism' (1942), in Georges Banguier, *Fernand Léger* (Paris: A. Maeght, 1987), p. 144. Léger defined his own Nouveau Réalisme as follows: 'This *New Realism* has its roots in the study of the objects and sections of the objects ... In the *New Realism* the "subject" is of secondary importance. The *New Realism* is dominated by the "object".'
51. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
52. *Ibid.*: 'La devanture-spectacle est devenue une inquiétude majeure dans l'activité du revendeur. Être plus vu que le voisin est le désir violent qui anime nos rues ... La rue s'organise, le yeux dire par là, les vitrines, les étalages, qui deviennent spectaculaires. Là une volonté d'ordre s'établit. Au lieu de mille objets entassés les uns contre les autres, on en expose dix, bien présentés, valorisés et qui sont aussi attractifs, plus même, que l'ancien dispositif. La qualité remplace la quantité.'
53. Jacques Soustelle, 'Le Musée de l'Homme', *La Renaissance*, 4 (August 1938), p. 18: 'Au système des anciens musées, qui plaçaient obligatoirement en vitrine, fautive de pouvoir les mettre ailleurs, tous les objets qu'ils possédaient, nous substituons délibérément le principe du choix, de la sélection; sélection sévère, choix difficile, lorsque, d'une série de dix ou vingt masques par exemple, tous intéressants ou tous beaux, il faut extraire les dix ou trois spécimens qui seront présentés au public ... ces éliminations nécessaires posent des problèmes ardu. Mais il ne semble pas possible d'éviter autrement l'entassement et le désordre que la méthode ancienne produit fatalement.'
54. For further commentary on the gas mask, see Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 68.
55. Many of the gas canisters in Arman's piece are stamped with the word POELMAN (after the French inventor Jacques Poelman) and the date 1938. For detailed information on the transformation of the ARS into the ANP 31, see Arnaud Léjaille, 'La contribution des pharmaciens dans la protection individuelle contre les gaz de combat durant la Première Guerre mondiale - Extension à la période 1920-1940' (PhD dissertation, Nancy: Université Henry Poincaré, 1999) <[http://pageperso.aol.fr/hl\\_a/Guerredesgaz/Protection/lesmasques/France/1920/19201940.html](http://pageperso.aol.fr/hl_a/Guerredesgaz/Protection/lesmasques/France/1920/19201940.html)> (accessed 26 August 2005).
56. Arman, 'Réalisme des accumulations', 1966: *Les Nouveaux Réalistes* (Paris: MAM, 1986), p. 265: 'Le côté obsessionnel et profane de la multiplicité d'un objet le rend pareil à une granulation unie, expression de la conscience collective de ce même objet.'
57. Alain Nicolas et al., *Arman et l'art africain* (Marseille: Musées de Marseilles, 1996), p. 44.
58. Pierre Baracat, 'Art contemporain: de la peinture aux objets', LMTU - Le Mensuel de l'Université - Magazine Interuniversitaire, June 2008, no. 27 <[http://lemonsuel.net/IMG/pdf/3\\_ARMAN-web.jpg](http://lemonsuel.net/IMG/pdf/3_ARMAN-web.jpg)> (accessed 18 October 2008).
59. SFBJ stands for the Société Française de Fabrication de Bébés et Jouets.
60. My thanks to Dr-Samy Odin, director of the Musée de la Poupée, Paris, for his helpful identification of the dolls.
61. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p. 161.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-2.
63. Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' (1925), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 volumes (London: Hogarth, 1955-1975), v. 17, p. 226.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
66. 'Oral history interview with Arman, 1968 May 18', Arman Oral History Interview Conducted by Severin Fesl for the Archives of American Art, 1968 - Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/amman68.htm>> (accessed 14 April 2009).
67. *Arman's Orchestra* (New York: Marissa del Re Gallery, 11 May-11 June 1983), p. 9.
68. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. 127.
69. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (trans.) (New York: The Modern Library, 1936).
70. Walter Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism', H. Zohn (trans.) (London: NLB, 1973), p. 148.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 165.
72. André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (trans.) (Ann Arbor: MI: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1972), p. 16; André Breton, *Nadir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 62, 190.
73. Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intellectuals', in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (trans.) (London: Verso, 1979), p. 229.
74. Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
75. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
76. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
77. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. 129.
78. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 104: 'The Surrealist image is thus a compulsive effort to split open the commodity forms of the objective universe by striking them against each other with immense force.' As argued in *Marxism and Form*, p. 97: 'Surrealists propose to re-awaken the deadened external world around us ... the commodity impulse is turned back upon itself, its own inner contradictions transformed into the motor of its self-destruction.'
79. Arman, 'Réalisme des accumulations', p. 265. An English translation published in the magazine *Zero* (1961) at times differs markedly from the original. I have re-translated from the French: 'A tout objet fabriqué correspond une série d'opérations précises qui se trouvent être contenues toutes dans sa forme et sa destination; multipliées par le nombre des sujets choisis, ces opérations se trouvent libérées dans des surfaces accumulatives.'
80. Arman (1960), in Denise Durand-Ruel, *Arman: Catalogue Raisonné II 1960-1961-1962* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1991), p. 26: 'L'objet, notre objet manufacturé, par tous les gestes nécessaires à son élaboration, libère tous ces mouvements contenus avec une grande force. Ce procédé de travail est en corrélation avec les méthodes actuelles: automation, travail à la chaîne et aussi même au rebut en série, créant des strates et des couches géologiques planes de toute la force du réel.'
81. Arman, *Paris - New York* (Paris, 11 June-19 September 1977), p. 612: '1961-1962. Une accumulation dans tous les sens; une grosse accumulation, "l'accumulation", je débarque et je me retrouve au centre de mes rêves, les vitrines de vitrines, profusion des cristaux à fenêtres sur le rocher de Manhattan; alors au passé je dis: au revoir, bye bye la cueillette archéologique dans les décharges publiques, les hauts aréniques au marché aux puces, l'empire de la production sous les yeux et sous la main.'
82. *Arman's Orchestra* (New York, 11 May-11 June 1983), p. 7.
83. Arman, *Mémoires Accumulés: Entretiens avec Oho Hahn* (Paris: Belmond, 1992), p. 53: 'Je suis attiré par la mécanique céleste. Les horloges, les cadrans, les montres, les rouges revêtement dans mon travail comme objets-culte d'un univers soumis au temps.'

84. 'Oral history interview with Arman, 1968 May 18', Arman Oral History Interview Conducted by Severin Fesscl for the Archives of American Art, 1968 – Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/arman68.htm>> (accessed 14 April 2009).
85. Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), in Adam Phillips (ed.), *The Penguin Freud Reader* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 145. 'The patient is unable to remember all that is repressed within him... Instead he is driven to repeat the repressed matter as an experience in the present, instead of remembering it as something belonging to the past.'
86. Cathy Carruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 61.
87. Arman, in Benjamin Buchloh, 'Plenty or Nothing: From Yves Klein's *Le Vide* to Arman's *Le Plein*', in *Premises: Invested Spaces in Visual Arts, Architecture and Design from France, 1958–1998* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc./Guggenheim Museum, 1998), p. 94.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 97, n. 20.
90. Ziva Amichai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), p. 150.
91. Daniel Spoerri, in Otho Hahn, *Daniel Spoerri* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990).
92. Otho Hahn, *Daniel Spoerri*, p. 43. 'Cela le rendrait acceptable (c'est le secret d'Arman).'
93. Marissa del Re, 'An Accumulation of Conversations with Arman', *Arman's Orchestra*, p. 8.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
95. Robert Benayoun and José Pierre, 'Aldahine de l'objet, cabotinage du déchet', *La Bièze* 2 (May 1962), p. 53. 'Je pense malgré moi aux montages de peignes et de cheveux, qui furent retrouvées à Büchenwald: est-il possible d'en tirer une esthétique?'
96. Arman, in Tira Reut, 'Quel charivari, les moribonds! Guerre et puissances de destruction. Entretien avec Arman', in *Arman Armé* (Milan: 5 Continents Editions srl, 2004–2005), p. 28. 'Pour les valises, ce n'était absolument pas en corrélation avec un exode quelconque, la Shoah ou quoi que ce soit. C'était déconnecté.'
97. *Ibid.*, p. 28. 'Acceptes-tu, néanmoins, cette deuxième lecture a posteriori, même si elle t'échappe?'
98. *Ibid.*, p. 28. 'Je continue à ne pas la revendiquer, parce que, si j'avais voulu évoquer l'exode, je ne l'aurais pas fait comme cela. Je me rappelle l'exode: j'étais sur la route. L'exode est passé à côté du grand pré de mon grand-père. J'ai vu ce qu'était un exode. Il y a un grand désordre, ce ne sont pas des valises mais surtout des ballons et une sorte d'accumulation de choses qu'on emporte. Cela va jusqu'au lit en passant parfois par des valises, naturellement, et le tout dans une confusion inrassemblable sur des véhicules que ne sont pas toujours des voitures. J'ai vu des exodes et je peux en parler... C'est toujours la même chose: j'ai toujours la même image et ce n'est pas une accumulation de valises.'
99. 'Oral history interview with Arman, 1968 May 18', Arman Oral History Interview Conducted by Severin Fesscl for the Archives of American Art, 1968 – Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/arman68.htm>> (accessed 14 April 2009). 'My granddaddy is a Sephardi Jew [sic], Spanish Jew.'
100. Arman, in *Arman Armé*, pp. 32–3. 'Boltanski... célèbre tristement la Shoah alors qu'il n'a pas été là-dedans. Il y a peut-être une culpabilité chez Christian, 'il y a eu, au départ, une certaine dénonciation de la production en masse qui allait nous écraser.'
101. Didier Semin, 'Pompéi mental', in Cécile Debray et al., *Le Nouveau Réalisme* (Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, Editions de la réunion des musées nationaux/Centre Pompidou, 2007), p. 158. 'le théâtre du retour subrepticé à la lumière d'un savoir inconscient.'
102. Sigmund Freud, 'Negation', in Adam Phillips (ed.), *The Penguin Freud Reader*, p. 99. Freud also noted in the same essay: 'to negate something in judgement is basically to say: "This is something I'd rather repress"', p. 97.
103. Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 103.
104. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p. 29.
105. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–36.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
107. *Ibid.* 'The implication, Foster elaborates, is that 'I am a machine too, I make (or consume) serial product-images too, I give as good (or as bad) as I get.'
108. *Ibid.*, pp. 131–2. 'The larger passage reads: 'Clearly this is one function of repetition, at least as understood by Freud: to repeat a traumatic event (in actions, in dreams, in images) in order to integrate it into a psychic economy, a symbolic order. But the Marhol repetitions are not restorative in this way: they are not about a mastery of trauma.'
109. Dominick LaCapra, 'Trauma, Absence, Loss', *Critical Inquiry*, 25/4 (Summer 1999): p. 716.
110. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Alan Sheridan (trans.) (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), pp. 42–64.
111. Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, p. 9.
112. Max Silverman, 'Horror and the Everyday in Post-Holocaust France: *Nuit et brouillard* and *Concentrationary Art*', *French Cultural Studies*, 17/1 (2006): pp. 5–18.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 6. 'On peut prévoir, et déjà nous avons pu le détecter chez certains jeunes peintres, un certain courant concentrationnaire ou lazareen dans l'inspiration de nombreux tableaux exposés (répétition continue des mêmes formules, état hypnotique des formes et des volumes, tension de la couleur, mande panique des objets, etc.)'
114. *Ibid.*, p. 9. Silverman also notes: 'I will consider ways in which the interplay between everyday life and horror, and especially the role of objects in this process, are central to the emergence of a reshaped artistic vision in post-Holocaust France.' *Ibid.*, p. 7.
115. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
116. Andrew Hebard, 'Disruptive Histories: Toward a Radical Politics of Remembrance in Alain Renais's *Night and Fog*', *New German Critique*, 71 (Spring–Summer 1997), p. 111.
117. Alain Jouffroy, 'Arman', *L'Œil*, p. 27. 'J'ai l'impression que les artistes sont toujours témoins de leur temps. Nous sommes le produit d'une époque, du moment et de l'endroit où nous vivons.'
118. Denyse Durand-Ruel, *Arman: Catalogue Raisonné II 1960, 1961, 1962*, p. 26.
119. Arman, quoted in *Worlds in a Box* (London: The South Bank Centre, 1994), p. 8.
120. See Arman, *Mémoires Accumulés: Entrepreneurs avec Otho Hahn*, pp. 92–3, for a candid discussion of this issue.
121. Alain Jouffroy, 'Les Objeteurs' (1965), in *Les Pré-objets* (Bruxelles: La Connaissance, 1974), pp. 29–32. 'The text continues: Arman reminds us of the child Maxim Gorki, who used to imprison cockroaches in matchboxes in the belief that he was magically dominating the inhabitants of an entire city: his work has the fragile, ambiguous beauty of this illusion. 'Arman tente de conjurer, d'endiguer le flux. Ses œuvres font songer à ces barricades de voitures et d'armées renversées que les peuples pauvres dressent parfois devant la puissance d'une armée. L' "armée", dans cette perspective, c'est la production des sociétés industrielles, leur pléthore dictatoriale, leur prétention à la réglementation de la planète par l'accumulation, le capital, des biens matériels. Mais, en même temps, il s'agit pour Arman de faire sienne cette accumulation... Arman détachait la richesse des objets, après l'avoir convoquée avec le fanatisme des collectionneurs de papillons ou de plantes rares. Par la répétition indéfinie de cet acte – "accumuler des objets identiques dans des boîtes" – il fait écho de ses conquêtes. Ses œuvres sont des tableaux de chasse. La révolte s'estompe derrière un tel orgueil... [Arman] tente d'éviter l'écrasement par la récupération des armes de l'ennemi. Arman fait songer à Maxime Gorki enfant, qui emprisonnait des cailloux dans des boîtes d'allumettes, et croyait dominer ainsi magiquement les habitants d'une ville entière: son œuvre a la beauté fragile, la beauté ambiguë de cette illusion.'
122. Jamey Hamilton, 'Arman's System of Objects', *Art Journal* (Spring 2008), p. 55.
123. Andrew Hebard, 'Disruptive Histories: Toward a Radical Politics of Remembrance in Alain Renais's *Night and Fog*', p. 111.
124. Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, p. 106.
125. *Ibid.*

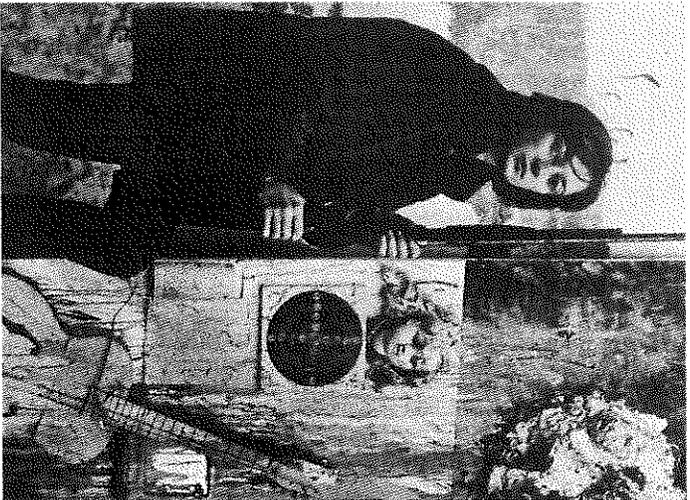
## Phallic Victories? Nouveau Réaliste Performance

In November 1970, a festival was held in Milan to mark Nouveau Réalisme's tenth anniversary. Towards the end of the festival, a giant auto-destructive phallus was unveiled in the middle of Milan's Piazza del Duomo in front of the city's cathedral. The suicidal phallic sculpture, titled *La Vittoria* (Victory), was artist Jean Tinguely's final homage to the by-then defunct movement.

In this chapter, I borrow Tinguely's exploding phallus to reframe a series of performance works created during the early 1960s by Tinguely's colleague, Niki de Saint-Phalle: 'Saint-Phalle's *Tirs*, or 'Shooting Pieces', were showcased by Restany as an example of Nouveau Réaliste '*actions-spectacles*'. Between approximately 1961 and 1964, they gained a certain notoriety. Using a rifle or pistol, Saint-Phalle shot her assemblages (Figure 4.1). Torn by bullets, the works broke open, dramatically spurring coloured paint hidden below their surface. To date, these performances have largely been interpreted as either a playful parody of post-war abstract painting, or a cathartic, pre-feminist performance gesture. Tinguely's *La Vittoria*, however, retrospectively highlights two specific and till now under-analysed themes within Saint-Phalle's *Tirs*: their phallic simulation, and their deployment of performance strategies associated with fetishism. The *Tirs*, I suggest, prefigured *La Vittoria* in their staging of a fetishistic scenario that was surreptitiously *piégé* or mined from within. Through the use of innovative critical strategies associated with fetishism and feminine masquerade, moreover, the *Tirs* confronted gender inequalities and societal violence. Saint-Phalle's *Tirs*, in short, staged a series of Pyrrhic victories and phallic defeats that challenged conceptions of masculinity and femininity prevalent in France in the early 1960s.

### *La Vittoria*

Tinguely constructed much of *La Vittoria* in secret, purportedly to prevent intervention from the Milan fire brigade. During the festival preparations,



4.1 Niki de Saint-Phalle posing with *Tir tablieu* circa février 1962. Succession Niki de Saint-Phalle/SODRAC 2009. © 2009 NIKI CHARITABLE ART FOUNDATION. All rights reserved. Photo: © unknown



Tinguely's monument was thus deliberately carnivalesque – ludic, overblown and irreverent. While *La Vihoria* ironically alluded to the sublime with its grandiose connotations of phallic potency, it also flirted with the tinselly aesthetics and tongue-in-cheek exaggerations of camp. True to the fetishistic tradition of civic monuments, *La Vihoria* functioned as a hypertrophied standard or substitute for the defunct Nouveau Réaliste movement. In its refusal to be preserved for posterity, however, Tinguely's 'anti-monument' deliberately undercut the commemorative role of conventional monuments. At one moment, it memorialized its subject in a grandiose, hyperbolic gesture of inflated presence and solidity. At another moment, it staged the movement's disappearance in a melodramatic cloud of smoke.

This staging of absence and presence possesses formal links with the structure of fetishism. Fetishism, as cultural theorist Marjorie Garber has pointed out, frequently takes the form of a spectacle or theatre of display.<sup>9</sup> During such a 'performance', the 'phallus/fetish' appears and disappears in a suite of staged simulations. *La Vihoria* ironically reproduced this fetishistic scenario, while simultaneously destabilizing the fetish-monument's presumed 'victory' against loss.

With *La Vihoria*, the phallus-fetish brusquely appeared in all its glory – stripped of its veils, masks and wardrobe of disguises – in a seemingly burlesque parody of the 'principle' of the fetish itself. As many commentators have noted, fetishism is frequently characterized as a type of misplaced veneration or over-valuation, and the fetish negatively cast as an 'inadequate' proxy or substitute. In Freudian terms, for example, the fetish generally functions as both a 'substitute' for the penis, and a venerated 'token of triumph over the threat of castration'.<sup>10</sup> Fetishism has also been analysed, however not only as a form of pathology or individual symptom, but also as a shared cultural language that points (through the conflictual nature of its very structure) to tensions in Western society's schemas of representation and desire. Despite the arguable limitations of Freud's original theories, the Freudian fetish has been taken up by recent cultural theorists as a useful model for theorizing broader social structures of substitution and subversion.<sup>11</sup> Saint-Phalle's *Tirs* and Tinguely's *La Vihoria* can be fruitfully re-interpreted in the light of such re-theorizations. Both works re-enact the Freudian fetish's attempted victory over castration anxieties, yet both also subvert its phallic 'triumph'.

Why propose an exploding phallus as a memorial to Nouveau Réalisme? Tinguely's curious choice challenged, and continues to challenge, standard characterizations of the movement. From the mid 1960s, Nouveau Réalisme was perceived by many of its members as defunct.<sup>12</sup> As early as January 1963, Restany himself ambiguously signalled the end of the movement as a group or a style, and its transformation into 'an open tendency' in European art. The Milan 1970 Anniversary Festival, while nominally celebrating the

movement's birthday, thus largely doubled as a funeral commemoration. *La Vihoria*'s self-conscious self-destruction helped underline this fact. Its phallic symbolism, however, perhaps also inadvertently signals other aspects of Nouveau Réalisme. To present *La Vihoria* as an emblem of the movement, as Tinguely proposed in 1970 and I now tentatively re-propose, is perhaps to emphasize a largely underexamined trajectory in Nouveau Réaliste art: a thematics of sexual fetishism, bodily display and ironic 'phallic performance' that existed alongside Nouveau Réalisme's more recognized preoccupation with found objects, commodity spectacle and the outmoded. Saint-Phalle's *Tirs* exemplify this alternative trajectory.

Associations between Nouveau Réalisme and fetishism were occasionally proposed during the 1960s, as we saw in Chapter 1. With varying degrees of theoretical sophistication, critics argued that Nouveau Réalisme's collections of objects and materials were the symptom of commodity fetishism, collecting fetishism and sexual fetishism. Their commentary, however, was more humorous than analytic.

In 1965, for example, Otto Hahn suggested in his *Arts Magazine* article, 'The Avant-garde Stance', that artists in France had succumbed to a fetishistic cult:

Inspiration gave way to the notion of appropriation, of cult: the character of the avant-garde was transformed into one of fetishistic delirium, into a paranoia of the gesture repeated and amplified indefinitely. Tinguely threw himself into his mechanical madness, Arman unleashed his ravings for accumulation, Rayssé centered his delirium on dime-store objects, multicolored plastics and mirrors, Christo gave free rein to his packaging mania, Spoerri to his urge to catch the world in its own traps, César to his desire to salvage and crush scrap iron, and the *offichistes* set out to resurrect lacerated posters.<sup>13</sup>

Nouveau Réalisme's fetishistic proclivities were also targeted, as we have seen, by *Daily Bul*. On the one hand, *Daily Bul* emphasized the capitalist transmutations of value that accompanied Nouveau Réalisme's transformation of the everyday into art.<sup>14</sup> On the other it presented a fake psychoanalytic account of Nouveau Réaliste art's 'fetishistic' relation to 'sexual transference'. Nouveau Réaliste showcases of traditional sexual fetishes may well have fuelled *Daily Bul*'s parodic jibes. Works such as Arman's *Madison Avenue* of 1962 (a collection of women's high-heeled shoes), or Deschamps's *Corsets Roses* ('Pink Corsets') of 1962 (a collection of soiled lingerie), offered virtual text-book examples of Freudian sexual imagery. Deschamps's efforts in this direction extended to works such as *Néo-slip nez au slip* of 1960 (the punning title roughly translates as 'nose to the panties') and *X-press-A* of 1961, a collection of fur, silk, brocade and garter belts. Despite Restany's description of Deschamps as 'the most "banned" artist in western Europe', however, the scandal value of Deschamps's assemblages remained luke-warm: a complaint was recorded in 1960 and another in 1962.<sup>15</sup>

By 1970, however, *Daily Buis*'s insinuations of a link between Nouveau Réalisme and a 'dubious' world of sexual substitution appeared to receive spectacular confirmation in *La Vittoria*. On the one hand, *La Vittoria* playfully invoked Nouveau Réalisme's occasional sexual allusions. On the other, it emphasized a more pervasive thematics of fetishistic substitution and loss that accompanied Nouveau Réalisme from its inception. Niki de Saint-Phalle's *Tirs*, I suggest, showcased both these trajectories and interwove them in innovative ways.

#### Les Tirs

Between 1961 and 1964, Saint-Phalle presented *Tir* performances in Paris, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Figueras, Los Angeles and New York.<sup>16</sup>

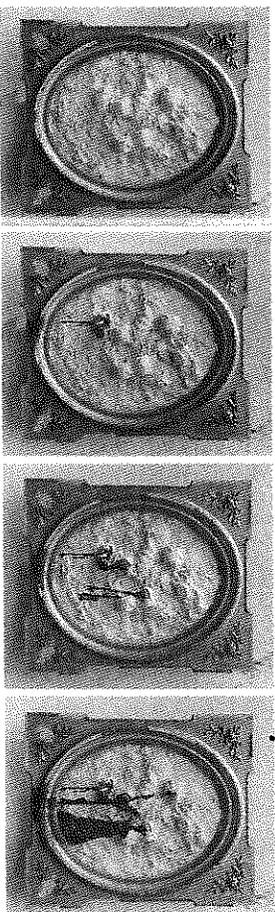


4.4 Niki de Saint-Phalle, *Tir*:

*Première séance – seconde séance*, 26 February 1961. Succession Niki de Saint-Phalle/SODRAC 2009, © 2009 NIKI CHARITABLE ART FOUNDATION, All rights reserved. Photo: © Laurent Condominas

Sources vary as to the exact date of the earliest *Tirs*, but many accounts refer to shootings held on 12 and 26 February 1961 outside Saint-Phalle and Tinguely's Paris studio at 11 Impasse Ronsin.<sup>17</sup> The visual appearance of the *Tirs* took various forms, from blank white surfaces to thickly encrusted assemblages. Saint-Phalle recounts burying bags of paint and various other materials at hand (including eggs and spaghetti) beneath surfaces of white plaster, then setting out to a local fairground to borrow a .22 long rifle from a shooting-stand attendant to use for the event.<sup>18</sup>

*Tir: Première séance – seconde séance* (Figure 4.4) resulted from two of these initial sessions. The piece, rotated at some stage during the shootings, presents a chromatically harmonious range of green, red, blue, brown and black paint flowing up and down the white plaster surface. Semi-submerged pieces of wire, plastic and other discarded objects protrude through the surface, creating a richly relieved textural effect not dissimilar to certain European abstract paintings and American assemblages of the period. *Grand tir – séance Galerie J*, produced between 30 June and 12 July 1961, presents a simpler composition

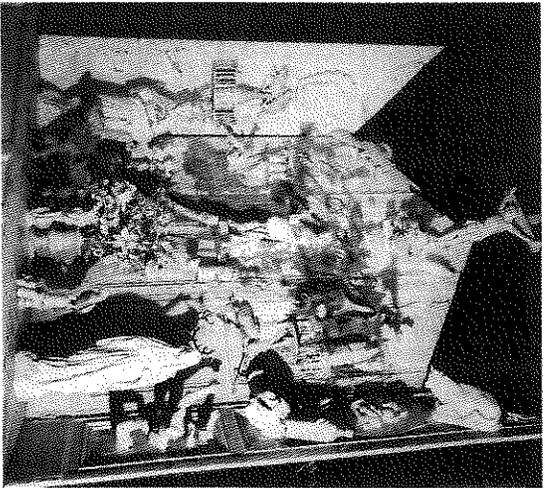


4.5 Niki de Saint-Phalle, *Old Master – séance 15 juin, 1961*. Sequence of performance. © Succession Niki de Saint-Phalle/SODRAC 2009, © 2009 NIKI CHARITABLE ART FOUNDATION, All rights reserved. Photo: Shunk-Kender © Roy Lichtenstein Foundation

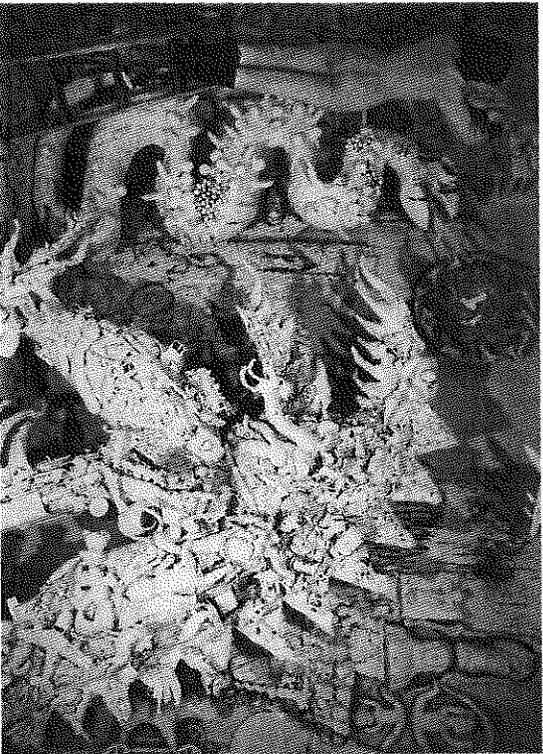
of vertical paint drips on a rectangular ground. It ranges in colour from blue and green to orange and yellow. The work was produced during Saint-Phalle's *Feu à volonté* (Fire at Will) exhibition at the Paris *Galerie J* (run by Pierre Restany's wife, Jeannine de Goldschmidt).<sup>19</sup> Inside the invitation to the *Galerie J* exhibition, a series of photographs chronicle the development of a single *Tir* through the course of its evolution (Figure 4.5). The depicted piece, titled *Old Master*, commences as a blank white 'monochrome' set in an ornate picture frame. Like many of the *Tirs*, its plaster surface is mined with sacks of buried paint. A photograph of the same year documents the artist preparing the interior of a similar *Tir*. Saint-Phalle and Tinguely are attaching materials such as tins of spray-paint (which spurted dramatically when shot) to a surface. The resulting assemblage was used in a *Tir* performance in May 1961 in Sweden in conjunction with a travelling exhibition to the Museet Moderna in Stockholm. As photographer Harry Shunk recounts, Saint-Phalle's firearms for this Swedish performance had to be hidden in a car and smuggled across five national borders.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to non-figurative two-dimensional works, Saint-Phalle created large tableaux encrusted with Catholic religious statuary and kitsch plastic objects. These more baroque assemblages were frequently painted white or gilded. Saint-Phalle's targets very often consisted of Catholic motifs – a reference, she has explained, to her convent education in New York by the Sacred Heart nuns before her eventual expulsion. Such iconography is evident in her *Tir (Aurel)* of 1970 (Figure 4.6). The tripartite form, suggestive of an altarpiece, is decorated with religious statuettes, copulating animals, funeral imagery and a multitude of protruding arms. The work was performed in Milan in 1970 during the same Anniversary Festival in which Tinguely staged *La Vittoria*.

*Shooting Gallery, or Homage to the Postman Cheval* (Figure 4.7) of 1962, on the contrary, features fairytale-like imagery such as a dragon and a giant



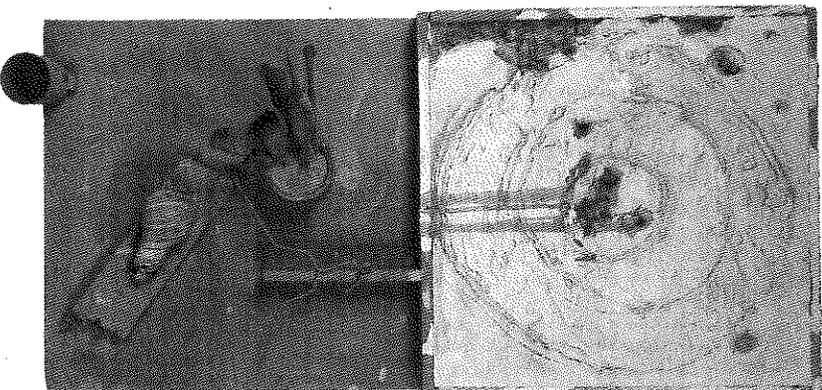
46 Niki de Saint-Phalle, *Tir (Anti)*, 1970. © Succession Niki de Saint-Phalle/SODRAC 2009. © 2009 NIKI CHARITABLE ART FOUNDATION, All rights reserved



47 Niki de Saint-Phalle, *Hommage au Facteur Cheval*, 1962. © Succession Niki de Saint-Phalle/SODRAC 2009. © 2009 NIKI CHARITABLE ART FOUNDATION. All rights reserved. Photograph by Hans Namuth. Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. © 1991 Hans Namuth Estate

fanged snake.<sup>21</sup> Saint-Phalle created it in New York during the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and described it to the gallery owner, Alexander Iolas, as targeting the threat of nuclear war. Gender-specific children's toys such as guns, trucks and girls' baby dolls, are incorporated into the tableau in and alongside a central circular emblem representing an atomic blast. This iconography's relatively explicit equation of warfare with men and maternity with women reappeared in many of Saint-Phalle's *Tirs* and later sculptural works.<sup>22</sup> A more ambiguous figuring of gender and politics, however, occurred in a later *Tir* of June 1963 titled *Khrushchev et Kennedy*. The image, also focused on the threat of war, portrayed John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev locked together in a deadly, grimacing embrace. The politicians' faces are grafted onto the body of a semi-naked woman with prominently exposed female genitals. The piece was censored (along with Eduardo Arroyo's paintings of disembowelled dictators) at the third *Biennale de Paris* in 1963.<sup>23</sup>

The range and diversity of Saint-Phalle's iconography is demonstrated in *Venus de Milo* (1962) and *Tir de Jasper Johns* (1961) (Figure 4.8). Both works testify to collaboration between Saint-Phalle and her American Neo-dada contemporaries Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. The *Venus de Milo Tir* was performed in New York in a play by Kenneth Koch titled *The Construction of Boston*.<sup>24</sup> The one-night performance, directed by Merce Cunningham, also featured appearances by Robert Rauschenberg (who constructed a combine painting on stage), Jean Tinguely, Henry Geldzahler, Maxine Grotfisky, Frank Stella and Billy Klüver. While Saint-Phalle performed, a chorus chanted: 'Men say she has a magic pistol/Which can turn plain glass to crystal .../Nikki [sic], bring us beauty's virtue/Fire at that ancient statue – Perhaps it has retained some value (bang) ...'<sup>25</sup> Saint-Phalle had previously appeared with Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Jean Tinguely in Paris



48 Niki de Saint-Phalle, *Tir de Jasper Johns*, 1961. © Succession Niki de Saint-Phalle/SODRAC 2009. © 2009 NIKI CHARITABLE ART FOUNDATION, All rights reserved. Photo: © Laurent Condominas

at the American Embassy on 20 June 1961, during a performance of John Cage's *Variations II*. Saint-Phalle's homage of this year to her friend Jasper Johns (Figure 4.8) incorporates typical motifs and colours from his work. It consists of a blank white 'ghost' target marked by bullet holes and red and brown paint splashes, and a greyish ground below featuring objects such as a light-bulb, a paint-tin with protruding paint brushes, and a suspended coat-hanger. She also created a companion piece, *Tir de Bob Rauschenberg* (1961), that plays with and refers to recognizable motifs from the latter artist's assemblages. At Saint-Phalle's invitation, Johns and Rauschenberg each fired at their respective works.

Critical reactions to the *Tir* iconography varied – for some, it smacked of Surrealism, for others such as Donald Judd, it was derivative and commonplace. As Judd put it: 'The depiction of cathedrals, dragons and old roses is banal, regardless of whether the past is being attacked or defended. A plain wall for everyone to shoot at would have been better.'<sup>26</sup> In common with many American critics disdainful of post-war French art, he dismissed Saint-Phalle's 'European' practice as a second-hand copying of American art: 'Rauschenberg's work is the model; there are even mounted birds.'<sup>27</sup> Other critics, on the contrary, emphasized the European Surrealist tradition informing Saint-Phalle's iconography, with the French journal *Cinémaise*, for example, referring to her 'rose-tinted, morbid surrealism', and *Art International* to Breton's 'Surréaliste pathétique'.<sup>28</sup>

### Staging Saint-Phalle

Saint-Phalle performed the *Tirs* across Europe and America during the early years of the 1960s. Schooled in drama in her early twenties, she fused her visual production with theatre.<sup>29</sup> Saint-Phalle self-consciously staged herself as 'phallic woman', that is, as a fetishized *femme fatale* sporting phallic props. She had previously worked as a model for magazines such as *Vogue* and *Life*, and was thus no stranger to presenting herself as an object of display. A 1949 cover of *Life* magazine, for example, presents her as a white clad, innocent *ingénue*. A cover of *Vogue* in 1952, on the contrary, represents her as a sophisticated, fur-clad seductress. By 1965, however, *Vogue* consecrated an interview to its former model in her capacity as artist. The interview is delightfully outrageous, both in its unapologetic reduction of the artist to her clothes (a playful feint on the part of the interviewer, Maurice Rheims, to weld fashion vocabulary with art criticism), and for Saint-Phalle's archly loaded, equally playful, *répliques*. The interview conveys the impression of an orchestrated 'flirt', a verbal game of reciprocal provocation constructed by Saint-Phalle and her interviewer for both their own and their readers' amusement.

Maurice Rheims commences:

MR: Niki de Saint-Phalle ... [you fuel provocation with] your autumnal face, your eyes expressing fear one minute, ferocity ... the next. A doe dressed as Marilène ... Two things fascinate me about your clothes: the boas that you wear around your neck, and those half-boots that take on ... how can I put it? ... the form of Marat's bath tub.

NSP: I like boas because they possess a certain life, because they continue to move like wounded pythons. I'm terrified of snakes yet at the same time I love them. For me, they are very erotic. To me, boas are the most erotic clothes I can imagine ... Go on, you can write that down.

MR: Your boots, do you find them at the flea market? ...

NSP: I buy them new, in London, at a shop for fetishists! I have a passion for shoes because, for me, shoes are a very erotic symbol, and in boots there is a form of cruelty in which I feel completely at ease. For me clothes are a way of provoking society ... it excites me.<sup>30</sup>

Within this highly ludic dialogue, spiced with sexual innuendo and verbal one-upmanship, Saint-Phalle lays out certain key elements of her performative strategy. Vengefully wielding moving 'wounded pythons' and fetishist's boots, she poses not only as Marlene Dietrich, but as a modern-day Medusa. Her teasing use of Freudian tropes of fetishism and castration, moreover, appears to be highly self-conscious. In this regard, her *Vogue* interview recalls certain of her filmed media appearances, which present a woman in seemingly firm command of both the seductive and aggressive components of her image.<sup>31</sup> Reassuring, and not reassuring at all, Saint-Phalle the 'phallic woman' appears to respond with a vengeance to her own media fetishization. True to fetishism's scenario of ambivalence, castration is simultaneously denied and memorialized. On the one hand, fetishism's phallic substitutes cover over their threat of castration; on the other hand, they sign-post it.<sup>32</sup>

Fears of castration indeed erupted in critical responses to the *Tirs*. Pierre Descargues supplied some of the purplest prose, referring to Saint-Phalle's 'female arsenal' of 'kitchen knives, sharp forks, knitting needles, crochet hooks, [and] meat axes'.<sup>33</sup> References to murderous housewives and devouring women also coloured his reviews.<sup>34</sup> Following *Tir* performances in which Saint-Phalle invited spectators to pick up the gun themselves and fire on her assemblages, Descargues responded with even more explicit Freudian tropes. As photographs showing Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella and others at a 1961 *Tir* event demonstrate, Saint-Phalle frequently included her spectators as active participants in the 'destructive' creation of the *Tirs* (Figure 4.9). Comparing Saint-Phalle to a fairground attendant, Descargues wrote:



4.9 Opening of *Feu à volonté*, Galerie J, Paris, 30 June–12 July 1961. Photo: Harry Shunk. © Succession Niki de Saint-Phalle/SODRAC 2009. Photo: Shunk-Kender © Roy Lichtenstein Foundation

In fairgrounds, have you never trembled with fear while watching the girls who tend shooting stands? They proffer carbines to passers-by and encourage them to fire at pipes. Sometimes, they jump lightly over the counters and come to the aid of a clumsy client. Poor man! Can he imagine that, beneath the innocent appearance of the saleswoman, a shoe [*chassure*] is officiating and is inviting him to smash masculine symbols? Acteon's trick is played upon him, and he smiles with pleasure.<sup>35</sup>

Behind the *Tirs*, then, one might wish to identify the principle of the fetish – curiously alluded to by Descargues through the surprising figure of the shoe. One is left to conjecture here whether Descargues's use of the French term *chassure* was simply an amusing Freudian slip, or perhaps a convoluted misspelling of the word *chasseuse* or huntress, as suggested in a slightly different English translation of Descargues's article also provided by *Quadrant*.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the case, for Pierre Descargues, the *Tirs* presented a modern re-enactment of the Diana/Acteon myth.<sup>37</sup> Saint-Phalle's spectators, in his opinion, were seduced during the *Tirs* into a symbolic act of self-destruction.

If critics such as Descargues chose to read Saint-Phalle's performances through the Acteon myth, others focused more on her alluring physical appearance. A drawing of Saint-Phalle at her Paris studio from the Italian publication *Domenica del Corriere* of 1962 gives some sense of this interest, despite the slightly concerned expressions of the two observers. In 1964 *Artforum* commented: 'she is not really such a bad shot – for a woman. In fact, she is a very attractive shot.'<sup>38</sup> The author echoed a whole battalion of mysteriously 'attracted' anglophone art critics: 'Miss Saint-Phalle is a remarkably attractive young woman' (*New York Post* 1962); 'Miss Saint-Phalle cut a sharp figure in her "shooting" bit' (*Art News* 1962); 'Through the room stalked the attractive white-suited figure of Niki de Saint-Phalle, booted, paint-flecked (perfectly)' (*Arts Magazine* 1962).<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, Saint-Phalle found herself compared to a 'blond Barbarella in black velvet', 'a delicate amber-haired Joan of Arc', or, in the words of the canny *Women's Wear Daily*: 'a combination of hieratic Garbo and mischievous Puck who delights in the idea of playing a trick on Papa'.<sup>40</sup>

In the interview in *Vogue*, Saint-Phalle emphasized the orchestrated nature of her public image. Not only did she describe her seduction-oriented clothes as a 'disguise', but her body as a constructed visual creation like her sculpture. So far, I have argued that Saint-Phalle wielded a fetishistic vocabulary of loaded, booby-trapped phallic symbols. As her comments suggest, however, her performances also involved a double-edged staging of female masquerade. Saint-Phalle's donning of a guise of 'overflowing' femininity can be viewed as an ambiguous cover for her symbolic possession of phallic power. As such, her performance invokes Joan Rivière's 1929 definition of a 'masculine' woman's 'feminine' masquerade: 'Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it.'<sup>41</sup> Whereas Rivière theorized masquerade as a strategy of reassurance, however, Saint-Phalle's *Tir* performances, on the contrary, both flouted and undercut femininity's masking effects.

The interview in *Vogue* offered Saint-Phalle yet another occasion for performative presentation in a witty and teasing exchange about her attire. Maurice Rheims proclaims:

MR: Listen, Niki, if you have so much contempt for men, why sport such extraordinary costumes, so provocative, so feminine – man-catching clothes, it seems to me?

NSP: In actual fact I have no grudge against men. I just think that, basically, they're pathetic types only just good enough to decorate my bed, polish my boots. But for other things I don't need them ... I believe that my boots, my red dresses, my disguises – in fact – are nothing but accessories of my creation, expressing more a desire to make myself into an object, like the celluloid dolls

I use in my work. I use my body in the same way I use a base of wire netting to make a sculpture. And at the same time, I feel at ease because it has stuff-all to do with me, because it's a detail, one of the accessories of my dreams.<sup>42</sup>

Although this passage appears to illustrate Saint-Phalle's internalization of the male gaze, that is, her self-reification and self-transformation into a sexualized, distant object of spectacle, her comments also suggest an aggressive assertion of her rights as an active subject, as orchestrator of her own image. Saint-Phalle attempted to seize control of the spectacle of her body 'all the better to bite', to use another of Rheims' expressions from the interview.<sup>43</sup> In France in 1961, in a society where women were still forbidden to have independent bank accounts, and had been granted the right to vote only 17 years before, Saint-Phalle was well aware of the limitations of her social positioning as both female and feminine.<sup>44</sup> As she noted retrospectively: 'I wanted the world and the world then belonged to MEN ... I felt jealous and resentful that the only power allotted to me was the power of attracting men.'<sup>45</sup> Clearly, I would argue, Saint-Phalle accepted the patriarchal vocabularies of self-representation available to her, namely, masquerade and fetishism. At the same time, however, she redeployed these stage props and veils, exposing not only their inherent doubleness, instability and reversibility, but – also – their threatening detachability.

Saint-Phalle augmented her performances of femininity with phallic metaphors of ejaculation and *jouissance*: 'I shot because it was fun and made me feel great ... I shot for that moment of magic. Ecstasy.'<sup>46</sup> In so doing, she played with word-plays stemming from her own name. Saint-Phalle may have combined the 'phallic' resonances of her surname with allusions to the Greek goddess of Victory, *Nike*. 'Nike', moreover, is reminiscent in French of the verb *niquer* – to fornicate – a verb that itself engenders connotations of sexuality (*niquer quelqu'un* – to sexually possess someone), shaming, mockery and bravado (*faire la nique à quelqu'un* – to laugh at or defy someone). Many of these connotations came together in her adoption of the French post-war role of the *enfant terrible* – the sexually active, occasionally criminal, 'bad girl'.

The fluidity of Saint-Phalle's gender travesties, her confrontational *mise-en-scènes* of seduction, sexuality and violence, and her audacious involvement of her spectators in conflictual situations of highly charged, gender-sensitive performance participation, all (not surprisingly) provoked conflicting responses to her art. Numerous tensions, for example, arose between the artist's interpretations of her work and those of her critics. According to Saint-Phalle: 'There I was, an attractive girl (if I had been ugly, they would have said I had a complex and not paid any attention) screaming against men in my interviews and shooting with a gun. This was before the women's liberation movement and was very scandalous.'<sup>47</sup>

Saint-Phalle's protests, however, were frequently trivialized by critics of the 1960s as evidence of womankind's stereotypical femininity. Descriptions

of Saint-Phalle as 'child-like' or 'hysterical' were common.<sup>48</sup> Recent attempts by anglophone critics to herald Saint-Phalle as a feminist artist, moreover, are complicated by the artist's own pronouncements on feminism and femininity:

I have always refused to be in a feminist show because I do not see the world that way. I'm a feminist in that I believe passionately in equal wages, equal opportunities and so on. But there's a war going on between the sexes in the United States ... I like the European game of flirting. I like to live my femininity and I think it's fun to ... *touler les hommes*; you know, manipulate them a little.<sup>49</sup>

Saint-Phalle's ambivalence concerning the contradictions of gender power in French and American society was clearly reflected in the contradictions of her stage persona. Many critics emphasized her 'attractiveness' and identification with the 'feminine'. For critic Gérard Cassiot-Talabot in 1965, on the contrary, it was Saint-Phalle's identification with the masculine that drew comment. Noting her 'sophisticated definition of behaviour and dress', he continued:

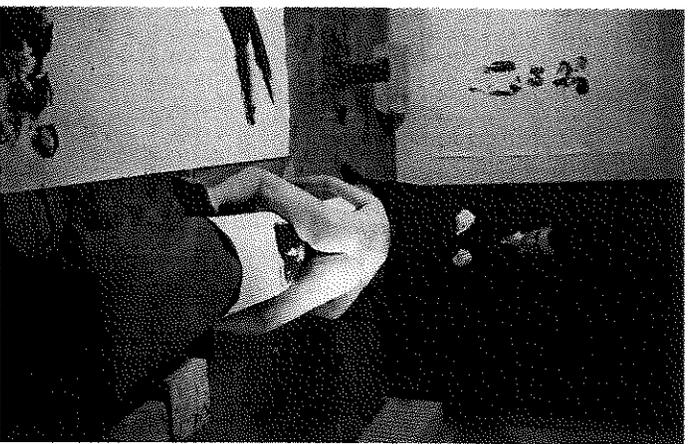
A whole part of her psychology is oriented towards a questioning of man in his capacities of sexual and social domination, and above all in the way in which he arrogates creative power to himself. And yet the phenomenon of identification with masculine characteristics is flagrant for, in her enterprise of supplanting man ... what she presents us with is osmosis rather than negation.<sup>50</sup>

Sympathetic to her feminist concerns, Cassiot-Talabot thus criticized Saint-Phalle for her repetition of 'masculine' behavioural tropes. Criticized if she was 'feminine' or criticized if she wasn't, her gender enactments continually risked confirming pre-existing stereotypes.<sup>51</sup>

### Klein's *Anthropométries*

Saint-Phalle's *Tits* nonetheless challenged certain gender stereotypes in the French art world. Stereotypes of the active controlling male artist and compliant female model occurred in certain performance works by her fellow Nouveau Réaliste artists. Yves Klein's *Anthropométries* (1958–61), for example, are notorious for their use of female 'living brushes' as eroticized production tools.<sup>52</sup> During these performances, the artist ordered naked female models to daub themselves in blue paint and imprint their bodies on canvas. He described his procedure as follows:

These living brushes are under the constant direction of my commands, such as 'a little to the right, over to the left now; to the right again, etc.' ... Personally, never would I attempt to smear paint over my own body and become a living brush; but on the contrary, I would rather put on my tuxedo and wear white gloves. I would



not even think of dirtying my hands with paint. Detached and distant, the work of art must complete itself before my eyes and under my command. Thus, as soon as the work is realized, I stand there – present at the ceremony, spotless, calm, relaxed, worthy of it, and ready to receive it as it is born into the tangible world.<sup>55</sup>

Klein directed several *Anthropométrie* performances between June 1958 and 1961. *Les Anthropométries de l'époque bleue*, for example, took place at the Galerie Internationale d'Art Contemporain in Paris on 9 March 1960. Three nude female models performed in front of approximately 100 spectators in formal dress. Following instructions given to them by Klein, the models daubed their bodies with 'International Klein Blue' (IKB) paint and pressed themselves against canvas and paper on the ground and wall. The performance was accompanied by Klein's 'Symphonie Monoton', a piece for 20 musicians and singers consisting of 20 minutes of a single note, followed by 20 minutes of silence.<sup>54</sup>

#### Extracts of Klein's *Anthropométrie*

performances have been preserved on film. The 1962 Italian documentary film *Mondo Cane*, for example, presented footage of a restaged *Anthropométrie*. Unbeknownst to Klein, the film was intended as a send-up of the post-war avant-garde art scene. It was directed by Gualtiero Jacopetti and shown at the 1962 Cannes Film Festival with the unwitting Klein sitting in the audience.<sup>55</sup> The film presented Klein as an autocratic figure given to raising his hands in messianic-like gestures while naked young women languorously stroked themselves in slow motion. The eroticism of the performance was heightened by hazy soft-focus shots of the women's swaying silhouettes filmed through back-lit canvas. The film also foregrounded a seemingly copulative encounter between human and canvas, as a woman was gently rocked backwards and forwards against a canvas screen by a partner.

Klein's apparent fantasies of phallic domination received one of their more overt representations in a photograph recording an *Anthropométrie* production. Klein stands at the head of a giant cylinder which extends

horizontally across the floor from between his legs. He is dressed in a dinner suit, white gloves and medal. Over the cylinder, a naked woman is splayed on hands and knees, face downwards. A dark smear of IKB paint is visible on the canvas beneath her. Her body is pictured from behind in a stance of subjugation and anonymity.

Only one case of 'rebellion' against Klein's theatrics of mastery appears to be on record. Pierre Restany recalled the disobedience of a 'paint-brush' as follows: 'I often attended anthropométrie sessions. All the models, with the sole exception of one young woman, played the game, lent their bodies as an object. Only one person out of half a dozen models took pleasure, seeing it no doubt as a superior form of masturbation.'<sup>56</sup> Female *jouissance* here broke the rules of the game and stole an unofficial recompense. Despite this transgression, however, one suspects the model's pleasure posed no threat at all to the already implicitly eroticized spectacle organized by Klein.<sup>57</sup> Film footage and photographs alike testify to a sexualized ambience already colouring the performances. This ambience was pioneered by Klein in a trial run *Anthropométrie* performed at an erotic dinner party for Robert Godet.<sup>58</sup>

Klein's use of women as objects of sexual spectacle and exploited tools of labour has drawn a range of commentary. His attempts to enact the role of commanding 'capitalist boss', for example, have been discussed by Thierry de Duve in his critique of Klein in *Causus de fil d'or*. According to de Duve, Klein cast himself as capitalist vendor and owner of his means of production, that is, as proprietor of his tools and raw materials. Klein's own plans for a fully automated human-brush machine appear to confirm de Duve's characterization of him as a Chaplinesque aspiring capitalist industrialist. To quote Sïdra Stich:

The idea was to equip a big truck with three or four gigantic crane-like arms ... plus a command tower with a hydraulic elevator. The truck would be used to seize nude models, lift them into the air, plunge them into blue paint, and deposit them in exact locations on a surface.<sup>59</sup>

Attempts have nonetheless been made to read the *Anthropométries* as examples of 'postmodern feminist irony'. Artists and critics who knew Klein, however, have unambiguously asserted that Klein saw his work as neither parodic nor ironic.<sup>60</sup> Some of the women participants in the *Anthropométries* viewed their role in a different light again. Questioned on her participation in one of the *Anthropométries*, model Elena Palumbo recalled that not only was Klein a 'gentleman' who never swore, but: 'The gallery was full of people who were boring snobs so of course I enjoyed shocking that sort of person.'<sup>61</sup> Satisfaction granted, however, Ms Palumbo acknowledged that she had not been paid – a revelation that unintentionally corroborates the more critical thrust of de Duve's argument.<sup>62</sup>

The 'human' paintings produced by the *Anthropométric* performances ranged from the dynamic *People Begin to Fly* of 1961 to comparatively static images such as *ANT 82 – Anthropométries de l'époque bleue* of 1960. *People Begin to Fly* presents life-size female figures seemingly flying through space, their stenciled outlines surrounding textured marks of the actual impressed body. *ANT 82*, on the other hand, presents five statically arranged imprints of the female body, here reduced to squat, truncated, dwarf-like x-shaped chiasmas. Each records the 'essentials' of the female body as judged by Klein: breasts, stomach, pudenda and thighs. In Klein's opinion, 'intellectual articulations' such as 'the hands, the arms, the head, the legs were of no importance. Only the body is alive, all-powerful, and nontinking.'<sup>65</sup> The imprinted forms take the shape of a double-headed crossing whose central axis is marked by the curly-haired texture of the paint-impregnated pudenda.

If there is a subversive element to the *Anthropométric* paintings, it may well lie in their identity as concrete traces or indexical marks of human presence. The possibility of reading the various traces left by the *Anthropométries* against the grain, however – for example, as markers of absence rather than metaphysical presence, or as 'counter-fetishistic' indicators of exploitative relations of production – remains just that: a reading against the grain of Klein's recorded intentions. Despite the artist's claims of mystical agency, magical power and masterful genius, his works conspire as much against as towards his own interpretive frame. Appreciation of Klein's art on his *own* terms, however, calls for a 'leap of faith' – a leap of faith premised upon unequal gender and labour relations. For these reasons, the political implications of his art still demand continued critique.

### Christo's *Wrapped Women*

Christo's *Wrapped Women* of 1962–69, on the contrary, may present a more sensitive and destabilizing performance of fetishism's economy of phallic substitution and disavowal. During these pieces, which were occasionally enacted before film or audience, Christo gradually wrapped a naked female model in transparent plastic and ropes. In placing himself within this 'strip-tease in reverse' as active participant, the artist provocatively acted out pre-existing cultural scripts of fetishistic anxiety and artistic sublimation.

Performances were carried out in Paris in 1962 in Yves Klein's studio, and subsequently in Dusseldorf, Milan, Minneapolis, Philadelphia and London.<sup>64</sup> In each, one or several models were wrapped in plastic polyethylene. Photographs show the artist progressively encircling a woman with an unfurling length of plastic, winding the material around her body until

its features are almost completely masked by bunched, glistening wads of drapery.<sup>65</sup> Thin rope was subsequently wound repeatedly around her form, criss-crossed and knotted.

Shared by ropes and 'soft-focus' transparent drapery, the wrapped bodies field references to Antique classical draped sculpture with suggestions of sadism and voyeurism.<sup>66</sup> The female body's transformation into an elongated, tightly encased glistening mass, moreover, meshes closely with fetishism's economy of phallic substitution and disavowal. As Laura Mulvey has noted in her analysis of bondage imagery, 'the fetishistic image of woman has three aspects ... First: woman plus phallic substitute. Second: woman minus phallus punished and humiliated ... Third: woman *as* phallus.'<sup>67</sup> Christo's wrapped women strikingly invoke Mulvey's last two categories. Exposed in her full 'lack', woman is 'victimized' and 'corrected', her disturbing sexual difference veiled and phallicly transfigured.

In its simultaneous solicitation and frustration of the scopophilic gaze, Christo's 'strip-tease in reverse' possibly theatricalizes aspects of artistic sublimation.<sup>68</sup> Freud's description of art as a form of sublimated sexual curiosity corresponds with the narrative progression of the performances:<sup>69</sup>

The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts. It can, however, be diverted ('sublimated') in the direction of art, if its interest can be shifted away from the genitals on to the shape of the body as a whole.<sup>70</sup>

Christo's *Wrapped Women* both gestured towards sublimation's 'higher artistic aims' (to quote Freud), and exposed its voyeuristic foundation.<sup>71</sup>

The living sculptures were occasionally exhibited to the public.<sup>72</sup> In 1968, for example, Christo presented seven wrapped women at the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art for five hours. The figures were placed horizontally on broad pedestal-like bases. As Christo explained: 'The work was done like a sculpture, with a base ... like a bronze.'<sup>73</sup> On one level, the mum-my-like figures of the wrapped women appear to waver uncannily between corpse and statue. Their shroud-like encasement evokes associations of suffocation and death. On another level, however, the breathing sculptures partially resist fetishistic processes of stabilization, preservation or abstraction from temporality. Christo's *Wrapped Women* may toy with a trajectory of fetishism devoted to the aestheticization of the embalmed female corpse, but they destabilize its dream of frozen eternity.<sup>74</sup> The sculptures are charged with temporality, their lifespan limited to hours or minutes.

The performance works of Christo and Saint-Phalle flirt with themes of fetishism, temporality and death. The use of the female body in Saint Phalle, Klein and Christo's works, however, differ significantly. In contrast to the

female models in the performances of her colleagues, Saint-Phalle asserted her own active (if always mediated) agency as a woman artist. Seductive, she remained, but this seduction was folded into more subversive scenarios of gender performativity.

### Medusa

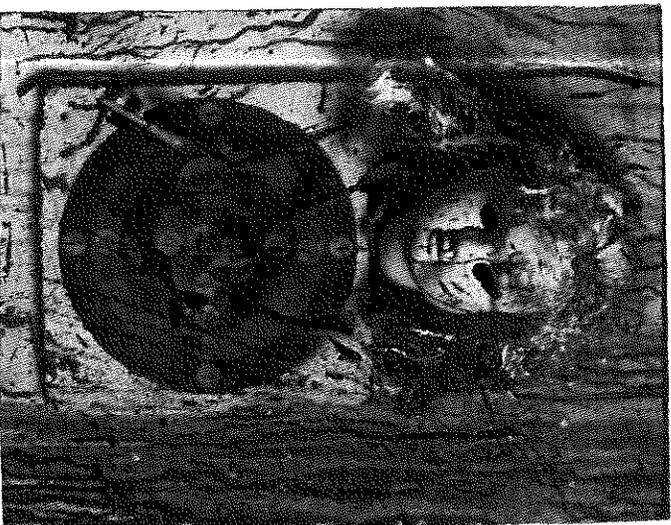
Saint-Phalle's use of flamboyantly feminine costumes (including red dresses and feather boas), masculine metaphors of ejaculation and Freudian tropes of castration drew upon a 'phallic' vocabulary of classic sexual fetishism and a 'feminine' vocabulary of female masquerade. By juxtaposing the representational strategies of fetish and masquerade, she destabilized their operation: the *Tirs* paraded fetishism's disavowal and masquerade's reassurance, then undercut both.

Freud's discussion of fetishism in his 1922 essay 'Medusa's Head' provides an apposite model for investigating these aspects of the *Tirs*.<sup>75</sup> As Rainer Mack has argued, the Medusa's head was employed in Ancient Greece as both a fearful symbol of the overturning of patriarchal power by a female monster, and conversely (in its deployment through representations encountered by men in everyday life), as a symbol of patriarchy's *défait* of the threat posed by Medusa's objectifying gaze.<sup>76</sup> Freud acknowledged the inherent ambivalence of Medusa's image in his own theorization of the condition of sexual fetishism. Freud employs the image of the bleeding, decapitated Medusa's head as a figure of fetishistic desire and horror: he describes it as simultaneously bewitching, seductive, threatening and castrating. For Freud, the visual fetish is a substitute for the castrated maternal phallus of fantasy. As a reminder of castration and the female genitals, he argues, Medusa's head petrifies the male spectator with fear. At the same time, it offers consolation through a multiplication of penis symbols figured in the undulating or rampant snake-hair of the Medusa. Freud writes:

to decapitate = to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something ... it occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals ... surrounded by hair ... The sight of Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone ... For becoming stiff means an erection. Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact.<sup>77</sup>

For Freud, the fetish thus functions for the fetishist as a simultaneous disavowal and affirmation of castration.

Saint-Phalle may be said to have taken up the attributes of Freud's Medusa – the dangerous seducer who lures the gaze, then petrifies the gazer with fear.



4.11 Niki de Saint-Phalle, *Tir, avec tête de poupée (fragment de Tir tableau circa février 1962)*, détail, c. February 1962. Succession Niki de Saint-Phalle/SODRAC 2009. © 2009 NIKI CHARITABLE ART FOUNDATION. All rights reserved

The theme of the Medusa's head occasionally appeared in the iconography of her assemblages (see Figure 4.11). A close-up, cropped photograph of this assemblage, reproduced in a book on Nouveau Réalisme by Pierre Restany in 1968, presents the decapitated head of a female doll with paint-smearing flowing hair. Below is a dart-board target, a motif used in an earlier work entitled *Saint-Sébastien: Portrait of My Lover* (1961).<sup>78</sup> If this assemblage is littered with fetishism's vocabulary of phallic symbols, it is equally strewn with allusions to invagination and penetration. The empty sockets of the doll's eyes, the openings and holes in the surface of the work and the streaming, spattered paint can be read as explicit reminders of castration and rape. Within this imagery infused with corporal metaphors, Medusa's head is arguably robbed of its powers of disavowal and re-figured through the image of the bleeding vagina.

If Saint-Phalle's stage persona foregrounded mechanisms of ambivalent reassurance, the physical qualities of her assemblages arguably exposed the bleeding underside of Medusa's head. The haemorrhaging surface of her

works, pouring with released paint and torn open to expose internal materials such as chicken wire or string, can, on one level, be viewed as a metaphoric staging of castration. On another level, the assemblages' simulated eruption of the boundaries of a body into a series of cavities and wounds bespeaks a language of abjection. As if to reassure the viewer against this so-called 'maternal' portrait of horror and mutilation, Saint-Phalle, as we have seen, assembled an ambiguous set of phallic stage props. These props, however, only partly mitigate the thematics of putrefaction, bodily disintegration and disruption of bodily boundaries visible in many of the *Tirs*. Spurling paint, torn plastic, strands of string and pieces of wire often erupt from their interiors, as evident in *Tir: Première séance – seconde séance* (Figure 4.4). Responding to such corporeal references, Maurice Rheims remarked to Saint-Phalle, 'your figures give the impression of being flayed, of having their intestines, nerves, and serous membranes exposed like anatomical drawings'.<sup>79</sup>

Disgusted critics turned to metaphors of putrefaction and death to describe her work. If for one reviewer her art resembled '*tableaux mourants*',<sup>80</sup> for another:

De Saint-Phalle's work begins not with life, but with death itself ... What this artist (and it is doubly astounding because she is a woman) has accomplished with death is not an act of violence, but a dreadful act of adornment, a stubborn refusal to dignify the corpse with the final rite of burial.<sup>81</sup>

Saint-Phalle's refusal to 'bury' her corpses strongly suggests the *Tirs*' origin in traumatic memory. If trauma is ultimately performative in nature, manifesting itself as an active if involuntary re-enactment of a past traumatic event, the *Tirs* both signal and physically embody this process. Saint-Phalle's 'repeated infliction of a wound' (to use an expression of theorist Cathy N. Davidson), appears, in other words, to re-enact her own memories of childhood wounding – namely her sexual abuse.<sup>82</sup> Saint-Phalle articulated the identity of her *Tir* victims in the following way:

WHO was the painting? Daddy? All Men? Small Men? Tall Men? ... Or was the painting ME? ... I was shooting at MYSELF, society with its injustice ... I was shooting at my own violence and the VIOLENCE of the times. By shooting at my own violence, I no longer had to carry it inside of me like a burden.<sup>83</sup>

Conceiving of her work as a form of catharsis, both personal and social, Saint-Phalle publicly stated in 1965: 'My work has always been my way of expressing my problems, then exorcising them.'<sup>84</sup> In 1993 she was more explicit: 'I was raped by my father when I was 11, so perhaps it's no wonder I started shooting my paintings.'<sup>85</sup> She elaborated as follows:

Things turned sour when I started growing breasts. The dark side of my idealistic father manifested itself.

My father got more involved watching my breasts grow and my hips widen than discussing politics or life with me. I had turned into quite an attractive young girl. I became an object of his desire for total power over me. Something happened between us, something that turned me away forever from my father. All that love turned to hate. I felt I had been assassinated.<sup>86</sup>

For Saint-Phalle, the *Tir* targets doubled as wounded human bodies: 'When I looked at [the relief ... ], I imagined the paint starting to bleed. Wounded, in the same way people can be wounded. As far as I was concerned, the painting became a person with feelings and sensations.'<sup>87</sup> Saint-Phalle's audience was itself made party to this wounding. Drawing on the French/English phonetic word-play of the *Tirs*' title – '*Tirs*' and 'tears' – Saint-Phalle at one stage incorporated actual tear gas into the finale of a *Tir* performance.<sup>88</sup>

Post-traumatic symptoms such as repetition and compulsion, moreover, appear to have surfaced in her performances. As she noted retrospectively in 1966: 'I just kept shooting and shooting until I ruined it.'<sup>89</sup> On one level, therefore, Saint-Phalle's symbolic infliction of injury upon her paintings (in an enactment of erotically tinged aggression evocative, one might argue, of the death-drive) reinforced her works' associations with trauma. On another level, however, her works transcended a simple re-living of a painful event. During the *Tirs*, Saint-Phalle melded her positive personal experience of fetishistic 'exorcism' and 'fantastic exaltation' (to use her own words) with a public and political call to witness, reflect and condemn.

### Turning from *Tirs*

By 1965, Niki de Saint-Phalle had largely abandoned her *Tir* works, turning her attention instead to the bright, gaily coloured 'Nana' sculptures with which her name is now most commonly associated. Examples include her well-known *Hon* or 'She' of 1966, constructed with Jean Tinguely and Per-Olof Ullvedt at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. This shift in her work to an allegedly open celebration of the female body parallels broader developments in the 1960s such as the sexual revolution and the development of counter-culture. If this later work appears consistent with its era, the earlier *Tirs*, on the contrary, at first glance appear to stand out for their radical feminist premises before the dawning of what is often described as the feminist art movement. Many accounts of feminist art have positioned, and indeed continue to position, the rise of feminist art and feminist performance art alongside the political emergence of second wave feminism, at the end of the 1960s or beginning of the 1970s.<sup>90</sup> Rather than categorize Saint-Phalle as somehow 'too early', a 'precursor' to feminist 1970s performance art, theoretical models for the exploration of 'complex, politicized synchronicities' allow for a questioning of this narrative.<sup>91</sup>

While the visual iconography of the *Tir* assemblages can perhaps be critiqued as naïve and stereotyped – and I leave this as an open question – Saint-Phalle's use of her own and her spectators' bodies to actualize her works in many ways broke new ground. By grafting fetishism's phallic signifiers onto masquerade's language of feminine sartorial excess, Saint-Phalle produced destabilizing performances of travestied masculinity and femininity. The *Tirs* demonstrate not only the difficulties and ambivalences of a woman artist based in France during the 1960s, but also her semi-spontaneous, semi-strategic solutions in the face of socially imposed models of femininity and masculinity. At the same time, the *Tirs* continue to raise important questions concerning the relationship of artistic practice to traumatic memory and public denunciation.

How might the phallic and fetishistic imagery in Saint-Phalle's works be assessed? The *Tirs*, as I noted at the beginning, staged a series of Pyrrhic victories and phallic defeats. On the one hand, like Tinguely's *La Vittoria*, they appear to re-enact fetishism's language of phallic affirmation. On the other hand, they undermine its unstable 'victory' over loss – and, in the process, reintroduce possibilities of overtly political resistance.

## Notes

1. Niki de Saint-Phalle (29 October 1930–21 May 2002) was born in France, raised in the United States, and pursued her artistic career in both countries. Christianed Catherine Marie-Agnès Fal de Saint Phalle (following the surname of her father, André Marie Fal de Saint Phalle, a wealthy banker), she was renamed Niki (from the Greek word *Nike* or 'Victory') at the age of seven. Saint-Phalle and Jean Tinguely were lovers from 1960, married from 1971, artistic colleagues and occasional collaborators. Joint projects by the two artists included *Honr* (1966, with Per-Olof Ulvred), *La Paradis Fantastique* (1967), and the Place Igor Stravinsky fountain in Paris (1982–83).
2. Sources vary concerning the date of *La Vittoria*'s performance. While certain accounts mention 29 November 1970, that is, the last night of festivities, others (including the official catalogue for the festival events) specify 28 November. Jean Tinguely's retrospective *La Vittoria* portfolio of prints and photographs commemorating the event presents both dates. See, for example, *Nouveau réalisme 1960/1970*, Milano: Jean Tinguely, *La Vittoria* (portfolio), Sergio Tozi Stampatore, 16 tavole in 100 fessmpanti, 28/11/70–11/9/72 (Milán, 1972); or conversely, 1966: *Les Nouveaux Réalistes* (Paris: MAM/Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1986), p. 106.
3. Accounts of the event testify to a certain instability or inflation surrounding recorded details of the performance. Tinguely himself retrospectively referred to a crowd of 8,000 spectators. Otto Hahn, writing in *L'Express*, for his part reported 10,000. Following Tinguely's lead, museum records at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, refer to a crowd of 8,000. These records stem from an exhibition of Tinguely's *La Vittoria* lithographs, etchings and photographs, curated by Riva Castelman, held at the Museum of Modern Art, July and September 1975. See Otto Hahn, 'Saturnales milanaises', *L'Express*, 14–20 December 1970; and Jean Tinguely, *La Vittoria* (portfolio); 'Wall Text', *La Vittoria*, Museum of Modern Art, July–September 1975; Tinguely's *La Vittoria* Documented at the Museum of Modern Art, No. 48 For Release, Museum of Modern Art, 4 July 1975.
4. Tinguely, *La Vittoria* (portfolio).
5. 'Tinguely parle de Tinguely' (1982), in Pontus Hultén, *Jean Tinguely* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1988), p. 361.
6. See, for example, Danielle Giraudy, 'La fête aux Nouveaux Réalistes', *Chroniques de l'art vivant*, 16 (1971), p. 40; and Jean Tinguely, *La Vittoria* (portfolio). Pontus Hultén's monograph *Jean Tinguely: Méta* for its part records a height of about 10 metres. Pontus Hultén, *Jean Tinguely: Méta* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), p. 345.
7. Jean Tinguely, *La Vittoria* (portfolio).
8. 'Tinguely parle de Tinguely' (1982), in Pontus Hultén, *Jean Tinguely*, p. 361.
9. Marjorie Garber, 'Fetish Envy', *October*, 54 (Fall 1990), pp. 45–56.
10. Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism' (1927), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 volumes (London: Hogarth, 1955–75), vol. 21, p. 154.
11. Of the large and expanding literature on fetishism, see, for example, Emily Apter and William Pietz (eds), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Emily Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).
12. Pierre Restany, 'Le Nouveau Réalisme: Que faut-il en penser?', in 1960: *Les Nouveaux Réalistes*, pp. 272–3.
13. Otto Hahn, 'The Avant-Garde Stance', *Arts Magazine*, 39/9 (1965), p. 24.
14. Karl Feurbach, 'Nouveau-Réalisme et Lumpen-Proletariat', *Daily Bul*, 9 (July 1963), unpaginated: 'There is a particularly rare form of delectation, linked to both class and morals, in the contemplation of old rags and scrap iron. And what better guarantee of this economic system based on capital than the observation that a destroyed object is a hundred times more valuable than the original?'
15. Gérard Deschamps (Paris: Galerie Le Gall Perroulet, 1988), unpaginated; Pierre Restany, *Le Nouveau Réalisme* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1978), p. 111.
16. For details of *Tir* performances during these years, see Janice Parente, Pierre Restany and Yoko Masuda, *Niki de Saint-Phalle: Catalogue Raisonné: Tirs, Assemblages, Reliefs, 1949–2000* (Lausanne: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001).
17. For references to *Tir* performances in 1960, however, see Niki de Saint-Phalle, Alexander Iolas Gallery, New York, 15 October–3 November 1962; or Rosalind Wholden, 'Pureréalism: "The End" with Innocence', *Artforum*, 2/3 (1963), p. 30.
18. Niki de Saint-Phalle, 'Letter', in Pontus Hultén, *Niki de Saint-Phalle* (Bonn: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1992), pp. 159–65.
19. Dates of exhibition as provided in *Fen a volonté* invitation (Paris, 1961); Janice Parente et al., *Niki de Saint-Phalle*.
20. Harry Shunk and Loti Malé, 'Pier 18', *ASA magazine*, 6 <<http://www.asa.de/magazine/iss6/42pier18.html>> (accessed 22 May 2003).
21. *Shooting Gallery, or Homage to the Postman Cervel* was shown at the Alexander Iolas Gallery, New York, 15 October–3 November 1962.
22. Saint-Phalle's use of dolls to signify babies and maternity occasionally look on Freudian resonance. In *L'accouchement rose* (1964), for example, Saint-Phalle pictures the child as the mother's phallus. She described this image as that of a 'virile woman giving birth, who wears the child like a masculine sex'. *Niki de Saint-Phalle* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1980), p. 44.
23. José Pierre, 'La Biennalen'a pas voulu de cette toile ...', *Combat*, 5 (October 1963), press clipping from MNAM archives; Eduardo Arroyo boîte verte.
24. Performed at the Maïstman Playhouse, New York, 4 May 1962.
25. Michel de Grace et al., *Niki de Saint-Phalle: Monographie* (Lausanne: Editions Acatos, 2001), p. 515.
26. Donald Judd, 'In the Galleries: Niki de Saint-Phalle', *Arts Magazine* (December 1962), p. 45.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
28. Marc Albert-Lavrin, 'Le XXe Salon de Mai ouvert au Ye-Yé pictural', *Cinéma*, 68 (1964), pp. 68–73.
29. Michael Benedikt, 'New York Letter', *Art International*, 9/5 (June 1965), p. 56.
30. *Niki de Saint-Phalle: la donation catalogue* (Nice: Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, 2002), p. 309.
30. Maurice Rheims, 'Niki de Saint-Phalle: l'art et les mecs', *Vogue* (February 1965), p. 60.

- vêtue comme Marlene ... Deux choses me fascinent dans tes vêtements: les boos que tu portes autour du cou et ces demi-boîtes qui affectent comment dirais-je ... la forme de la baignoire de Marat.
- NSP: J'aime les boos parce qu'ils ont une vie, parce qu'ils continuent à bouger comme les pythons brossés. Je suis terrifié par les serpents et en même temps je les aime. Pour moi, ils sont très érotiques. Pour moi, les boos sont les vêtements les plus érotiques que je puisse imaginer ... Vas-y tu peux l'écrire.
- MR: Tes boîtes, tu les trouves aux puces? ...
- NSP: Je les achète neuves, à Londres, dans un magasin pour fétichistes! J'ai une passion pour les chausures parce que, pour moi, les chausures sont un symbole très érotique, et dans les boîtes, il y a une espèce de cruauté dans laquelle je me sens tout à fait à l'aise. Pour moi, les vêtements sont un moyen de provoquer la société ... ça m'excite.
31. Film extracts, captioned 'Impasse Ronsir' (1961) and 'Study for the End of the World' (1962), were screened at Saint-Phalle's 2002 retrospective exhibition 'Niki de Saint Phalle: la donator', at the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice.
32. A murderous subtext, in short, was perceived to lurk beneath Saint-Phalle's performances, as indicated in Rheims' allusion to Jean-Paul Marat, murdered by Charlotte Corday. For a theoretical account of the 'femme castratrice', see Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
33. Pierre Descargues, in *Niki de Saint-Phalle* (Paris: Gallérie Alexandre Iolas, 1965), unpaginated.
34. *Ibid.*; Pierre Descargues, 'Niki de Saint-Phalle: Nanas', *Quadrant*, 20 (1966), pp. 67-74.
35. Saint-Phalle subsequently alluded to the theme of castrating, devouring women in her 1972 illustrated book *The Devouring Mothers: Stories by Niki de Saint-Phalle* (London: Gimpel Fils Gallery, 1972). Its playful captions include 'Mummy Bais Daddy' and 'They eat. They eat. They eat'.
36. Descargues, 'Niki de Saint-Phalle: Nanas', p. 67. 'Dans les foies, j'avez-vous jamais frémi de crainte en regardant les demoiselles des stands de tir? Elles tendent aux passants des carabines et leur suggèrent de tirer sur des pipes. Parfois, elles sautent leur compitor, légères, et viennent donner un leçon au maladroît. Le pauvre! Songe-t-il que, sous l'innocent aspect de la vendeuse, c'est une chausure iscé qui officie et qu'elle l'invite à fracasser des symboles masculins? On lui retient le coup d'Action et il sourit de plaisir.'
37. Action, according to the myth, went out hunting and surprised Diana, the goddess of hunting, bathing and naked. In punishment, Diana transformed Action into a stag, whereupon he was hunted down by his own hounds.
38. C.W., 'Niki de Saint-Phalle, Dwan Gallery', *Artforum*, 2/9 (March 1964): p. 11
39. Beverly Gray, 'Close-up: Avant-Garde Artist', *The New York Post Magazine*, 5 December 1962, Jill Johnston, 'Robert Rauschenberg, Jean Tinguely, Niki de Saint-Phalle (Maidman Theater)', *Art News*, 61/4 (1962): pp. 53-4; Gerald Nordland, 'Neo Dada Goes West', *Arts Magazine* (May/June 1962): p. 102.
40. Danièle Giraudy 'La fête aux Nouveaux Réalistes', in *Chroniques de l'art vivant*, 16 (1971): p. 40. 'A delicate amber-haired Joan of Arc, her loose-fitting man's shirt and tiny sneakers exaggerated the contrast between the huge project and its light-stepping sovereign', Rosalind Wholoden, 'Parealisim', p. 32; Theima Sweetinburgh, 'Niki's Nanas', *Women's Wear Daily* (Friday, 15 October 1965): p. 4.
41. Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929), in Victor Burgin (ed.), *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 38. As Riviere also put it: 'I shall attempt to show that women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men.' *Ibid.*, p. 34.
42. Maurice Rheims, 'Niki de Saint-Phalle', p. 94.
43. 'MR: Ecoute, Niki, si tu méprises tant les hommes, à quoi bon arborer ces costumes si extraordinaires, si provocateurs, si féminins qu'ils me paraissent être des costumes attrapé-l'homme?'
- NSP: En réalité je n'ai aucune dent contre les hommes. Je pense seulement, au fond, qu'ils sont des pauvres types tout juste bons pour décorer mon lit, direr mes boîtes. Mais pour autre chose,
- je rien ai pas besoin ... Je pense que mes boos, mes boîtes, mes robes rouges, mon dégraisement qu'oïl me sort autre chose que des accessoires de ma création, exprimant mieux le désir de faire de moi-même un objet, comme ces poupées en celluloid dont je me sens des moi travail. Je me sens de mon corps comme je me sens d'un fond de grillage pour faire une sculpture. Et en même temps, je me sens à l'aise parce que ça n'a rien à foutre avec moi, parce que c'est un détail, et que c'est un des accoutrements de mes rêves.'
43. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
44. 'MR: Niki, je reviens encore une fois à cette question du costume. N'es-tu pas comme ces animaux de la nature qui sont vêtus de pelage ou de plumes merveilleux, n'es-tu pas désireuse de plaire, pour mieux motrice peut-être?'
45. 'MR: Niki, let me come back once again to this question of costume. Aren't you like those animals in nature dressed in a marvelous coat or feathers, don't you wish to please, all the better to bite, perhaps?'
46. Women were granted the right to vote in France in 1944; they were allowed to have their own independent bank accounts in 1962. Between the end of the war and 1965, a baby boom was in full force - contraception was not legalized in France until 1967.
47. 'Niki de Saint-Phalle poster', McEllian Galleries, Scotland, January-April 1993.
48. Niki de Saint-Phalle, quoted in *Fantastic Vision: Works by Niki de Saint-Phalle* (Roslyn, NY: Naassau County Museum of Fine Art, September 1987-January 1988), p. 12.
49. *Ibid.*
50. According to *Art International*, Saint-Phalle's work emerges from a 'context of accident and hysteria, John Ashbery, Paris Letter', *Art International*, 6/7 (1962): p. 64. For *Artforum* it epitomizes 'art as pure, unsolved and untransposed neurosis', C.W., 'Niki de Saint-Phalle, Dwan Gallery', while for *Art in America*, 'Niki de Saint Phalle in an excess of hysteria shoots at her own paintings', Cleve Gray, 'Aspects of Anonymity', *Art in America*, 50/3 (1962): p. 95. See Beverly Gray, 'Close Up: Avant-Garde Artist', p. 3; Roger Cohen, 'An Artist, Her Monsters, Her Two Worlds', *New York Times* (7 October 1993); Pierre Descargues, in *Niki de Saint-Phalle*, for descriptions of Saint-Phalle as 'chuldike'.
51. Niki de Saint-Phalle, in Roger Cohen, 'An Artist, Her Monsters, Her Two Worlds', p. 8.
52. Gérard Cassiot-Talabot, 'Lettre de Paris', *Art International*, 9/8 (1965): p. 54. 'Toute une partie de sa psychologie est tournée vers une mise en question de l'homme dans ses fonctions de domination sexuelle et sociale, et surtout dans la façon dont il s'arrange le pouvoir créateur, et pourtant le phénomène d'identification aux attribus masculins est flagrant car, dans son entreprise de supplantation de l'homme (dépolluë), selon elle, de tout pouvoir créateur par la vie stérilisée qu'il aménage), c'est à une osmose et non à une négation qu'elle nous fait assister.'
53. Saint-Phalle's persona was also taken up by the media to illustrate popular stereotypes of the avant-garde. A fictional portrayal of Saint-Phalle, for example, occurs in the 1964 20th Century Fox film *What a Way to Go!*, directed by J. Lee Thompson. The film includes a Saint-Phalle character named Polly (played by Jane Wald), and a Jean Tinguely character (played by Paul Newman). Through cliché-ridden parodies and dialogue, the film hammers home the 'folies' of the avant-garde. Following a comment by the main character (Shirley Maclaine) that a shot 'Tir painting, it should her feel s'ick, the Saint-Phalle character responds: 'Why thank you, thank you very much. It makes me feel you feel sick. It's destruction pure and simple. It's what today is all about. A more tangential reference to Saint-Phalle's later work occurs in John Updike's 1964 novel *The Witches of Eastwick*. A character named Alexandra - a witch and artist - is described as the creator of brightly coloured sculpted female figurines similar (Updike specifies) to those produced by Saint-Phalle. (My thanks to El Zabeth Legge for referring me to the novel.)
54. See, for example, Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 72-3.
55. Yves Klein, 'Hot! Chelsea, New York 1961' (New York: Museum of Modern Art, archives/artists files), pp. 1-8-9. The manifesto continues: 'Now the reason for my use of nude models becomes quite evident: it was a way of preventing the danger of secluding myself in the overly spiritual spheres of creation, thus rupturing with the most basic common sense, repeatedly affirmed by our incarnate condition', p. 10.
- As various commentators have noted, Klein's piece resembled the earlier experimental compositions of composer John Cage.

55. Excerpts of film viewed at *Hors Limites* exhibition, 1994, MINAM/Centre Pompidou, Paris.
56. Pierre Restany, in 'Yves Klein special', *Art Press*, 67 (February 1983): p. 8. 'J'ai participé souvent à des séances d'anthropométries. Tous les modèles, à l'exception d'une seule jeune femme, ont joué le jeu, ont prêtés leur corps comme un objet. Une seule sur une demi-douzaine de modèles, a pris du plaisir en y voyant sans doute une forme supérieure de masturbation.'
57. Although criticism of the sexism of the 'human brush' was rare, Daniel Buren, Benjamin Buchloh and Thomas Crow briefly raised the issue. Daniel Buren, 'Yves Klein special', *Art Press*, 67 (1983): p. 13; Benjamin Buchloh, 'Formalism and Historicity: Changing Concepts in American and European Art Since 1945', in *Europe in the 70s: Aspects of Recent Art* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1977), p. 91; Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties* (London: Everyman Art Library, 1996), pp. 122-3.
58. Detailed in Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein* (Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1994).
59. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
60. *The Guardian* (7 February 1995); Gerald Cassiot-Talabor: interview by author (Paris, 1995); Alain Joffroy: interview by author (Paris, 1995); Daniel Spoerri: interview by author (Paris, 1995); Christo and Jeanne Claude: interview by author (New York, 1994).
61. Mike Ellison, 'Exhibition Shows the Naked Truth about an Artist with the Blues', *The Guardian*, 7 February 1995.
62. *Ibid.*
63. Statements exhibited in *Yves Klein retrospective exhibition*, London, Hayward Gallery, February 1995.
64. Dusseldorf, 1962; Milan, 1963; Minneapolis, 1967; Philadelphia, 1968; London, 1968.
65. See *Christo: Wool Works* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1969), pp. 16-17.
66. The 'soft-focus' analogy is suggested by David Bourdon and Oho Hahn, *Christo* (Milan: Edizioni Apollinaire, 1965), unpaginated.
67. Laura Mulvey 'You Don't Know What is Happening Do You, Mr. Jones?' (1973), in Marsha Rowe (ed.), *Spore Rib Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 50-51.
68. While certain wrappings were carried out in private *them* exhibited (for example, in Philadelphia), others were preserved as a narrative spectacle (for example, stills from Charles Whip's 1962 film, *Wrapping a Woman*).
69. Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', in Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 251.
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*
72. Christo and Jeanne Claude, interview by author, New York, August 1994.
73. *Ibid.*
74. For discussion of the fetishization of the female corpse in nineteenth-century literature and art, see Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
75. Sigmund Freud, 'Medusa's Head' (1922), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 volumes (London: Hogarth, 1955-75), vol. 18, pp. 273-4.
76. Rainer Mack, 'Facing Down Medusa (An Aetiology of the Gaze)', *Art History*, 25/5 (2002): pp. 571-604.
77. Freud, 'Medusa's Head', p. 273.
78. *Saint-Sébastien, ou le Portrait de mon amour* (1961) consisted of a dartboard-head, a man's shirt and darts.
79. Maurice Rheims, 'Niki de Saint-Phalle', p. 60. 'Pourquoi] les personnages donnent-ils l'impression d'être dépouillés de leur peau, d'exposer leurs viscères, leurs nerfs, leurs muscles serrés à la façon des planches anatomiques?'

80. Rosalind Wolkstein, 'Puerrealism', p. 30.
81. C.W., 'Niki de Saint-Phalle, Dwan Gallery'.
82. Caruth reminds us in her writings on trauma that 'trauma' is Greek for 'wound'. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
83. Niki de Saint-Phalle, 'Letter', in Pontus Hulten, *Jean Tinguely*, pp. 161-2.
84. Niki de Saint-Phalle, in Maurice Rheims, 'Niki de Saint-Phalle', p. 60. 'Mon travail a toujours été ma façon d'explorer mes problèmes, puis de les exorciser, comme les noirs avec leurs fétiches ...'
85. Niki de Saint-Phalle, in Roger Cohen, 'An Artist: Her Monsters, Her Two Worlds', p. 8.
86. Niki de Saint-Phalle, 'A Letter to Bloumi', in Susan Haggood, *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art 1954-62* (New York: The American Federation of Arts in association with Universe Publishing, 1995), p. 142. Details of her experience of rape are recounted in her autobiography, *Niki de Saint-Phalle: Mon secret* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1994).
87. *Niki de Saint-Phalle: la donation catalogue*, p. 23.
88. Pontus Hulten, *Niki de Saint-Phalle*, p. 161.
89. 'Calico Dames in a Frolic of Art', *Life*, 60/13 (1966). Saint-Phalle also noted: 'I experienced a moment of fantastic exaltation seeing that work become something real before my eyes. My feelings of aggress on underwent a type of sublimation. It was like a drug. I had enormous difficulty freeing myself. I kept wanting to return to that marvelous period of the shootings.' Maurice Rheims, 'Niki de Saint-Phalle', p. 60. 'C'était un moment d'exaltation fantastique de voir cette œuvre devenir quelque chose de vrai devant mes yeux, mes sentiments d'agression trouvaient une espèce de sublimation. C'était comme une drogue. J'ai eu de grandes difficultés à me libérer. Je voudrais toujours revenir à cette merveilleuse période de tir ...'
90. These accounts include Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 3rd edition (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002); Thalia Gouna Peterson and Patricia Matthews, 'The Feminist Critique of Art and Art History', *Art Bulletin*, 69/3 (1987): pp. 326-57; Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (eds), *The Power of Feminist Art* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994).
91. Griselda Pollock (ed.), *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 16. See, for example, Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (eds), *Performing the Body: Performing the Text* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999); Amelia Jones and Tracey Warr (eds), *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000).