

Readymade, Found Object, Replica: Redefining Sculpture in Europe and America, 1980s - 2010s

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To the memory of my grandmother,
Evangelia Klepkou

Abstract

This thesis examines the legacies of the *readymade* and the *found object* in contemporary art. It considers the critical currency and implications of these concepts today by looking at selected contemporary artworks. The two terms are often used interchangeably in the critical literature. However, the Duchampian *readymade* has been privileged in contemporary thought. My aim is to demonstrate that these concepts are related, but not identical, while drawing attention to aspects of the *found object* that have been overlooked or suppressed. I suggest that this will allow for the subtle nuances and overlaps between these two key concepts to emerge, further enriching our understanding of contemporary works of art that draw upon them.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first two chapters form the first section which is a literature review of the material dealing with Marcel Duchamp's *readymade* and the surrealist object, setting the historical and theoretical framework for the discussion of the contemporary works. The following three chapters, each concentrate on work by one contemporary artist or collaborative pair who makes use of *readymade* and found objects, as well as their replicas: Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Gabriel Orozco, and Urs Fischer. Through a close analysis of the contemporary work, I address the issue of a return of the category of sculpture, post 'sculpture in the expanded field', marked by a renewed, critical attention on the material object in art.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Return of the Object

In her presentation at the conference *Sub-objects and Studiowork* on February 6, 2010 at the University College London, art historian Mignon Nixon observed that the art object has been mythologised through its absence in the context of its 'dematerialisation' since the 1960s; according to her Freudian reading: 'the neglected object becomes the overinvested one'.¹ In 1968, Lucy Lippard and John Chandler formulated this 'dematerialisation' of the art object with their influential essay 'The Dematerialization of Art', followed five years later by Lippard's seminal book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*.²

During the last decade or so, however, in the early twenty-first century, there has been an important shift in the direction of these discussions, with the proliferation of exhibitions, symposia and publications that investigate the role of the object in art.³ These include, for example, the ambitious exhibition *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*, which inaugurated in 2007 the new building of the New Museum in New York and included work by Urs Fischer, one of the artists examined here. Another exhibition was *Part Object, Part Sculpture* at the Wexner Center for the Arts in 2005, curated by Helen Molesworth, exploring Duchamp's late *erotic objects* and replicas of readymade objects, and their legacies in the work of contemporary artists such as Gabriel Orozco. Articles that tackled the return of the object include Sven Lütticken's 'Art and Thingness' published during 2010 in three parts in *e-flux journal*, symposia and publications such as *The Lure of the Object* organized by Stephen Melville in 2006, the aforementioned *Sub-objects and Studiowork* organised by Briony Fer at UCL in 2010, and more recently the anthology entitled *The Object* published in 2014 by the Whitechapel Art Gallery, that includes a text on Orozco as well as Boris Groys' celebrated essay 'Simulated Readymades' (1994) on Peter

¹ Mignon Nixon, 'Object -Work' in *Sub-objects and Studiowork: From Eva Hesse to Anna Maria Maiolino*, organised by Briony Fer at the University College London (UCL) on February 6, 2010. The symposium was held to coincide with the exhibition *Eva Hesse: Studiowork* at Camden Arts Centre, London, 11 December 2009 - 7 March 2010.

² Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art' *Art International*, February 1968. Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

³ Interestingly, in this context, Lippard's book and its decisive impact in art history has been recently revisited as the theme of the exhibition *Materializing 'Six Years': Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art* at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, September 14, 2012–February 17, 2013.

Fischli and David Weiss, three of the artists also examined in this thesis.⁴ Another example of this tendency is *The Clever Object Research Project* at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, which resulted in a publication of a special issue of the *Art History* journal in June 2013, also including an article on the work of Fischli and Weiss.⁵

In view of this renewed interest in the object in contemporary art, this thesis examines the role of the object with particular reference to the work of Peter Fischli (b. 1952, Swiss) and David Weiss (1946–2012, Swiss), Gabriel Orozco (b. 1962, Mexican) and Urs Fischer (b. 1973, Swiss). It investigates the appropriation of the everyday object, first, in reconsidering the category of sculpture, and second, in rethinking the ambition of the early twentieth century avant-gardes to blur the boundaries between art and life. It does so by looking at selected contemporary works in relation to Marcel Duchamp's readymade and André Breton's found object, as well as the surrealist object in general. Most of the literature in this area examines artistic practices that incorporate everyday objects in the light of the Duchampian readymade, which has been privileged in contemporary art criticism. I argue here that the prominence of the readymade in the discussion of contemporary art has often driven critical enquiry into a dead-end.

More recently, however, scholars have drawn attention to the legacies of the surrealist object, as well as to the historical relation between the readymade and the object in surrealism. In his article on this subject, art critic Sven Lütticken remarks: 'If we look beyond the horizon of the 1960s reception of Duchamp, at the

⁴ Richard Flood et al. (eds), *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*, catalogue for an exhibition at the New Museum, New York, curated by Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman, Massimiliano Gioni, November 30 – March 23, 2007, (London; New York: Phaidon Press, 2007); Helen Molesworth (ed.), *Part object, Part sculpture* (Columbus: Philadelphia: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2005); Stephen Melville (ed.), *The Lure of the Object* (Clark Art Institute, 2006); Sven Lütticken, 'Art and Thingness, Part One, Two and Three,' *e-flux journal*, no. 13, Feb. 2010, no. 15, April 2010, and no. 16, May 2010; Joshua Simon, 'Neo-Materialism, Part One and Two,' *e-flux journal*, no. 20, Nov. 2010, and no. 23, March 2011; Vivian Rehberg, 'Objects Relations', *Frieze*, issue 132, Summer 2010, pp. 150–153; Antony Hudek (ed.), *The Object* (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art, 2014). Other publications include: Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (MIT, 2005); Jo Applin, *Eccentric Objects*, 2012; A number of books and articles revisit the object and its repercussions in dada and surrealism, exploring new aspects of their reception: Ingrid Pfeiffer and Max Hollein (eds.), *Surreal Objects: Three-Dimensional works from Dalí to Man Ray*, 2011, Hatje Cantz. Exhibition at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt; Janet Mileaf, *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects After the Readymade* (Dartmouth College Press, 2010), exploring the relation between readymade and surrealist objects, a recontextualisation of the readymade in surrealism.

⁵ *The Clever Object Research Project* at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, March 2009 – Feb. 2010. Rachel Wells, 'Fischli and Weiss's Equilibre/Quiet Afternoon (1984/85)' in 'The Clever Object', *Art History*, special issue edited by Matthew C. Hunter and Francesco Lucchini, Volume 36, Issue 3, June 2013, pp. 627–639.

repercussions of the readymade among the surrealists around 1930 in particular, things become rather more complicated and interesting.’⁶ Even though he stresses the importance of the reception of the readymade in surrealism, Lütticken does not pursue further the interrelation between the two in his discussion of contemporary art.

Overall, Lütticken identifies two different strands in the discussions of the readymade and its legacies in the 1960s, particularly those that were critical of it: the first, addresses art critic Clement Greenberg’s writings that champion the autonomy of the work of art, while criticizing the collapse between art and life that the readymade anticipates (Lütticken refers to Greenberg’s concerns in writings such as ‘Modernist Painting’ (1960) and ‘Recentness of Sculpture’ (1967) that ‘a blank sheet of paper or a table would become readable as art, that the boundary between artworks and “arbitrary objects” was eroding’).⁷ This response, shaped by a ‘fear for the collapsing of categories’, was followed by another thread that involves discussions on the status of the readymade as commodity, in the work of artists such as Dan Graham (b. 1942), Robert Smithson (1938–1973) and Daniel Buren (b. 1938), in the emerging context of institutional critique. For Lütticken, these artists criticized Duchamp’s gesture with the readymade for using art institutions to ‘redefine objects as artworks, thus multiplying their aura, their fetishistic allure, and their value’.⁸ Smithson, for example, insisted that, ‘there is no viable dialectic in Duchamp because he is only trading on the alienated object and bestowing on this object a kind of mystification’.⁹

According to Lütticken, both these critical responses to the readymade, by artists such as Graham, Smithson and Buren in the context of institutional critique, and by art critic Greenberg, argue against the appropriation of the art object that the condition of the readymade entails, either in the sphere of commodity, by critiquing its compliance with the market and the commodity ethos, or in the domain of everyday life, for endangering the critical autonomy of the artwork. I suggest, however, that the perpetuation of these positions has often brought the critical evaluation of the

⁶ Sven Lütticken, ‘Art and Thingness, Part one: Breton’s Ball and Duchamp’s Carrot’, e-flux journal, no. 13, Feb. 2010. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-and-thingness-part-one-breton%E2%80%99s-ball-and-duchamp%E2%80%99s-carrot/>, last accessed 26 September 2014.

⁷ *Ibid.* Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85–93, 250–256.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.* Robert Smithson, ‘Robert Smithson on Duchamp, interview with Moira Roth’ (1973), in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 310.

readymade to a standstill and the contemporary art object informed by the readymade to an impossible place where it is caught up in a deadlock within its status as commodity.

In her article entitled 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph' (2004), Margaret Iversen observes that from the long list of objects that make up the general category of surrealist objects in *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets*, only two types survive in contemporary art: Duchamp's readymade and Breton's found object. Despite their similarities, their well-established lineage, and the fact that they are often used interchangeably in the relevant literature, Iversen stresses the point that there are important differences between the two. The most fundamental among these differences is that the readymade is mass-produced and 'aesthetically indifferent', while the found object is bound up with the unconscious, and as such it opens up the art work to wider issues of life, death and sociality, revealing the traumatic core of the modern subject.¹⁰ For Iversen, calling attention to this aspect of the found object thus breaks the self-critical cycle perpetuated by the readymade and its legacies, which are more concerned 'with reflecting on and undermining the conventions and institutions of art.'¹¹ Moreover, each of them puts forth a different kind of subjectivity, brought into relief by the difference between the chance encounter with the found object ('both lost and found', as she claims), and the pre-arranged rendez-vous with the Duchampian readymade, stressing the 'singular or irreplaceable' character of the former and the 'essentially indifferent, multiple and mass-produced' quality of the latter.¹²

This thesis takes into consideration the driving distinction between readymade and found object that Iversen points out, but it also looks at the overlaps between the two in contemporary art works. My aim is to demonstrate that these concepts are interrelated, but not identical, while drawing attention to aspects of the found object, or the surrealist object in general, that have been overlooked or suppressed in contemporary criticism. I suggest that this will allow for the subtle nuances and overlaps between these two key concepts to emerge, further enriching our understanding of contemporary works of art that draw upon them (to either support, modify or challenge them). Further to this dialectical relationship between the

¹⁰ Margaret Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', *Art Journal*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2004, pp. 48, 57.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

readymade and the object in surrealism, the present thesis examines how their histories are underpinned by the practice of replication. Replicas are often produced when artworks have been lost or destroyed, in order to save them from oblivion, or to create artists' versions and editions. However, many of the contemporary art works examined here implement replication as a fundamental part of their working process, by simulating everyday objects via carving or casting in diverse materials, ranging from polyurethane to rubber and aluminum. Reverting thus to simulation or *trompe l'oeil*, these works further examine the limits of representation in art but also the formation of the postmodern subject.

The Return of Sculpture

In his introduction to the recent anthology *The Object* (2014), the editor of the volume, Antony Hudek, identifies three phases in the 'dematerialisation of the art object': Lippard's first phase in the late 1960s, which favourably reviewed the demise of the material object partly in opposition to Greenberg's brand of Modernism with its emphasis on the qualities of the material support of the artistic medium. The demise of the object championed by Lippard included Conceptual art practices which introduced the idea of art as language. Hudek determines that the second phase took place in the mid-1980s with the advent of automated machines, cybernetic devices and computers, which brought an increasing concern that these momentous technological developments would render the subject obsolete. Finally, with the third phase in the 1990s, 'dematerialization' took the form of the abject object with the work of the psychoanalytic cultural theorist Julia Kristeva as well as that of Rosalind Krauss.¹³

In 1979, Rosalind Krauss published her groundbreaking essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', which contested the notion of 'medium-specificity', the insistence on the importance of the artist's engagement with the particular material and formal properties of individual media, such as painting and sculpture, which was the holy grail of her former mentor Clement Greenberg.¹⁴ In the essay, Krauss calls attention instead to the emergence of an expanded notion of the category of sculpture that had been gaining ground since the late 1960s. Examples of these practices included spatial

¹³ Hudek, *The Object*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁴ Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1985, pp. 276-91.

arrangements as diverse as installations of TV monitors in architectural interiors, the photographic documentation of 'country hikes', mirror installations, and earthworks. In contrast to the largely self-referential character of modernist sculpture, the 'expanded field of sculpture', the term Krauss employed to describe these new manifestations under the rather malleable category of 'sculpture' in the context of postmodernism, came to denote an artistic medium that superseded oppositions between sculpture, landscape and architecture, exemplified by the work of sculptors like Carl Andre, Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt and Bruce Nauman.

The essay on the 'expanded field of sculpture' was followed in 1999 by Krauss's writings on the 'post-medium condition'.¹⁵ In her discussion of Marcel Broodthaers, for example, Krauss suggests that his medium is fiction. This new and broader understanding opened up of the notion of the Greenbergian medium-specificity confined to a strictly physical support. In his introduction to *The Object* (2014), Hudek aptly remarks that Krauss's notion of the 'post-medium condition', rather than rendering the idea of medium-specificity altogether obsolete, effectively retains the 'spectre' of the medium: 'It is precisely a spectre, an after-life of the medium, alive only in dreams, memory and fiction'.¹⁶

Hudek further suggests that 'the history of modernism is commonly understood to be pictorial, with the main breaks produced by abstraction, the monochrome and the blank canvas', highlighting, for example, Thierry de Duve's reading of Duchamp via Kant vis-à-vis Greenberg's Modernism. Sculpture, however, since the readymade, has been continuously 'pushing back against the encroachment of the ordinary object, not the aesthetic *tabula rasa* of the blank canvas', thus occupying 'an economic plane against the real and present threat of the commodity', while pictorial Modernist developments were taking place 'mainly on aesthetic grounds against the deferred threat of the black canvas'.¹⁷

Recent debates on sculpture reflect the current state of the medium after the 'expanded field of sculpture'. In the book series *Subject/Object: New Studies in Sculpture* published since 2004 by Ashgate press, the editors note:

¹⁵ Rosalind Krauss, 'Reinventing the Medium', in *Angelus Novus: Perspectives on Walter Benjamin*, a special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, 25: 2, Winter 1999, pp. 289–305; 'A Voyage on the North Sea': *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London, 1999; *Perpetual Inventory*, Cambridge, MA, 2010.

¹⁶ Hudek, *The Object*, p. 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

We have become familiar with the notion that sculpture has moved into the 'expanded field', but this field has remained remarkably faithful to defining sculpture on its own terms. Sculpture can be distinct, but it is rarely autonomous. For too long studied apart, within a monographic or survey format, sculpture demands to be reintegrated with the other histories of which it is a part. In the interests of representing recent moves in this direction, this series provides a forum for the publication and stimulation of new research examining sculpture's relationship with the world around it, with other disciplines and with other material contexts.¹⁸

After around forty years of sculpture's existence in the 'expanded field,' it may seem surprising that the field is still dominated by a tendency to study sculpture autonomously. The demand to pay attention to the relationship of sculpture with the world that the series proclaims, is also felt in the work of the artists I examine here.

Exhibitions such as *Sculpture after Sculpture* in the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, in 2014, featuring works by Katharina Fritsch (b. 1956), Jeff Koons (b. 1955), and Charles Ray (b. 1953), who came of age in the early 1980s, advocate a return to representation, particularly figuration, in sculpture, with works that came 'after sculpture's supposed demise.'¹⁹ While the early works presented, from the late 1980s and early 1990s, engage with the commodity and the readymade, following and reconsidering the trajectory of the historical avant-garde practices toward 'a gradual undoing of the traditional art forms', the later works are 'pointedly figural, quotidian in reference, resolutely sculptural'. The exhibition claimed to be tracing this trajectory 'in a series of startling juxtapositions', in order to register 'the development of their practices from the found to the made, from the performed to the embodied', and the way that these sculptors 'have folded the experiments of the twentieth century into the complex statuary of the twenty-first'.²⁰ The same emphasis on figuration in sculpture is evident in the recent exhibition *The Human Factor: The Figure in Contemporary Sculpture* that opened on 17 Jun 2014, at the Hayward Gallery in London and included artists such as Pawel Althamer, Maurizio Cattelan, Urs Fischer, Katharina Fritsch, Isa Genzken, Rachel Harrison, Thomas Hirschhorn, Martin Honert, Jeff

¹⁸ *Subject/Object: New Studies in Sculpture* published by Ashgate. Series editor: Published in association with the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, UK Commissioning Editor: Penelope Curtis, Tate Britain Henry Moore Institute Editor: Jon Wood Henry Moore Institute.
http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=5097&series_id=267&calcTitle=1

¹⁹ Press Release, *Sculpture after Sculpture* in the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, in 2014
<http://www.modernamuseet.se/en/Stockholm/Exhibitions/2014/Sculpture-After-Sculpture/>, last accessed 24 September, 2014.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Koons, and Paul McCarthy, all of whom look back at the history of sculpture through the human form.

In a similar vein, in February 2014, James S. Meyer, curator at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, and Professor of History of Art, presented his paper 'Sculpture after Sculpture' at the annual conference of the College Art Association (CAA) in Chicago, as part of the panel 'Abstraction and Anthropomorphism in Postwar and Contemporary Sculpture'. Meyer noted that, 'sculptural debates of the 1960s and 1970s confronted the question of the medium, of whether sculpture remained a viable category or it had become a subgenre in an "expanded field"'. Recounting the experience of sculpture in relation to the human body as either phenomenological or anthropomorphic, where the first triumphed over the second 'with sculpture's alleged dispersal in the expanded field', Meyer concludes: 'Since the 1990s an art of phenomenological address has reemerged as an institutionalized form, often yielding gigantic, costly installations. A sculpture that is unapologetically sculptural and explicitly referential may afford a counterpractice to this tendency'.²¹

In a discussion with Gabriel Orozco in 2004, the art historian Benjamin Buchloh asked about the artist's decision, since the early 1990s, to engage with a sculptural vocabulary at a time when the practice of sculpture had been devalorized. Buchloh remarks: 'All of a sudden you make sculpture; in the 1960s and 1970s nobody thought sculpture would ever be possible'.²² Orozco's sculptural concerns are not simply symptomatic; they are fundamental in defining his identity as an artist. In the same conversation with Buchloh, the artist declares: 'I'm a sculptor, I'm into gravity and I perceive the world in volumes, even though I use photography, drawing, or painting'.²³ Similarly, Fischli and Weiss make sculptures of everyday objects by incorporating traditional techniques such as carving, casting and modeling, albeit with the use of unusual material such as polyurethane or synthetic rubber. Even though the two artists have never explicitly identified themselves as sculptors, to my knowledge,

²¹ James S. Meyer, 'Sculpture after Sculpture', from a paper presented at the annual conference of the College Art Association (CAA) in Chicago, February 2014. A podcast of the talk can be downloaded here: http://www.conferencemedia.net/store/stores/college_art/college-art-association-102nd-annual-conference-february-12/abstraction-and-anthropomorphism-in-postwar-and-contemporary-sculpture.htm

²² Gabriel Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh' (2004), in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, edited by Y. A. Bois, (Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 105-120, p. 105. This public conversation took place at the Sackler Museum at Harvard University, April 18, 2007, under the auspices of the M. Victor Leventritt Lectures on Latin American Art.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

and while they work with a variety of media, they refer to selected groups of their works as 'sculptures', i.e., *The Rubber Sculptures*. On several occasions, they have created public sculptures, with the most recent example being the work *Rock on Top of Another Rock* (2010-13), that comprises two large granite boulders, one seemingly balancing precariously on top of the other, installed near the entrance to the Serpentine Gallery in Kensington Gardens, Hyde Park, London. And finally, Urs Fischer, despite working with a variety of media, including sculpture, painting and photography, expressly considers himself to be above all a sculptor.²⁴

In this thesis I will argue for a return to sculpture enabled by the use of everyday objects without, however, reverting to formalist aesthetics that accompany narrowly defined narratives about medium-specificity, or returning to anthropomorphism and a reconsideration of sculpture through the study of the human figure. The works examined here are looking back at the historical avant-gardes for tools and aesthetic practices in order to re-invent the category of sculpture. The use of readymade and found objects from everyday life supported a shift away from medium-specific, formal concerns and aesthetic appreciation. By setting the contemporary works in the context of two historical phenomena, the readymade and the surrealist object, this thesis examines how this constellation of historical practices creates the vocabulary for the contemporary practices. In particular, it looks at how the ideas that underpin these practices point to two interrelated theoretical problems: the notion of reality and that of simulation.

*

Following the general introduction, the first two chapters form the first section which is an overview of the material dealing with Marcel Duchamp's readymade and the object in surrealism. The purpose of these two broadly introductory chapters is to set the historical and theoretical framework for the discussion of the contemporary works. The second section has three chapters, each concentrating on work by one contemporary artist who makes use of readymade and found objects, as well as their replicas: Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Gabriel Orozco, and Urs Fischer. Through a close analysis of the contemporary work, I aim to address the issue of a return of the category of sculpture, after the 'post-medium condition' and 'sculpture in the expanded field', marked by a renewed, critical attention on the material object in art.

²⁴ Urs Fischer in a conversation with Natasha Adamou on 16 Nov. 2013, during the installation of his solo exhibition *Melodrama* at the Sadie Coles Gallery, London.

Following the general introduction, the second chapter, 'Unpacking the Readymade', seeks to unpack the concept of the readymade, introduced and developed by Marcel Duchamp. Some of the key themes related to the readymade include: the mass-produced object, aesthetic indifference, replication, casts and moulds. My research shows that these are important themes in many of the contemporary works examined here. The third chapter provides a historiography of the object in surrealism and introduces different types of surrealist objects, as well as related ideas and strategies. It concentrates on the implications of the unconscious (automatism, the dream-work), André Breton's found object and the corresponding strategy of the chance encounter, Salvador Dalí's paranoia-critical method and related issues of simulation.

The fourth chapter, entitled 'Gabriel Orozco: Impossible Objects', examines Orozco's incorporation of readymade and found objects in rethinking the category of sculpture, on the one hand, and renegotiating the tension between art and life, on the other, in the historical horizon established by Marcel Duchamp's readymade and André Breton's found object. Orozco claims that he works 'in reality'. In situating Orozco's work in the historical horizon of Duchamp's readymade and Breton's found object, this chapter seeks to bring into relief some of the perplexing qualities of these objects, (their often opaque and enigmatic nature, and their precarious state as artworks), in the hope of getting a better grip of the kind of claims they make to being in 'reality'.

The fifth chapter, 'Peter Fischli and David Weiss: Phantom Objects', looks at the different types of objects Fischli and Weiss incorporate in their work: carved, cast, modeled, found and readymade. It considers these works in the aftermath of Marcel Duchamp's readymade objects with their decisive emphasis on elements from daily life, while examining the idea of replication that underpins these practices. Duchamp famously displaced commercial objects he found in the store by taking them into the exhibition space, thus changing their interpretative context. Yet Fischli and Weiss take the mass-produced objects that are at hand in their workplace or in domestic situations and put them through different and complex operations in the studio.

In the early 1930s, Salvador Dalí was developing his method of paranoia-criticism, exploring the critical and creative potential of paranoia 'to systematize confusion', while closely engaging with the idea of simulation. The sixth and final chapter, entitled 'Urs Fischer: Delirious Objects', draws on Dalí's paranoia-criticism

and its related tropes of simulation, *trompe l'oeil*, and anachronism, to read works by contemporary artist Urs Fischer. His work, which often incorporates the practice of assemblage, subverts notions of copy and original, museological conventions of display, and revisits questions on historiography and historical order. Fischer admires Dalí for his ability to overthrow the limits of art making. However, the relevance of Dalí's paranoia-criticism to contemporary art has yet to be investigated. I argue that any sustained study of it has been overlooked in favour of André Breton's psychic automatism, which Dalí both drew upon and challenged. In this thesis, overall, I argue that the current interest in the object, inevitably points back to the early avant-gardes and the central position of the object in dada and surrealism. Duchamp's readymade and Breton's found object, in particular, still stand today as artistic categories that inform the current trends for a redefinition of sculpture on the one hand, and the investigation of limits between art and life, on the other.

Chapter 2: Unpacking the Readymade

Brief History and Themes

On October 19, 1961 Marcel Duchamp gave a talk entitled 'Apropos of "Readymades"' at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in which he recounts his 'lucky' idea, in 1913, to fasten a bicycle wheel on top of a kitchen stool in his Paris studio for a work titled *Bicycle Wheel* (see Figure 2.1).²⁵ This assemblage of two objects, a stool that served as a base and a bicycle wheel turned upside down and attached to the base, as if it were a sculpture placed on a pedestal, was described by Duchamp as an optical device that would stimulate thought, in a similar way to someone lost in contemplation while looking at the flickering flames of an open fire.²⁶ *Bicycle Wheel* was followed by *Pharmacy* (1913), a cheap printed reproduction of a painting of a winter landscape onto which Duchamp applied in gouache two small dots in red and green colour. These 'assisted' or 'aided' readymades, as they were later called, were followed by what Duchamp considered as his first proper readymade, *Bottle Rack* (1914) (see Figure 2.2), a bottle dryer the artist bought from a large department store, the Bazar de l' Hôtel de Ville in Paris, and which he carried to his studio.²⁷ Likewise, the following year, a snow shovel inscribed by Duchamp with the title *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915) (see Figure 2.3), was purchased at a hardware store in New York. It was only around the time he got the snow shovel in 1915, that Duchamp came up with the term 'readymade' to connote this kind of mass-produced, commodity object which he subsequently presented in the context of art exhibitions.

A limited number of objects of this sort followed in the next few years including *Comb* (1916) (see Figure 2.4), a plain metal comb inscribed along its narrow edge with the enigmatic note: '3 OU 4 GOUTTES DE HAUTEUR N'ONT RIEN A FAIRE AVEC LA SAUVAGERIE' (3 or 4 drops of height have nothing to do with savagery), and on its wider edge imprinted with the date of its 'making': 11 A.M., Feb. 17, 1916. Other objects included a typewriter cover he named *Traveller's Folding Item* (1916) (see Figure 2.5), *Hat Rack* (1917) (see Figure 2.6), a coat rack titled *Trébuchet* (Trap, 1917) (see Figure 2.7), and

²⁵ Marcel Duchamp, 'Apropos of "Readymades"' (1961) in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp: Salt Seller*, Michel Sanouillet (ed.), (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), pp. 141-42.

²⁶ Gavin Parkinson, *The Duchamp Book*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), p. 28.

²⁷ Marcel Duchamp says: 'I bought a bottle rack at the Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville and brought it home. And that was the first readymade'. From a radio interview with G. Charbonnier: 'Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp' (Paris, 6 December 1960 - 2 January. 1961, 99'15"), RTF, radio, 9 December 1960. Cited and translated from the French in http://www.toutfait.com/online_journal_details.php?postid=912&keyword=bottle%20rack#N_1. Last accessed 22 August, 2014.

most famously, *Fountain* (1917) (see Figure 2.8), a porcelain urinal signed by the artist with the pseudonym R. Mutt.

Besides the 'pure' readymade that consists of an unaltered mass-produced object (except from the artist's inscription and/or signature), there are several variations such as the reciprocal readymade, that inverts this relation with the instruction to use an artwork as a utility object (i.e. use a painting by Rembrandt as an ironing board)²⁸ and the 'assisted' or 'aided' readymade, in which the artist intervened, effecting minor or more significant changes. Examples of 'assisted readymades' include: *With Hidden Noise* (1916), a collaborative work that consists of a ball of twine placed between two vertical brass plates joined by four long screws, containing an unspecified object added by Duchamp's friend and patron, the collector Walter Arensberg, *Why Not Sneeze Rose Selavy?* (1921) (see Figure 2.9), a bird cage filled with one hundred and fifty two marble cubes that look like lumps of sugar, also containing a thermometer and a cuttlefish bone, *Fresh Widow* (1920), a miniature replica of a standard French-style window that Duchamp commissioned from a carpenter, and whose window panes were each covered with a square panel of black leather, and *Paris Air* (1919) (see Figure 2.10), a pharmacy glass ampoule filled with 50cc Paris air which Duchamp brought to New York and gave as a gift to Arensberg. For this work, 'Duchamp had a pharmacist empty the ampoule, which originally contained serum, and then seal it again once air replaced its original contents. Duchamp attached a label with 'Serum Physiologique' ('Physiological Serum') printed on it.'²⁹ The readymade in its many transformations and apparent contradictions, thus developed a fluid identity that challenged its original concept as a mass-produced object, singled out of the production line and presented in a different context than the one it was initially designed for.

There were also radical shifts in the strategies of their display. Initially, they were staged in the artist's private studio which remained their exhibition context for years to come, viewed only by a few individuals - collectors, artists, and intellectuals - who were part of a small artistic and intellectual community close to the artist. There, as it can be easily discerned from a few now widely circulated old black-and-white photographs, they were hung from the ceiling, suspended under the doorframe, even nailed to the floor. Later, they were exhibited in gallery and museum shows, but also presented as miniature reproductions in the *Boîte-en-valise* (Box in a Suitcase, 1935-

²⁸ From Duchamp, *Green Box*, 1934. In Sanouillet, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, p. 32.

²⁹ Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, revised and expanded edition, Vol. 2, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 676.

41) (see Figure 2.11). Thus, the very production, viewing conditions and attitude towards the readymade changed substantially, not only from one object to the other but also with regards to their display context.

As I mentioned earlier, for *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, for example, Duchamp had the snow shovel hung from the ceiling, where it became 'a graceful, dangling sculpture'.³⁰ *Hat Rack* was also suspended from the ceiling, and *Trébuchet* (Trap), the coat rack, could be nailed on the floor where someone might trip over it or, alternatively, on the ceiling so that, in Duchamp's humorous words, 'flies might stumble over it'.³¹ In a similar spirit of spatial displacement and re-contextualisation, the *Fountain* (1917) was rotated by ninety degrees, positioned on its flat side on a plinth, as seen in a famous photograph by Alfred Stieglitz (see Figure 2.12). The urinal's dislocation had the humorous effect that if the object were to be used in its original capacity, the urine would probably run onto the feet of the user. *Fountain* was first exhibited at the 1950 show *Challenge and Defy*, at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York. As the original had been lost, Duchamp arranged to show a different version which was bought from a New York store, rotated back to its original position and mounted on the wall like a painting albeit at a much lower height. In the exhibition *Dada 1916-1923* which followed three years later at the same gallery, Duchamp had the same version of *Fountain* fixed upside down over a doorway, 'with a sprig of mistletoe attached, in a position to drench kissing lovers in the urine', constantly reinventing new possibilities and interpretive contexts for the same objects over thirty years on.³²

Notably, in 1916, two or three readymades were 'displayed,' during the *Exhibition of Modern Art*, at the foyer of the Bourgeois Gallery in New York, possibly in the umbrella stand or the coat rack, where they went virtually unnoticed.³³ There are no accurate accounts or documentation of this exhibition, so it is not known with certainty which objects were displayed and in what manner. Shortly after this (deliberately staged) missed encounter of the public with Duchamp's first readymade objects at the Bourgeois Gallery exhibition, another readymade notoriously failed to make a public appearance in the inaugural large-scale exhibition of the Society of

³⁰ Arturo Schwarz, 'The Philosophy of the Readymade and of its Editions' in *Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia*, edited by Jennifer Mundy (London: Tate, 2008), p. 126.

³¹ Duchamp quoted from a conversation with Arturo Schwarz. *Ibid.*

³² Parkinson, *The Duchamp Book*, p. 61.

³³ Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), p. 156.

Independent Artists in New York, which opened in April 1917. This time, however, the failure to introduce the readymade to a public audience was due to a different reason. The Society of Independent Artists, formulated after the French Salon des Indépendants, was co-founded by Duchamp and others in 1916. In 1917, the Society organised its first open-entry exhibition put together by a committee, which included Duchamp, with the purpose of promoting modern art in America. The committee determined there would be no selection process but instead artists could submit any two artworks, for a small participation fee. The exhibition took place in the vast space at the Grand Central Palace on Lexington Avenue, where 2,125 works of art by 1,200 artists were displayed in alphabetical order, after Duchamp's recommendation. The show was twice as large as the 1913 Armory Show where Duchamp had exhibited his controversial painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912), which had already gained him notoriety in New York.³⁴

Besides Duchamp, the Board of Directors of the Society included mainly American artists: William Glackens, George Bellows and Maurice Prendergast, associated with social realism, Rockwell Kent and John Marin, from photographer Alfred Stieglitz's circle, advocates of European modernism John Covert, Morton Schamberg and Joseph Stella, and the collectors Walter C. Arensberg and Katherine Dreier, both of whom were dedicated patrons of Duchamp's work, as well as Man Ray.³⁵ Without the prior knowledge of the organising committee or the Board, Duchamp submitted to the exhibition an object under the title *Fountain*, the by now infamous urinal signed by the artist with the pseudonym 'R. Mutt'. The 'original' *Fountain* was bought from the showroom of the J.L. Mott Iron Works on Fifth Avenue, and was intended as a provocation to the Board of Directors, testing the rules set up by the committee. Indeed, despite the exhibition ground rules that any one work would be admitted without going through any sort of selection process, *Fountain* was effectively removed by Members of the Board prior to the opening of the exhibition, so the work was never shown to the public. Witness accounts vary widely as to what happened to the work; it has been claimed that it disappeared and was later found tucked away behind a screen at the exhibition space. After this event, Duchamp handed in his resignation without disclosing his identity as author of the controversial 'artwork'.

Allegedly, *Fountain* was recovered by Duchamp and was subsequently brought to the studio of Alfred Stieglitz, where it was photographed. Another version of the story has it

³⁴ Parkinson, *The Duchamp Book*, p. 33.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

that the 'original' *Fountain* was lost and was never to be recovered. What can be said with certainty is that the now famous photographic reproduction of the work shot in close up by Alfred Stieglitz was published in the second issue of the periodical *Blind Man* in May 1917, the month after the exhibition opening. The *Blind Man* was an independent publication in the spirit of dada, which ran for two issues only, and was set up by Duchamp, Henri-Pierre Roché and Beatrice Wood. It was printed in a limited number of copies and distributed among the artist's close circle. The renowned photograph, taken in Stieglitz's own studio, thus introduced the censored object to a small public and has since then been the only reference point for the work, while it also served as the model for the authorised replication of *Fountain* in 1964, which I shall discuss in more detail below.

Despite the attention that the censorship of *Fountain* stirred in the daily press, following the publication of *Blind Man*, there were no major critical texts on the subject or on the readymades in general until almost two decades later, in the mid-1930s when André Breton wrote about the readymade within the wider theoretical framework of surrealism. Breton's most influential definition of the readymades in 1934 (for most of their subsequent critical reception, this definition was indisputable), outlined them as: 'manufactured objects promoted to the dignity of works of art through the choice of the artist'.³⁶ A later description by Breton emphasizes the act of displacement, the radical change of context enacted by this gesture: 'diverting the object from its destination by attaching a new label to it and signing it, thus reclassifying it by the exercise of choice'.³⁷ The single written dictionary-style definition of 'readymade' under the name of Marcel Duchamp (with the initials M.D.) was only published in 1938 in André Breton's and Paul Eluard's *Dictionnaire abrégé du Surréalisme*: 'an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist'.³⁸

In a note from *The Green Box* (1934), under the heading 'Specifications for "Readymades"', Duchamp writes: 'by planning for a moment to come (on such a day, such a date such a minute), "to inscribe a readymade" - The readymade can later be looked for (with all kinds of delays). *The important thing then is just* this matter of timing, this

³⁶ André Breton, 'Lighthouse of the Bride' (1934) in *Surrealism and Painting*, translated by Simon Watson Taylor (MFA, 2002), pp. 85-99. p. 88. Readymades: are 'manufactured objects promoted to the dignity of works of art through the choice of the artist. ... But who can say what is the true significance for those in the know, of a signature that has been openly called into play so very charily! The intense, fascinating light cast by this signature sweeps over the narrowly defined object to which it usually assigns a status, and then focuses upon a whole mental process'.

³⁷ Breton, 'Crisis of the Object' (1936) in *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 280.

³⁸ Breton, *Dictionnaire abrégé du Surréalisme*, (Beaux Arts, 1938), p. 23.

snapshot effect, like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but *at such and such an hour*. It is a kind of rendezvous. - Naturally inscribe that date, hour, minute on the readymade as *information*'.³⁹ In 'Apropos of "Readymades"', Duchamp insists that the choice of the objects was not dictated by aesthetic preoccupations but was based instead 'on a reaction of visual indifference, with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste... In fact, a complete anaesthesia'.⁴⁰ In the same talk, Duchamp identifies in retrospect the full range of conditions and attributes of his readymade objects:

One important characteristic was the short sentence which I occasionally inscribed on the 'Readymade'. That sentence instead of describing the object like a title was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal. □ Sometimes I would add a graphic detail of presentation which, in order to satisfy my craving for alliterations, would be called 'Readymade aided'. □ At another time, wanting to expose the basic antinomy between art and 'Readymades', I imagined a 'Reciprocal Readymade': use a Rembrandt as an ironing board! □ I realized very soon the danger of repeating indiscriminately this form of expression and decided to limit the production of 'Readymades' to a small number yearly. I was aware at that time, that for the spectator even more for the artist, *art is a habit forming drug* and I wanted to protect my 'Readymades' against such a *contamination*. Another aspect of the 'Readymade' is its lack of uniqueness... the replica of the 'Readymade' delivering the same message, in fact nearly every one of the 'Readymades' existing today is not an original in the conventional sense. □ A final remark to this egomaniac's discourse: □ Since the tubes of paint used by an artist are manufactured and readymade products we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are 'Readymades aided' and also works of assemblage.⁴¹

In 'The Philosophy of the Readymade and of its Editions', Schwarz is critical of the common perception surrounding the readymade that choice and signature of an ordinary object are sufficient to elevate it to a work of art. He maintains that Duchamp's conception of the readymade was instead a much more complex operation that implicated four additional aspects: re-contextualisation (both logical and spatial), administering a title, limiting the number of readymades, and finally, the idea of the

³⁹ Marcel Duchamp 'Specifications for "Readymades"' in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp: Salt Seller*, Michel Sanouillet (ed.), London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), pp. 32-33.

⁴⁰ Duchamp, 'Apropos of "Readymades"', p. 141.

⁴¹ Duchamp, 'Apropos of "Readymades"', pp. 141-42.

rendez-vous (the most esoteric of the four, he writes), the meeting that occurs between the artist and the object.⁴² Indeed, Duchamp's notes in the *Green Box* (1934), a collection of his notes since 1913, indicate that there are four further rules to his concept of the readymade. In addition to choice and signature, there is the important notion of displacement. First, physical displacement, that is, displacing the object from its physical context, changing the viewing angle, as he did for example when he hung the snow shovel or the hat rack from his studio ceiling, or when he nailed the coat rack to the floor, resulting in what Schwarz calls de-contextualization. Logical displacement, which includes inscription or renaming the object by adding new title that bears no obvious relation to the ordinary meaning of the object, which according to a discussion Duchamp had with Schwarz endowed the object with a 'verbal colour'.⁴³ Third, limiting the number of readymades yearly in order to avoid repetition that turns something into taste. Fourth, the notion of the rendez-vous marked by 'the inscription of the date, hour, minute on the readymade'. In fact, he only inscribed this information in one readymade: *Comb*, 1916 (Feb. 17 1916 11 A.M.), as the time of designating the object as a readymade. Other influential themes and strategies that have emerged in relation to readymades are authorship, aesthetic indifference, as well as the notion of de-skilling, that is a negation of traditional artistic skills. In an interview to Katherine Kuh in 1960, Duchamp admitted: 'the curious thing about the readymade is that I have never been able to arrive at a definition that fully satisfies me...'.⁴⁴ What is fascinating, however, is that with such an economical gesture as the readymade Duchamp has brought together a complex and intriguing cluster of discourses that keep resonating with different strands of artistic practice to the present day.

Readymade Replicas, 1960s

The modern model of repetition has been established well outside the avant-garde. It is usually called mass production and is recognized in the commodity, that dull fetish, the brand-name good, the ideal of middlemen. Though we tend to consider this kind of repetition unbearably crude, it has nonetheless become

⁴² Duchamp quoted in Schwarz, 'The Philosophy of the Readymade and of its Editions', p. 126.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴⁴ 'The Artist's Voice', 1960, in William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, (Houston: Menil Collection, 1989), footnote 63.

*the unwritten point of reference for all other definitions of the copy, not to say the original*⁴⁵ - Molly Nesbit

One controversial dimension of Duchamp's readymade objects has been the issue of their replication in limited editions during the 1960s. In order to address the question of what led Duchamp to duplicate his 'original' readymades, Schwarz cites earlier examples of the artist's practice of meticulous reproduction of his own works or notes tracing them back to *The Box of 1914*. This comprises of a standard box for Kodak photographic plates, containing photographs of sixteen notes and one drawing associated with *The Large Glass*, produced in an edition of five. *The Box of 1914* was followed by *The Green Box* in 1934 (full title: *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even*, the only difference with the title of the work is that there is no extra comma after the word Bachelors), an edition of 320 signed and numbered copies, containing sketches and notes on *The Large Glass*, scrupulously reproduced down to their slightest detail including the different types of paper, ink colour, and other material irregularities of the original notes. Finally, in 1967, Duchamp issued the last version of his boxes with *A l'Infinitif*, or *White Box*, containing facsimiles of seventy-nine notes related to *The Large Glass*, in an edition of 150 copies.⁴⁶

In 1964, the Italian art dealer and gallerist Arturo Schwarz produced full-scale replicas of the most significant readymades in signed and numbered editions of eight, after Duchamp's request and under the artist's close supervision. One of the reasons for making these replicas was that, by that time, most of the 'original' readymades had been either lost or destroyed. There were fourteen works in total that were produced in this way by Galleria Schwarz in Milan: *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913-14), *Bottle Dryer* (1914), *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915), *Comb* (1916), *With Hidden Noise* (1916), *Traveller's Folding Item* (1916), *Apolinère Enameled* (1917), *Fountain* (1917), *Trébuchet* (1917), *Hat Rack* (1917), *Air de Paris* (1919), *Fresh Widow* (1920), and *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* (1921). According to Schwarz, at that moment, Duchamp considered that the readymade might be the 'most important single idea to come out of [his] work'.⁴⁷ The full range of replicas were manufactured in Italy by craftsmen who reproduced the 'original' objects as faithfully

⁴⁵ Molly Nesbit, 'Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model', *October*, Vol. 37 (Summer, 1986), pp. 53-64, p. 53.

⁴⁶ Schwarz, 'The Philosophy of the Readymade and of its Editions', p. 128.

⁴⁷ Duchamp quoted in *ibid.*, p. 130.

as possible from old photographs. The only exception was *Air de Paris*, which was manufactured in Paris so that it would indeed contain original Paris air. In 1967, Duchamp recounts to Robert Lebel his contentment with the 'fanatical care' with which Schwarz had been dedicated to replicating the readymades. The *Bicycle Wheel*, for example, was reproduced from a photograph to correspond exactly with the 1913 version which featured a straight fork instead of the most commonly fashioned curved fork, and for which edition Duchamp was meticulously "'press-proofing" each item'.⁴⁸

In 1960, four years prior to Schwarz's replicas of Duchamp's readymades, the Swedish curator Ulf Linde (1929-2013) and Pontus Hultén (1924-2006) started reproducing initially unauthorized versions in Sweden, without the knowledge of the artist. In 1963, the first show ever to concentrate on Duchamp's readymades, featuring in fact Linde's replicas, took place at the Galerie Eva af Burén, in Stockholm. Earlier, Linde had contacted Duchamp who was reportedly quite enthusiastic about the proposal. He wrote back, 'For the show at Mrs. Buren's I agree thoroughly with your idea to have every Readymade shown in exact replicas', and thought that Schwarz should use Linde's replicas as models for the 1964 editions of the readymades.⁴⁹ For the 1964 show in Milan, Schwarz borrowed Linde's replicas, and it was there that Duchamp signed Linde's versions, which are now at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm.⁵⁰ Linde has meticulously reproduced almost the entire works by Duchamp. The readymades, together with significant replications of other major works including the unique 1:10 replica of Duchamp's last piece *Étant donnés: 1° La chute d'eau, 2° Le gaz d'éclairage*, were presented in a special exhibition entitled *De ou par Marcel Duchamp par Ulf Linde* that opened in Stockholm on September 29, 2011 at The Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts, in collaboration with Moderna Museet. The exhibition paid tribute to the significance of Linde's replicas, indeed, they 'were essential to the international reception of the artist's work and played a key role in such major exhibitions as Walter Hopps's 1963 Duchamp

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Ulf Linde, *Marcel Duchamp*, (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1986), in Swedish, published on the occasion of an exhibition held at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, 15 Nov. - 25 Jan. 1987, pages 52, 57. Quoted and translated in Leif Eriksson, 'Duchamp in Sweden 1933-1970: A Critical Review' in *tout-fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 3, December 2000.

http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_3/Articles/Eriksson/eriksson.html, last accessed August 31, 2014.

⁵⁰ Leif Eriksson, 'Duchamp in Sweden 1933-1970: A Critical Review' in *tout-fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 3, December 2000.

http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_3/Articles/Eriksson/eriksson.html

retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum, and the Centre Pompidou's opening exhibition in 1977'.⁵¹

As mentioned earlier, Duchamp's decision, however, to replicate his works went a long way back starting with *The Box of 1914*. For Schwarz, this decision was not made in order to ensure the artist's authorship nor was it driven by 'the desire to exploit his ideas commercially. Rather, it was the realization that, contrary to the works of most artists, his opus constituted a single continuum. Each item was like a page of a work in progress and an item isolated from its context would be as obscure as a page torn from a book'.⁵² With regards to the early lost or damaged readymades, he claims that 'only this way could [Duchamp] rescue these readymades from oblivion and, at the same time, restore the missing pages to the corpus of his works'.⁵³ The decision to replicate his readymades, however, generated strong objections and criticism even from people among Duchamp's circle, because it was seen to betray the principles of the readymade, negate its provocative gesture and endorse the logic of the art market. Duchamp scholar Robert Lebel, for example, initially refused to exhibit any of the replicas,⁵⁴ while Max Ernst was equally cautious about the replication of the readymades. Ernst wrote:

When I learned that Marcel allowed an art dealer from Milan to replicate the ready-mades (to make multiples of them), I was surprised at first. The value of the gesture that gave all the beauty to the readymade seemed to me compromised. The provocation that scandalized the United States and set off a storm of enthusiasm in European capitals where Dada was established, risked falling to zero. Afterwards I asked myself if this wasn't a new attempt to throw public opinion, to confuse minds, to deceive his admirers, to encourage his imitators by his bad example, etc. when I asked him, he answered laughingly: 'Yes, it was all of that'.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Press release for the exhibition *De ou par Marcel Duchamp par Ulf Linde* that opened on September 29, 2011 at The Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts, in collaboration with Moderna Museet, Stockholm. <http://www.modernamuseet.se/en/Stockholm/Exhibitions/2011/Marcel-DuchampUlf-Linde-Place-The-Academy-of-Fine-Arts/>, last accessed August 31, 2014.

⁵² Schwarz, 'The Philosophy of the Readymade and of its Editions', p. 129.

⁵³ Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, revised and expanded edition, Vol. 1, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 49. Also in Schwarz, 'The Philosophy of the Readymade and of its Editions', p. 130.

⁵⁴ Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Ghent: Ludion Press, 1999), p. 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Cited from Max Ernst, *Ecritures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 419-36.

One celebrated instance of the systematic reproduction of his works by creating limited editions, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (Box in a Suitcase, 1935-41). In 1935, he started working on the *Boîte* which comprised a set of reproductions in miniature of his most significant works and which Duchamp envisaged to become a comprehensive portable collection of his entire oeuvre. With a total of 69 items, assembled by Duchamp between 1935 and 1940, the *Boîte* included facsimiles of notes and drawings that were presented loose in different handmade boxes and compartments of the suitcase, as well as monochrome collotypes reproduced from hand-painted and annotated black-and-white photographs of his paintings, the 'original' editions of which were then painted again by Duchamp.⁵⁶ Other items included hand-made miniatures of three of his readymades: *Fountain*, *Traveller's Folding Item*, and *Paris Air*. Dawn Ades notes that the miniature replicas 'produced the ironic situation that the mould of an already mass-produced object had to be hand-crafted in order to mass-produce it again', putting into question 'the interplay between 'original', mould and cast'.⁵⁷ Since the 'original' *Fountain*, which was itself a cast, had been lost, Duchamp made from memory by hand a miniature version in papier-mâché, which then served as the model to enable a potter to make a ceramic 'inter-positive copy'. The ceramic copy was then used to make a mould from which cast multiples were produced, using a porcelain or matt glaze.⁵⁸

In 'Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model' (1986), Molly Nesbit argues that Duchamp's readymade served not only as a response to industrial mass production and commodity culture, but also as a way of taking control, albeit symbolically, of the 'visual means of industrial culture'.⁵⁹ Taking as examples his first unassisted readymade, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, the snow shovel Duchamp bought from a commercial store, as well as his 'assisted readymade' *Fresh Widow* (1920), Nesbit points out that: 'In the readymades Duchamp seized control of the dialogue dictated by the shop window: the model is taken out of circulation, often given an absurd title, hung in a limbo, and effectively silenced. This shovel will never be used, bent, rusted, or fall obsolete'.⁶⁰ For *Fresh Widow*, 'the design was given to an American carpenter to get this small-scale model in blue. So the design is repeated

⁵⁶ Ades, *Marcel Duchamp*, p. 178.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Nesbit, 'Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model', p. 64.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

and manufactured like a model for a patent office. It makes a joke at the expense of the French war widow. But this time around, Duchamp has inserted a bona fide word that takes the visual language into another discourse: the Fresh Widow is declared copyrighted by Duchamp's alias, Rose Selavy'.⁶¹ By doing so, Nesbit insists, '[Duchamp] pulled the culture of the patent over into the culture of copyright, the traditional culture, the culture of artists'.⁶²

In *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910 – 1941*, (1998), David Joselit argues that for Duchamp the readymade was not just a mass-produced commodity object, but most importantly 'a "rendez-vous", a fleeting encounter between subject and object that can only emerge into representation through an act of inscription. The transformation of commodity into artwork is therefore an effect of writing'.⁶³ Joselit revises one of the most dominant strands in the reception of the readymade with 'now-canonical' works such as *Bicycle Wheel*, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, *Comb*, and *Fountain*, utilitarian objects stripped off their customary function by being dislocated from the realm of everyday life and situated within the domain of art discourses.⁶⁴ Alongside these object-based readymades, Joselit draws attention to a number of overlooked textual projects where he argues that Duchamp subjects language to a similar process of dislocation and de-sublimation, advocating an understanding of the readymade 'not simply as a displaced commodity but as a dynamic of linguistic specification'.⁶⁵ In these projects, 'words are being set free from their conventional meaning' in the same way commodities are freed from their intended functions.⁶⁶

Alongside the idea of language as readymade, Joselit posits Duchamp's understanding of 'the unconscious as a readymade', which materializes with the meticulous reproduction process involved in projects such as *Green Box* and *Box-in-a-valise*.⁶⁷ Joselit points out the paradox that exists between Duchamp's proclaimed disdain for copying oneself, and his engagements with reproduction, for example, in the above projects, while observing that, for Duchamp, 'repeating himself' and 'reproducing his own conceptions' are two different things: 'the artist who makes the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Joselit, *Infinite Regress*, p. 72.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

same painting fifty or one hundred times is doing so not as an explicit act of reproduction but rather with a presumption of originality, and it is this false innovation that Duchamp paradoxically wished to avoid through his own perfectly tautological acts of reproduction'.⁶⁸

The 'assisted readymade' *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette* (Beautiful Breath, Veil Water, 1921) (see Figure 2.13) features a bottle of perfume where Duchamp affixed a label with a photographic portrait of himself dressed as a woman. The portrait is part of a series of photographs by Man Ray, where Duchamp adopts the name Rose Sélavy. Referring to *Belle Haleine* and two other works - *Duchamp's Wanted: \$2000 Reward* (1923), and *Monte Carlo Bond*, (1924) - Joselit construes the 'readymade as self'.⁶⁹ He writes that Duchamp's encounter, a rendez-vous, with the self that is 'already transformed into something other than himself (woman, criminal, faun)', becomes 'introjected as a proper unconscious'.⁷⁰ For Joselit,

This intersubjective model of the unconscious founded in the logic of the game exceeds Freudian theories and introduces a notion closer to those developed in the 1960s by thinkers like Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser. The type of unconscious projected by *Belle Haleine*, "Archie Pen Co.", and the *Monte Carlo Bond* is what Foucault would call discourse, or Althusser, ideology. It is the *material* unconscious, a set of social conditions that determine what can and cannot be said or what can and cannot be believed at a particular historical moment', in short the entire fabric of internalized cultural and social values and conventions.⁷¹

By inscribing the self as readymade, Duchamp not only attempts to liberate the industrially produced object from the 'slavery of utility' and the conditions of commodification, as Nesbit has suggested, but he also resists the instrumentalisation of the modern subject in the broader sense, as it is advocated through prescribed gender roles, working conditions, social norms and values. On the flip side of this interpretation, however, Joselit suggests that conceptualizing the self as readymade hints at the idea of the human subject as commodity.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 184.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.

The Reception of the Readymade in the 1960s and after

The exhibition *The Bride and the Bachelors: Duchamp with Cage, Cunningham, Rauschenberg and Johns* opened at the Barbican Art Gallery in London on February 14, 2013. The exhibition, curated by Carlos Basualdo in collaboration with Erica F. Battle, focuses on the legacy of Marcel Duchamp in America in the 1950s and 1960s, exploring his relationship to four influential figures - composer, John Cage, choreographer, Merce Cunningham, and visual artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. The younger artists met with Duchamp and became familiar with his work in the early stages of their careers, and this encounter had a lasting influence in their own practice as each of them engaged with different aspects of Duchamp ground-breaking work. One key point of exploration was the relation between art and life, and the attempt to blur the boundaries between the two, foreshadowing the advent of Pop Art.

The French contemporary artist Philippe Parreno designed the experimental staging of the exhibition that included two Yamaha Disklavier pianos playing live Cage scores, while a soundtrack of dancers dancing to Cunningham's choreography could be heard around the gallery, like a 'ghost'. The soundscape included Parreno's own interpretation of Cage's legendary 4' 33". In addition, for the duration of the show there were live dance performances in the exhibition space every Thursday by students and graduates from London Contemporary Dance School and dancers from Richard Alston Dance Company. *The Bride and the Bachelors* featured around 90 works, some of which by Rauschenberg and Johns were being shown in the UK for the first time. In the context of 'acting in the gap between art and life' as Rauschenberg famously put it, both Johns's and Rauschenberg's works closely engaged with the theme of the readymade object.⁷²

Importantly, the notion of delay is deeply engrained in the conception of the readymade. Duchamp wrote: 'by planning for a moment to come (on such a day, such a date such a minute), "to inscribe a readymade"' - The readymade can later be looked for (with all kinds of delays).⁷³ With regards to their reception, it was only in the early 1950s

⁷² Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle (eds), *Dancing around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*, New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2013.

⁷³ Duchamp, 'Specifications for "Readymades"' in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 32-33. Robert Rauschenberg's statement: 'Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two)', was first included in *Sixteen Americans*, catalogue for an exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, ed. Dorothy C. Miller, (New York: MoMA, 1959), p. 58.

and 1960s, when Duchamp's works started becoming more widely accessible to an American and European public, when *The Large Glass*, for example, was bequeathed to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1953, the French critic Robert Lebel published his monographic catalogue *Sur Marcel Duchamp* in 1959, and the British artist Richard Hamilton produced the 'typo-translation' in English of Duchamp's *Green Box* in 1960. Duchamp's influence on a younger generation of artists who became familiar with his work was generated through two important retrospective exhibitions: the first American exhibition dedicated to his work, including his recent production, *By or of Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy*, curated by Walter Hopps at the Pasadena Art Museum, California in 1963, and *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, organized by Hamilton at the Tate Gallery in London in 1966.

As mentioned earlier, the American artists Jasper Johns (b. 1930) and Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008), were instrumental in the reception of Duchamp's work in America in the 1950s and 1960s. Martha Buskirk noted in the 1994 roundtable discussion on the reception of Duchamp in the 1960s, that 'the Duchamp of the late 1950s and 1960s was a construction of the artist that depended largely on Johns's reading on the one hand and Lebel's monograph on the other'.⁷⁴ In the chapter 'Duchamp's Legacy: The Rauschenberg-Johns Axis' in *After Modern Art* (2000), art historian David Hopkins addresses the implications of the readymades for the work of Jasper Johns, writing about *Painted Bronze (Ale Cans)* (1960) (see Figure 2.14), which features two cans of Ballantine Ale cast in bronze and painted by hand, that the work 'represented a new phase in Johns's reception of Duchamp, which now centered more squarely on the implications of the "readymades"'. While Rauschenberg had incorporated in his work imagery relating to commodities, 'reflecting America's postwar consumer boom', Johns beer cans returned the mass-produced object back to the realm of art by placing them on a base and by using the traditional sculptural process of bronze casting. This way, Hopkins argues, 'Johns raised conceptual conundrums about the relation between uniqueness and sameness. This is further dramatized by the way that the labels of the twinned objects were hand-painted to emphasize differences between them. In addition, one of the cans was opened whilst

⁷⁴ Martha Buskirk in 'Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp', roundtable discussion between Buskirk, Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Alexander Alberro, Thierry de Duve, Martha Buskirk, Yve-Alain Bois in *October*, Vol. 70, *The Duchamp Effect* (Autumn, 1994), pp. 126-146, p. 131.

the other remained sealed'.⁷⁵

In the context of issues concerning uniqueness and sameness, Hopkins brings to attention Duchamp's letter to Hans Richter where the artist is expressing his disappointment about the aestheticizing of the readymades, because they had been elevated to the status of art, negating their whole anti-aesthetic rationale, the fact that they lacked 'uniqueness'.⁷⁶ According to Hopkins, however, 'it was not until the 1980s that artists registered the full consequences of the Duchampian concern with replication.' Referring to Sherrie Levine's *Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp)* (1991) (see Figure 2.15) and Robert Gober's *Three Urinals* (1988), he notes that these works played with issues of gender, but also with the tension between original and replica.⁷⁷ While during the first half of the twentieth century the readymade defied categorization as part of the traditional art genres (even though it has been extensively discussed in relation to painting and sculpture),⁷⁸ in the late twentieth century Hopkins suggests that the idea of the readymade itself constitutes a genre in its own right, like the seventeenth century still life, 'a category of subject-matter which painters could knowingly manipulate'.⁷⁹

In this introductory chapter I have outlined the history and explored some of the themes of Duchamp's readymades, which will be taken up in subsequent chapters in order to trace some tendencies related to the readymade that have been developed in contemporary art. Following Hopkins, I suggest that the contemporary artworks examined in the upcoming chapters treat the readymade as an art historical genre that has been effectively institutionalized. I argue, however, that drawing on its rich legacies, contemporary artists take up some of the central issues pertinent to the readymade, such as dislocation, mass-production, replication, artistic skill, authorship, and the encounter between object and artist, in order to explore issues surrounding recent sculptural production.

⁷⁵ David Hopkins, *After Modern Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 62.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 63. Duchamp quoted from Camfield, *Fountain*, pp. 81-99.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64. These works are also discussed in Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (MIT Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ Thierry de Duve, 'The Readymade and the Tube of Paint', *Artforum*, May 1986: 'readymades belonging to the history of painting, and not, for example, ... to that of sculpture' ... 'historical context common to the readymade and abstract painting.' Jon Wood 'Brancusi's "White Studio"' in *Sculpture Journal*, Vol. 7, 2002, pp. 108-120. Wood argues that Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze Rose Selavy?* (1921) is about Brancusi's studio. Quoted in Parkinson, *The Duchamp Book*, p. 121.

⁷⁹ Hopkins, *After Modern Art*, p. 64.

2. Unpacking the Readymade

Although they use readymade objects, many of the contemporary art works also incorporate traditional sculptural techniques such as adding or subtracting matter through carving, modeling or casting. They also address issues of volume, scale, weight, and composition, reinstate or dismiss the pedestal, and deal with materiality and ephemerality. Drawing on the practice of replication, Fischli and Weiss, for example, create 'simulated readymades', by carving and painting by hand sculptures of everyday objects of utility such as their workshop tools. In another project, they cast mass-produced objects from the domestic environment in black rubber. Orozco implements everyday objects such as an empty shoebox, the lids from yogurt containers, an iconic car with its middle section sliced and removed, a displaced elevator cabin brought into the exhibition space or a human skull bought from an evolution store. His use of objects revolves around the idea of the readymade as a mass-produced object that has been removed from its everyday context and inserted into the context of art by being exhibited in art exhibitions. In this context, Joselit, for example, reads Orozco's work through the idea of the Duchampian rendez-vous. Finally, taking up the notion of the replicated readymade, Urs Fischer combines aluminum casts of banal mass-produced objects from the office or the domestic environment in imaginative and often absurd assemblages.

Chapter 3: The Object in Surrealism

Having introduced Marcel Duchamp's readymade objects, I turn in this chapter to an overview of the surrealist object in order to complete the historical and theoretical context for the contemporary artworks discussed in the next three chapters. The exhibition *Le Surréalisme et l'objet* (Surrealism and the Object), which opened at the Pompidou Centre in Paris on October 30, 2013, was publicized as 'the first large-scale exhibition dedicated to Surrealist sculpture ... [that] retraces the various stages in the story of the Surrealist "challenge" to sculpture through the use of everyday objects', bringing into view the contested relation between surrealist practice and traditional art categories.⁸⁰ The exhibition showcased an exhaustive selection of surrealist objects and related material, including items never shown or even reproduced in publications before. A great deal of the material was presented in rooms that reconstructed the original displays, often shown in glass vitrines. The restaged exhibition settings were accompanied by black-and-white archival photographic documentation of the historical exhibitions, printed as life-size free-floating screens.⁸¹ Importantly, *Surrealism and the Object* opened with two of Duchamp's earliest readymades, *Bottle Rack* (1914/64) and *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915/64), demonstrating their significance among the various predecessors of surrealist objects (see Figure 3.1).⁸²

The two readymades were presented next to a black-and-white photograph of an umbrella and a sewing machine taken by Man Ray in 1935 (see Figure 3.2). These objects are a reference to an earlier photograph, also by Man Ray, of a mysterious object, wrapped in a blanket and tied by string, titled *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, (*L'Enigme d' Isidore Ducasse*, c. 1920) (see Figure 3.2). The photograph and appeared in the first issue of the first surrealist journal *La révolution Surréaliste* on

⁸⁰ From the exhibition pamphlet:

<http://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/imp/M5050/CPV/82/34/M5050-CPV-d8ab589d-913f-42d8-8234-a9d1f9729676.pdf>. The exhibition remained on view until March 3, 2014.

⁸¹ The exhibitions included: Exposition internationale du Surréalisme, 1933; Exposition internationale du Surréalisme, 1938; Exposition Surréaliste d'objets, 1936; Le Surréalisme en 1947; and Exposition internationale du Surréalisme (Éros), 1959-1960.

⁸² André Breton's admiration for Duchamp at that time is manifest in several articles, he wrote: André Breton, 'Marcel Duchamp' and 'Testimony 45: On Marcel Duchamp' in *What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings*, edited and introduced by Franklin Rosemont (Monad, 1978); Breton, 'Lighthouse of the Bride' (1934) in *Surrealism and Painting*, translated by Simon Watson Taylor (MFA, 2002), pp. 85-99.

December 1, 1924.⁸³ The title of the piece refers to the late-nineteenth-century French poet Isidore Ducasse, known as Comte de Lautréamont (1846-1870), who became an important reference point for the surrealists. More precisely, the enigmatic object was inspired by Lautréamont's famous phrase: 'Beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella, on a dissecting table'.⁸⁴ The arrangement below the blanket allegedly consists an assemblage of disparate objects, a sewing machine and an umbrella, illustrating Lautréamont's phrase. The phrase was adopted by the surrealists to embody the principle of the surrealist chance encounter and to introduce a new kind of beauty for which the French writer and founder of surrealism, André Breton, coined the term 'convulsive beauty'. Significantly, the photograph of this elusive object that marks the inauguration of the first surrealist journal, foreshadows the importance that the material object, as well as photographic documents, were going to play in surrealist discourse and practice.

In the room following the one with Duchamp's readymades and Man Ray's *Enigma*, at the Pompidou exhibition, there was on display a selection of sculptures by Alberto Giacometti. Among them featured a work titled *Suspended Ball* (1930-31) (see Figure 3.4), which is part of Giacometti's *Mobile and Mute (Silent) Objects*, (*Objets mobiles et muets*). In his text 'Surrealist Objects' (1931), an introductory account on the role and nature of objects in surrealism, Salvador Dalí effectively proclaimed Giacometti's *Suspended Ball* as the precursor of surrealist objects. Dalí stressed, however, that the work maintains a relation to the category of sculpture, while surrealist objects break with traditional artistic categories, with sculpture, in particular.⁸⁵ Dalí further observes that the originality of the surrealist objects is that they have no formal concerns: 'they depend solely on everyone's loving imagination and are extra-sculptural'.⁸⁶ As such, they advance a new era in art away from modernist discourses on beauty and formal appreciation. Finally, one section of the Pompidou exhibition included contemporary artworks, by Paul McCarthy, Cindy

⁸³ *La révolution Surréaliste*, issue 1, December 1, 1924. The photograph accompanied the preface, which was co-signed by J.A. Boiffard, Paul Eluard, and R. Vitrac. The image, however, appeared with no caption, title or any other credit.

⁸⁴ Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse), *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris, 1969), p. 327.

⁸⁵ Salvador Dalí, 'Surrealist Objects' (1931) in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, edited by Haim Finkelstein, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 232. First published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, vol. 3, Paris: December 1931, pp. 16-17.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Sherman, Heim Steinbach, Mark Dion and Ed Ruscha, among others, relating to issues that pertained the object in surrealism.

Exposition Surréaliste d'objets (Paris, 1936)

The crucial role that the object held in surrealist discourse during the early to mid-thirties became apparent in the landmark *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets* dedicated exclusively to objects which took place in 22-31 May, 1936, at the Charles Ratton Gallery in Paris (see Figure 3.5). Accompanying the exhibition was a special issue of the journal *Cahiers d'art*, which included Breton's essay 'Crisis of the Object' (1936), an article by the journal's publisher, Christian Zervos, on mathematical objects and abstract art, Paul Eluard's account of indigenous objects from the Tropics, Gabrielle Buffet's celebratory feature on Marcel Duchamp, alongside Claude Cahun's and Salvador Dalí's takes on the object, among others.⁸⁷ The essays were accompanied by the photographic documentation of diverse objects, many of which were presented in the exhibition. The opening page of the review indicates that the exhibition included: mathematical objects, natural objects, savage objects, found objects, irrational objects, ready-made objects, interpreted objects, incorporated objects and mobile objects.⁸⁸

In 'Crisis of the Object', Breton delineates these heterogeneous items by giving descriptions of the methods involved in their production, to indicate types of objects that make up the full range of surrealist objects. First on the list is Duchamp's readymade, which is described as 'diverting the object from its destination by attaching a new label to it and signing it, thus reclassifying it by the exercise of choice'.⁸⁹ Breton further describes natural objects subjected to the forces of nature, objects whose original function is unclear (such as an iron mask, a statistical device, and a bronze glove), or objects whose ambiguity results from their dramatic transformation by natural elements. As a sub-category of surrealist objects alongside Duchamp's readymades, natural objects, the surrealist object proper et al., Breton lists

⁸⁷ Breton, 'Crisis of the Object', *Cahiers d'art*, issue 1-2, 1936, pp.12-15; reprinted in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. S.W Taylor (London: MacDonald, 1972), pp. 275-279.

⁸⁸ *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets*, Galerie Ratton, Paris, May 1936. These categories are also mentioned in a footnote in the 'Crisis of the Object', listing primitive, rather than savage objects, among the rest. The advertisement for the exhibition on the first page of the *Cahiers d'art*, announces more briefly the array of the objects exhibited; mathematical, natural, found and interpreted, mobile, irrational and finally objects of America and Oceania. Breton, 'Crisis of the Object' in *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 279.

⁸⁹ Breton 'Crisis of the Object' *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 280.

the 'found objects', which are 'entailing their dignification through chance discovery'.⁹⁰ He further expands the category of the found object with the example of Max Ernst's 'interpreted found objects', which, are 'amenable to extremely bold interpretations', and finally, the 'surrealist object proper', created from scratch 'by bringing together disparate elements selected arbitrarily from the immediate data'.⁹¹ However, for Breton, these disparate objects have one common denominator: 'they derive from the objects which surround us but succeed in achieving a separate identity simply through a *change of role*'.⁹² Once more, Breton underlines here the prominent role he gives to Duchamp's readymades in the genealogy of the object in surrealism.

Finally, Breton emphasizes that the movement of the thought process involved in conceiving all these objects was most importantly directed from the abstract realm towards the concrete (from the mind to the world), in contrast to abstract art which 'insists obstinately on moving in the opposite direction, thus running the risk of seeing its realizations completely outclassed by – for example – objects such as those on display here'.⁹³ Surrealism then situates itself not only against traditional categories of art, such as painting and sculpture, but also in relation to contemporary developments in art; in its criticism of abstract art, Breton's account posits surrealism as not only different, but also *ahead* of developments in modern art. Most importantly, the implicit demand to move from the abstract to the concrete and not vice versa (as it happens in abstract art), reveals Breton's ideological formation in materialist discourses, set against the utopian idealism of abstraction.

André Breton: The Found Object

In his book *Mad Love (L'Amour Fou)*, 1937), Breton gives a detailed account of his encounter with two found objects while strolling around the Saint-Ouen flea-market on the outskirts of Paris with his friend Alberto Giacometti. Initially, both men were drawn to an unusual object, a metal mask whose origin or function they could not determine, but eventually bought by Giacometti (see Figure 3.6). The second object, a carved wooden spoon with a small carved shoe on the end of its handle, caught Breton's attention who bought it immediately (see Figure 3.7). This event took place

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Breton, 'Crisis of the Object' in *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 280. See also Christian Zervos' position against abstraction in his article 'Mathematical Objects', *Cahiers d'art*, issue on The Object (1936).

in the spring of 1934, and the location (flea-market) had already been described in Breton's earlier book *Nadja* (1928), that preceded *Mad Love* by nine years. Indeed, Breton's earliest mention of found objects occurs in *Nadja*, where he describes his first encounter with such objects during a visit to the Saint-Ouen flea-market with Marcel Noll. There, he ran into a curious object in the shape of a half-cylinder that turned out to be a statistical device, a metric chart measuring the population of a city (see Figure 3.8). Taken by unexpected encounters of this sort, Breton explains that he often likes to visit the market in search of 'objects that can be found nowhere else: old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse [...]'.⁹⁴ In the succeeding pages of *Nadja*, he discusses the 'sky-blue gloves' of a woman he was apparently in love with at the time (Lise Meyer/Deharme), who left on the table one day, not the sky-blue gloves he was so much hoping to see there, but a peculiar bronze glove she had in her possession that astounded Breton with its unexpectedly heavy weight when he picked it up to examine it up close (see Figure 3.9). The found object, however, gains its full theoretical purchase in *Mad Love*, where Breton develops this concept in the light of Hegelian dialectics, Marxist theory and psychoanalysis, placing it at the centre of aesthetic, political and theoretical discourses that were current at the time.

Stressing their concrete, material properties, Breton contemplates the purpose of such objects and the nature of the subject's encounter with them: these are objects which 'imposed with themselves this abnormally prolonged sensorial contact'.⁹⁵ He further explains that found objects act as *catalysts*, because they present a solution to a certain problem faced by the subject.⁹⁶ He goes on to explain that the finding of the mask, for example, helped free Giacometti from a certain aesthetic dilemma, by unblocking his creativity with regards to a sculpture of a female figure he was working on at the time. The sculpture, the head in particular, had troubled Giacometti, as it was difficult to integrate with the rest of the sculpture, and the mask, with its peculiarly flattened face, somehow helped unblock this problem.⁹⁷ Drawing on psychoanalysis, Breton equates the function of the dream (following Freud), with that of the found object, claiming that 'the finding of an object serves here exactly the

⁹⁴ Breton, *Nadja* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928).

⁹⁵ Breton, *Mad Love* (*L'Amour Fou*, 1937), p. 30. *Mad Love* is dedicated to Jacqueline Lamba, the woman Breton met in a Parisian café (in a chance encounter), while he was still married to his first wife. Lamba was to become his second wife.

⁹⁶ Breton, *Mad Love*, p.32.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

same purpose as the dream, in the sense that it frees the individual from paralysing affective scruples, comforts him and makes him understand that the obstacle he might have thought unsurmountable is cleared'.⁹⁸

The narrative of the found object unfolds in *Mad Love* and starts taking on its full significance when Breton takes the object of his choice, the wooden spoon, home, where it occurs to him in a sudden and revelatory manner that this unusual item responds to a certain desire of his own. He writes:

Some months earlier, inspired by a fragment of a *waking sentence*, 'the Cinderella ash-tray' (Cendrier-cendrillon) and the temptation I had for a long time to put into circulation some oneiric and para-oneiric objects, I had asked Giacometti to sculpt for me, according to his own caprice, a little slipper which was to be in principle Cinderella's lost slipper.⁹⁹

Moreover, he explains that he wished to have this object cast in grey glass and then use it as an ashtray. Giacometti never realized the project, and Breton felt the pressing *lack* of this slipper, which, he tells us, generated a long day-dream which partly derived from a childhood memory.¹⁰⁰ The fact that the glass shoe from the Cinderella fairy-tale, which Breton desired, materialised in his story entirely by chance in the form of the humble wooden spoon, typically carved by peasants, concretely realised the moral of the old story revealing 'the marvellous slipper potential in the modest spoon'.¹⁰¹ Breton writes that the desired object of his imagination thus 'had been constructed outside of [him], very different, *very far beyond* what [he] could have imagined ... So it was at this price, and only at this price, that the perfect organic unity had been reached'.¹⁰² Reflecting his concerns in the wider context of surrealism, Breton refers here to the desired synthesis between the imagination or, more broadly, the workings of the mind, and the world.

Surrealism and Psychoanalysis

Several scholars have pointed out that psychoanalysis served as a methodological paradigm for surrealism from the early days of the movement. Peter Wollen, for

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

example, notes that Breton incorporated Freud into his work before he 'made any formal approach to Marxism'.¹⁰³ In addition, in *Surrealism: the Road to the Absolute* (1959), Anna Balakian argues that, from the early surrealist writings, emphasis to the function of the dream and psychic automatism demonstrates that the influence of Freud came before that of Hegel.¹⁰⁴ Balakian traces Breton's first encounter with psychoanalysis while he was a psychiatry student in 1916, at the beginning of World War I.¹⁰⁵ In 1917, Breton continued working in other neurological centres where therapeutic methods included free-association and dream interpretation. These methods point to the development of automatism and the investigation into the workings of the unconscious mind that the surrealists implemented later on in their experiments. Balakian argues that, in 1919, Breton's continuing interest in Freud and psychoanalysis facilitated his turn from medical studies to literature, as 'psychoanalysis proved a convenient bridge for him between the scientific attitude of objective investigation and a literary mind's philosophical introspection'.¹⁰⁶

Breton's first published account of the mask and the 'Cinderella ash-tray' appeared in 'Equation de l'objet trouvé' (June 1934) in the Belgian journal *Documents 34: intervention surrealiste*.¹⁰⁷ Having read this article, Joë Bousquet (a French poet who was also a friend of many surrealists) wrote 'a long and troubling letter' to Breton, identifying Giacometti's iron mask as 'one of those he had to hand out to his company in Argonne on a muddy evening in the war, just before the attack in which a great number of his men were to die and he was himself to get the bullet in his spine which immobilised him'.¹⁰⁸ Breton was drafting the text of *Mad Love* when the letter arrived, and this incident shed new light into his interpretation of the mask. More specifically, it helped crystallize his view of the spoon and the mask as two objects that effectively materialize Freud's conception of the sexual instinct and the death instinct, respectively.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Peter Wollen, 'The Situationist International' in *New Left Review* 1/174, March-April 1989, p. 79.

¹⁰⁴ Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute*, 1959, republished 1970 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁵ Hal Foster later on in *Compulsive Beauty*, also gives details of Breton's internship at the neuropsychiatric clinic of the Second Army at Saint-Dizier, where he was treating wounded soldiers. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Balakian, p. 125.

¹⁰⁷ Stéphane Massonet, *Documents 34: intervention surrealiste*, Paris, 1998.

¹⁰⁸ Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁹ Breton quotes Freud on the economy of the sexual instinct and the death instinct in *Mad Love*, p. 38. Also see: Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. 45. Haim Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the*

In *Compulsive Beauty* (1995), Hal Foster stresses the importance of trauma and the Freudian idea of the death-drive in the formulation of the found object that came to light following Bousquet's letter to Breton. Foster, however, argues that the traumatic experience that drives the Freudian understanding of the unconscious as a site of conflicting forces and subsequently of repression, is resisted in Breton's account of the found object. His reading thus highlights a difference in the understanding of the notion of the unconscious between Breton and Freud, claiming that Breton draws instead on Freud's contemporary rival, the psychiatrist Pierre Janet's version of an unconscious that enables him to privilege automatic practices.¹¹⁰ Foster writes: 'In this way Breton developed a conception of the unconscious at a remove from Freudian models of conflictual forces, a conception of a *champ magnétique* of associations registered through automatist means, an unconscious based on originary unity rather than primal repression'.¹¹¹

Indeed, in the 'First Surrealist Manifesto' (1924) Breton gives a dictionary definition of surrealism as 'pure psychic automatism'. He writes: 'SURREALISM, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought. Thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations'.¹¹² In the same text he famously describes the surrealists as 'simple receptacles of so many echoes, modest *recording instruments*'.¹¹³ This definition propagates the idea of an authentic source of thought that can be reached through the automatic process by giving up rational agency. While acknowledging that Breton's automatic techniques aimed at liberating the subject from certain psychic and moral constraints, Foster maintains that rather than enabling a revolutionary subject, at the end, automatism 'revealed a compulsive mechanism', and a subject in the grip of the death-drive

Object, (Ann Arbor : UMI Research Press, c1979), p. 27. Exploration of Freud's work by Breton and other surrealists continued in the publications *La révolution Surréaliste* and *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1924-33), in Breton's first manifesto in 1924 and remained constant throughout latter publications, while Breton met and interviewed Freud in 1924. They later exchanged three letters (published in *Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution* and in *Communicating Vessels* (English translation).

¹¹⁰ Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Breton, 'Manifesto' (1924) in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, 1972), p. 26. This definition also appears unaltered ten years later in Breton's 'What is Surrealism?' (1934), a lecture given in Brussels on 1st June 1934 at a public meeting organised by the Belgian surrealists, and issued as a pamphlet immediately afterwards. The first example of automatic text was Breton's and Philippe Soupault's *Les champs magnétiques* (1920).

¹¹³ Breton, 'Manifesto,' p. 27.

threatened with complete disintegration. For Foster, in contrast to Breton's conception, automatism thus pointed to 'an unconscious not unitary or liberatory at all, but primally conflicted, instinctually repetitive'.¹¹⁴

In *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930's*, Steven Harris points out that Foster's otherwise apt emphasis on the traumatic aspect of the encounter with the found object, concentrates exclusively on 'a medical reading of surrealist imagery as trauma', and disregards the movement's 'intertextual negation of existing categories of art'.¹¹⁵ For Harris, it is exactly the value that the surrealists put on the experimental dimension of psychoanalysis as science that enabled them to supersede these categories. Emphasising the synthetic and experimental aspects of surrealism, he concludes that, 'Surrealism stakes its success on the extra-aesthetic, and fails; but it is the intersection of the political, psychical, and aesthetic that carries the weight of its project in the 1930s'.¹¹⁶

Salvador Dalí: Surrealist Objects

In the 'First Surrealist Manifesto' (1924) and in 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality' (1924), Breton effectively undermines traditional artistic categories such as painting and sculpture, which become displaced by alternative practices such as automatism, as well as the construction of objects. In 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality', in particular, he proposes the fabrication of objects of an oneiric origin, which would then be put into circulation together with other objects of everyday life.¹¹⁷ He refers here to the dream of a 'curious' book he came across at the open-air market near Saint-Malo. The pages of the book were made of black wool, and its spine comprised a wooden gnome 'whose white beard, cut in Assyrian fashion, flowed down to its feet'.¹¹⁸ In the dream, Breton had immediately bought the book, yet he was sad not to find it next to him when he finally woke up, leading to his decision to start reconstructing such items he encountered in dreams.

¹¹⁴ Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930's: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 115.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹¹⁷ Breton, 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality' (1924), translated by Richard Sieburth and Jeniffer Gordon in *October*, no. 69, Summer 1994, pp. 133-44, p. 142.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Following up on these and other related writings by Breton, in December 1931, Salvador Dalí published 'Surrealist Objects' in the journal *Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution*, where he designates certain types of surrealist objects. Among them are: 'objects functioning symbolically (automatic origin)', 'transubstantiated objects (affective origin)', 'objects to be thrown (oneiric origin)', 'wrapped objects (diurnal fantasies)', objects-machines (experimental fantasies)', and finally, 'objects-moldings (hypnagogic origin)'.¹¹⁹ Of these categories, with their parenthetical explanations which reveal a preoccupation with dreams, fantasy and experimentation, Dalí provides detailed examples only of the 'objects functioning symbolically'. Asserting their 'automatic origin' which grants them their status as representations of unconscious desires, he writes, among other things, that: 'These objects, lending themselves to a minimum of mechanical functioning, are based on phantasms and representations likely to be provoked by the realization of subconscious acts. [...] The Objects Functioning Symbolically allow no leeway to formal concerns. They depend solely on everyone's loving imagination, and are extra-sculptural'.¹²⁰

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Dalí credits Giacometti's sculpture titled *Suspended Ball* (1930-31), as the inspiration for the Objects Functioning Symbolically.¹²¹ *Suspended Ball* comprises a wooden ball bearing a horizontal cavity suspended by a thin string over a long narrow phallic form, which invites mechanical movement bearing erotic associations. Yet unlike the surrealist objects, for Dalí, Giacometti's work is still formulated within the domain of sculpture, a kind of 'transitional object, which by its very place in this logic of differentiation must still occupy the site of sculpture'.¹²² By contrast, these assemblages of objects of 'automatic origin' are understood as giving up a great deal of conscious authorial control, as one way of sidestepping the intentional, formal and compositional concerns of traditional and modernist sculpture. The surrealist object thus breaks with the traditional categories of painting and sculpture, not unlike the way the surrealist texts broke with established literary categories; Breton's *Mad Love*, for example, displays a fusion of literary genres and other categories: part-manifesto, part-

¹¹⁹ Salvador Dalí, 'Surrealist Objects' in Haim Finkelstein (ed.) *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, p. 231.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

¹²¹ The journal issue also features two pages of Alberto Giacometti's Mobile and Mute (Silent) Objects, (*Objets Mobiles et Muets*), with drawings by the artist and some explicatory text.

¹²² Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 31.

theoretical inquiry, part scientific report, part auto-biographical novel with a use of a poetic, often opaque and elusive language.¹²³

Alongside his account of Giacometti's sculpture, in 'Surrealist Objects', Dalí gives detailed descriptions of four untitled objects, each made by André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Gala Eluard, and Valentine Hugo, respectively, accompanied by photographs. Breton's Object, for example, comprises a complex assemblage of disparate items such as a bicycle saddle topped with tobacco and confections, a wooden sphere, an hourglass laid horizontally, an alabaster book, and a bicycle bell, among other items, materializing in this way issues and concerns possibly relating to the end of a recent romantic relationship (see Figure 3.10). Dalí's own assemblage features a woman's shoe with a glass of milk placed in it, while an elaborate mechanism dips a sugar cube that bears the image of a shoe into the glass. Among other paraphernalia, the arrangement is furnished with fetishes such as a small erotic photograph, as well as pubic hair stuck in a sugar cube (see Figure 3.11).

Later, in his account of surrealist objects, while he writes approvingly about their explosive value and 'beauty', Breton partially criticises these objects for corresponding to erotic fantasies and subjective concerns in a rather direct and determined way. They are, he writes, 'too particularly conceived, too personal, [and] will always lack the astonishingly suggestive power that certain almost everyday objects are able to acquire by chance'.¹²⁴ As it becomes evident, Breton values instead the peculiar yet unique and resolutely simple objects he formulated in 'Beauty Will Be Convulsive,' which preceeded *Mad Love*, describing a found object, stressing 'its extreme simplicity' and the pleasure he derives from 'the lack of resemblance between the desired object and the *discovery*. ... it takes all the beauty that I see in it from what it is *not*. In it alone is it given us to recognize the marvelous precipitate of desire. ...its power to enlarge the universe, to do away with a part of its opacity ...

¹²³ In his essay 'Surrealism', Walter Benjamin notes that, 'the writings of this circle are not literature but something else – demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs, forgeries if you will, but at any rate not literature...' Walter Benjamin 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', p. 179. Also in *New Left Review*, vol. I, no. 108 (March-April, 1978), 47-56.

¹²⁴ Breton, *Communicating Vessels* (1932), translated by Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln, Neb.; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 55. An earlier version of this argument appeared in Breton's essay 'Objet phantome' (Phantom Object) (1931), published in the same issue of *Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution* with Dalí's 'Surrealist Objects'.

everyday life abounds with tiny discoveries of this kind'.¹²⁵ In effect, in contrast to the more personally determined surrealist objects, the key notion of the chance encounter (or objective chance) that accompanies the found object, advocates a 'less-determined exploration of the relations between subject and object'.¹²⁶

Dawn Ades notes Breton's expressed doubts about Dalí's symbolically functioning objects which he finds less effective, narrower in the possible range of interpretations, than objects less systematically determined. In Breton's opinion, objects like Dalí's, being too personal and particular in conception, lose the astonishing power of suggestion of such scientific apparatus as the gold-leaf electroscope, whose perfectly joined leaves spring apart at the approach of a rubbed stick.¹²⁷ Ades pertinently remarks that Breton here is voicing the same doubts Freud was later to express to Dalí himself, regarding the way in which Dalí interprets the latent content of his work and incorporates it within it.¹²⁸ Similar concerns arise in relation to Dalí's paintings, for which Ades asks if they 'consist of images springing directly from the unconscious, or are they rather images which have already been digested and analysed', in a way, too determined in their conception.¹²⁹ Ades moreover observes that even if 'this kind of analysis is necessarily amateur, there is a justification for it, in that Dalí is in fact treating the iconography of the science of psychoanalysis as though it were common property, in the way that religious iconography was common property in the Middle Ages'.¹³⁰ She further argues that the difference between Breton and Dalí's ideas is that,

¹²⁵ Breton, 'Beauty Will Be Convulsive' (1934), in *What is Surrealism?* Translated by David Gascoyne (London: Faber & Faber, 1936; reprint, New York: Haskell House, 1974), 37-43, p.42. The article was first published in *Minotaure*, no. 5, Feb. 1934. It was later incorporated in *Mad Love*, p. 13.

¹²⁶ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 107.

¹²⁷ Dawn Ades, *Salvador Dalí*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982/1995), pp. 154, 156.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74. Dalí and psychoanalysis: Dalí read Freud's interpretation of dreams, as a student in Madrid. "This book presented itself to me as one of the capital discoveries in my life, and I was seized with a real vice of self-interpretation, not only of my dreams but of everything that happened to me, however accidental it might seem at first glance." How far, then, does a painting ... consists of images springing directly from the unconscious, or are they rather images which have already been digested and analysed? Dalí was introduced to Freud in London in 1938 by Stefan Zweig. According to Dalí, Freud told him: "It is not the unconscious I seek in your pictures, but the conscious. While in the pictures of the masters – Leonardo or Ingres – that which interests me, that which seems mysterious and troubling to me, is precisely the search for unconscious ideas, of an enigmatic order, hidden in the picture, your mystery is manifested outright. The picture is but a mechanism to reveal it." Dalí's paintings, he is suggesting, contain both the latent cause of an obsession and its symbolic manifestation. p. 74.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

Breton is thinking in social and philosophical terms, attacking an attenuated notion of reality in which certain human needs (fetishism for example) or potential fields of action are ruled out by a blinkered reliance on 'reason', [while] Dalí is thinking in cultural and sexual terms. If his objects have any *raison d'être* beyond their inutility, it is as symbolically functioning simulacra of private desires.¹³¹

For Ades, moreover, the most fundamental difference between Breton and Dalí, in the wider context of surrealism, rests on their conception of the role of surrealism to change how people at that time perceived the world. While both of them talk about discrediting rationality, what they understand by this is something very different. For Breton, this changed consciousness rests on the reconciliation between reality and dream, as he advocates, for example, in his essays on the 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality' (1924), and the First and Second Surrealist Manifestoes. For Breton, Ades writes, the imagination, the dream, and the unconscious, all belong to that part of the world excluded by narrow pragmatism.¹³² Breton's 'Second Surrealist Manifesto' (1929), coincided with Dalí's entry into surrealism, and if Dalí's early writings seem in line with Breton's call to discredit rationality, as in Dalí's 'Rotting Donkey' with its call 'to systematize confusion and contribute to the total discrediting of the world of reality', it soon becomes clear that what Dalí wanted was *to maintain* the distinction between the two, and his world of imagination to be substituted for the real world.¹³³ At least Breton's charge against Dalí, was that he sought to maintain the irrational in the same way that he deliberately maintained his neurotic complexes in as high a state of exuberance as possible.¹³⁴

Crisis of the Object

Several publications in the last fifteen years or so have investigated the importance of the object in surrealism.¹³⁵ In *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics and the Psyche* (2004), Steven Harris stresses the crucial role the surrealist object

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ These publications include Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s* (2004), Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism and Politics*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 2001).

played in the early 1930s in the claims of the surrealist group to maintaining their autonomy from the cultural (and political) agenda of the French Communist Party. According to Harris, the object advances the redefinition of surrealism's activity 'as a research into the workings of the mind, outside of the immediately political tasks of the party'.¹³⁶ The found object, for instance, as it is conceptualized by Breton, is an elaborate theoretical construction (as well as a concrete, material manifestation of the workings of the mind), that draws on Hegelian dialectics, psychoanalysis and Marxism. It seeks to bring together in a dialectical relationship subject and object (mental space and the world, theory and practice, art, politics and the everyday life). Harris discusses the (deliberate) delay of a 'premature' reconciliation between these different domains, stemming from a desire, on the part of Breton, to maintain the autonomy of surrealist thought as distinct from political thought and action.¹³⁷ This was, however, one of the main reasons for the criticisms aimed at Breton's surrealism by other members of the surrealist group, such as Tristan Tzara, Roger Caillois, René Crevel and René Char, which eventually effected a certain schism within the group over the winter of 1934.¹³⁸ This crisis led to a reconsideration of the identity of surrealism as a movement and the reevaluation of its strategies, but also reinforced the central position that the surrealist object held during that period.¹³⁹

In view of this crisis in surrealism, Breton delivered a lecture in Prague, March 29, 1935, titled 'Surrealist Situation of the Object (Situation of the Surrealist Object)' (1935), where he attempts to establish the position and implications of surrealism at that specific historical moment, to clearly demarcate its space, and to safeguard its authenticity and independence. The surrealist object is central in carrying this project

¹³⁶ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 84.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85. Other scholars have also stressed this tension which resulted in an official break of Breton and other surrealists with the French Communist Party. Peter Wollen in 'The Situationist International' (1989) maintains that Breton retained 'the specificity and autonomy of artistic revolution, intellectually and organizationally', p. 79. In *Profane Illumination*, Margaret Cohen gives a detailed account of the relationship between psychoanalysis and Marxism in Breton's writings and thought at that time; more specifically as it is developed in *Communicating Vessels* and *Mad Love*. Cohen traces the tension between surrealist Marxism and that of the French Communist Party, which has repeatedly attacked surrealism for the alleged idealism that its version of Marxism (and its fusion with psychoanalysis) put forth, as well as Breton's rejection of the Party's 'simplistic materialism' in the *Second Surrealist Manifesto* and the movement's defense in *Communicating Vessels*. Drawing on Marxist theory, *Mad Love* is, to a certain extent, Breton's critique of the current state of communism. See Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹³⁸ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 85.

¹³⁹ These preoccupations are reflected upon the titles of two lectures Breton gave around that time, namely, 'Surrealist Situation of the Object' (1935) and 'Crisis of the Object' (1936).

through, and Breton goes so far as to propose a kind of 'distinctive outer sign,' a hallmark or seal (by Man Ray) that will differentiate the surrealist object and make it immediately recognisable.¹⁴⁰ For Breton, surrealism's task was to remain clear sighted, to examine attentively 'this object in crisis', and *the recent speculations that this object has publicly given rise to* (the oneiric object, the symbolist object, the real and virtual object, the found object etc.).¹⁴¹

According to Harris, surrealism's second phase in the 1930s, in contrast with its first more anarchic phase, revisits and revises many of its early ideas and formulations in order to restructure and systematize them. The author maintains that this shift is evident in Breton's *Communicating Vessels*, for example, which provides a self-criticism of surrealism's extreme subjectivity and even self-absorption evident in the first *Manifesto* and *Nadja*. In *Communicating Vessels*, Breton 'describes the spring of 1931 as a 'waking dream' in which only personal considerations were in play, at the expense of any notion of the social'.¹⁴² According to Harris, Breton recognizes that the overt emphasis on subjectivity can prove to be equally disastrous as an emphasis on objectivity which excludes any level of interpretation, as in Soviet constructivism where extreme functionalism and subjection to instrumental reason amounts to a 'boundless servility'.¹⁴³ Importantly, it is to this servility, that Breton juxtaposes his search for objects, such as the bronze glove, the peculiar metric device, and the iron mask, 'that can be found nowhere else: old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse [...]'.¹⁴⁴

Harris argues, however, that Breton's critical attitude to instrumental reason was not meant to dismiss rationality altogether, but to address the tendency of contemporary thought to repress the irrational, while putting too much emphasis on the rational. Breton purports that by privileging rationality at this level, the subject's unconscious desires that partake in the shaping of action are ignored, while on the contrary they should be known and understood as they form part of conscious decisions. 'At the most political moment of Surrealism', Harris writes, 'Breton

¹⁴⁰ Breton, 'Surrealist Situation of the Object (Situation of the Surrealist Object)' (1935), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 258. Lecture delivered in Prague, March 29, 1935. Hugnet's 'L'objet usuel' as part of a series of lectures on June 1935, on the object. Speakers included Breton and Dalí. Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous*, p. 78.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 90.

¹⁴³ Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, p. 135. Quoted in Harris. p. 90.

¹⁴⁴ Breton, *Nadja* p. 52.

describes irrationality as a swamp of corruption, whose elimination would be achieved through understanding rather than repression'.¹⁴⁵ Following this comment, Harris cites an extract from *Communicating Vessels* where Breton concludes: 'We will be done with them [corrupting germs that stem from the unconscious] only by agreeing to rehabilitate the study of the self, in order to integrate it to that of the collective being'.¹⁴⁶ Here, the study of the unconscious becomes a tool to advance the purposes of the revolution in the service of the collective. However, as Johanna Malt observes in her 2004 book *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics*, the surrealists and especially Breton's attitude to revolutionary action remained ambivalent.¹⁴⁷

Salvador Dalí's 'Paranoia-Criticism'

In several essays during the early thirties, Dalí subjected the object to paranoid mechanisms and delusions. Following his article, 'Surrealist Objects' (1931), Dalí expanded and reformulated his idea of the object in 'The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment' (1932). Here, he writes that, 'the years have modified the surrealist concept of the object most instructively, showing, as it were, in images how the surrealist view of the possibilities of action on the external world have been and may still be subject to change'.¹⁴⁸ Dalí describes a few objects, among which are outdated scientific instruments, a woman's bronze glove (that first appeared in *Nadja*), the peculiar instrument that was used to measure the population (*Nadja*), as well as phosphorescent objects etc. These objects which imbue the atmosphere with their peculiar physicality, their smell, and their delicate mechanisms, are laid out on a table during surrealist experiments with automatic processes. Surrealism's intention to render concrete objects of the imagination was initially stated in Breton's, 'Introduction to a Speech on the Poverty of Reality' (1924-25), where he sought to put into circulation oneiric and para-oneiric objects: '...one should manufacture one

¹⁴⁵ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁶ Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, pp. 130-31. Quoted in Harris, p. 91.

¹⁴⁷ Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁸ Salvador Dalí, 'The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment' (1932) in *The Collected Writings*, p. 235. First published in English in *This Quarter* (London), 5, no. 1 (September 1932), pp. 197-207. Re-published in *Surrealists on Art*, edited by Lucy R. Lippard, (Prentice Hall, 1971), pp. 87-97.

of the articles one meets only in dreams...'¹⁴⁹ Following up on Breton, Dalí asserts that, 'the experiments revealed the desire for the object, the tangible object. This desire was to get the object at all costs out of the dark and into the light, to bear it all winking and flickering into the full daylight'.¹⁵⁰

While stressing the importance of the physical aspects of these objects, which are subjected in experiments through the automatic method, he goes on to introduce the idea of simulation akin to his method of paranoia-criticism. He writes: 'the world of objects, the objective world, as the true and manifest content of a new dream, attained by an active simulation of a paranoiac state in which the objective phenomena will combine with subjective concerns to form a complex delusional system'.¹⁵¹ The combined concerns of automatism and simulation, as opposed to functionality and instrumental reason, also come together in Dalí's retrospective description of surrealist objects in *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (1942), where he further stresses their anti-functional, fetishistic and delirious character: 'The surrealist object is one that is absolutely useless from the practical and rational point of view, created wholly for the purpose of materializing in a fetishistic way, with the maximum of tangible reality, ideas and fantasies having a delirious character'.¹⁵²

Dalí began to write on the theme of simulation and paranoia-criticism in 1930. First mentioned in 'The Moral Position of Surrealism' (*Hèlix*, 1930), the method was more substantially developed for the first time in 'The Rotting Donkey', published in the volume *Femme Visible* (1930), and in the first issue of the surrealist journal *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, that same year.¹⁵³ Other important texts by Dalí on the subject include: 'New General Considerations Regarding the Mechanism of the Paranoiac Phenomenon from the Surrealist Point of View' (*Minotaure*, 1933); 'The Latest Modes of Intellectual Stimulation for the Summer of 1934', (*Documents* 34, 1934); and *The Conquest of the Irrational* (1935). His writings on paranoia-

¹⁴⁹ Dalí refers to this essay in 'New General Considerations', in *The Collected Writings*, p. 262, and quotes from this text in Dalí 'The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment', in *The Collected Writings*, pp. 237-238.

¹⁵⁰ Dalí, 'The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment' (1932), in *The Collected Writings*, p. 89.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹⁵² Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, (New York: Dial, 1942), p. 312.

¹⁵³ Dalí, *La femme visible*, (Paris: Editions Surréalistes, 1930), pp. 11-20; *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* no. 1, Paris, July 1930, 9-12.

criticism culminated with the belated publication of *The Tragic Myth of Millet's L'Angélus: Paranoiac-Critical Interpretation*, in 1963.¹⁵⁴

In an introductory commentary in the *Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, the volume's editor Haim Finkelstein observes that Dalí's efforts since his early writings strike a balance between accepting and challenging the surrealist doctrine, in order to carve a space for himself and his own originality within surrealism.¹⁵⁵ Paranoia-criticism, Finkelstein notes, was central in this attempt, developed in the context of surrealist automatism, while challenging its basic assumptions, in order to 'bring new life to a weakened and, indeed, outmoded, theory and practice'.¹⁵⁶ The complex interrelation between the two strategies, which further marks the way Dalí envisaged his place within surrealism, is best illustrated in a phrase from 'Millet's *L'Angélus*', the text that accompanied the invitation to a Dalí exhibition. Here, the artist adapted Lautreamont's phrase in the context of Millet's painting: 'Millet's *L'Angélus*, beautiful like the fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella!'¹⁵⁷ effectively merging the origins of surrealism in automatism and his own paranoia-criticism.

Dalí first introduced the potential of the paranoiac-critical method, as an addition and extension of surrealist automatism, in 'The Rotting Donkey' (1930). In the opening paragraphs, he writes: 'the moment is drawing near when, by a thought process of a paranoiac and active character, it would be possible (simultaneously with automatism and other passive states) to systematize confusion and thereby to attribute to a total discrediting of the world of reality'.¹⁵⁸ However, Dalí suggests that the paranoiac-critical method enables a more active engagement with reality than

¹⁵⁴ Arguably written in the 1930s, but not published until 1963, because the manuscript was lost during the German occupation. Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), p. 42. Iversen notes in a footnote: 'Although Dalí is not exactly a reliable source, the original text from 1933 has been located by Dawn Ades, who will soon publish her findings'. Steven Harris has suggested to [Iversen] that the non-publication of *The Tragic Myth* may have something to do with Dalí's break with the surrealists. See also: Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Finkelstein, on the other hand, argues that it was heavily rewritten in the early 1960s on the grounds that its autobiographical revelations are out of character with his earlier prose in *Collected Writings*, p. 274.

¹⁵⁵ Finkelstein (ed), *Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, pp. 212-13.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹⁵⁷ Salvador Dalí, 'Millet's *L'Angélus*' (1934), invitation to the exhibition: *Salvador Dalí: Les Chants de Maldoror*, Paris: Galeries des Quatre Chemins, 1934; the text also appeared under the title 'Explication d'une illustration des *Chants de Maldoror*' as an appendix for *Le mythe tragique de L'Angélus de Millet* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963), pp. 93-7. Reprinted in Dalí, 'Millet's *L'Angélus*' in *The Collected Writings*, p. 279.

¹⁵⁸ Dalí, 'The Rotting Donkey,' in *Collected Writings*, p. 223.

automatism, with the important effect of intervening and changing this very reality. 'Paranoia makes use of the external world in order to set off its obsessive idea, with the disturbing characteristic of verifying the reality of this idea for others', he writes.¹⁵⁹

At this stage, Dalí introduces the concept of the simulacrum, the very product of paranoiac thought, made manifest, for example, in the phenomenon of double and multiple images. A well-known visual example illustrating this object-change, is demonstrated by Dalí's initial (mis)apprehension of a postcard which he thought to be a face drawn by Picasso. Upon turning it horizontally, however, he realized that the image in fact depicted a group of Africans sitting in front of their straw huts (see Figure 3.12).¹⁶⁰ Dalí moreover reports an anecdote about showing Breton that same image, which the latter mistook for a portrait of the Marquis de Sade, mirroring his own preoccupation with the Marquis at the time. A double image, Dalí explains, is 'a representation of an object that is also, without the slightest pictorial or anatomical modification, the representation of another entirely different object'.¹⁶¹ This example demonstrates the acutely subjective nature of the phenomenon, while at the same time manifesting its purportedly objective character. According to Dalí, no one can deny, once it's been pointed out to them, the reality of these images. Dalí assumes simulation as a critical strategy, undermining the hierarchy between copy and original. Margaret Iversen explains that the simulacrum is that species of image which is defined by a superficial likeness, as opposed to the copy that bears a mimetic, that is, an essential and internal relation to the model.¹⁶²

Dalí's 'New General Considerations Regarding the Mechanism of the Paranoiac Phenomenon from the Surrealist Point of View' (1933) was published in the first issue of the surrealist review *Minotaure* (1933), alongside psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's essay 'Le problème du style et la conception psychiatrique des formes paranoïaques de l'expérience'.¹⁶³ In this essay, Dalí draws upon Breton's theories of

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Dalí's 'Paranoiac Face' was reproduced in the fourth issue of *LSASDLR*. Dalí, 'New General Considerations Regarding the Mechanism of the Paranoiac Phenomenon from the Surrealist Point of View' in *The Collected Writings*, p. 260.

¹⁶¹ Dalí, 'The Rotting Donkey,' in *The Collected Writings*, p. 224.

¹⁶² Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure*, p. 54.

¹⁶³ Dalí, 'Interprétation paranoïaque-critique de l'image obsédante *L'Angelus* de Millet: Prologue: Nouvelles considérations générale sur le mécanisme du phénomène paranoïque du point de vue surréaliste,' *Minotaure*, Paris, 1 June, 1933, pp. 65-7. Published as 'New General Considerations

automatism, while at the same time introducing a more sustained critique of them. More specifically, he professes that automatism (like the dream), is subject to interpretation only retroactively, while the paranoid delirium already constitutes in itself a form of interpretation.¹⁶⁴ Importantly, Dalí found support for this idea in Lacan's doctorate thesis on paranoia published in 1932. Dalí writes: 'Lacan's work perfectly accounts for the objective and "communicable" hyperacuteness of the phenomenon, thanks to which the delirium assumes a tangible character that cannot be contradicted and that situates it at the very antipodes of the stereotypy of automatism and dream'.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, 'the delirium would suddenly appear *fully systematized*', resulting in the 'profound change of the object', manifesting thus its concrete, active and intervening character, as discussed above.¹⁶⁶

In terms of methodology, Dalí's stated purpose to 'systematize confusion', lies in the 'objective and communicable hyperacuity' of paranoid thought that generates not only new associations, but also new objects (simulacra). Importantly, despite Dalí's claim that the delirium already constitutes in itself a form of interpretation, Finkelstein draws attention to the artist's insistent rejection of the view that paranoia is involved in a 'voluntarily directed thinking' and '*a posteriori* systemitization'.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, Dalí describes paranoia as a 'reasoning madness', because it contains and builds upon the contradiction between reason and madness.¹⁶⁸ In her monographic book on Dalí, Ades explains that this 'delirium of interpretation' consists of 'suites of images, ideas or events perceived as having causal connections, or are all related to one central idea, and are internally coherent for the subject of the delusion though meaningless to an outside observer'.¹⁶⁹ In other words, its systematic character is due to the fact that the paranoid delirium is organized by establishing causal links that connect seemingly random images, ideas or events, or by relating different events to one central idea in an internally coherent and systematic way, thus attesting to its active (intervening), and concrete, objective nature.¹⁷⁰

Regarding the Mechanism of the Paranoid Phenomenon from the Surrealist Point of View' (1933), in Finkelstein, *The Collected Writings*, pp. 256-262.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 259. Dalí on Lacan's thesis on paranoia.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Ades, *Dalí*, p. 122.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Automatism, Simulation and Chance Encounter

In *Simulating the Marvellous* (2014), David Lomas indicates that automatism has been a contested and controversial term in the context of surrealism, where it naively came to signify a sort of a direct and unmediated outpouring of the unconscious, ('opening wide the floodgates of the unconscious'), noting partially that Breton identified automatism with spontaneous inspiration against deliberate calculation.¹⁷¹ Lomas claims simulation instead as an intrinsic part of surrealism right from the start, implicit in the very concept of automatism, challenging the more widely received notion of a pure, unmediated, automatic state, where content is perceived to flow directly from a plentiful unconscious. For Lomas, simulation, which involves a performative enacting of automatic states, is 'at the basis of moral and epistemological worldview of surrealism from the start'.¹⁷² The author further notes that the key role of simulation is also demonstrated with the surrealists' 'fondness for masks and imaginary portraits of precursor figures such as Lautreamont and Sade for whom no actual likeness existed'.¹⁷³ Lomas also recognizes in 'surrealism's desire for materialization' the surrealist object as 'a kind of ersatz object, or simulacrum'.¹⁷⁴ This emphasis on a copy without an original reinforces, for Lomas, surrealism's challenge to the idea of authorship. Finally, Lomas points out that Dalí's theory of simulation, in the context of paranoia-criticism, anticipates postmodernism, while proposing a re-reading of surrealism (including automatism), precisely, *as* simulation, performatively producing the 'unconscious', rather than passively recording it.¹⁷⁵

Twelve years after his dictionary definition of surrealism as 'pure psychic automatism' in the 'First Surrealist Manifesto' (1924), Breton brought together the notion of automatism and that of the chance encounter with the found object in *Mad Love*. As I discussed earlier, for Breton, the finding of the object provides a solution to a certain problem. This solution, however, comes suddenly and unexpectedly, and thus cannot follow ordinary logical paths. In *Mad Love*, Breton goes on to say that one way of producing this solution is through surrealist automatic writing, generating a certain image that corresponds to it perfectly. However, he immediately identifies the found object with this kind of solution, bringing together the concerns of

¹⁷¹ David Lomas, with contributions by Jeremy Stubbs, *Simulating the Marvellous: Psychology – Surrealism – Postmodernism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 181.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 205.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 179, 269.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

automatism and the strategy of the chance encounter constitutive of the found object. Sidestepping instrumental reasoning, the object found by chance, even though it is unique and recognizable among so many other fabricated objects, is always *different* in every way from what he had foreseen: 'what is delightful here is the dissimilarity itself which exists between the object wished for and *the object found*'.¹⁷⁶

If automatism is conceived as producing an immediate and accurate image which corresponds directly to the thought process, stressing the idea of similarity, then what is crucial in Breton's definition of the chance encounter is that it introduces the notion of *difference* between the object imagined or wished for, and the found object. Importantly, the attitude entailed in the chance encounter opens up the subject to the Other and to the world. Breton's stakes in traversing between the mental domain and the world, the subject and the object, are highlighted by his insistence that the solution that arises from the encounter with the object is found, not within the mind, but in the external world, 'constructed outside of [him], very different, *very far beyond* what [he] could have imagined ... So it was at this price, and only at this price, that the perfect organic unity had been reached'.¹⁷⁷ On the contrary, this crucial notion of the difference between the mind and the world, maintained in the chance encounter with the ultimate aim of forming a synthesis, is completely erased in simulation - as Lomas notes, simulation effaces the distinction between imaginary and real.¹⁷⁸ The strategy of the chance encounter however, which I suggest provides a reworked and elaborated version of automatic procedures, clearly maintains the tension between intentionality and chance, thus constructing a much more complex idea of the unconscious than that of a 'space' which can be simply accessed through a pure, unmediated, automatic state.

David Lomas' indispensable account on the role of simulation in surrealist theory and practice from the early days of the movement brings crucial aspects of simulation to bear upon the formulation of automatism. Rather than reading automatism as simulation, however, or understanding them as outright antagonistic and mutually exclusive strategies, I want to suggest that the two are complimentary and that furthermore key aspects of automatism remained grounded in Dalí's conception of

¹⁷⁶ Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 13. Also in Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 108. Also Finkelstein, 'Automatic Writing and the Genesis of the Object' in *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, c1979).

¹⁷⁷ Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 34.

¹⁷⁸ Lomas, *Simulating the Marvellous*, p. 205.

paranoia-criticism. One fundamental dimension, which permeated both Breton's conception of automatism and Dalí's idea of paranoia, is the notion of an instantaneous, photographic effect. This spontaneous element of paranoia-criticism is evident in Dalí's use of a metaphor that 'critical lucidity plays the part of a photographic developer, and in no way influences the course of the paranoiac force'.¹⁷⁹ The spontaneous, automatic, aspect of paranoia is also highlighted in Dalí's retrospective account of the method's history and objectives, when he describes paranoia as 'the delirium manifested in a series of systematic interpretive associations', and its method as '*spontaneously* explaining the irrational knowledge born of delirious associations by giving a critical interpretation of the phenomenon.'¹⁸⁰

Readymade and Found Object

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, a reselected version of Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* was displayed in a central spot on one of the large glass vitrines among other surrealist objects at the *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets* at Charles Ratton gallery (1936). This was apparently the earliest documented public exhibition of the *Bottle Rack*, as well as that of any of Duchamp's readymade objects. In addition to the central position that the readymade occupied in the exhibition, Breton further theorized a prominent place for the readymade in the context of the surrealist object in the special issue of *Cahiers d'art* accompanying the exhibition. In *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí and Surrealist Exhibition Installations*, Lewis Kachur notes that apart from the controversy caused by *Fountain* in the 1910s, Duchamp's readymade objects 'were little known and in many cases not even preserved until they begun their public life under the aegis of the surrealists. Thus in the mid-1930s, Breton had managed to focus attention on both the *Large Glass* and then the readymade, the two creations that have dominated writings on Duchamp ever since'.¹⁸¹ Further supporting the claim that many of the found and interpreted objects that were exhibited in *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets*, both originated from and expanded on the idea of Duchamp's readymades, Kachur brings to attention a subsequent publication of the definition of *Objet* in the *Dictionnaire abrégé*, where he

¹⁷⁹ Dalí, *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí*, p. 151.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous*, p. 92

notes that Duchamp's readymades are claimed as the first surrealist objects. Kachur attributes without doubt the authorship of this definition to Breton, to remark however that 'it does not necessarily reveal Duchamp's own attitude towards the readymades, but rather his rising position among the surrealists'.¹⁸²

As discussed in the previous chapter on the readymade, Duchamp's definition of the readymade along the lines of 'visual indifference' and 'complete anesthesia', brought about a challenge to the dominant ideas of authorship and intentional artistic creation.¹⁸³ For TJ Demos, this approach did not take into consideration the repercussions of automatism that were prevalent in modern life, manifest, for example, in the automatic behavior related to consumerism. Some of Breton's early concerns with the material object are articulated in his article 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality', where he writes that he wished to fabricate and put into circulation together with other everyday objects, certain objects that appeared in dreams or were products of his imagination.¹⁸⁴ On these grounds, Demos remarks that the incongruous repositioning of the readymade by Breton as the key historical practice in the context of surrealism in the 1930s presents a sweeping gesture because 'rather than figuring as its obvious precedent, the readymade suggests its very antithesis.'¹⁸⁵ While the readymade consolidated the intentional vanquishing of individual taste and creativity played out in its form as mass produced commodity object thus 'revealing the anonymous rationalization of production and passivity of consumption – the very forces against which surrealism was locked in struggle', Demos suggests that Breton incorporated 'this threat within surrealist practice so that it paradoxically came to bear the mark of individuality and exemplify the realization of the unconscious intention, rather than portent their destruction.'¹⁸⁶ Significantly, Duchamp later remarked about the dialectic between readymade and found object and the misconception that they are identical:

My Ready-Mades have nothing to do with the *objet trouvé* because the so-called 'found object' is completely directed by personal taste. Personal taste decides that this is a beautiful object and is unique. That most of my Ready-mades were mass produced and could be

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 80.

¹⁸³ Marcel Duchamp 'Apropos of "Readymades"' (1961) in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp: Salt Seller*, Michel Sanouillet (ed.), (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p. 141.

¹⁸⁴ Breton, 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality' (1924), p. 142.

¹⁸⁵ TJ Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, p. 150.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

duplicated is another important difference. In many cases they were duplicated, thus avoiding the cult of uniqueness, of art with a capital A.¹⁸⁷

Demos argues that by incorporating the readymade as part of the histories of the surrealist object, Breton's gesture was the first in a series of those that in effect institutionalized the readymade and somehow negated its radicality, which Duchamp had achieved by projecting new meaning to the mass-produced object by placing it in a different context than usual. By collapsing the readymade and the found object under a single category, that of the surrealist object, Demos insists that Breton abolished the crucial difference between the two thus 'deradicalizing' the former and 'confounding' the latter.¹⁸⁸ This gesture also deemed the readymade, a mass-produced object determined by the choice of the artist yet based on the premise of 'aesthetic indifference' which brought about a crisis in perceived notions of authorship, continuous with the found object which was bound with unconscious acts and the formation of individual subjectivity. For Demos, by linking the readymade with the found object Breton 'desubjectivised' the readymade, ignoring the fundamental issue of 'aesthetic indifference' and 'returning aesthetic intention to it, even if one of psychoanalytic complexity'.¹⁸⁹

As I mentioned in the introduction, in her article entitled 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph' (2004), Margaret Iversen notes that only two types survive in contemporary art, from the long list of objects that make up the surrealist objects in the *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets*: Duchamp's readymade and Breton's found object. Despite their similarities, their well-established lineage, and the fact that they are often run interchangeably in relevant literature, Iversen stresses the point that there are important differences between the two. The most fundamental among these differences is that the found object is bound up with the unconscious, and as such it opens up the art work to wider issues of life, death and sociality, revealing the traumatic core of the modern subject.¹⁹⁰ For Iversen, calling attention to this aspect of the found object thus breaks the self-critical cycle perpetuated by the readymade and its legacies, which are more concerned 'with reflecting on and undermining the

¹⁸⁷ Duchamp interview with Katherine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 90.

¹⁸⁸ Demos, p. 151.

¹⁸⁹ Demos, p. 152.

¹⁹⁰ Margaret Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph,' *Art Journal*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2004, pp. 48, 57.

conventions and institutions of art'.¹⁹¹ Moreover, each of them puts forth a different kind of subjectivity, brought into relief by the difference between the *chance encounter* with the found object ('both lost and found', as she claims), and the pre-arranged *rendez-vous* with the Duchampian readymade, stressing the 'singular or irreplaceable' character of the former and the 'essentially indifferent, multiple and mass-produced' quality of the latter.¹⁹²

Duchamp's well-known skepticism (or resistance) to psychoanalysis, comes perhaps from a different conception of the unconscious. For him the unconscious is not a deep space with the liberatory potential that Breton and the other surrealists bestowed on it, but a locus of repetition and restraint, a conservative force instrumental in maintaining the *status quo*. In *Infinite Regress*, David Joselit describes Duchamp's understanding of 'the unconscious as a readymade', which materializes with the meticulous reproduction process involved in *Green Box* and *Box-in-a-valise*.¹⁹³ Joselit points to the paradox that exists between Duchamp's proclaimed disdain for copying oneself, and his dedicated engagements with reproduction for example in the above projects. The author observes however that, for Duchamp, 'repeating himself' and 'reproducing his own conceptions' are two different things: 'the artist who makes the same painting fifty or one hundred times is doing so not as an explicit act of reproduction but rather with a presumption of originality, and it is this false innovation that Duchamp paradoxically wished to avoid through his own perfectly tautological acts of reproduction'.¹⁹⁴

The critical reception of Duchamp's readymade and Breton's found object in contemporary art draws on this view that the two terms are treated as being identical. The chapter that follows on work by Gabriel Orozco, for example, looks at aspects of the found object that have been neglected for the most part in critical accounts of his practice, while discussing the complexities arising from the subtle overlaps between readymade and found object therein. This task however presents certain challenges because Orozco actively resists the legacies of surrealism in Mexico with regards to his work. The fifth chapter, focusing on selected artworks by Peter Fischli and David Weiss, examines the artists' practice of replicating everyday objects, and the idea of simulation, alongside automatism. The final chapter examines the work of Urs

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁹³ Joselit, *Infinite Regress*, p. 188.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

3. The Object in Surrealism

Fischer in light of Dali's paranoia criticism and related ideas of simulation, as well as formal similarities and differences between his assemblages and surrealist objects.

Chapter 4: Gabriel Orozco: Impossible Objects

The realistic position ... clarity bordering on stupidity, the life lived by dogs. - André Breton, 'First Manifesto of Surrealism'

*What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real.*¹⁹⁵ - André Breton, 'First Manifesto of Surrealism'

*I come from a country where a lot of art is labeled Surrealist. I grew up with it and I hate that kind of dream-like, evasive, easy, poetic, sexual, cheesy Surrealist practice. I try to be a Realist.*¹⁹⁶ - Gabriel Orozco

Some time in the early Nineties, Gabriel Orozco was considering which works to present at the 1993 Venice Biennale. While going through the contents of a shoebox he kept in his studio, which contained various 'exploring objects', that is, found objects and small models, an idea for a work started to form in his mind. As he took the objects out of the box and placed them on a table, reveling in the thought of presenting them as the final work, his attention was captured by the empty shoebox. He found the thought of presenting the shoebox so intriguing that he immediately decided to include it in the exhibition.¹⁹⁷ The idea culminated in the work now known as *Empty Shoe Box* (1993) (see Figure 4.1) which was shown alongside *Yielding Stone* (1992) (see Figure 4.2), a ball of plasticine the weight of the artist, at the Venice Biennale in 1993. Both these works were intentionally set up to resist spectacle in the historical and institutional context where they were exhibited: a global biennial at a time when the art world was dominated by large-scale installations and paintings. *Empty Shoe Box* and *Yielding Stone* seek to break with established narratives in art museums and exhibitions in a way that often involves the works' intentional or accidental obliteration.

In a conversation with Benjamin Buchloh, Gabriel Orozco noted: 'most of my actions are done with found objects – it is kind of a rule or a system to bring nothing

¹⁹⁵ Breton, 'First Manifesto of Surrealism', in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richar Seaver and Helen R. Lane, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 15.

¹⁹⁶ Jessica Morgan and Gabriel Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco: In Conversation', Tate Modern, London, 19 January, 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/gabriel-orozco-conversation>, last accessed 10 September, 2014.

¹⁹⁷ Gabriel Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh' (2004), in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, edited by Y. A. Bois, (Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 105-120, p. 107. This public conversation took place at the Sackler Museum at Harvard University, April 18, 2007, under the auspices of the M. Victor Leventritt Lectures on Latin American Art.

with me'.¹⁹⁸ In view of this practice, art historian Guy Brett argues that there are two historical threads in Orozco's work: the reconsideration of the category of sculpture, and the dissolution of the barrier between art and the everyday, although the two threads do not, paradoxically, exclude each other.¹⁹⁹ This chapter, then, examines Orozco's implementation of readymade and found objects in rethinking the category of sculpture, on the one hand, and in renegotiating the tension between art and everyday life, on the other. It does so in relation to the historical horizon established by Marcel Duchamp's readymade and André Breton's found object, which implement the idea of breaking with a definition of art as an autonomous institution (disassociated from the praxis of life) that has been a long-standing imperative among the European historical avant-gardes.²⁰⁰ More specifically, this chapter looks in detail at the two significant early works by Orozco *Empty Shoe Box* (1993) and *Yielding Stone* (1992), alongside his *Working Tables* (2000-5), *La DS* (1993), *Elevator* (1994), *Black Kites* (1997), and a selection of photographs of found objects.

In order to address the contradictions that arise from the objects' status as both everyday items and artworks, and seeking to maintain their unresolved status between banal objects and artworks, David Joselit reads Orozco's works through the Duchampian *rendez-vous*, as an encounter between the artist and the object.²⁰¹ I suggest, however, taking my cue from an analysis by Margaret Iversen, that this encounter is best encapsulated in André Breton's notion of the *chance encounter* with the found object, which further posits the latter's retrospective connection to the unruly and traumatic Lacanian Real. Iversen notes that the two terms, readymade and found object, are often run together and used interchangeably in critical literature and she seeks to 'drive a wedge between them'.²⁰² For Iversen, calling attention to aspects of the found object in contemporary art breaks the self-critical cycle perpetuated by the readymade and its legacies, which are more concerned 'with reflecting on and undermining the conventions and institutions of art'.²⁰³ By being situated in the space of the unconscious, Breton's found object opens up the art work to wider issues of life, death and sociality, and reveals the traumatic core of the modern subject.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁹⁹ Guy Brett, 'Between Work and World', in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 51.

²⁰⁰ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 255.

²⁰¹ David Joselit, 'Gabriel Orozco', *Artforum*, Vol. 39, No. 1, September 2000, p. 173.

²⁰² Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', p. 45.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 57.

Because of their subject matter, incorporating everyday objects in the context of art, the links with the readymade and the found object are entrenched in Orozco's works. Rather than maintaining, however, the sharp distinction between readymade and found object that Iversen puts forth, this chapter is responsive to the intersections, overlaps and encounters between them in the work of Orozco, a dialogue that is still active and potent in much object-based contemporary art. It is my view, moreover, that examining Orozco's pieces in relation to the historical horizon of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes does not reduce the works to mere repetitions of earlier art, as Bürger held in his criticism of the neo-avant-gardes of the 1950s which, he argues, institutionalized the early avant-gardes by reproducing their gestures and in effect defeating their purpose of eliminating the distance between art and life.²⁰⁵ On the contrary, situating Orozco's works in relation to Duchamp's readymade and Breton's found object brings into relief some of the perplexing qualities of these objects and the claims they make to being 'in reality'.²⁰⁶ Finally, I address the complexities that arise from reading Orozco's work in the light of aspects of surrealist practice given the artist's own vocal resistance to surrealism. In particular, I situate Orozco's position in relation to the historical reception of surrealism in Mexico.

Empty Shoe Box (1993)

The 53rd Venice Biennale in 1993 was the first major international exhibition where Orozco presented his work. Achille Bonito Oliva was the artistic director of the Biennale, with the main exhibition entitled *Cardinal Points of the Arts*. The event addressed issues of globalization and included art from art world's 'peripheral regions'. *Empty Shoe Box* (see Figure 4.3) was presented in the Aperto section of the Biennale, a much-anticipated event established in 1980 to showcase work by emerging artists. The Aperto '93 exhibition, entitled *Emergency/Emergenze*, was organised by Helena Kontova, who additionally invited thirteen emerging curators to select and present artists.²⁰⁷ Among them was Francesco Bonami, who in turn invited Orozco to participate in his exhibition entitled *The Mere Interchange*, alongside Matthew Barney, Maurizio Cattelan, Paul McCarthy, Charles Ray, Rudolf Stingel, and others. Bonami reports that during his presentation of Orozco's work to the main

²⁰⁵ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, p. 256.

²⁰⁶ Benjamin. H. D. Buchloh, Carrie Lambert Beatty, Megan Sullivan and Gabriel Orozco, 'To Make an Inner Time: a Conversation with Gabriel Orozco', *October* 130, Fall 2009, p. 190.

²⁰⁷ Other invited curators included: Jeffrey Deitch, Nicolas Bourriaud, Matthew Slotover etc.

curators committee for the final selection of artists, two questions were posed:

“‘Where is he from?’” someone asked. Mexico was my answer. “‘How many Mexicans do we have in the show?’” someone else asked. None, I said. “‘Invite him!’” was the response.²⁰⁸ The dialogue reflects the climate around the Biennale at that particular historical moment in the early 1990s, marked by the end of the Cold War, the opening of borders, and the increased mobility of people and products among the emerging global markets.

The work, as the title reveals, comprised an empty open shoebox placed directly on the floor of the exhibition space at *Le Corderie dell'Arsenale*, the former rope factory where Aperto was taking place.²⁰⁹ Orozco describes the long corridor and the way the booths were lined up one after another in a space that he found ‘too big and strange’, divided as it was into fragments.²¹⁰ During the installation, Bonami recalls that Orozco casually opened his knapsack, took out the empty shoebox and placed it on the stone floor of the space allocated to him.²¹¹ However, competition for space is not unusual in an exhibition like the Venice Biennale and thus ‘the idea that such an uneventful object was taking up so much real estate caused quite a commotion among many artists’ – raising objections from Charles Ray, for example, who was installing his *7 1/2 Ton Cube* (1990) for the same section of the Biennale.²¹² As a result, Bonami explained how he had to stand his ground to defend the legitimacy of this occupation of space, for, proportionally speaking, the shoebox ‘looked like a caravan in Monument Valley’.²¹³

In his account of the work on site, Orozco recalls: ‘it disappeared minutes before the exhibition began, carried off because people thought it was trash’.²¹⁴ Because the work kept disappearing, Bonami suggested that the box could be glued onto the floor but Orozco objected to the idea as he thought it would cause the object to be more easily ‘destroyed by its own resistance’.²¹⁵ Instead, the artist suggested, ‘it would be better to let it be kicked and for the container to take the blows and ricochet all over

²⁰⁸ Francesco Bonami, ‘The Early Adventures: Gabriel Orozco’, *Tate Etc.*, 21, 2011, p. 92.

²⁰⁹ Francesco Bonami, ‘Back in Five Minutes’, *Parkett* 48 (Spring 1996), p. 41.

²¹⁰ Jessica Morgan and Gabriel Orozco, ‘Gabriel Orozco: In Conversation’, Tate Modern, London, 19 January 2011. <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/gabriel-orozco-conversation>, last accessed 10 September, 2014.

²¹¹ Bonami, ‘Back in Five Minutes’, p. 41.

²¹² Bonami, ‘The Early Adventures: Gabriel Orozco’, p. 92.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Gabriel Orozco, ‘Lecture’ (2001), in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 88.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the place [...] this way it would be more likely to survive'.²¹⁶ Taking into consideration that visitors to this vast exhibition would probably see the work for just two or three minutes, Orozco explains that this almost imperceptible gesture was aimed at testing the potential for impact on visitors' memories and perception. He later claimed that such a subtle gesture 'can have a stronger impact on our memory than a skyscraper ever could'.²¹⁷ Moreover, the decision to present the shoebox came as a challenge to the grand gestures of the large-scale paintings and installations of the Eighties:

It was the climax of market speculation, and the objects were made to behave in a market of commodities. They were trying to impress with shininess, as products. Obviously Jeff Koons is one of the main characters of this type of art. I was skeptical of art like this, and still am. I also found it really tedious – stiff, dead, not intriguing. So my work started to do something different.²¹⁸

Indeed, *Empty Shoe Box* stood in stark contrast to the glossy, monumental works by Koons and others at the Aperto, such as Damien Hirst's *Mother and Child (Divided)* (1993) (the dissected halves of a cow and a calf in formaldehyde solution, displayed in glass vitrines) or Charles Ray's heavy solid steel cube painted with white automobile paint to make it appear lighter than it really was, effectively putting into question the condition of art as spectacle.²¹⁹ Orozco's 'slight' objects attracted substantial criticism because they appeared to undermine an internationally prestigious event: 'There has sometimes been the complaint (not least at the Venice Biennale in 1993) that Orozco has lowered the tone of a would-be important mixed show by submitting a slight piece of work', writes Guy Brett.²²⁰ Others, as Gabriel Kuri remarks, criticized the works for being opportunistic, demonstrating 'nothing more than a counterpoint to the magnitude of the exhibition by means of their own

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Gabriel Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco: Interview with Carmen Boullosa', *Bomb* 98, 2007.

²¹⁸ <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2862/gabriel-orozco>, last accessed 12 June, 2014.

²¹⁹ Orozco cited in Alastair Sooke, 'Gabriel Orozco: All the Right Moves', *The Telegraph* (30 December 2010), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8207377/Gabriel-Orozco-all-the-right-moves.html>, last accessed 12 June, 2014.

²²⁰ Charles Ray, 'Charles Ray' in *Aperto '93: Emergency/Emergenza*, edited by Helena Kontova and Achille Bonito Oliva, (Milan: Flash Art International/Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1993), p. 380.

²²⁰ Guy Brett, 'Between Work and World', in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 57.

circumspection and failing to resonate outside the event's structure of publicity and promotion'.²²¹

In addition to the commotion at the Biennale, Brett notes the annoyance *Empty Shoe Box* has often caused among museum directors who have despaired of insuring as an artwork a nondescript empty box that could easily get destroyed or discarded.²²² For Brett, however, 'paradoxically, the modest empty box can become in one's mind the opposite: an expansive figure of receptivity, openness, possibility, especially by contrast with some of the more laboured efforts around'.²²³ In another instance, Orozco stresses that *Empty Shoe Box* resonated with the function of the gallery space as container.²²⁴ Brett picks up these repercussions comparing the *Empty Shoe Box* to Yves Klein's (1928-1962) *Le Vide* (The Void), the famous 1958 exhibition where Klein showcased the empty gallery room at the Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, rendering the gallery itself as an exhibit. For Brett, Orozco's empty box 'can be seen as a small, portable void, enabling him to pose the same question as Klein within the large-scale survey exhibitions typical of today's Biennales and *documentas*'.²²⁵

The artist's own approach to the controversy caused by the shoebox highlights his strategic implementation of surprise and disappointment. Acknowledging that many people were shocked while others remained indifferent, Orozco observes that for some, the encounter with the box was a special moment in the midst of this massive exhibition.²²⁶ The artist writes in his notebook:

Truly new art tends to be disappointing, especially for the public that already has an idea of what art should be. This is because new art shatters the public, forcing it into a crisis based on the simple fact that there can be no public for an art that did not exist before.²²⁷

²²¹ Gabriel Kuri, 'General Orozco: By Way of Introduction', in *Gabriel Orozco*, edited by Alma Ruiz, (Los Angeles and Mexico City: MOCA and the Museo Rufino Tamayo, 2000), p. 48.

²²² Brett, 'Between Work and World', p. 57. Also in Guy Brett, 'Elasticity of Exhibition' in *Landmark Exhibitions* Issue, *Tate Papers*, Issue 12, 1 October 2009. <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/elasticity-exhibition>, last accessed 10 October 2014.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Orozco, 'Lecture', p. 88.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Orozco, 'To Make an Inner Time', p. 194.

²²⁷ Orozco, 'Lecture', p. 88.

In other words, this kind of art effectively ‘represents a new reality’ and while reality is banal, ‘it is also a space where something marvellous may happen’.²²⁸ This effect is also demonstrated in Orozco’s first solo exhibition at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York in 1994, that is, the year after the Biennale, where the artist showed four yogurt lids, each installed on one of the four walls of the gallery space (see Figure 4.4 and 4.5). Visitors entered the room only to find that there was hardly anything there to look at. After the initial disappointment, many left the room but when some of them returned, possibly ‘with a different consciousness, with a new attitude toward what was happening – which was banal, which was real – a new surprise could occur’.²²⁹ In Orozco’s words, ‘this art cannot be spectacular, since reality is not spectacular, except by accident or because the individual has decided that that reality is spectacular. Intentional spectacles are made for the expectant public and the artist is not working for that public’.²³⁰

It is worth noting that, somewhat ironically, it was this ‘slight’ work, the modest shoebox, which brought Orozco to international prominence. Buchloh considers the box as one of Orozco’s paradigmatic objects ‘that has gained – with hindsight all the more so – an epistemological authority approaching the status of Duchamp’s first, pure unadulterated readymade’.²³¹ Bonami also describes the box in retrospect as a ‘mythical gesture’ now belonging to ‘the trinity of conceptual art’ alongside Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) and Piero Manzoni’s *Merda d’artista* (1961).²³² Even if the work is now canonized as part of art history, it still triggers dispute, providing a key example of how an almost imperceptible work can disrupt the art establishment, challenge the limits of art discourse and question the assumptions that sustain it and the bureaucracies that constitute it as an institutional system.

As a mass-produced object inserted into the museum context, *Empty Shoe Box* undeniably evokes the Duchampian readymade, (I recall among other examples Duchamp’s early attempt at exhibiting a number of readymades in the hallway of the Bourgeois Gallery, New York, which went completely unnoticed, since the objects became entirely incorporated back into the realm of the everyday, by being displayed alongside other everyday objects). The box further resonates with Duchamp’s *Box-in-*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, ‘Sculpture as Recollection’, in *Gabriel Orozco*, edited by Y. A. Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Briony Fer, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), p. 177.

²³² Francesco Bonami, ‘The Early Adventures: Gabriel Orozco’, *Tate Etc.*, 21, 2011, pp. 92-95.

a-Valise (1935-41), *Green Box* (1934) and *White Box* (1967), albeit emptied of their contents. Indeed, Duchamp is an important figure for Orozco, and the readymade has been crucial in the reading of Orozco's work by numerous scholars and art critics.

In addition to the Duchampian echoes, it also brings to mind minimalist practices: Donald Judd's specific objects and other minimalist cubes and containers, perhaps as a kind of joke. Bonami, for example, noted that, in the Biennial, in contrast to Ray's steel cube, Orozco's modest shoebox turned into an ironic comment on minimal art.²³³ Orozco is aware of these connections and gives a new dimension to Judd's specific objects, when he says about the box that 'also, and most of all, it is what it is. It's really just a shoe box on the floor, which many people didn't even see it when it was shown, and which was kicked around'.²³⁴ By contrast to minimalist objects that are fabricated according to the artist's specifications, his description highlights the specificity of the work as a mass-produced readymade object and as industrial waste.

Benjamin Buchloh who has written extensively on Orozco and has been his long-term interlocutor has repeatedly attempted to situate the artist's work within different sculptural traditions of the twentieth century, focusing on different aspects of his practice. In 'Sculpture Between Nation-state and Global Commodity Production', Buchloh locates Orozco's work within a historical framework of sculpture that spans the one hundred years from the early twentieth to the early twenty-first century, ranging from Brancusi's sculpture and Duchamp's readymade in the 1910s, to Conceptual Art, Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, and Arte Povera.²³⁵ Guy Brett further relates Orozco's practice to Latin American art, particularly the Argentinian artist Alberto Greco's *Vivo Ditto* (1962) and Hélio Oiticica's *Bólides* (1964-64).²³⁶ Indeed, *Empty Shoe Box* is a work rich in art historical reverberations, 'infinitely knowing, art-historically speaking', as T.J. Clark has noted.²³⁷ However, these extensive accounts fail to link the work to Breton's found object, a link which would further connect with Orozco's investigation of reality.

²³³ Francesco Bonami, 'Back in Five Minutes', *Parkett* 48 (Spring 1996), p. 42.

²³⁴ Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco in conversation with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh' (2004) in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 108.

²³⁵ Benjamin. H. D. Buchloh, 'Sculpture Between Nation-state and Global Commodity Production', in *Gabriel Orozco*, edited by A. Temkin, (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), pp. 34-43.

²³⁶ Brett, 'Between Work and World', p. 53.

²³⁷ T.J. Clark, 'At Tate Modern' *London Review of Books*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2011, p. 32.

Yielding Stone (1992)

... a fact [*fait*] is always made up of [*fait de*] discourse. No one has ever seen a received fact. That is not a fact. It's a lump, something you bump into, all the things that can be said about something that is not already discursively articulated.²³⁸ — Jacques Lacan

At the 1993 Biennale, the shoebox was displayed alongside Orozco's *Yielding Stone* (1992), a lump of plasticine the same weight as the artist, rolled into a roughly spherical shape and placed on the floor of the Arsenale. Having picked up debris and bearing visible traces of its trajectory, the plasticine ball was situated on the floor between two gigantic brick pillars. Bonami recounts that the work was handled roughly by visitors to the exhibition, even being stabbed with a plastic fork.²³⁹ He moreover explains that both *Yielding Stone* and *Empty Shoe Box* were born to be destroyed, 'abused without pity', discarded, thrown away.²⁴⁰ Bonami finally argues that in their encounter *Empty Shoe Box* and *Yielding Stone* bring together the two most common techniques of classical sculpture, by subtracting in one work, and adding in the other.²⁴¹

The bulk of plasticine used for *Yielding Stone* was a leftover from the New York studio of Jimmie Durham, a friend and occasional collaborator of Orozco. Orozco started working with the material for a different project in 1992, but as a result of handling and modelling it the plasticine soon became dirty, grey and amorphous. Eventually, Orozco came to terms with the predicament of the material, he says: 'I accepted it somehow and it was liberating'.²⁴² The artist continues:

That is why it interests me: it is a material in a state of constant mutability, every time that it is touched it changes, it becomes 'upset'. So, rather than modeling its form, it is a question of inducing it, now irredeemably. It will change with time. Like stones worn away by a river. Besides, being a greasy, sticky substance it easily 'gets dirty', covered with dust and debris.²⁴³

²³⁸ Jacques Lacan, *My Teaching*, translated by David Macey, (London: Verso, 2008), p. 72.

²³⁹ Bonami, 'Back in Five Minutes', *Parkett* 48 (Spring), 1996, p. 41.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁴² Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh', p. 113.

²⁴³ From a proposal by Orozco for the exhibition *In Transit* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. Work first shown at Monterey, Mexico. Quoted in Jessica Morgan (ed.), *Gabriel Orozco*, (London: Tate, 2011), p. 22.

Brett has compared *Yielding Stone* to Alberto Giacometti's *Object to be Thrown Away* (1931), 'a wooden plane with two protuberances', from his set of *Disagreeable Objects*, 'a sort of ugly thing that would not fit or function within established, expected protocols'.²⁴⁴ Giacometti said about this sculpture, foregoing a typically formalist approach for an attitude that spoke to his living experience and psychology, that, 'it was no longer the exterior form of things which interested me but rather what I felt in my own life... I didn't want to create a figure which looked realistic on the outside, but wanted to experience life and to create only those forms that really affected me, or that I desired'.²⁴⁵ Indeed, *Yielding Stone* is also this kind of 'disagreeable', outcast object that absorbs dust and dirt, and fails to set into a permanent form because of its oily, malleable substance in contrast to the hard and shiny surfaces of more spectacular sculpture. Orozco, however, remarks that despite it being a lump of plasticine the weight of the artist thus carrying personal connotations, 'its function is to erase identity, to facilitate the artist to disappear as a person as an anecdote'.²⁴⁶

Orozco identifies two different tendencies in the use of everyday objects in art during the early 1990s, which he combines in his work: one is the object as 'by-product of an action in life', the other, an everyday object inserted into the context of the art museum or gallery in the tradition of the readymade.²⁴⁷ As a by-product, *Yielding Stone* may recall works such as Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Lump* (1969) in that they are both residues of industrial material turned into art by the choice of the artist (see Figure 4.6). *Asphalt Lump* is a piece of refuse from the production of steel, and as such it is presented as residual yet hardened matter on the floor of the gallery or the museum. Robert Hobbs describes Smithson's works as 'the residue of an activity', and inscribes them in the tradition of artworks that incorporate elements from everyday life, beginning with Picasso's use of newspapers as part of his painting collages.²⁴⁸ Hobbs notes that this operation served to support the tendency among many American artists since the 1950s to exhibit with their works a literalism

²⁴⁴ Brett, 'Between Work and World', p. 54.

²⁴⁵ Alberto Giacometti, letter to Pierre Matisse, 1947, quoted in *Alberto Giacometti 1901-1966*, exhibition catalogue (Vienna: Kunsthalle; Edinburgh: Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art; London Royal Academy of the Arts, 1996), p. 146. Quoted in Brett, 'Between Work and World', p. 54.

²⁴⁶ Orozco, 'Conversations with Contemporary Artists: Gabriel Orozco', with Glenn D. Lowry (moderator), 30 January 2008, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York.

<http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/5/242>, last accessed 15 Sept. 2014.

²⁴⁷ Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews*, Vol. 1, (Edizioni Charta, 2009) p. 654.

²⁴⁸ Robert Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 29-30.

indicating their 'distrust of a subject that is not an inherent component of the materials manifesting it'.²⁴⁹ For these artists, including Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Morris, Donald Judd, and Carl Andre among others, Hobbs explains that, 'matter and meanings should not be an overlay [...]; if they are, the work will be an illustration'.²⁵⁰ While such works do not altogether exclude metaphorical meaning, it is important that they prescribe meaning as an inherent part of their material support.²⁵¹

Hobbs further writes that with *Asphalt Lump*, Smithson 'allows the unaltered material itself to connote gravity and inertness'.²⁵² Orozco shares with artists whose works have been inscribed in the cannon of Minimalism and Post-Minimalism a preference for the literal, factual qualities of the found objects and materials he incorporates in his work. Aspects of his works are grounded in the tradition of the literal object, articulated with minimalism and Donald Judd's specific object. The Mexican artist Gabriel Kuri, who participated in weekly workshops held in Orozco's studio in Mexico City, notes that, Orozco's artistic language is 'abstract and phenomenological'.²⁵³ By eliminating narrative possibilities, while seeking to 'reduce aspects of the work to its essential statement', the artist employs a realist language in the sense that he strives to 'develop a voice that allows things to speak for themselves, and that makes use of a given phenomenon's natural form of expression instead of imposing a vernacular dialectic upon it'.²⁵⁴ As mentioned previously in my discussion of *Empty Shoe Box*, Orozco often stresses this literal aspect, with statements, for example, that above all, the box 'is what it is ... just a shoe box on the floor'.²⁵⁵

The same emphasis on the factual, literal quality of the material object is placed on *Yielding Stone* when the artist explains that he was interested in plasticine because of its 'constant mutability', and that he used this quality 'to shape its appearance: camouflage, not of stone into sculpture, but of sculpture into stone; modeling a rock which is not a rock, nor a sculpture, but a ball of plasticine, dirty'.²⁵⁶ Besides the

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Kuri, 'General Orozco: By Way of Introduction', p. 41.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh', p. 108.

²⁵⁶ Orozco quoted in Morgan, *Gabriel Orozco* (2011), p. 22.

tautological aspect of the work, its literal status as a plasticine ball, however, Orozco articulates with this statement his awareness of the numerous metaphorical possibilities and transmutations between different forms and registers, denoting in turns natural object, sculptural material, industrial matter, readymade, and sculptural object.

Unlike Smithson's *Asphalt Lump* which features a solidified inert matter and has direct connotations to industry, Orozco's *Yielding Stone* made out of plasticine, is a rather muted, receptive material that is intermediary in sculptural process, and which keeps changing over time as it incorporates the anonymous traces of the visitors' clandestine touches.²⁵⁷ As such, for Orozco, the work is not a relic of an action that happened in the past, but it is still happening in the gallery or museum; its malleability, moreover, makes 'what happened to it in the museum as real as what happened to it in the street'.²⁵⁸

Ann Temkin says of the *Yielding Stone* that by making it receptive, Orozco 'figuratively emptied it, creating an inside-out vessel'.²⁵⁹ Indeed, like *Empty Shoe Box*, Orozco also conceives of *Yielding Stone* as a container, because it incorporates and contains in its body the material traces from its encounters in the street, as well as traces such as fingerprints from the visitors in the museum.²⁶⁰ In carrying these traces the work 'keeps on happening in the present; it has a natural subsequent activity; it contains time'.²⁶¹ This process becomes even more visible in another version of the plasticine ball titled *Lost Line* (1993-96) which incorporates a cotton string. The implosion of the cotton thread into the body of the plasticine makes tangible the idea of sculpture not as a monumental unchanging presence but as ongoing, ever-changing process.

Resonances of the container, for which the *Empty Shoe Box* can be considered as a prototype, are found throughout Orozco's entire oeuvre. The idea of the container, resonates formally as well as conceptually with works such as: *Recaptured Nature* (1991), *La DS* (1993), *Pinched Ball* (1993), *Elevator* (1994), and *Black Kites* (1997).

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Orozco, 'Lecture', p. 92.

²⁵⁹ Ann Temkin, 'Afterword' in *Photogravity*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1999), p. 173.

²⁶⁰ Gabriel Orozco, 'Conversations with Contemporary Artists: Gabriel Orozco', Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2008 <http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/5/videos-adult-programs>, last accessed 16 June, 2014.

²⁶¹ Temkin, 'Afterword' in *Photogravity*, p. 173.

As an extension of his many experiments with objects he finds in the street, *Recaptured Nature* features the worn out inner tube of a trailer-wheel made of vulcanized rubber (see Figure 4.7). The artist manipulated the item by cutting it down the middle, opening it up, then cutting two circular shapes from another rubber tube and welding them together at a tire repair shop to form the shape of an inflatable ball. In the final work, by reconstructing the initial object, the artist 'recaptured' in a sense the original function of the inner tube.²⁶²

Following this example of reconstructing a disused object, while 'restoring its *raison d'être* and the original use of its material', a couple of years later Orozco created two of his most iconic works: the *Elevator* and *La DS*. For the *Elevator* (1994) (see Figure 4.8), which was completed one year after he showed *Empty Shoe Box* in Venice, and was made for an exhibition at The Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago, the artist managed to acquire a used elevator cabin with the request to have it extracted intact from a building that was being demolished. After obtaining the cabin, Orozco had it cut horizontally and reassembled to his height.²⁶³ The artist explains that by displaying the elevator at the exhibition space, the relation between the interior and exterior of the object became somehow reversed because, 'the interior of an elevator is its exterior, and when we have a 'naked' elevator outside a building, the external part of the elevator is visible and we notice ... that interior space of three-dimensional objects that would normally be inside and that when you open it up emerges from obscurity'.²⁶⁴

La DS (1993), one of Orozco's most spectacular works, is another reconstruction, this time of an iconic French car, the 1950s Citroën DS (see Figure 4.9). For this work, the artist modified the car by having it split vertically along its length, removing a portion from the middle of the car, and then putting the remaining parts together again to generate a new shape. Even though part of the body of the car is missing, it is still present, 'in our bodily-cultural memory of the object'.²⁶⁵ Orozco here combines once more his concerns with bodily presence, memory or absence, with the readymade industrial object, in this case a cultural symbol and an example of design utopia. Buchloh remarks that by cutting through the *déesse* (which translates

²⁶² Orozco, 'Lecture', pp. 86-87.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin Buchloh' (2004) in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 111.

from French as 'goddess'), the artist not only enacts 'a classical sculptural procedure onto the body of the commercially designed object', but with this destructive gesture and by then putting together the two halves he is also rendering the iconic object as a 'carcass of promises', revealing 'the inherent betrayal of desire of all design culture'.²⁶⁶

In his notebooks, Orozco compares the inversion between interior and exterior which many of his sculptures undergo with the turning inside out of sculpture, the idea of 'sculpture as a fruit': 'I like to think of sculpture as a fruit, for me, sculpture is not something that is hollow inside. Like a fruit, what it is inside is related to what is outside. The fruit is a vehicle, it's an important vehicle for the survival of the plant. The colour is the attraction, the structure of the fruit is how I like to think about sculpture: the idea of the centre of seeds, the flesh growing, flowing, the bubble, and then at the end you have the skin. La DS can be looked at like a fruit'.²⁶⁷ Elsewhere, he compares this normally obscure space, for example the exterior of the elevator cabin, with the equally concealed space that rests between the sculpture and its base, accumulating dust.²⁶⁸ Iversen takes up Orozco's endeavor with these inverted 'non-sculptures' in her discussion of a sketch the artist made in his notebooks where,

A slice of clay is removed from the base of a traditionally conceived sculpture. The sculpture is thrown away and the slice of clay spread out on the ground and flipped over so we can see the imprint of this opened-out, obliterated vanishing point. We are not far from Carl Andre's floor pieces and his gnomonic remark 'A thing is a hole in a thing it is not', which points toward an idea of sculpture as a rupture in the continuum of space.²⁶⁹

Iversen further remarks that this sketch might be related to the early stages of what was to become *Yielding Stone*.²⁷⁰ All these works, *Yielding Stone*, *Empty Shoe Box*, *Elevator*, play with notions of container and void, further reflecting upon the idea of sculpture as a rupture in the continuity of space.²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Buchloh, 'Gabriel Orozco: The Sculpture of Everyday Life' (1996) in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 44.

²⁶⁷ Orozco quoted in Morgan, *Gabriel Orozco* (2011), p. 33.

²⁶⁸ Orozco, 'Lecture', p. 97.

²⁶⁹ Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', p. 54.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ Orozco, 'Lecture', p. 88.

In addition to these examples, art historian Briony Fer describes Orozco's *Working Tables* (since 1996) (see Figure 4.10) where he displays found objects, small sculptures and models, arranged on the surface of a working table 'unlike sculpture and more like tools on a workshop bench', as 'a big container holding a lot of diverse objects', like a toolbox.²⁷² At the same time, on several occasions Orozco uses the idea of the box in order to support or clarify his conceptual framework, when, for example, he talks about photography, or about the body as a containers, bringing to the fore the key notions of emptiness and receptivity.

Orozco rejects the idea of the shoebox as a readymade, emphasizing instead its phenomenological dimension, he says: 'It related to the emptiness of space, which I don't think is true of readymades'.²⁷³ Works such as *Empty Shoe Box*, *Yielding Stone* and *Elevator*, however, bring together the phenomenological space of Minimalist sculpture and the histories of the readymade object. In 'Gabriel Orozco: The Sculpture of Everyday Life' (1996), Buchloh discusses this double function of Orozco's work in the context of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964) (see Figure 4.11) which, he argues, addresses two opposing sculptural traditions. Firstly, what the author calls the *Reductivist*, geometrical or stereometrical paradigm and Minimalism's rediscovery of it, which in *Brillo Box* 'appears as one that is already fused with the structural logic of an industrially produced container'. Secondly, the readymade, the industrial box, 'converted into a design/ sign that challenges the myth of sculpture's seemingly guaranteed conditions of weight, mass, and corporeal tangibility altogether'.²⁷⁴ Importantly, for Buchloh, Orozco's work 'provides an exacting account of the fragile conditions of object experience and sculpture's tenuous existence within them'.²⁷⁵ Orozco thus brings together the tradition of the readymade as a mass-produced industrial object relocated in the exhibition space and its function as cultural sign, with the phenomenological experience of Minimalism manifest in the relation between the body of the spectator and the artwork in the exhibition space. More specifically, he revisits the industrial minimalist container in the form of the found object, the defunct or obsolete object, the industrial waste.

²⁷² Briony Fer, 'Part objects' in *Part Object Part Sculpture*, Helen Molesworth (ed.), *Part object, Part sculpture* (Columbus: Philadelphia : Wexner Center for the Arts, 2005), p. 223.

²⁷³ Quoted in Jessica Morgan (ed.), *Gabriel Orozco*, (London: Tate, 2011), p. 26.

²⁷⁴ Buchloh, 'Gabriel Orozco: The Sculpture of Everyday Life' (1996), in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 33.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.35.

With works such as *Elevator* and *La DS*, Orozco literally opens up sculpture and places the body to inhabit it from within, inverting the traditional perspective of the visitor who looks at an object situated vis-à-vis himself or herself in the exhibition space. In these works, however, the experience of sculpture as a container and as a hole is further punctuated by another void, a missing part. In both the *Elevator* and *La DS*, the missing volume that has been cut away and removed from these objects is retained in the memory of the spectator that occupies that familiar space. The idea of sculpture as a container and a hole thus figures both formally and conceptually and becomes manifest on different levels in the works, involving the experience of the physical body in a space whose absence is inscribed in the memory of the body that inhabits it.

Black Kites (1997) (see Figure 4.12), which was initially titled *Skulpture*, consists of graphite geometrical drawings on human skull, and it was first shown in 1997 in *Documenta X*. Orozco bought the skull from a store called Evolution in Soho New York.²⁷⁶ Previously Orozco had tried drawing on a monkey skull. The artist writes in his notebook about *Black Kites*: 'Topography of the cranium. Entering the eyes. Losing itself. Portrait of a space. ... A drawing of nothingness. The volume of No. Empty receptacle. Like a shoebox. The gaze as space. Receiving. The gaze as space that receives. As receptacle. To spend time with nothingness. To waste time ... Pencil as scalpel. Skulpture. With the drawing we flatten the object. Volume made graphic. Object made image.'²⁷⁷ With these working notes it becomes clear that even while engaging with this technical, geometric drawing his concerns remain fundamentally sculptural – it is as if he explores this space, the protruding volumes of the skull, and its cavities, such as the deep space of the eyes. It took the artist six months to make this drawing, and the personal and traumatic significance of the work is revealed by the fact that when he started making it Orozco had been at the hospital because his lung had collapsed, followed by a long period of convalescence, which resonates with the very lack implied by death with the skull.

The Found Object

As I mentioned previously in the chapter on the surrealist object, in his book *Mad Love* (*L'Amour fou*, 1937), André Breton describes in detail his encounter with two

²⁷⁶ Molly Nesbit, 'The Tempest' (2000), in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 65.

²⁷⁷ Orozco in Temkin, *Photogravity*, p. 148.

found objects while visiting the Saint-Ouen flea market on the outskirts of Paris with his friend Alberto Giacometti. There, he bought a curious wooden spoon carved by a peasant whose handle was supported by a small, carved shoe. Breton subsequently connects this unique and unusual object to a certain preexisting desire of his:

Some months earlier inspired by a fragment of a *waking sentence*, 'the Cinderella ash-tray' and the temptation I had for a long time to put into circulation some oneiric and para-oneiric objects, I had asked Giacometti to sculpt for me, according to his own caprice, a little slipper which was to be in principle Cinderella's lost slipper.²⁷⁸

Breton wished to have this object cast in grey glass but Giacometti never realized the project and Breton reports that he felt the pressing *lack* of this slipper. He further says that even though the flea market wooden spoon is different in all points from what he had planned, its beauty comes precisely from this lack of resemblance between the desired object and the found object. Breton says:

Similarly, I once desired to have a very special object constructed, corresponding to some poetic fantasy. I more or less foresaw what form this object would take and of what material it would be made. I then happened to discover this object already made, unique, no doubt, of its kind; there would be no mistaking it, even though it differed in all points from what I had planned. Its extreme simplicity ... In such a case as this, one's pleasure is always partly accounted for by the lack of resemblance between the desired object and the *discovery*. ... it takes all the beauty that I see in it from what it is *not*. In it alone is it given us to recognize the marvelous precipitate of desire. ... power to enlarge the universe, to do away with a part of its opacity ... everyday life abounds with tiny discoveries of this kind...²⁷⁹

Breton is thus thrilled to find 'the marvelous slipper potential in the modest spoon'.²⁸⁰

Orozco's modest shoebox operates in a similar way by opening up an expansive space of possibility, far from the dominant forms of spectacle. Interestingly, the shoe has gone missing from the shoebox in Orozco's story, further invoking ideas of loss and desire. In addition to these allusions, the story of the origin of the shoebox as the

²⁷⁸ André Breton, *Mad Love*, translated by Mary Ann Caws. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1987, p. 33.

²⁷⁹ Breton, 'Beauty Will Be Convulsive', in *What is Surrealism?*, p.42. Also in *Mad Love*, p. 13.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

container of the artist's notes and working objects, as well as the common use of shoeboxes for storing photos, letters and other personal memorabilia, also point to ideas of loss, memory and desire that counterbalance the work's status as a readymade, mass-produced object.

During the visit at the Saint-Ouen flea market by Breton and Giacometti, where Breton found the wooden spoon, Giacometti was also drawn to an unusual object, a metal mask whose origin or function they could not work out, which he finally bought. In *Mad Love*, Breton contemplates the purpose of such objects found by chance and the nature of the subject's encounter with them. He suggests that they most poignantly present a solution to a certain problem faced by the subject, while stressing their concrete, material presence. They are objects 'which imposed with themselves this abnormally prolonged sensorial contact', he writes.²⁸¹ He then goes on to explain that the mask, for example, helped free Giacometti from a certain aesthetic dilemma. It unblocked his creativity with regards to a sculpture of a female figure he was working on at the time (Invisible Object (plaster, 1934), 'The head, particularly had resisted integration with the rest of the work, and it was to this problem that the mask seemed to address itself'.²⁸²

In her account of Breton's carved wooden spoon, the *Cinderella-ashtray* (*Cendrillion-cendrier*), in 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', Iversen observes:

If the reflection in the mirror is the prototype of all images of the ego, then this contradictory, ungraspable, fleeting object is the prototype for an image of the castrated, barred, split, in short, anamorphic subject. This subject, called punningly by Lacan *le sujet troué* (the subject full of holes), uses an *objet trouvé* (a found object) to figure both the hole and the bit that's missing.²⁸³

The author brings into relief the difference between the *chance encounter* with the found object (both lost and found, as she claims) and the pre-arranged *rendez-vous* with the Duchampian readymade, stressing the 'singular or irreplaceable' character of the former and the 'essentially indifferent, multiple and mass-produced' nature of the latter. Iversen writes: 'Throughout his career, Lacan insisted that there was something about the subject not captured in the articulations of language or in a series of

²⁸¹ Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 30.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁸³ Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', pp. 44-57.

imaginary captivations... "There is, in effect, something radically unassimilable to the signifier. It's quite simply the subject's singular existence"²⁸⁴.

Indeed, Breton's found wooden spoon features an odd, unique, and rather indecipherable object, which is grounded in surrealism's polemic against modernist functionalism and instrumental reason. Orozco's objects, on one hand, feature as industrial waste and refuse with the aim to propose a critique of spectacle. Yet as I already mentioned with regards to the shoebox, for example, it is *both* a mass produced object (readymade) *and* has something of the psychic make-up of the found object because of the specific links to the artist and the more general associations of the common shoebox as storage for personal memorabilia. In other words, there are latent psychic associations that inscribe the personal content on the object, bringing it to bear upon a mass-produced industrial object such as the easily dispensable shoebox.

As I mentioned earlier in the description of Orozco's *Empty Shoe Box* when it was shown at the *Venice Biennale* (1993), the empty box was thrown away minutes before the exhibition began because people thought it was trash. This caused the artist to come up with the idea of using replacements as an important artistic technique.²⁸⁵ The precarious existence of the box as artwork in the exhibition space, and Orozco's act of constantly replacing it thus pulling it back again and bringing it to visibility, reminiscent of Sigmund Freud's little object in *fort-da* perhaps an early version of Lacan's *objet a*, shows something about the limits of representation therein. In effect, as Iversen duly notes, Orozco's works 'show us the unrepresentable threshold itself: the next-to-nothing.'²⁸⁶

'Photography as a hole'

In the course of writing this chapter, it became apparent that there is a strong relation in Orozco's works, between the material object and its photographic documentation. In fact, many of Orozco's objects often manifest only in their photographic reproductions. At other times, they feature both as three-dimensional objects and as photographs. As I have noted above, Orozco's work consists largely of objects that are found or readymade. Importantly, he often uses photography to document these

²⁸⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses, Seminar Book III*, 1955-56, p. 50, quoted in a footnote Margaret Iversen 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', *Art Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer, 2004), p. 50.

²⁸⁵ Orozco, 'Lecture', p. 88.

²⁸⁶ Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', p. 55.

'lucky finds' during his walking expeditions in the city. However, even though he works in a variety of media, including sculpture, painting and photography, he insists in identifying himself as a sculptor. Indeed, in a conversation with Buchloh, Orozco asserts: 'I'm a sculptor, I'm into gravity and I perceive the world in volumes, even though I use photography, drawing, or painting'.²⁸⁷ It comes as no surprise then, that he describes his photographic practice in spatial terms, as a container, as a shoebox: 'I like the idea of the photograph as a shoebox in which you keep and transport objects or memorable events in your life'.²⁸⁸

In the same conversation with Buchloh, Orozco resists the art historian's tendency to look at his photographs in line with conceptual art strategies. When Buchloh suggests that the box, which Orozco likens to photography, denotes the archive, the artist says: 'It is not exactly an archive. It is a real object and a container'.²⁸⁹ A few years later, Orozco elaborates his position, claiming that in conceptual art the photograph is treated like a relic of an action that happened in the past; it ends up in the museum, like the 'leftovers of a party'.²⁹⁰ (Here, he voices a similar concern as with *Yielding Stone* and his desire for the work to keep on happening in the museum space). In addition to his view of photography as a container, Orozco describes 'photography as a hole'.²⁹¹ He also claims that his work aims to 'reestablish or to develop a relationship with reality - the real, whatever it is'.²⁹² Orozco wishes to maintain something of that initial experience in his photographs. In an interview with Briony Fer, he says: 'I think the experience has to be a real one, interacting with a phenomenon, not a representation of one [...] it is more about making something present, that inevitably, the only way to see something is through a photograph'.²⁹³

The catalogue accompanying Orozco's first exhibition that showed exclusively his photographs at the Hirschhorn Museum in 2004, opens with a photograph of the shoebox taken on the terrace of the artist's New York apartment. It shows the empty

²⁸⁷ 'Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin Buchloh' (2004) in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 120.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁹⁰ Briony Fer and Orozco, 'Crazy about Saturn: Gabriel Orozco Interviewed by Briony Fer' (2006), in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 159.

²⁹¹ Temkin, *Photogravity*, p. 56.

²⁹² 'Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin Buchloh' (2004) in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 106.

²⁹³ Fer and Orozco, 'Crazy about Saturn', in October Files, 2009, p. 160.

box with its lid placed at the bottom like a base resting on the snowy ground. It is shot from a neutral angle in the typically snapshot aesthetic of much conceptual photography. The selection of this photograph, to open the catalogue for an exhibition dedicated exclusively to Orozco's photographs, is significant in understanding the artist's conception of photography for which the box is a metaphor.

Among these photographs, *Pinched Ball* (1993) depicts a deflated soccer ball, an object kicked around in the streets and then abandoned (see Figure 4.13). Brett notes that its beauty 'lies in its light touch, its marriage of sculptural reference and psychic make-up'.²⁹⁴ The cavity of the ball, which has been photographed on the asphalt of the street, contains water probably from rain reflecting the sky above, turning the object into yet another container. In another photograph, entitled *Island within an Island* (1994) (see Figure 4.14), a small construction of found planks and sticks of wood and other detritus material from the street placed next to a puddle of water, are spontaneously made to mimic in miniature the spectacular Manhattan skyline with the corporate architecture lurking behind it.

The modern city is the privileged site of the chance encounter in surrealism.²⁹⁵ Orozco also often finds his objects in the streets and outskirts of cities, which he believes to be rich in such encounters: 'What I had learned in art school was inadequate when I began to take an interest in what was all around me, walking down the street, experimenting with objects I would find, as well as picking things up and taking them into the studio to transform them'.²⁹⁶ At times, rather than taking the object in the studio, the artist uses film or photography to record his interactions in the street. Describing his films, comprised of unedited sequences of things he encounters in the streets, Orozco admits there may be similarities with John Cage's recordings, as well as with surrealist automatic writing. However, he is careful to distinguish his work from these practices because they are about 'losing control', giving up artistic agency, while his work entails 'focusing on concentration and intention'.²⁹⁷ As he puts it, 'the flow of images in my work is extremely controlled. I trace certain intentions with the camera, and then suddenly the tension between my intentions and

²⁹⁴ Guy Brett, 'Between Work and World: Gabriel Orozco' (1998), in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, pp. 51-58, p. 54

²⁹⁵ See André Breton's *Nadja* (1928) and *Mad Love* (1937).

²⁹⁶ Orozco, 'Lecture', p. 85.

²⁹⁷ Gabriel Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco Talks About his Recent Films', *Artforum* New York, June 1998, p. 115.

reality becomes too great and the whole thing breaks down'.²⁹⁸ Rather than a simplified conception of surrealist automatism and the corresponding strategy of the chance encounter as 'losing control', it is exactly this tension between intention and chance, the discrepancy between the imagined and the found object demonstrated in Breton's story of the found wooden spoon that finds expression in Orozco's work.

Molly Nesbit discusses Orozco's ambivalence in his statements about chance and intentionality by comparing the artist's interview with Daniel Birnbaum from which the above comment about chance and automatism is taken, with the interview Orozco gave to Daniel Pinchbeck in 1998.²⁹⁹ In apparent contrast to the artist's comment to Birnbaum that, as opposed to Cage and to surrealist automatism, his work focuses on 'concentration and intention', Orozco relays to Pinchbeck the constitutive role of the accidental in his work: 'I am interested in the accidental, and I don't think stability anyway is a constant. What is really happening is always accident, accident, accident - that is the constant... I am really open about what I am looking for - you have to trust this very subconscious thing, you get attracted to something and you don't know why'.³⁰⁰

The apparent disparity identified in Orozco's discussion of intentionality and chance is fundamental to the found object. It is exactly these tensions that become negotiated with Breton's concept of the chance encounter (elsewhere he discusses it as 'objective chance'), which can be seen to introduce a 'less-determined exploration of the relations between subject and object'.³⁰¹ Breton considers the purpose of the found object and argues that it poignantly presents a solution to a certain problem faced by the subject. He describes the encounter with these objects as follows: 'it is as if I had been lost and they had come to give me some news about myself'.³⁰² The found object thus becomes a *sign* of the subject's desire and is inextricably linked to the formation of subjectivity; in accordance to 'this very subconscious thing' that

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Molly Nesbit, 'The Tempest' (2000), in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009. 'A thousand words: Gabriel Orozco talks about his recent films' *Artforum* 36, no. 10 (summer 1998), p. 115 (contiguity, contingency, the unconscious): Footnote 52. Orozco's interview to Daniel Pinchbeck for the *Art Newspaper* 87 (December 1998).

³⁰⁰ Orozco interview to Daniel Pinchbeck for the *Art Newspaper* 87 (December 1998)

³⁰¹ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 107. According to Harris, this less deterministic strategy employed by Breton, was among the principal reasons that caused a break between Breton and other surrealists, including Dalí, Tzara, and Caillois, who perceived this strategy as too passive and wished to put forth "a synthetic mode of thought capable of a more active and interventionist relation to the real."

³⁰² Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 23.

Orozco invokes in the description of his working method that incorporates chance and accident.

The Lacanian Real

In one of his notebooks, Orozco quotes Slavoj Žižek's discussion of Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915).³⁰³

The 'reality' (white background surface, the 'liberated nothingness,' the open space in which objects can appear) obtains its consistency only by means of the 'black hole' in its center (the Lacanian *Thing* that gives body to the substance of enjoyment) i.e. by the exclusion of the real, by the change of the status of the real into that of a central lack.³⁰⁴ (original emphasis)

In formulating the psychoanalytic concept of the *objet petit a*, (formerly the Lacanian *Thing*), it has been convincingly argued by Iversen that Lacan had Breton's found object in mind.³⁰⁵ And vice-versa, given this relation, the Lacanian *objet petit a*, as that which partakes of the Real, can tell us something in retrospect about the found object. It becomes apparent from Orozco's notebook citation, that the idea of lack that constitutes Breton's found objects, and which retrospectively resonates with the *objet petit a* and the Lacanian Real, is crucial for Orozco, who often claims that he works 'in reality.'³⁰⁶

David Joselit considers the problems of this claim from an art historical perspective, informed on the one hand by the readymade, and on the other by (Lacanian) psychoanalytic theory. He argues that, first, in the case of the readymade, there is a danger of simplistically collapsing art into life, and vice-versa.³⁰⁷ Secondly, in relation to psychoanalytic theory, Orozco's remark that he works in reality 'evokes shades of the Lacanian "real," giving rise to a vexing contradiction': how can the Lacanian Real, often understood as that which lies outside representation, be

³⁰³ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, (Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 19. An excerpt from Žižek's essay was reproduced in the *Aperto 93* exhibition catalogue: Slavoj Žižek, 'Violations of the Fantasy Space', in *Aperto '93: Emergency/Emergenza*, edited by Helena Kontova and Achille Bonito Oliva, (Milan: Flash Art International/Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1993).

³⁰⁴ From Orozco's notebooks, cited in Ann Temkin, *Photogravity*, p. 37.

³⁰⁵ Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007.

³⁰⁶ Joselit, 'Gabriel Orozco', p. 173.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

incorporated into a system of representation? That is, 'how can reality be incorporated as an artwork?' Joselit writes: 'From both art-historical and poststructuralist perspectives, [...] working in reality calls forth "impossible objects". Such things must simultaneously emerge as representations and fall back into the unmediated condition that is "reality"'.³⁰⁸ In other words, as Žižek asks in relation to the Real defined as lack: 'How can nothing beget something?'.³⁰⁹

To address this problem, Joselit reads Orozco's objects through the Duchampian *rendez-vous*, an encounter between the artist and the object, which can nevertheless be circumvented by all sorts of delays and where, he suggests, 'the stain of reality remains pungent'.³¹⁰ By cultivating the dimension of the readymade as an encounter, according to Orozco's claims that these objects are 'either the provocation or the residue of an event,' Joselit proposes that Orozco's works reach beyond issues of 'aesthetic validation conferred on ordinary commodities'.³¹¹ Indeed, aspects of the *rendez-vous* are present in *Yielding Stone*, for example, where the artist set a date and time for himself to roll the ball around the streets, as per Orozco's set instructions that the work 'will be constructed and rolled around between October 8 and 14 the city of Monterey'.³¹² This recalls Duchamp's instructions to himself to inscribe a readymade on a specific date at a certain time.

However, I suggest that the pungent 'stain of reality' in Orozco's works, is more aptly captured by the surrealist chance encounter with the found object, which engages more fully with the questions Joselit identifies. While the *rendez-vous* implies intention and choice on the part of the artist, the accidental character of the chance encounter helps bring into relief the precarious state of Orozco's everyday objects as artworks, and allows us to get a better understanding of the claim they make to being 'in reality'. Indeed, in his reading of Orozco's work, Joselit understands the Duchampian *rendez-vous* as chance encounter stressing its aleatory and accidental character. He concludes: 'Where exactly do we find the art of Gabriel Orozco? In this gallery "reproduction" slid in next to original, study sided up to art object, and ephemera joined with monumental sculpture. In other words, Orozco took the material conditions of the museum, including its strategies of canonization, and

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*

³⁰⁹ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 8.

³¹⁰ Joselit, 'Gabriel Orozco', p. 173.

³¹¹ *Ibid*.

³¹² Quoted in Jessica Morgan (ed.), *Gabriel Orozco*, (London: Tate, 2011), p. 22.

submitted them to the same acts of unraveling and serendipity that inform all of his work “in reality”.³¹³

Reality and the Real

Further addressing Orozco's interest in reality, Briony Fer draws our attention to the word *REALIA* written in capital letters in one of Orozco's earliest notebooks. The term concerns ‘such items as objects, specimens, samples, relics, artefacts, souvenirs and even models and dioramas. And *realia* which one uses in construction of exhibition and bulletin boards. Real things, actual facts’.³¹⁴ Fer maintains that these physical things can be connected with the objects collected in cabinets of curiosity because, like those objects, Orozco's items, even though small and mundane, maintain something ‘immense and mysterious’.³¹⁵ In her reading, Fer effectively dissociates ‘reality’ from the simple amassing of factual information, highlighting an unresolved tension in Orozco's engagement with it. There is, then, a difference between ‘reality’ and the Real which is not clear in Orozco's statements and is also obscured in Joselit's discussion of Orozco's work. Working with ‘real things, actual facts’ is one thing. Incorporating the concept of the Real, on the other hand, as that which escapes representation, is a rather different matter. Breton himself is well aware of this distinction when he differentiates the real, from ‘given data’.³¹⁶ Understanding this important distinction is essential if we are to further comprehend Orozco's version of realism.

Tracing aspects of Breton's found object in Orozco's works provides the necessary theoretical tools with which to answer questions regarding the artist's ambition to work ‘in reality’. In addition, a central objective of surrealism was to propose a fundamental reformulation of the notion of reality, which is also Orozco's proclaimed aim for new art – that it ‘represents a new reality’.³¹⁷ I have thus far suggested that the found object, which in its very conception maintains a dialectical tension between representation and reality, effectively allows us to think through this

³¹³ Joselit, ‘Gabriel Orozco’, p. 173.

³¹⁴ Briony Fer, ‘Constellations in Dust: Notes on the Notebooks’, in *Gabriel Orozco*, edited by Ann Temkin, (New York, NY: MoMA, 2009), p. 23.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ André Breton, ‘The Crisis of the Object’, in *Surrealism and Painting*, (Boston, MA: MFA, 2002), p. 276.

³¹⁷ Orozco, ‘Lecture’, p. 88.

tension without simplistically collapsing the one into the other as Joselit was concerned may occur.

On the level of representation and its relation to the Real, Žižek refers to Lacan's well-known example of the mysterious object depicted in Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1553). When viewed frontally, this object resting at the feet of the Ambassadors is nothing at all, just a void, an indecipherable stain. It is only when we shift our position and look at the object from an oblique angle that the figure of a skull appears. This anamorphic distortion, referring here to death, reveals the *objet petit a* as a strange object which 'acquires a definite shape only when looked at from a standpoint slanted by the subject's desires and fears – as such, as a mere "shadow of what it is not"'.³¹⁸

There is, however, another important dimension to the Lacanian Real that rests beyond longstanding debates on the dichotomy between representation or symbolization and a supposedly unmediated reality. In *How to Read Lacan*, Žižek emphasizes the complexities of the Lacanian Real which exceed the idea of it as 'a fixed transhistorical "hard core" that forever eludes symbolization'.³¹⁹ The Real, as Lacan insisted, is different from Immanuel Kant's 'thing-in-itself,' 'reality the way it is out there, independently of us, prior to being skewed by our perceptions'.³²⁰ To illustrate this elusive concept, Žižek further identifies the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the marker of the Real, with an example taken from popular culture: the barely perceptible detail which distinguishes aliens from humans in the films of Ridley Scott:

Are we not dealing with the same in our everyday racism? Although we are ready to accept the Jewish, Arab, Oriental, other, there is some detail that bothers us in the West: the way they accentuate a certain word, the way they count money, the way they laugh. This tiny feature renders them aliens, no matter how they try to behave like us.³²¹

Žižek further distinguishes between the object of desire, and the *objet petit a* as the cause of desire, 'the feature on whose count we desire the object'.³²²

³¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006, pp. 68-9.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65. For a discussion of the complexities of the Real in Lacan, see Tom Eyers, *Lacan and the Concept of the Real* (Palgrave, 2012).

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

³²² *Ibid.*

In his discussion of Orozco's realist and at times reductive language, Kuri claims that Orozco's artworks are 'more communicative when they have something to conceal. When his pieces began to presuppose that the best language is one of muted words (i.e. a concrete language), Gabriel's voice found its force'.³²³ Precluding any conclusive reading, fellow artist Matthew Ritchie has also remarked that, 'the point about Orozco's work seems to be that any one reading will always be wrong. His work exists in the interstices, the negative spaces which make up most of the world'.³²⁴

In 'Refuse and Refuge' (1993), a discussion regarding Orozco's implementation of found objects in his early sculptural practice, Buchloh describes them as silent, muted objects which actively circumvent an explicit political dimension. Their function, however, is to take a stance against the instrumentalisation of art from cultures of the developing countries by the Western world: 'Once again, current hopes expect artists of marginalized cultures (both of the urban ghettos and the non-Western world) to redeem the crisis of the artistic object and reimburse it with a credible auratic dimension, defying as it were the now generally governing principle of simulation and political instrumentalisation of artistic practices in the centers'.³²⁵ Buchloh continues: 'How can an artist escape these projections operative in the process of "othering"? ... In a peculiar phenomenology of the postcolonial object, Orozco's work traces these complicated relationships between the projections of the hegemonic world and the refusal to be subjected to these expectations, answering in each instance with a precise analysis of the mechanism of othering itself'.³²⁶ To achieve that, 'Orozco's sculptures articulate themselves within the most complex modes of reflection and within the idioms of Western European and American modernism'.³²⁷

Buchloh describes *Yielding Stone*, for example, which is turned into 'public sculpture' through 'the hundreds of anonymous finger imprints – traces of spectators' secret touches ... by which they clandestinely tried their hands'.³²⁸ For Buchloh,

³²³ Kuri, 'General Orozco', p. 41.

³²⁴ Matthew Ritchie, 'Gabriel Orozco', *Flash Art* (Jan./Feb. 1995), p. 96.

³²⁵ Buchloh, 'Refuse and Refuge' in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 4.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, footnote 4, p. 15.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Orozco's atavistic object, with its relapse into a primary concept of mere tactility as a participatory mode, appears to prefer muteness over the myth of public speech. But this muteness would be in and of itself merely reprehensible if it was presented emphatically and with the reactionary conviction and minimalist spite, in the manner of Donald Judd, for example. Orozco's objects exude a silence that is always aware of its inflicted and transitory status, neither ostentatiously displayed as an aesthetic privilege nor internalized as an inescapable condition. It is the muteness of elementary materials before they achieve the status of an instrumentalized object [...] or it is the silence of discarded and dysfunctional materials (such as rubber tires) after a return to the margins.³²⁹

Buchloh argues in this article that Orozco's works construe a strategic position both in relation to their historical situation after postwar modernism, and their geopolitical position. The muteness or silence that he detects in these objects is preemptive of the condition of receptivity that is among Orozco's main concerns, as it is in Breton's chance encounter: 'The investigation of the relations between subject and object would in principle depend upon an openness to such chance encounters'.³³⁰

Circumventing the rigid polarities in geopolitical and art historical terms, the works negotiate a condition of possibility and agency grounded precisely on their status as excluded or obsolete objects and material. Buchloh however writes that we desire 'silent objects' in order to restore the 'opacity of the signifier', where 'typical of the desire to establish an opaque, irreducible and indivisible material experience with artistic means is the recurrence of the indexical procedure, an operation that claims the material trace as strictly non-translatable, as a pure material causality'.³³¹ In short, Buchloh reads Orozco's sculptures in terms of indexical art practice that resists the simulacrum which has permeated art and culture in the metropolitan centres in the US and Europe. Yet he argues that Orozco is alert to resisting the assimilation of his work by the West who turns to the art of developing countries to 'redeem the crisis of the artistic object and imbue it with a credible auratic dimension', providing an alternative to their own 'now generally governing principles of simulation and political instrumentalisation of artistic practices'.³³²

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 107.

³³¹ Buchloh, 'Refuse and Refuge', p. 5.

³³² *Ibid.*, p.4.

Following Buchloh, Iversen writes that Orozco is reluctant to be perceived in terms of a primitive, or exotic, otherness;³³³ in other words, his challenge is 'to respond to this need without being relegated to the position of a primitive other or negating the specificity of his Mexican cultural formation'.³³⁴ Orozco's comments with regards to surrealism are indicative of these concerns, and I think his resistance to surrealism is partly due to the perceived exoticisation of Mexican culture through a surrealist lens. He says, for example, referring to the paintings of Frida Kahlo: 'I was very tired of this image of Mexico as a surrealist country. Mexican culture is permeated by this exoticism of reality – which I don't find to be true, and is not important to me. I find Surrealism boring'.³³⁵

Rather than understanding them as 'mute' or 'silent' objects in their process of resistance to assimilation and instrumentalisation, or subjecting them to uncritical exoticisation, however, I suggest that reading Orozco's sculptures through the lens of Breton's found object and the Lacanian Real, as I have done in this chapter, enables us to conceive the more complex process of identity construction and identification that goes on in these works. In his book *Lacan and the Political*, the political theorist Yannis Stavrakakis discusses the fundamental impossibility, in a Lacanian context, of the formation of a stable identity through the notion of the Real as lack. He writes:

Symbolisation, that is to say the pursuit of identity, introduces *lack* and makes identity ultimately impossible... Identity is possible only as a failed identity; it remains desirable exactly because it is essentially impossible.... Thus, it is rather misleading to speak of identities within a Lacanian framework. What we have is only attempts to construct a stable identity, either on the imaginary or the symbolic level, through the image of the signifier. The subject of lack emerges due to the failure of all these attempts. What we have then ... is not identities but identifications, a series of failed identifications or rather a play between identification and its failure, a deeply political play.³³⁶

I have argued here that Orozco's 'impossible objects' partake of the Real, maintaining 'the stain of reality' that Joselit wanted to preserve, but they do so as found objects.

³³³ Iversen, 'Involuntary Photography' in Anna Dezeuze and Julia Kelly (eds.), *Found Sculpture and Photography from Surrealism to Contemporary Art*, (Ashgate, 2013) p. 178.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³³⁵ Orozco cited in Alastair Sooke, 'Gabriel Orozco: All the Right Moves', *The Telegraph* (30 December 2010), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8207377/Gabriel-Orozco-all-the-right-moves.html>, last accessed 12 June, 2014.

³³⁶ Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 29.

These 'slight' objects that marked the artist's entrance into the international art world by reverting to the Real as *central lack* with its rich connotations of identity and desire, effectively negotiate identity formation and reverberate with all the complexities that this process entails, without reducing the work to an exotic Otherness or seamlessly incorporating it into dominant institutional discourses. By situating themselves at the verge of representation and visibility in the museum or gallery, they propose an iconoclastic negotiation of the void, the empty space, and they imply a slanted view upon the art object. By effectively sabotaging representation as the premise behind the works, they moreover cause a crisis in the museum context and they call into question the status of art as spectacle.

Surrealist Legacies in Latin America

In an interview with Briony Fer, Orozco speaks about his relation to the early European avant-gardes, highlighting his preference for the geometric aesthetic of pre-Second World War art and the infantile attitude of dada that, for him, were more connected to reality. In contrast to that, he rejects the 'self-indulgent, teenage attitude' that emerged in the Mexican context with the work of Frida Kahlo and Surrealism.³³⁷ Elsewhere, Orozco acknowledges the lasting legacies of the surrealist movement in Mexico fuelled by Breton's visit to the country in 1938, yet he reads surrealism through the prism of the 'fantastic' that dominated its reception in Latin America, explaining:

I got more and more distant from the idea of fantasy or Surrealism in the work of art, which I found [in the end] ornamental or artificial. Surrealism was a very important trend in Mexican art through the twentieth century and I wanted to break with that. I wanted to break with the idea of attaching an object with special powers or psychological expression. One way to put it is that I was searching for realism. I was searching for the object as a thing that was real, not Surreal.³³⁸

Because of his father, the Mexican artist Mario Orozco Rivera (1930-1998) who was a painter and muralist, Orozco grew up and identified with the strong tradition of muralism in Mexico, its socially committed leftist politics and the idea of

³³⁷ Orozco's interview to Briony Fer, 'Crazy about Saturn', in *Gabriel Orozco* (Thames & Hudson, 2006) p. 113. Reprinted in *Gabriel Orozco*, October Files 9, 2009, p. 173.

³³⁸ Orozco quoted in Morgan, *Gabriel Orozco* (2011), p. 9.

reconstructing a cultural and historical identity for Mexico. He recounts, however, his distance from and disapproval of the succeeding generation, the 'Ruptura generation', who broke with muralism. The following tendency in Mexican art came in the mid-1980s with *neomexicanismo*, a kind of postmodernist painting 'that tried to revive the cliché of some Mexican symbolism' and which was 'like trying to solve the problem of dull formalism with surrealist identity folklore', which Orozco strongly reacted against.³³⁹ It is partly this kind of painting and its reception of surrealism that Orozco is probably referring to when speaks dismissively of surrealism: 'I come from a country where a lot of art is labeled Surrealist. I grew up with it and I hate that kind of dream-like, evasive, easy, poetic, sexual, cheesy Surrealist practice. I try to be a Realist'.³⁴⁰

In the introduction to *Surrealism in Latin America, Vivísimo Muerto*, the authors address the often negative reception of surrealism in contemporary Latin American art as amounting to 'a partial and limited historiography and stereotypical characterizations that aligned it with the gratuitous fantastic and the charge that it appropriated artists such as Frida Kahlo in a neo-colonialist manner'.³⁴¹ They further suggest that the treatment of surrealism as 'a closed historical chapter' which is met with suspicion, discomfort or silence when discussed in a contemporary context hinders possible readings of unexplored connections and may partly derive from 'the collateral effect of recent strategic re-readings'.³⁴²

Elsewhere, in the context of 'initiatives to stamp a distinctive, unique cultural identity on Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century', Ades refers to the impact of Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier's *real maravilloso* [magical realism], which 'consolidated the identification of Surrealism with "fantasy" and a fantastic divorced from the real world'.³⁴³ Further, the reception of surrealism in Mexico during the 1940s did not include consideration of surrealist objects but was focused

³³⁹ Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco: Interview with Carmen Boullosa', *Bomb* 98, 2007, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2862/gabriel-orozco>, last accessed 12 June, 2014.

³⁴⁰ Jessica Morgan and Gabriel Orozco, 'Gabriel Orozco: In Conversation', Tate Modern, London, 19 January, 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/gabriel-orozco-conversation>, last accessed 10 September, 2014.

³⁴¹ Dawn Ades, Rita Eder and Graciela Speranza (eds), 'Introduction' in *Surrealism in Latin America. Vivísimo Muerto*, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2012, p. 1.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁴³ Ades, 'Surrealism and its Legacies in Latin America', The British Academy Lecture (27 May 2009), <http://www.britac.ac.uk/audio.cfm/assetfileid/11824>, last accessed 12 June, 2014.

mainly on painting.³⁴⁴ This resulted in a partial reception of surrealism, one which was lacking an understanding of the complex issues surrounding the fusion of art and politics negotiated by the surrealists in the form of the surrealist object in the 1930s.³⁴⁵ In short, Ades points out that the reception of surrealism in Latin America consolidated it with something extraneous to reality. In other words, the surrealist marvellous or fantastic is grounded in the real and this aspect becomes particularly clear with the practice of the found object, which Orozco is rescuing in his work, albeit without acknowledging it.

With his statements, Orozco seeks to effect a programmatic break with surrealism, considering its reception in Mexico in particular, setting up his own quest for 'realism' directly against a surrealist frame of reference that addresses the fantastic. In this chapter, I have argued, however, for a different conception of surrealism that advances an understanding of the Real as it emerges from Breton's engagement with the found object, an aspect that has been absent from the movement's historical reception in Mexico. In effect, the surrealism Orozco rejects is quite removed from the found object and is rather steeped in a painting tradition represented by artists such as Kahlo, *neomexicanismo* etc.

While removed from this tradition, I have suggested here that there are aspects of surrealism that deeply inform Orozco's artistic practice to be found in Breton's found object, namely the notion of the Real as lack. I argue that Orozco's work is marked by a fundamental indeterminacy and tension between positivist models (minimalism and Judd's specific object), and aspects of surrealist aesthetic theory with its emphasis on imagination and desire. As early as 1924, at the beginnings of the movement, Breton declared in the 'First Manifesto of Surrealism': 'What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real'.³⁴⁶ Even though aspects of Orozco's work draw on Duchamp's readymade and its legacies, it is in Breton's found object that he finds an apt theoretical and aesthetic tool to re-negotiate the position of the art object, by shifting it into an indeterminate status between representation and 'reality' and by finding a new

³⁴⁴ Consider, for example, the *International Exhibition of Surrealism*, held at the Galería de Arte Mexicano, in Mexico City, in January 1940. Daniel Garza Usabiaga, 'André Breton, Surrealism and Mexico, 1938-1970: A Critical Overview', *Arara*, no. 10, 2011, p. 8. https://www.essex.ac.uk/arhistory/research/pdfs/arara_issue_10/usabiaga.pdf, last accessed 12 June, 2014.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁴⁶ Breton, 'First Manifesto of Surrealism', p. 15.

vocabulary for a critique of spectacle. Despite Orozco's proclaimed resistance to the surrealist legacy, this chapter has identified that he shares with surrealism an understanding of the Real as not simply a place outside of representation, as Joselit maintains, but a marker of desire linked to issues of identity and Otherness; for Orozco, the Real understood in this way is a key concept, effectively shaping his 'impossible objects'.

Chapter 5: Peter Fischli & David Weiss: Phantom Objects

*Plato, by dint of inquiring in the direction of the simulacrum, discovers, in the flash of an instant as he leans over its abyss, that the simulacrum is not simply a false copy, but that it calls into question the very notions of the copy ... and of the model. ... If we say of the simulacrum that it is a copy of a copy, an endlessly degraded icon, an infinitely slackened resemblance, we miss the essential point: the difference in nature between simulacrum and copy, the aspect through which they form the two halves of a division. The copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance.*³⁴⁷ - Gilles Deleuze, 'Plato and the Simulacrum'.

*The artificial and the simulacrum are not the same thing. They are even opposed. The factitious is always a copy of a copy, which must be pushed to the point where it changes its nature and turns into a simulacrum (the moment of Pop Art).*³⁴⁸ - Deleuze, 'Plato and the Simulacrum'.

Peter Fischli and David Weiss reportedly began their collaboration in 1979, with a visit to a large Swiss furniture store.³⁴⁹ The excursion, which has been compared to a museum visit where they discussed the objects on display, can be seen to foreground the artists' ongoing interest in mass-produced, everyday objects, extensively incorporated in their work. Fischli's father, Hans Fischli (1909-1989), was an architect and artist educated in the Bauhaus tradition in Dessau between in 1929-1930. Soon after his return to Switzerland, he built the modernist house where his family later lived, in the small farming community of Meilen near Zurich, ironically dubbed the 'shoebox house' by Fischli's classmates (see Figure 5.1).³⁵⁰ During a talk at the Barbican Centre, London, on May 30, 2012, Peter Fischli presented a googled photograph that showed the wired imprint of a Bertoria chair on the behind of a female nude (see Figure 5.2). In the talk, titled 'From Dessau to Las Vegas', organized on the occasion of a major Bauhaus exhibition at the Barbican, incidentally shortly after David Weiss's death on April 27, 2012, Fischli spoke of his father and his reluctance to upholster the Bertorias in their house, the Bauhaus aesthetic of functionalist modernism, and the use of everyday objects in their work.

³⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, 'Plato and the Simulacrum,' translated by Rosalind Krauss, *October*, Vol. 27 (Winter, 1983), The MIT Press, pp. 47, 48.

³⁴⁸ Deleuze, 'Plato and the Simulacrum', p. 56.

³⁴⁹ Rainald Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality: Peter Fischli and David Weiss' in Ingvild Goetz, Karsten Löckemann (eds), *Peter Fischli, David Weiss*, (München: Hatje Cantz; Sammlung Goetz, 2010), catalogue of an exhibition of works from the Sammlung Goetz, Munich, held there, Nov. 8, 2010 - Mar. 12, 2011. (Texts: German/English), pp. 84, 86, 87.

³⁵⁰ Peter Fischli, 'My House, Bauhaus', *Tate ETC.*, Issue 6, Spring 2006.

This chapter looks at the different types of objects Fischli and Weiss incorporate in their work: carved, cast, modelled, found and readymade. It considers these works in the aftermath of Marcel Duchamp's readymades, whose important repercussions can be found in neo-dada (1950s), and pop art (1960s) with their decisive emphasis on elements from daily life, while examining the idea of replication that underpins these practices. Duchamp famously displaced commercial objects he found in the store by taking them into the exhibition space, thus changing their interpretative context. Yet Fischli and Weiss take the mass-produced objects that are at hand in their workplace or in domestic situations and put them through a different operation in the studio. The artists point out this important distinction between their practice and Duchamp's readymade: 'In the case of Duchamp the concept of *objets trouvés*, or "found objects", is important, whereas we try to *create* objects'.³⁵¹ It becomes clear, then, that while Fischli and Weiss engage closely with the notion of the readymade, which they conflate here with that of the found object (for a detailed discussion about this distinction as well as the overlaps between these two concepts played out in some contemporary artworks, see my last chapter on Gabriel Orozco). By making their objects look like readymades, they effectively distance themselves from it by putting emphasis on traditional sculptural techniques, such as carving, casting, and modeling. At the same time, they put these operations into question by incorporating materials unusual for sculpture, such as polyurethane and rubber.

Early champions of Fischli and Weiss's work, which include Bice Curiger, collector Ingvild Goetz, Boris Groys, Arthur Danto, Germano Celant and Hans Ulrich Obrist, and more recently, Claire Bishop, Mark Godfrey, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Anna Dezeuze, among others, have conducted interviews and contributed writings about them. This vast and engaging bibliography and critical reception focuses on a variety of different aspects, such as the aesthetics of the everyday, the investigation of the limits between life and art, precariousness, ephemerality and obsolescence, simulation and *trompe l'oeil*, collecting, craftsmanship and artistic labour, as well as humour and irony. Yet it remarkably ignores the specificities and intricacies of making these works. The importance of working techniques and processes can further be inferred by the fact the artists developed a system of working that avoided general discussions about artistic work, focusing instead on 'fundamental questions and problems related

³⁵¹ Fischli quoted in 'Beate Söntgen in conversation with Peter Fischli and David Weiss', in *Peter Fischli/ David Weiss*, (London: Phaidon, 2005), p. 22.

to a specific piece of work. ... Central questions about reality, art and its function, mission and possibility thus flow directly, productively and creatively into a particular project and find their unmistakable expression'.³⁵²

In his important essay, 'Simulated Readymades' (1994), Boris Groys highlights the fact that Fischli and Weiss's carved polyurethane objects, for example, 'are the products of a slow process that revives the ethos of the artist as a working, creating craftsman who once again represents the things of reality'.³⁵³ Groys further considers these works as products of the ironic simulation of obsolete methods of production, yet neglects to engage further with the kind of work involved, the specificities of the artistic techniques and processes, and what they can tell us about these objects and the subjects that make them. In examining these works, I wish to keep in view their relation to the readymade and the critique they entail, their potential for a new sculptural language as it emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as their place and significance on the shifting conditions of artistic labour in the general context of a rapidly emerging 'immaterial economy' at that time.

Phantom Objects: Carved Polyurethane Sculptures (1982-2014)

Fischli and Weiss started creating sculptural installations of carved polyurethane objects in the early 1980s, with works such as *Floss (Raft)* 1982 (see Figure 5.3), their first indoor installation with carved sculptures at Galerie St. Gallen, Switzerland.³⁵⁴ From this group of works, *Untitled (Tate)* (2000-2006) (see Figure 5.4), at Tate Modern, London, for example, is a life-size installation of carved, hand-painted, feather-light polyurethane objects. They are realistic sculptures of familiar, everyday objects, tools and materials arranged to recreate the environment of a workshop. The installation includes plastic buckets, paintbrushes, rubber tires, furniture, small items such as milk cartons and cigarette packets, masking tape, and other studio utensils. Every one of the items is made by hand, with great attention to detail, painted in a realistic manner to give the illusion that they are mass-produced, everyday objects, rather than skillfully hand-crafted sculptures. *Untitled (Tate)* was originally commissioned as a site-specific installation for the opening displays of Tate Modern

³⁵² Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', p. 84.

³⁵³ Boris Groys, 'Simulated Readymades', in *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions* (London: Tate, 2006), p. 14. First published in *Parkett*, no. 40/41, Zurich, 1994, English version, pp. 33-37.

³⁵⁴ Subsequently shown at the Klapperhof, Gologne. *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions*. Photographs of still lifes with the objects from the *Raft*. pp. 136-143.

in 2000. Fischli and Weiss visited the gallery a few months before the opening, when it was still under construction, and designed the installation 'in part to recreate a sense of that working environment'.³⁵⁵ At first glance, the work gives the impression that the gallery is under construction or that repairs are taking place, thus challenging the visitors' perception.

Recent versions from 2014 include, *The Objects for Glenstone* at the Glenstone Foundation, Potomac, Maryland, *Polyurethane Objects* at Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles, and *Eine Ansammlung von Gegenständen* at Sprüth Magers Berlin (see Figure 5.5), where the gallery was transformed to resemble a nondescript suburban workspace and storeroom. For the Berlin installation 'each one of the objects was made at some time over the past 30 years and each one was kept back in the studio, surplus to previous exhibitions. The objects themselves are thus cast-offs, divorced from the utility they propose, while as a collection they form a kind of *Salon des Objets Refusés* of the artist's previous endeavors'.³⁵⁶ Other similar works include *The Room in Cham* (1991), with approximately life-size objects, an installation which could only be seen through the window of a free-standing garage,³⁵⁷ as well as an installation of objects in Hans-Ulrich Obrist's first exhibition, curated in his home kitchen in St. Gallen, Switzerland, also in 1991.³⁵⁸ While in earlier works such as *Raft*, the objects had a rougher finish, which distinguished them immediately from everyday objects, they were followed by their more precisely rendered, illusionistic sculptures that include *The Table* (Der Tisch, 1992-1993), at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Basel; *Room under the Stairs* (Raum unter der Treppe) (see Figure 5.6) at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, 1993; *Untitled* at the Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1994; *Empty Room* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1996; and *Untitled* at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2003.

³⁵⁵ Tate Gallery Records. The version owned by Tate is a slightly smaller configuration of the 2000 installation and the last of their major polyurethane sculpture installations. It was shown as part of a major retrospective exhibition on their work, organized at Tate Modern from 11 October 2006 – 14 January 2007.

³⁵⁶ Press release for the exhibition *Eine Ansammlung von Gegenständen* at Sprüth Magers Berlin, 2 May – 30 August 2014, http://www.spruethmagers.com/exhibitions/365@@@press_en, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

³⁵⁷ Created for the exhibition *Chamer Räume (Rooms in Cham)* in Cham, near Zug (Switzerland). Subsequent versions in 1992 include *Doubletake*, Hayward Gallery, London, and a long-term installation at Hardturmstrasse and in the Löwenbräuareal, Zurich. *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions* (Tate: 2006), pp. 144-153.

³⁵⁸ In the PhD thesis by Renate Goldmann, *Peter Fischli, David Weiss: Ausflüge, Arbeiten, Ausstellungen, Ein Offener Index*, (Köln: König, 2006).

Fischli describes the objects that make up these installations as 'will-o-the-wisps' or 'phantoms', because they are 'there in visual terms but not corresponding in terms of touch'.³⁵⁹ Regarding their deceptive similarity with readymade objects, Fischli remarks on the futility of repeating the gesture of the readymade, and expresses his skepticism about what he perceives as Duchamp's implicit demand through the readymade 'to bring art to an end. In our case, the carved objects are the contrary of the readymade', Fischli asserts.³⁶⁰ Elsewhere, he explains:

Perhaps our carved objects have more of an affinity with painted still lifes. In the case of Duchamp the concept of *objets trouvés*, or 'found objects', is important, whereas we try to create objects. Duchamp's objects could revert back to everyday life at any point in time. Our objects can't do that, they're only there to be contemplated. They're all objects from the world of utility and function, but they've become utterly useless. You can't sit on the chairs we carve. They are, to put it simply, freed from the slavery of their utility. Nothing else is left other than to look at this chair. What else can you do with it?³⁶¹

Contemplation, however, is crucial at the level of their production, as well as their reception. With regards to the attention required on the part of the artists when making the polyurethane sculptures, Fischli has remarked: 'I'm suddenly forced really to contemplate these plastic tubes. The imitation demands patient engagement with the object, an empathy'.³⁶² Mark Godfrey draws a parallel between Fischli's comment about feeling empathy with the everyday object, and the advertising strategy of branding which invests consumer goods with human characteristics: 'If advertisements persuade us to find luxury products sexy, exotic, or confident, then everyday things such as tubes, stationary, and cupboards might be called reliable and unassuming, if a little unsophisticated and boring'.³⁶³ Yet certainty and reliability are quickly eroded with the polyurethane sculptures as soon as we realize their trick, their hollowed out functionality: the fact they are rendered in polyurethane makes them unavailable for use as everyday objects. By reverting back to the notion of

³⁵⁹ Jörg Heiser, 'The Odd Couple: An Interview with Fischli and Weiss' *Frieze*, October 2006, p.205. http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the_odd_couple/, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014,

³⁶⁰ Peter Fischli, 'From Dessau to Las Vegas', talk at the Barbican Centre, London, 30 May 2012. 53rd min in <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RO-x-qOkR5A>, last accessed 15 August, 2014.

³⁶¹ Fischli quoted in 'Beate Söntgen in Conversation with Peter Fischli and David Weiss', in *Peter Fischli/ David Weiss* (London: Phaidon, 2005), p.22.

³⁶² Quoted in Mark Godfrey, 'A Fine Balance' in *Peter Fischli David Weiss*, (Glenstone, 2014), p. 19.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

contemplation in art, while implicating objects from everyday life, and by rendering them useless as functional objects, these works can be seen to undermine the principles of modernist functionalism as expressed, for example, in Bauhaus, via simulation. At the same time, by further comparing these objects to painted still life, the artists revisit the traditional categories of painting, as well as sculpture, through the category of the readymade.

The types of objects the artists use in these projects come from their immediate working environment, the studio. These are utility objects rather than consumer goods, the very tools they use to carve these sculptures. As Fischli notes, they are 'mostly things that would be around the studio – tools and objects we would need to make a carving – we carved. ... Then we also realized that the tools we use around the studio are similar to the kinds of objects that museums and galleries use. These are the studio objects, but they are also objects in the cabinets in a gallery'.³⁶⁴ For an exhibition at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York, for example, in preparing the work, the artists visited the gallery ahead of time and went through the different types of objects they found in the cabinet and storage rooms, many of which they subsequently brought back with them to Zurich. After a selection was made, they carved these objects and arranged the installation in the empty gallery space to look as if the room was being prepared for the next exhibition. Fischli notes: 'The gallery told us that when the elevator doors opened and the visitors looked into the exhibition space, they thought that there was no show to visit. People thought that the objects belonged to real life, so they weren't interested in them'.³⁶⁵

The art critic Rainald Schumacher describes a similar version from 1999 that resembled a gallery under construction: 'the entrance to one room was obstructed by a small wooden block. A glance into the room, which contained a few boards leaning against the wall, tools and several bowls and cups, showed that repairs were obviously being made here'.³⁶⁶ Schumacher remarks that this work only 'pretends that it is not an artwork. The whole story is fictitious, made-up, projected and fake. Is art only a fraudulent affair, a large counterfeit operation used to stage real life as genuinely as possible? Can we still trust art?'³⁶⁷ The premise of the polyurethane objects seems to be engaging with Duchamp's celebrated question, 'Can one make works which are

³⁶⁴ Rirkrit Tiravanija, 'Rirkrit Tiravanija talks with Fischli and Weiss', *Artforum*, Oct. 1996, p. 85.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', p. 108.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

not works of “art?”³⁶⁸ Fischli and Weiss maintain the tension implied in this question throughout their artistic practice to interrogate what it means to make art: ‘In the Frankfurt room, you look through a window and see this room, which seems to belong to a museum custodian. But it is also an illusion: you think you’re looking out of the museum... DW: Out of the art world into a private space ...PF: But in fact it’s probably the most artificial thing in the museum. This switch is always very nice. Or it is the point of interest, it’s part of everything we do’.³⁶⁹

In a section of his essay ‘Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny’ (1993/2003), Mike Kelley addresses the issue of simulation in the context of the readymade.³⁷⁰ The section opens with a quote from surrealist artist Hans Bellmer, stating that, ‘an object that is identical with itself is without reality’.³⁷¹ For Kelley, Duchamp’s readymades, which he acknowledges as the most important sculptural production of the twentieth century, effectively problematize the notion of the double by their status as real objects in the museum setting: ‘One wonders *when* they are a real object and *when* they are an illusion’, further suggesting that readymades ‘become their own *doppelgänger*’.³⁷² Following the same logic, in a celebrated article published a year later, in 1994, philosopher and art historian Boris Groys notably described Fischli and Weiss’ polyurethane sculptures as ‘simulated readymades’, because they only *appear* to function in the manner of Duchamp’s readymades, industrial objects inserted in the exhibition space, while they are in fact sculptures of everyday objects.³⁷³

Like Kelley, Groys also understands the readymade not simply as an everyday, commodity object, but as a reproduction, a copy of an everyday object, which is made mysterious and endowed with signification and symbolic value by virtue of its entrance to the museum and to the realm of art. As a result, he argues that the

³⁶⁸ Marcel Duchamp ‘A l’Infinitif’ (1913) in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp: Salt Seller*, Michel Sanouillet (ed.). London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), pp.74-101, p. 74.

³⁶⁹ Tiravanija talks with Fischli and Weiss’, p. 84.

³⁷⁰ Mike Kelley, ‘New Introduction to the Uncanny’ and ‘Playing With Dead Things’, *Les Cahiers du Musée national d’art moderne* (Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou) 93 (Fall 2005): 20-47. ‘Playing with Dead Things’ originally published in *The Uncanny*. Exh. cat. Arnhem, The Netherlands: Sonsbeek, 1993; a slightly modified version ‘Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny’ was published in *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism* / Mike Kelley; edited by John C. Welchman, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003, pp. 70-99; ‘New Introduction to the Uncanny’ originally published in *The Uncanny by Mike Kelley*, Exh. cat. Liverpool: Tate Liverpool; Vienna: MUMoK, 2004; Excerpt reprinted in *Colour: Documents of Contemporary Art*. David Batchelor, ed. London: Whitechapel: 195-198.

³⁷¹ Mike Kelley ‘Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny’ in *Foul Perfection*, p.85.

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ Groys, ‘Simulated Readymades’ in *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions*, p. 14.

sculptures by Fischli and Weiss, rather than simulations of everyday objects, are, in fact, simulations of readymades which are already *representations* of objects. In simulating readymades then these polyurethane objects challenge viewers' expectations of the now well-established artistic category of the readymade. Groys invokes the taming of the readymade that has entered the realm of representation through its longstanding institutionalization. Mike Kelly, however, maintains in his reading the productive ambivalence of the readymade both as representation and as simulation. With their 'simulated readymades', Fischli and Weiss then revert to the postmodern notion of the simulacrum to question and upset the current premises of representation, by re-introducing and radicalizing the readymade as simulation.

Groys refers to Fischli and Weiss's polyurethane sculptures as 'replicants', after the simulated human beings of Ridley Scott's 1982 film, *Blade Runner*, bringing into the discussion issues of subjectivity. Indeed, in the opening lines of his essay, Groys remarks: 'The insight that reproduction is more appropriate to human subjectivity than production is one of the oldest in the history of human thought. Nature produces; [...] the wise reproduce'.³⁷⁴ Groys suggests that in the act of reproducing reproductions through traditional sculptural techniques such as carving, Fischli and Weiss simulate not only readymades, but also older modes of artistic production while subverting their operation by ironically using unorthodox, more ephemeral material such as polyurethane in place of the venerable marble. He concludes:

These objects are the products of a slow process that revives the ethos of the artist as a working, creating craftsperson who once again represents the things of reality. Except, Fischli and Weiss' replicants are not the original things of this world but, as we know, mere readymades. The traditional artistic ethos can only be reproduced today under the cover of irony. Fischli and Weiss render their things not in marble but in polyurethane. Who knows whether the reproduction of the traditional role of the artist is used by Fischli and Weiss as an ironic device or whether irony is deployed to make this role acceptable again.³⁷⁵

This ironic ambivalence about the role and the work of the artist today is a central concern that underpins Fischli and Weiss's art. By carving much softer and ephemeral

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

material such as polyurethane, instead of the hard and enduring stone or marble, the artists mock the heroic image of the classic sculptor who struggles to physically master his or her medium.

In *The Stones of Rimini*, his 1934 book about fifteenth century Italian sculpture, English art critic Adrian Stokes considers modelling and carving as two fundamentally different techniques which mark distinct attitudes with which sculptors engage with their materials, the first by adding, the second by subtracting. Stokes, who was psychoanalyzed by Melanie Klein, and whose art criticism was informed by psychoanalytical concepts, considers the psychodynamic engagement between the artist and the work assumed by these two techniques. For Stokes, carving puts emphasis on the material: 'a figure carved in stone is fine carving when one feels that, not the figure but the stone through the medium of the figure, has come to life'.³⁷⁶ Carving in other words is 'an articulation of something that already exists in the stone'.³⁷⁷ This medium-specific approach in relation to carving, becomes undone in modelling where the material is subservient to the concept, implying a more forceful imposition of imagination to external reality. In short: 'the modeler *realizes* his design with clay. Unlike the carver, he does not envisage that conception as enclosed in his raw material'.³⁷⁸ The modelling forms are thus the '*embodiment* of conception'.³⁷⁹ Modelling then is 'the perfect embodiment of conception: whereas, in the process of carving, conception is all the time adjusted to the life that the sculptor feels beneath his tool'.³⁸⁰ Stokes condemns modernist architecture by Le Corbusier, for example, as the perfect embodiment of the principle of modelling which upholds a narcissistic view of the self, with the domination of mind over matter, and the world.³⁸¹

This quality of modelling, which imposes a preconceived idea to a yielding material which highlights an imaginary control over the external world on the part of

³⁷⁶ Adrian Stokes, *The Quattro Cento and Stones of Rimini: A Different Conception of the Italian Renaissance*, (London: Ashgate, 2002), p. 110. Margaret Iversen refers to this essay by Stokes when discussing the psychodynamic relation to carving, modelling and casting in her lecture 'Rubbing, Casting, Making Strange', presented at the 12th Franklin M. Ludden Lecture in Art History and Criticism, Department of History of Art, The Ohio State University, 4 April, 2013. A later version titled 'Carving, Modelling, Casting', was presented at the Art History and Psychoanalysis Workshop 1, a series of three workshops in a collaboration between the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies and the School of Philosophy and Art History at the University of Essex, organized by David Hodge, Natasha Adamou and Matt Ffytche, 3 May, 2013.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

the human subject, aptly comes to light with another work by Fischli and Weiss, entitled *Suddenly this Overview* (see Figure 5.7), albeit to a different end and with an ironic conclusion. The work is comprised of unfired clay models each presented on a pedestal that aspire to the impossible task of depicting an overarching history of human civilization. The diverse titles of individual scenes and objects that range from the mundane and the everyday to important scientific discoveries, philosophical ideas, important historical moments, include: *The Russians Send the First Rocket into Space*; *Drama and Comedy*; *Two American Scientists Discovering a Piece of Space Junk*; *Popular Opposites – High and Low*; *Artist and Audience*; *The Freedom of Choice*; *Full and Empty Dog Bowl*; *Galileo Galilei Presenting the World as a Ball*; *The Temptation of St Antony*; *Smoking Break*; *Alice in Wonderland*; *The Invention of the Miniskirt*; *Waiting for the Elevator* etc. While clay has been chosen by the artists for its malleability, the fact it is a material easy to work with, the material fragility of the resulting artifacts paired with the often comic effect of the titles poignantly highlights the impossibility of submitting things and events to an all-encompassing overview, the futile task of attempting to create a rationally watertight, coherent and systematic ordering of any sort.

With regards to the *Polyurethane Sculptures*, even though Fischli and Weiss undertake a classical sculptural technique such as carving to create these sculptures, carving in polyurethane makes for a decidedly different type of engagement than working with the firm material resistance of stone or marble, thus expressly undermining the claims of modernist medium-specificity that Stokes advocates. Not only is the materiality of polyurethane, which additionally is more easily disposable than marble, not privileged in these works, their materiality is further concealed by carefully hand-painting the works to make them resemble everyday objects, and undercut by the *trompe l'oeil* manner in which the material is misleadingly made to appear like plastic, wood, metal, rubber etc. In this sense, these objects are closer to movie props than sculpture, with their phantasmatic, image-like qualities.

These objects, which are much lighter than they appear to be, remind me of Duchamp's reverse trick in *Why Not Sneeze*, an empty birdcage containing considerably heavier marble cubes, passing for sugar cubes. In his lecture 'Characteristics of the Modern Evolution and What it Consists Of', André Breton remarked about *Why Not Sneeze* that, 'this trick is as good as any other - and even as

good as nearly all the tricks of art put together'.³⁸² For Breton, this experiment poignantly highlights the deep-rooted antinomy between reason and the senses that dominated Modernist thought and culture, which surrealism aimed to challenge.³⁸³ The trick Breton refers to, involves the simulation of marble made to resemble sugar cubes. Fischli and Weiss's sculptures also invoke the simulacrum, and by rendering these everyday objects useless from a practical point of view, revisit debates about Modernist instrumental reason and functionalism.

Simulation, then, a celebrated trope of postmodern theory since the early 1980s, through the writings of eminent thinkers such Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze, undercuts modernist aspirations on different levels in these works: in relation to their subject matter (they pretend to be common objects from everyday life), material (they simulate different industrial material and textures), and working techniques (they simulate traditional sculptural techniques). In his critique of Platonism, 'Plato and the Simulacrum', Deleuze describes the difference between the copy and the simulacrum: 'the simulacrum is not simply a false copy', he writes, 'but it calls into question the very notions of the copy ... and of the model'.³⁸⁴ This operation creates two types of image: 'copies are second hand possessors, well-grounded claimants, authorized by resemblance. Simulacra are like false claimants, built on dissimilitude, implying a perversion, an essential turning away'.³⁸⁵ While the copy is based on resemblance, the simulacrum is based on difference: '[it] implies great dimensions, depths, and distances which the observer cannot dominate. It is because he cannot master them that he has an impression of resemblance'.³⁸⁶ He concludes: 'In short, folded within the simulacrum there is a process of going mad, a process of limitlessness'.³⁸⁷ For Deleuze, this unbridgeable difference, which we cannot master, and which brings forth a gap in visual perception is what makes the simulacrum unruly for it subverts the very notion of representation. In the simulacrum, the distinction between model

³⁸² André Breton, 'Caractères de l'évolution moderne et ce qui en participe', lecture presented at the Ateneu de Barcelona on November 17, 1922. C. B. Morris, *Surrealism and Spain, 1920-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 214-27. Breton, 'Characteristics of the Modern Evolution and What it Consists Of' in *Lost Steps* (Les pas perdu), translation in English by Mark Polizzotti, University of Nebraska Press, 1996, p. 116. Dalí quotes this excerpt by Breton in Dalí 'The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment', Finkelstein (ed.), pp. 237-238.

³⁸³ Breton, 'Characteristics of the Modern Evolution and What it Consists Of' in *Lost Steps* (Les pas perdu), p. 114.

³⁸⁴ Gilles Deleuze, 'Plato and the Simulacrum,' translated by Rosalind Krauss, *October*, Vol. 27 (Winter, 1983), The MIT Press, p. 47.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

and copy collapses: 'This whole distinction operates in the world of representation. The goal is the subversion of this world, "the twilight of the idols"'.³⁸⁸

Fischli and Weiss's polyurethane sculptures can be compared to Jasper Johns's *Painted Bronze (Ale Cans)* 1960, two cans of Ballantine's ale cast in bronze, that has been discussed as the neo-avant-garde moment of Duchamp's readymade. The two works are similar in that they simulate readymade objects, using sculptural techniques. They are different, however, as Mark Godfrey notes, because Johns's works render isolated objects, while Fischli and Weiss make installations, but also because, Johns works with bronze, a material typically associated with sculpture, while Fischli and Weiss carve their sculptures in polyurethane.³⁸⁹ Other comparisons could be made with contemporaneous works from the 1980s, by Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach or Allan McCollum, who have made sculptures based on commodity objects as a commentary on 'sign exchange value' and brand culture. However, as Godfrey argues, Fischli and Weiss's sculptures have less to do with an overt criticism of branded objects or commodity culture, yet the labour intensive and extremely time-consuming task of carving these mundane objects in polyurethane involves a degree of opposition.³⁹⁰

Swiss artist Urs Fischer, one generation younger from Fischli and Weiss, has remarked of their installation of polyurethane sculptures displayed in vitrines at the Zurich Stock Exchange, 'a building never used for the purpose it was intended for', that although they were mundane contemporary objects of the time, today these objects look outdated, obsolete, 'like a time capsule'.³⁹¹ 'Appropriation art often takes something that's very "now," but "now" becomes old so fast', Fischer concludes.³⁹² For Fischer, unlike traditional art techniques, these mass-produced objects made for minimum cost become dispensable very fast, and this process accelerates as most things become obsolescent?.³⁹³

Around 1960, Jasper Johns wrote in his notebook: 'An object that tells of the loss, destruction, disappearance of objects. Does not speak of itself. Tells of others.'

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-56.

³⁸⁹ Mark Godfrey, 'A Fine Balance' in *Peter Fischli David Weiss*, (Glenstone, 2014), p. 19.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ Urs Fischer, *Skinny Sunrise*, (Vienna: Kunsthalle Vienna, 2012), p. 17.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

Will it include them? DELUGE'.³⁹⁴ In one chapter of his book *The Disappearance of Objects*, Joshua Shannon draws attention to the specificities of the objects featuring in Jasper Johns' sculptures, in order to reveal something about the state of the everyday material environment in American postwar consumer culture. He asks what was at stake in the works' resistance to signification and their emphasis on blunt materiality.³⁹⁵ Around the time they were produced, Johns's sculptures were criticized for their literalness, for being tautological, described on one occasion as 'dumb objects'.³⁹⁶ For various critics, his early sculptures, such as *Light Bulb* (1958), *Flashlight* (1958), initially rendered in sculpt-metal, presented themselves as material facts and were often interpreted as 'parodies of antique sculptural fragments',³⁹⁷ compared to 'high art... fragments of classical sculpture', and deemed 'as deathly as the castings made from the holes in the lava and ash in Pompeii',³⁹⁸ or 'Roman funeral portraits ... [drawn] from death masks'.³⁹⁹

For Shannon, the evocation of fossils and death masks in relation to these objects speaks of the loss of cultures or sets of objects.⁴⁰⁰ Shannon writes about Johns's *Painted Bronze (Ale Cans)* (1960) that: 'One way to understand this weighty bronze, is as an imagined counterweight to an environment of expedient waste and redesign', so bringing up issues of obsolescence.⁴⁰¹ In contrast to works of Pop art, such as Warhol's iconic *Brillo Boxes* (1969), where objects function predominantly as signs, the author argues that the dialectic of *Painted Bronze* is situated between the materiality of commodities and the systemic abstraction of capitalist economy that is evident in practices such as advertising, for example, by counter-posing material concretion and specificity to the capitalist dematerialization of objects.⁴⁰² Shannon concludes that Johns's practice forms a 'negative meditation on the contemporary erosion of the material world'.⁴⁰³

Fischli and Weiss's almost weightless polyurethane sculptures, on the other hand,

³⁹⁴ Quoted by John Cage in 'Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas', in *Jasper Johns*, exhibition catalogue, (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1964), p. 22.

³⁹⁵ Joshua Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 54.

³⁹⁶ Stuart Preston, *New York Times*, Quoted in Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects*, p. 55.

³⁹⁷ Harold Rosenberg quoted in Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects*, p. 57.

³⁹⁸ Fairfield Porter quoted in Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects*, p. 57.

³⁹⁹ Andrew Forge quoted in Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects*, p. 57.

⁴⁰⁰ Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects*, p. 57.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

rather than seeking to restore a resistant materiality, emphasize instead with their choice of material the changing parameters of post-industrial economy where 'art production indexes the service industry and immaterial economy more than heavy industry (as it did with Minimalism)'.⁴⁰⁴ The proliferation during the 1980s and 1990s of service industries and immaterial labour has been discussed among others by Virginia Postrel, a New York Times business columnist and author of *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness* (2003), who wrote in the mid-1990s that, 'We are, in fact, living more and more in an intangible economy, in which the greatest sources of wealth are not physical. We aren't yet used to an economy in which beauty, amusement, attention, learning, pleasure, even spiritual fulfillment are as real and economically valuable as steel or semiconductors'.⁴⁰⁵

Rubber Sculptures (1986 – 2012)

Between 1986-1988, Fischli and Weiss made about twenty life-size sculptures of everyday items and natural objects cast in synthetic black rubber, including a dog bowl, a drawer, a small cupboard, a candle, a vase, a vinyl record, and an early version of a tree root. The artists continued with the production of the series of *Rubber Sculptures*, different versions of which have been presented in various exhibitions through to the present. *Untitled (Small Root)* (2005) (see Figure 5.8), for example, which is part of this series, has been cast directly from a part of the root of a tree. The work is solid and appears like a thick chunk of wood. To produce it, a silicon mold was made from the root of a felled tree, which was then cast in black polyurethane (synthetic resin). To stabilize the sculpture, the core consists of foam glass, a material that is resistant to shrinkage or to chemical reactions.⁴⁰⁶ *Untitled (Small Root)* was produced on the occasion of Fischli and Weiss's large retrospective

⁴⁰⁴ Bennett Simpson, 'Public Relations: An Interview with Nicolas Bourriaud' in *Artforum*, April 2001 <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/simpson1.pdf>, last accessed 14 August, 2014.

⁴⁰⁵ Virginia Postrel 'It's All In The Head' *Forbes ASAP*, 26 February 1996 <http://reason.com/archives/1996/02/26/its-all-in-the-head>, last accessed 14 August, 2014.

⁴⁰⁶ *Roots*, 2005, polyurethane, diverse formats. In conjunction with their large retrospective *Flowers & Questions* in London, New York, Hamburg and Zurich, Fischli and Weiss added two large tree roots to their series of rubber sculptures: one smaller root with a squat, compact format, and one larger root, weighing round two-hundred kilograms, fissured on one side and cut with a saw into a geometric form. Silicon negatives were produced for both of them and these were cast in black polyurethane (synthetic resin) – a complex procedure in the case of the larger root due to its frayed surface. The core consists of foam glass, a material that, in contrast to synthetic foams, is not prone to shrinkage or to chemical reactions. <http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/fischli-and-weiss/roots-2005.html>

exhibition *Flowers & Questions* in Tate London, and it is the smaller one of two sculptures cast from a tree root in 2005 (the larger one is *Big Root*, 2005). The earlier version made in 1987 and mentioned above, was titled *Wurzel (Root)*. A related work, *Wurzeltisch* (Root Table, 2005) (see Figure 5.9), is a peculiar object in the form of a root-table found in a second-hand shop, also cast in black rubber. *Wurzeltisch* is a variation that brings together the two different themes in *Rubber Sculptures*, combining the form of a natural object and a manufactured domestic object.⁴⁰⁷

Other objects include three cupboards made between 2000–2001, cast from ‘negatives made of particleboard coated with synthetic resin. Profiles were either glued onto the negative with strips of silicon or milled. Details such as the cardboard back panels typical of cheap furniture were molded in silicon and inserted into the assembled negative’.⁴⁰⁸ Another object, *Chinesischer Topf* (Brush Pot, 2005), features an enigmatic container cast from a carved Chinese brush pot the artists found during a trip to China.⁴⁰⁹ In an interview with Pier Luigi Tazzi, following one of the first exhibitions of the *Rubber Sculptures* in Milan in 1987, the artists explain that they selected these particular types of objects because they can typically be found in domestic situations. For them, moreover, these objects ‘reveal the desires hidden beneath [everyday life]. Such objects are brought back from journeys and expeditions; they spring from the wish to bring a foreign element into the familiar environment’.⁴¹⁰ The artists’ desire to bring a foreign element into everyday life is further stressed by casting everyday objects in black rubber, a material with sexual and subversive fetishistic connotations that serves to defamiliarise them. Cast in black rubber these familiar objects that can be found in variations in almost every middle class household are made strange, adding ‘a disconcerting twist, bringing associations of industry, mass production and sexual fetishism’.⁴¹¹ The material itself makes the objects ‘robust and indestructible’, while transforming them into ‘archetypal

⁴⁰⁷ <http://www.swiss-artfoundry.com/artistsprojects/fischli-and-weiss/wurzeltisch-2005/> Last accessed 3 August, 2014.

⁴⁰⁸ <http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/fischli-and-weiss/roots-2005.html>

⁴⁰⁹ <http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/fischli-and-weiss/roots-2005.html>

⁴¹⁰ From Pier Luigi Tazzi, ‘Conversation with the Artists’, *Vanity*, Milan, July/Aug 1987. Translation: Nina Kappelman in *Das Geheimnis de Arbeit – Text zum Werk von F/W.* ed. Patrick Frey, Kunstverein Munchen, 1990/91, pp. 140–141. Quoted in Schumacher, ‘Salt and Pepper for Reality’, p. 103.

⁴¹¹ <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/fischli-weiss/fischli-weiss-room-guide-room-1>

representations of yearnings that are hidden deep in the darkness of daily routine'.⁴¹² At the same time, in the spirit of play and make-believe, Fischli and Weiss enjoy making unexpected associations: 'if one can see pillows as mountains, one can also make roots out of rubber'.⁴¹³

In 'Fetishism: Surrealism's Job', Dawn Ades provides a very helpful overview of the origins and history of the term fetish, in order to further discuss fetishism in the context of surrealism.⁴¹⁴ According to Ades, the fetish has come to signify over-valuation and displacement, signal error, excess, difference and deviation, set against the rationalist discourse of European Enlightenment. Ades explains that the notion of the fetish, 'one of the key phantoms of the dream of reason', helped 'to structure and enforce distinctions between rational and irrational, civilized and primitive, normal and abnormal, natural and artificial'.⁴¹⁵ Karl Marx, who wrote one of the most influential accounts on the fetish, as well as nineteenth-century psychologists, perceived them as items that denote 'forms of irrational valuation within their own society', giving the term a 'satirical edge'.⁴¹⁶ In her discussion of Marx's section of the *Capital I* on commodity fetishism, Ades notes that, the fetishisation of commodities, along with the fetishisation of capital, which for Marx was a more complex form of bourgeois economic production, is based on an illusion comparable to 'the nebulous world of religion. In that world, the products of the human mind become independent shapes, endowed with lives of their own, and able to enter into relations with men and women. The products of the human hand do the same thing in the world of commodities. I speak of this as the *fetishistic character* which attaches to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced in the form of commodities'.⁴¹⁷ In surrealism, on the other hand, the fetish serves to subvert utilitarian and positivist values - in the words of Carl Einstein: 'to change the hierarchies, the values of of the real'.⁴¹⁸ The material character of the fetish is

⁴¹² Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', pp. 103, 104.

⁴¹³ David Weiss quoted in Patrick Frey 'The Art of Gentle Repulsion', *Fischli, Weiss: Flowers & Questions*, 2006, p. 256.

⁴¹⁴ Dawn Ades, 'Fetishism: Surrealism's Job', pp. 67-87 was originally published in Anthony Shelton (ed.), *Fetishism: Visualising Power and Desire*, London: South Bank Centre and The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton in Association with Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995. Reprinted in Jennifer Mundy (ed.), *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, exhibition catalogue, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

⁴¹⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital*, London, 1942, p. 57. Quoted in Ades, 'Fetishism: Surrealism's Job', p. 381.

closely linked to the surrealist object as conceived by Dalí. For Ades, André Breton 'is interested in the fetishist not, in the first instance, because of his sexual obsessions *per se*, but as someone who is convinced by his imagination'.⁴¹⁹ While the fetish has psychological value for the individual it has no practical value: 'Breton's attack on the despised objects of utility sets the surrealist object in direct confrontation with Le Corbusier's "type-objects", hygienic and prosthetic'.⁴²⁰

Initially linked to issues of power, desire, and superstition, the term fetish was developed in the context of encounters and exchanges between Africans and Europeans on the coast of West Africa during the sixteenth century and after. Given this specific historical and geographical context, William Pietz has argued that, 'these cross-cultural spaces were not societies or cultures in any conventional sense. From this standpoint, the fetish must be viewed as proper to no historical field other than that of the history of the word itself, and to no discrete society or culture, but to a cross-cultural situation formed by the ongoing encounter of the value codes of radically different social orders'.⁴²¹ Viewed in this context, it is telling that Fischli and Weiss connect some of the domestic objects they cast in black rubber, a material with overt fetishistic connotations, to the desire for a foreign element brought back to a familiar domestic situation from trips abroad.

In his influential essay 'Fetishism' (1927), Sigmund Freud writes about the psychological significance of the fetish in the emotional life of the individual. The fetish, for Freud, stands for a particular type of object that was important during childhood but was subsequently lost: the penis. In the mind of the child, however, the fetish is not a substitute for the penis in general, or even that of the father, but more specifically it stands for an object that does not exist: 'the woman's (mother's) phallus which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego - we know why'.⁴²² According to Freud, the realization that the mother is without a phallus creates great anxiety to the little boy relating to fears about his own castration. To keep this anxiety at bay, the fetish then plays the role of preserving the object from being lost. If in Freud's account, the fetish is a copy of an object that does not exist, a stand-in for the absent phallus of the mother, then, in my view, the fetish can be perceived as a kind

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 390. Referring to Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, London 1925.

⁴²¹ William Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish,' *Res* No. 9, Spring 1985, pp. 10-11. Quoted in Ades, p. 382.

⁴²² Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism' (1927) in *Collected Papers*, Volume V, edited by James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953), 198-204, p. 199.

of simulacrum. The notion of simulation is pertinent in different projects in the work of Fischli and Weiss. In the *Rubber Sculptures*, the simulacrum further comes to bear on these objects in the form of the cast, bestowing them with a phantasmatic, preservative function.

In 2009, Fischli and Weiss presented an assortment of the *Rubber Sculptures* (1986 – 1988), including a chest of drawers, a table, a candle, and a cutlery tray, alongside works made in unfired clay that also depict mundane objects, in the exhibition titled *Objects on Pedestals* at their gallery in London (see Figures 5.10).⁴²³ The sculptures were scattered around the gallery, and together, these two bodies of work reflect Fischli and Weiss's ongoing interest and often humorous investigation on the form and function of mundane elements from contemporary daily life. As discussed above, in the *Rubber Sculptures*, the disconcerting and fetishistic associations that arise from the use of heavy industrial black rubber contrasts with the practical function of these objects throwing new light on our perception of them. 'As the objects are divested of any recognised utility, they become charged with an aesthetic and sensory resonance which, both through the anonymising effect of the black colouration, and the simultaneously seductive and repulsive tactile quality of the rubber, presents a disquieting and intriguing image of the domestic world'.⁴²⁴

The clay sculptures on display in this exhibition also reflect the artists' concerns with the material culture of everyday life, yet the fragile and crumbling unfired clay reveals a very different attitude as things slowly deteriorate and collapse. Ironically, however, the artists have chosen to model in clay items 'which demand to be robust and resilient in order to be of any use', such as an axe or a chain, once again upsetting and subverting the order between utility and aesthetic appreciation.⁴²⁵

The exhibition *Walls, Corners, Tubes* at the Sprüth Magers gallery, London, October 10 – November 10, 2012, presented a series of geometrical objects in the form of walls, corners, and tubes (see Figures 5.12 and 5.13).⁴²⁶ Some of these objects were modeled by the artists with great precision in unfired clay producing nearly

⁴²³ Fischli and Weiss, *Objects on Pedestals* at Sprüth Magers London, January 29 - March 28 2009.

⁴²⁴ Press Release from the exhibition *Objects on Pedestals*, Sprüth Magers London - January 29 - March 28 2009. <http://www.spruethmagers.com/pdf.php?active=exhibitions&nr=229&rotz=press>

⁴²⁵ <http://www.spruethmagers.com/pdf.php?active=exhibitions&nr=229&rotz=press>. A similar assortment of objects was also presented in their New York gallery with the exhibition 'Peter Fischli David Weiss: Clay and Rubber' at Matthew Marks, New York, October 29, 2009 - January 16, 2010. <http://www.matthewmarks.com/new-york/exhibitions/2009-10-29-peter-fischli-david-weiss/>

⁴²⁶ A selection of the clay objects was first shown at the 2011 Venice Biennale.

perfect geometric shapes and smooth surfaces, while others were cast in synthetic black rubber. Unlike the previous exhibition, *Objects on Pedestals*, where the cast and the modeled sculptures were independently made, in this case, the casts were produced directly from the modeled objects making them almost identical yet slightly narrower than the clay ones, due to the technicalities of casting. Both the forms and the titles of these works, such as *Wall of Clay* (2012), *Tube of Rubber* (2012), *Narrow Corner of Rubber* (2012), refer to basic architectural elements as well as functional construction units 'such as those often found at building supplies stores'.⁴²⁷ While their subject matter and form indicate an affinity with Minimal Art of the 1960s, the sculptures, which varied in scale, were displayed on white pedestals, a form of display denounced by the Minimalists. In view of their manner of display and their use of fragile clay that contrast with the hard industrial material and techniques usually associated with Minimalism, Mark Godfrey describes the clay sculptures as 'handmade parodies of Minimalism'.⁴²⁸

Once again in this exhibition, in contrast to the rubber casts rendered in hard and highly durable material, the clay sculptures displayed signs of deterioration such as cracks and chips, highlighting the physicality of their different material.⁴²⁹ The difference in tactile quality and visual impact between two such different materials is further underscored by their distinct connotations: rubber brings to mind the fetishistic element of mass produced commodity objects, while the soft and yielding material of clay suggests the different procedure of modeling, slowly shaping by hand, typically used by artists, craftsmen, as well as amateurs. 'Inasmuch as the almost identical forms are created out of the two contrasting materials, there is an evocation of the differences between culture and nature, rapid technical production and slow meticulous craftsmanship, resistance and evanescence'.⁴³⁰

Included in this installation, next to the geometric forms, is the work *Dog Bowl* (2012) (see Figure 5.14), featuring a dog bowl reproduced in clay. The bowl was part

⁴²⁷ Press release for the exhibition *Walls, Corners, Tubes*, with works by Fischli and Weiss, at the Spruth Magers gallery, London, October 10 – November 10, 2012.

http://www.spruethmagers.com/exhibitions/316@@press_en

⁴²⁸ Godfrey, 'A Fine Balance' in *Peter Fischli David Weiss*, p. 23.

⁴²⁹ Switzerland has a track record of technical innovation based on reviving and re-inventing traditional techniques, and even if unfired clay appears to be an altogether unsuitable material for architectural construction due to its purported fragility, I was informed by a Swiss architect (friend of Urs Fischer), that unfired clay has been recently used to build major architectural units such as schools.

⁴³⁰ Press release for the exhibition *Walls, Corners, Tubes*, with works by Fischli and Weiss, at the Spruth Magers gallery, London, October 10 – November 10, 2012.
http://www.spruethmagers.com/exhibitions/316@@press_en

of the series of *Rubber Sculptures*, featuring natural objects and common everyday items cast in synthetic black rubber, which Peter Fischli and David Weiss started producing in 1986. *Dog Bowl* was produced for the first time in unfired clay in 2012, bringing together technical procedures they have been using in two different ongoing projects - the unfired clay sculptures from *Suddenly this Overview* and the cast rubber objects. Throughout their work, Fischli and Weiss interchange these classical sculptural techniques: carving, casting, modeling, while using unexpected material, to different ends and effects.

Finally, objects from the rubber sculptures are usually shown alongside work from the series *Photographs (Fotografias, 2005)* (see Figures 5.15 and 5.16). The series consists of underexposed, black-and-white photographs of paintings depicting fairy tale motifs, cityscapes, exotic landscapes, animals, images of the universe and cosmic events, as well as scenes and characters from urban and popular myths, horror stories and science fiction. Fischli and Weiss came across these painted or airbrushed images in amusement parks and fairgrounds from around the world. Over a number of years the artists photographed them using black-and-white slide film, which is underexposed by two to three aperture points, and printed them on coloured paper to subdue tonal contrasts. Each print measures four by six inches, the standard size for snapshots and postcards. The colourful, large-scale, kitsch paintings are thus transformed into small, dark, haunting photographs.

There are one hundred and eight individual photographs in the entire series, which can be divided into eighteen groups of six prints. The prints are always arranged in their groups, hung across the gallery wall in a single horizontal line at eye level. When displayed together they form a frieze that invites the viewer to construct a narrative by reading one picture next to the other, allowing them to 'engage their own imaginations while likewise revealing the artists' enjoyment in storytelling'.⁴³¹ When displayed together with sculptures of everyday objects cast in black rubber, these two bodies of work – the *Photographs* series and the black rubber sculptures – exemplify the artists' desire to subvert the way we view these everyday items and invest them with new meaning.

⁴³¹ Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', p. 96.

Remarking on the pair's experience making photographic projects, such as *Visible World* 1997 which consists of 3000 colour slides taken during their journeys around the world, Peter Fischli notes that:

With photography, you always bounce on the wall of the visible. There is no way of going behind that wall. Using the trick of taking images of painted things [in the *Photographs* series], most of them about dreams and fears, we found a sort of a fake hole in the wall of the visible, but maybe it was only a painted hole.⁴³²

By transposing the distinct material features of the fairground paintings into underexposed, black-and-white, small format photographs, the artists undermine the indexical nature of photography, and seek to reveal the fantasies and desires hidden beneath the use of this popular imagery that serves as their subject matter. This operation is comparable to the casting process of the *Rubber Sculptures*, for example, where they transpose familiar and banal objects to unexpected material in order to bring forth an array of hidden associations.

***Equilibres: Quiet Afternoon* (1984-85)**

Fischli and Weiss's first collaborative project, a ten-part photographic series titled *Wurstserie*, was made in 1979.⁴³³ It consists a series of photographs of sausages (Wurst) arranged in settings that evoke domestic scenes or excursions in impressive landscapes, which include anthropomorphized cigarette butts, pickles and sausages in mountains of pillows amid unmade beds or makeshift landscapes laid out on the kitchen floor, inside the fridge or in the oven. Individual photographs bearing titles such as *Moonracker* and *Fashion Show*, show small sausages parading around household shelves dressed in capes of sliced salami; another one titled *In the Mountains*, captures a group of adventurers climbing on mountains of pillows; in *At the Carpet Shop*, slices of salami are laid out in piles exhibited around the floor with little sausages strolling around (see Figure 5.17); while in *The Accident*, *Pavesi*, *The Fire of Uster*, a cardboard box made to stand for a block of flats is set aflame, etc. The playful and humorous aspect of these arrangements depicting daily activities is

⁴³² Fischli, 'From Dessau to Las Vegas', 2012.

⁴³³ Around the same time they started working on the film *Der Geringste Widersand* (1979-81) (The Point of Least Resistance) made in Los Angeles in Super-8 format and later converted to 16-mm and video. In Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', p. 86.

immediately evident. Moreover, the verbs 'wursteln' or 'herumwulsten' that the series title alludes to, are slang terms in German language for working on something in an amateurish or aimless manner.⁴³⁴

This mode of working that demonstrates a playfulness reminiscent of children's games when the parents are away from home, using whatever material and objects are at hand, can also be seen in one of their most celebrated series that materializes with the photographic documentation of precarious assemblages of everyday objects: the photographic series *Equilibres* (1984-85), followed by the film *The Way Things Go* (1986-87). This unconstrained playfulness, led art critic Peter Schjeldahl to comment that, 'as professional artists, these guys are pretty jejune', arguing that, 'their ideas are hybrids or repeats of precedents they don't advance or otherwise alter significantly'.⁴³⁵ Even though Fischli and Weiss's work may bring into view ideas and issues pertinent in artworks that preceded theirs, rather than passively reproducing them, they reflect and rework them. Like most artists of their generation (and past), they are highly aware of art historical precedents and willfully engage in a dialogue with them, establishing and questioning their genealogies. In a recent talk at the Barbican Centre in London, Peter Fischli stressed the fact that artists 'always work in line with other artists and other artworks' and that an artwork is created in a dialogue with other artworks, before addressing a public.⁴³⁶

Equilibres document arrangements of objects that were within easy reach in the artists' studio or in their domestic environment, such as tools, chairs, kitchen utensils, and vegetables. These mundane objects have been stacked to balance precariously one on top of the other, forming fragile towering assemblages that collapse as soon as the photograph has been taken. 'These "quiet afternoons", which were probably filled more by the noise and clatter of falling objects have enabled the artist to demonstrate that balance is possible, if not for eternity, then for a short moment'.⁴³⁷ The artist, curator and art critic, Rainald Schumacher, notes the 'perplexity and boredom' involved in such a 'futile task'.⁴³⁸ Schumacher further places the work in the wider

⁴³⁴ Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', p. 84, 86, 87.

⁴³⁵ Peter Schjeldahl: 'Child's Play' *Artforum International*, New York, no. 10 (Summer, 1996), p. 126.

⁴³⁶ Peter Fischli, 'From Dessau to Las Vegas', talk at the Barbican Centre, London, 30 May 2012. 53rd min in <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RO-x-qOkR5A>. last accessed 15 August, 2014.

⁴³⁷ Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', p. 96, 99.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.* Among other roles, Schumacher has been the assistant of Gerhard Richter and head of his studio in Cologne; director of Esther Schipper Gallery, Berlin; artistic director of Goetz Collection in Munich. Ingvild Goetz is one of the first and most important collectors of work by Fischli and Weiss.

context of scientific theories of the 1980s, around chaos and order, chance and necessity that provided a general understanding that 'our world is not as fixed as suspected, but that it is statically anchored based on eternal laws'. The impending fragility of environmental balance, as well as that of economic or financial systems, fuelled by the general feeling of uncertainty about the state of balance in the world and the sense that a minimal change could bring the system to a fall. At this prevailing moment, *Equilibres* (1984/5), presents these 'works of balance'.⁴³⁹

The series consists of black-and-white, as well as colour photos, in portrait and landscape format, and comprises about 45 parts (see Figure 5.18). Some are artist proofs, slightly different from, or variants of the regular editions, but still bearing the same titles.⁴⁴⁰ With individual titles, such as *The Egoist* or *Completion*, or its black-and-white version titled *Honor, Courage, Confidence*, where a glass bottle rests on top of the handle of a bent saw that intersects with a piece of wood balanced on a kitchen paper roll resting on a horizontal surface. *Talented* – a precarious balance of a grater, a bottle opener, a carrot, a potato and a courgette, exists in a different variation including a glass of wine and a piece of string titled *Roped Mountaineers*. In another one called *The Maid*, we find different assortments including teapots, brooms, plastic bottles of cleaning products, shoes, videotapes, knives, rolls of masking tape, hair brushes, chairs, ladders etc. Titles such as *Triumphant Carrot*, *The Twentieth Century Mr. and Mrs. Pear with Their New Dog*, *Artificial Intelligence*, etc. play an important role, and each of the photographs demonstrates, with a tongue-in-cheek manner, a situation, idea, personality or social type and conventions. 'The subtitle of the series, *Am schönsten ist das Gleichgewicht, kurz bevor's zusammenbricht* (The equilibrium is most perfect right before the point of collapse) likewise conveys the joy and disappointment that is triggered by the lapse of fragile order into chaos... only during that split second of the documentary photograph artistic thought can convey a deceptive ideal of balance and standstill; immediately afterwards reality and thought rush back into the creative chaos. Order, in the form of dramatic effigy, becomes the rule for art – while remaining an exception in reality'.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', p. 99.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Also in Claire Bishop on *Equilibres* 1984/5: 45 different photographs, colour and black-and-white, portrait and landscape. Two series: 30 x 24 cm and 40 x 30 cm. In 2006, additional *Equilibres* were printed from old negatives. 'Equilibres - quiet afternoon' in *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions* (London: Tate, 2006), pp. 95-106.

⁴⁴¹ Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', p. 99.

Thematically and formally, the *Equilibres* share the artists' ongoing interest in objects from everyday life, demonstrated with the carved polyurethane sculptures and the rubber cast sculptures. Yet *Equilibres* are photographs of assemblages of random objects that formally, even if somewhat ironically, evoke surrealist objects. In an article featuring in the exhibition catalogue of the Fischli and Weiss's major retrospective exhibition at Tate Modern in 2007, Claire Bishop brings into view the often-noted relation of the *Equilibres* with surrealist objects. To illustrate this connection, Bishop includes an excerpt of Dalí's 'Surrealist Objects':

These objects, which lend themselves to a minimum of mechanical functioning, are based on phantasms and representations susceptible to being provoked by the realization of conscious acts. Acts of realization from which one can hardly explain the pleasure drawn, or which render account of the erroneous theories elaborated by censorship and repression. In all the cases analysed, these acts correspond to fantasies and desires clearly characterized as erotic.⁴⁴²

On the aesthetic level, as discussed previously in my chapter on surrealist objects, the random, 'automatic' arrangements of the surrealist objects produce a new kind of beauty that is divorced from formal concerns, expressed for the surrealists as we have seen with Lautréamont's phrase, 'Beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella, on a dissecting table'.⁴⁴³ By contrast, the *Equilibres* evoke a certain disentanglement from the question of aesthetic response, bringing their concerns closer to Duchamp's brand of anti-aesthetics, and the notion of aesthetic indifference which the artist developed in relation to his readymades. In the small black book of questions, titled *Will Happiness Find Me?* (1999/2003), a project by Fischli and Weiss that contains questions ranging from the philosophical to the mundane and the absurd, the artists include the question: 'Do I suffer from good taste?'⁴⁴⁴ In the *Equilibres*, however, Fischli indicates that, to some extent, questions of taste and aesthetic composition were kept at bay: 'We were slightly relieved of the question of which object must be selected according to which criteria: it didn't matter whether the colour of the cigarette lighter that establishes and maintains the balance is

⁴⁴² Quoted by Bishop, by way of commentary in 'Equilibres - Quiet Afternoon' in *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions*, p. 99.

⁴⁴³ Lautréamont, *Oeuvres*, p. 327.

⁴⁴⁴ Peter Fischli, David Weiss, *Will Happiness Find Me?*, translation: Catherine Schelbert, Köln; London: König, Alberta Books, 2003.

a nice green or not'. 'The only criterion shaping the composition was balance', David Weiss concludes.⁴⁴⁵ Unlike the surrealist objects, moreover, where the selection of objects seeks to reveal something of the process of unconscious thought as well as register personal preoccupations of their makers, with the *Equilibres*, Fischli and Weiss distance their work from compositional preoccupations and values by reverting, not to chance, but, ironically, to gravity - ironically, because gravity is traditionally one of the central components of sculpture, that drives and directs sculptural form and composition to an important extent.

However, these photographs document sculpture, literally, on the brink of its collapse. Bishop moreover writes about the series that not only it brings forth a crisis in contemporary sculpture, but in doing so it frustrates art historical interpretation of any kind:

Such slack randomness has an immediately deflationary effect on art historical analysis. If anything *Quite Afternoon* is a send-up of traditional sculpture and the language with which we read it. Composition, matter, dynamism, weight, pictoriality: all these terms fall flat in the face of ropey materials and bathetic titling. It's hard to discuss a work of sculpture when the object of your study is a quizzical courgette tentatively gracing a stumpy carrot supported by a slim cheese grater.⁴⁴⁶

***The Way Things Go* (1986-1987)**

The experimental balancing acts in *Equilibres*, led to the construction of a filmic *perpetuum mobile* with *The Way Things Go* (Der Lauf der Dinge, 1986-1987), which is one of Fischli and Weiss's most celebrated projects to this day (see Figure 5.19). *The Way Things Go*, 'a film about a dynamically changing sculpture', was first shown in *Documenta 8*, Kassel, 1987.⁴⁴⁷ The film marked the artists' international recognition accompanied by 'a wealth of international exhibitions, articles and reviews from the mid-1980s, [that] catapulted Fischli and Weiss's work into the orbit of the international art and cultural scene'.⁴⁴⁸ For the work, the artists used objects they found lying around in their studio, such as tools, chairs and working tables, garbage bags, plastic buckets and ladders, as wells as items of waste or more or less

⁴⁴⁵ Heiser, 'The Odd Couple' *Frieze*, p. 205.

⁴⁴⁶ Bishop, 'Equilibres', p. 98.

⁴⁴⁷ Schumacher, 'Salt and Pepper for Reality', p. 100.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

obsolete like empty plastic bottles, recovered pieces of scrap metal or wood, old shoes, an old kettle, old car tires etc.⁴⁴⁹ For the film, they arranged these objects to form an elaborate and captivating chain reaction where things followed a sequence of movement triggered by and in turn causing explosions, liquid spills, small fires etc. In the painstaking task of staging an absurd yet entertaining procession of objects that tumble and fall upon each other, generating ongoing movement, the film builds up a plot, often with comic results. *The Way Things Go* problematizes notions of movement and progress in producing the illusion of a seamless, continuous flow achieved by over two dozen different edited scenes.⁴⁵⁰

The opening sequence shows the close up of a black plastic garbage bag, suspended from a rope that causes the bag to slowly spin and gradually descend until it hits a tire, set just below, which immediately starts rolling down a wooden ramp. The tire, in turn, keeps rolling on the floor until it collides with a counterweight placed at the end of a pivoting wooden board.⁴⁵¹ From that point on, a series of similar collisions and reactions take place creating a domino effect in a film that runs for about thirty minutes, shot by cinematographer Pio Corradi.⁴⁵² The first sequence of *The Way Things Go* was made in September 1985, with a three-minute Super-8 film.⁴⁵³ Subsequently, the entire film was shot in parts in Super-8 and 16mm film footage, instead of video, making it crucial for the artists to carefully set up and calibrate everything for each individual shot.⁴⁵⁴ David Weiss notes that some transitions had to be repeated many times, which means that the individual sequences had to be re-staged, calibrated and set in motion over and over again since all the process was made in real time by hand and there was no computer-manipulation

⁴⁴⁹ Relics: Vitrine of Objects used in *The Way Things Go*, 1986-1987. Photo in *Peter Fischli, David Weiss*, exhibition catalogue, (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1992) (French text), p. 45. At the Pompidou exhibition, it was shown next to *Der Tisch (The Table)*, 1992-93. 'Cette vitrine rassemble des utensils plus ou moins obsoletes et d'un archaïsme recherché: vieux pneus, déchets de plastique, bouts de feraille récupérés, vieille bouilloire etc. Contrairement à ce qui s'accumule sur la table (*my note: replicas, polyurethane carved objects), en désordre, les objets de la vitrine sont classés d'après la fonction qu'ils ont occupée dans le film. Malgré les traitements énergiques qu'on leur a infligé dans ces sequences: explosions, métamorphoses, chocs, ils sont régénérés et conservent leur intégrité physique dans cette nouvelle configuration', pp. 44, 45.

⁴⁵⁰ Jeremy Millar, *Fischli and Weiss: The Way Things Go*, (London: Afterall, 2007), pp. 35-36.

⁴⁵¹ Katherine Stauble, 'Fischli and Weiss' Mad Machine', National Gallery of Canada Magazine, January 28, 2014. <http://www.ngcmagazine.ca/exhibitions/fischli-and-weiss-mad-machine>, last accessed 6 August, 2014.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ Thomas Kapielski, 'Making Things Go' in *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions* (Tate: 2006), p. 225.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226. The final film was transferred to digital video disk (DVD), and it is shown in this form playing in a TV screen in exhibitions.

involved.⁴⁵⁵ The preparation for each take thus required great effort and always carried the imminent potential of failure. The artists resolved that there should be no immediate human presence in the film, focusing instead on the continuous movement of things that appear to take on a life of their own.⁴⁵⁶ The result was an 'exciting, thriller-like as well as humorous plot', where things featured as 'characters'.⁴⁵⁷

Interestingly, there is a video recording part of this process, the 'making of' *The Way Things Go*, titled *Making Things Go* and shot by Patrick Frey. The video comprises six hours of edited material in two video-tapes, each three-hours long, which Frey finished editing and presented to the artists early in 2006, twenty years after *The Way Things Go* was finalized. It includes footage recorded by Frey on the occasion of the very first experiments and during the shooting in Super-8 for the three-minute sketch of 1985, where he let the video camera constantly running.⁴⁵⁸ It records the artists and a crew of technicians, electricians, workers etc., setting up the objects and starting the process. The atmosphere is that of an energetic workshop, with a lot of laughing going on, frequent failures, as well as demonstrations of pleasure when something succeeds, for example, 'the men dance with each other and howl'.⁴⁵⁹ There is evidently a great deal of effort and patience involved in this laborious procedure, indeed 'a lot of WORK', as one of the workers commented.⁴⁶⁰

In both the *Equilibrium* series and *The Way Things Go* the artists express their interest in 'objects which are "next to nothing" or nothing special'.⁴⁶¹ When asked if the film could be seen as 'an animated version of the photographs', they explained that in the course of building up and precariously balancing the objects, which were inevitably collapsing after a few moments, for the *Equilibrium* photographs, they came up with the idea of using 'the energy of their collapsing', and that is what triggered the idea for the film. They further explain how this metaphor of breaking down, or failure, could be applied to things like society or family. Rather than over-determining the meaning of the works, however, they focus on the idea of ascribing

⁴⁵⁵ Ingvild Goetz, 'Encounter', in *Peter Fischli, David Weiss*, Ingvild Goetz, Karsten Löckemann (eds), (München: Hatje Cantz; Sammlung Goetz, 2010). Catalogue of an exhibition with works from the Sammlung Goetz, München, held there, Nov. 8, 2010 - Mar. 12, 2011. (Texts: German/English) p. 31.

⁴⁵⁶ Kapielski, 'Making Things Go' p. 225.

⁴⁵⁷ In *Peter Fischli, David Weiss* Goetz, 2010, p. 134.

⁴⁵⁸ Kapielski, 'Making Things Go', p. 226.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁴⁶¹ Fischli and Weiss interview with Matthew Collings 'The Stumbling Objects of Fischli and Weiss', in *Artscribe International*, November/December 1987, p. 561.

new value to these mundane objects from daily life, which take on new life and meaning for as long as they function: 'We discovered during the long months of putting the film together that a thing was good if it functioned and not good if it did not function. That was the limit of its value.'⁴⁶² The artists never intended to present these objects in the gallery as readymades but to use them only for the duration of the shooting, as 'their meaning lies in their power to transport energy'. Their meaning then depends on their functionality; it's a question of mechanics, or the ability to create with these objects a system that works, 'or more accurately to create a system that works but nearly doesn't work. It has to be very close to not working, just as the arrangements for the equilibrium series are close to collapsing. There has to be a very real possibility of failure in every moment of the film: we like it where at every moment you think, "now it stops". But in fact it goes on'.⁴⁶³

The experimental character of these two artworks, a parody of a scientific, engineering or building project, is comparable for Fischli and Weiss to *Bouvard et Peruchet*, Gustave Flaubert's unfinished masterpiece, that recounts the adventures of two Parisian clerks who move to the countryside to live and work together venturing on an encyclopedic inquiry that includes every realm of arts and sciences, from agriculture and gardening, to chemistry, anatomy, biology, architecture, history, politics and philosophy.⁴⁶⁴ The projects they initiate never come to fruition, exposing the limits of arts and sciences as all-encompassing, watertight systems. Fischli and Weiss are interested in the process, the inquiry into systems of knowledge, rather than the end result. Fischli says: 'What I like about the film is the way these objects can be seen to be trying again to work, to function. We see this as the tragic, or melancholy aspect of what we do'.⁴⁶⁵ He further compares the unfired clay sculptures from *Suddenly this Overview* to the film, as for him they share the same spirit: 'the idea of trying to achieve a system that makes sense of everything we know – history big and small, ideas big and small, opposites and so on – but in the end, of course, finding that explaining only creates more confusion'.⁴⁶⁶ He continues: 'One object in the film is

⁴⁶² Fischli and Weiss interview with Matthew Collings 'The Stumbling Objects of Fischli and Weiss', in *Artscribe International*, November/December 1987, pp. 561-62.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁴ 'We like the way Bouvard and Peruchet are always trying out new things, but they never try anything for very long and always give up very soon', Collings, 'The Stumbling Objects of Fischli and Weiss', p. 563

⁴⁶⁵ Collings, 'The Stumbling Objects of Fischli and Weiss', p. 563.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

no more important than another. It's the energy that's important. If you have a beginning and an ending, immediately a special meaning is given to the first and last movements, but the real meaning is in the fact of constant movement. When this sequence of moving objects is functioning then it's good. When it's nicely functioning, just on the edge of failure, then for us it's beautiful...'⁴⁶⁷

In 1969, the sixteen-year-old Peter Fischli visited in Zurich the now legendary exhibition *Live in your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations-Information*, curated by Harald Szeemann.⁴⁶⁸ This seminal international travelling exhibition, opened in Switzerland, travelled to Germany, and finally a smaller version was presented at the ICA, London. The exhibition showcased work by artists such as Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Joseph Beuys, Alighiero Boetti, Mel Bochner, Hans Haacke, Michael Heizer, Eva Hesse, Douglas Huebler, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Claes Oldenburg, Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, and Lawrence Weiner, among others, many of whom became leading figures associated with Minimalism and Conceptual Art. Szeemann describes the works on display in terms of opposition to form, personal and emotional engagement, focus on the artistic process rather than the finished product or the autonomous object. The exhibition was a formative experience for Fischli, and its emphasis on process rather than form opened a view into different ways of thinking about art and working with everyday materials.⁴⁶⁹

At the time Fischli and Weiss started their collaboration in the late 1970s, and throughout the 1980s, the German-speaking artworld was dominated by discussions on 'neo-Expressionism'.⁴⁷⁰ *The Way Things Go* instead turns away from the expressive artistic gesture that focuses on the hand of the artist as the carrier of an inner psychological depth, in order to draw parallels between the work of the artist and that of the engineer, or between artistic gesture and manual labour. The film has often been discussed in relation to American engineer Rube Goldberg's early twentieth century cartoons involving ingenious experimental machines concocted by an eccentric inventor, which according to Arthur Danto, present 'caricatures of so-

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ See Alison Green, 'When Attitudes Become Form, and the Contest over Conceptual Art's History', in *Conceptual Art, Theory, Myth and Practice*, edited by M. Corris (Cambridge, 2004)

⁴⁶⁹ 'Peter Fischli and David Weiss, interview with Claire Bishop and Mark Godfrey' *Flash Art*, no. 251, November – December 2006.

⁴⁷⁰ Heiser, 'The Odd Couple', http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the_odd_couple/, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

called Yankee ingenuity', an ironic take on the obsession with 'labor-saving devices'.⁴⁷¹ By contrast to these complicated yet supposedly functional machines, however, *The Way Things Go* has no useful function and no practical goal.⁴⁷²

A correspondence between fellow Swiss artist Jean Tinguely's *Homage à New York* (1960) (see Figure 5.20) and Fischli and Weiss's *The Way Things Go*, has been repeatedly highlighted by art historians and critics discussing the latter.⁴⁷³ In his essay 'The Way Things Go' Arthur Danto writes, for example, that: 'Beginning with a Katzenjammer Kids mentality, Fischli and Weiss take their mischief to a distance so great that the resulting work becomes a postmodern classic with a rich art-historical pedigree ranging from Jean Tinguely, the fabricator of self-destroying machines, to Joseph Beuys, who made art of soap, old newspapers and whatever was, to echo Heidegger, "at hand."'⁴⁷⁴ Besides brief commentaries, however, there is no detailed account to date that evokes this relation in greater depth. In *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960's*, Pamela M. Lee locates the central, movement-related issue in Tinguely's art to be the *speed* and *direction* of history itself, split as it is between regression and forward movement.⁴⁷⁵ Following in the steps of Tinguely's *Homage* - a machine comprising of objects and material recovered from a garbage dump that was planned to self-destruct in a live performance staged at the Museum of Modern Art in New York - *The Way Things Go* further problematizes notions of movement and progress in producing the illusion of a seamless, continuous flow achieved by editing. Despite the teleological rhetoric of the film's title and narrative, delivered however with a tongue-in-cheek attitude, *The Way Things Go* offers a complex reflection on historical determinism and the Modernist ideology of progress.

Pontus Hultén considers Tinguely's auto-destructive machines as part of the liberation of art 'from its material components', with the delightful outcome of the work 'ending up in the museum's garbage bins'.⁴⁷⁶ Among the objects that comprise

⁴⁷¹ Arthur Danto, 'Play/Things', in Elizabeth Armstrong (ed.), *In a Restless World* (Minneapolis; London: Walker Art Center, 1996), pp. 94-113, p. 104.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*

⁴⁷³ In *Peter Fischli/ David Weiss* (London: Phaidon, 2005), 'The artwork with which *The Way Things Go* has the greatest affinity is perhaps *Homage à New York* (1960) by Fischli and Weiss' fellow Swiss of an earlier generation, Jean Tinguely', p. 100.

⁴⁷⁴ Arthur Danto 'The Way Things Go' in *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions* (London: Tate, 2006), p. 214. The full text was first published in *Peter Fischli David Weiss: In a Restless World*, (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), pp. 94-113.

⁴⁷⁵ Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960's*, (MIT Press, 2006), p. 93.

⁴⁷⁶ Pontus Hultén, *Tinguely: Méta* (in German, 1972), first English translation, 1975, p. 133, p. 127.

the work is a burning piano, a meteorological balloon etc.⁴⁷⁷ Hultén notes that 'Jean's machine was conceived out of "total anarchy and freedom" as [the artist] put it. ... Jean supplied the energy to create the freedom and was the ruler over the chaos. When the energy was released everything that happened was related to some of Jean's decisions. No distinction can be made between the "random" elements, the accidents, or the controlled parts of the spectacle'.⁴⁷⁸ Photographic documentation shows the remains of the sculpture being removed from the museum garden (MoMA), to be returned to the rubbish dump they came from, while another photograph shows Tinguely on a French rubbish dump he visited to select material for the piece.⁴⁷⁹ While both works incorporate items of waste put to a new function, perhaps as a parody of a civilization taken by technological efficiency and progress, there are several differences: *Homage à New York*, for example, was a public performance, a spectacle presented at the garden of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, while *The Way Things Go* was staged in private in the artists' studio in order to be filmed.

Another related group of works by Tinguely are his automatic drawing machines, collectively titled the *Meta-matics*, a numbered sequence of machines the first of which was constructed in 1955, and the last one, number 21, made in 1960 and were first exhibited together at Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, in 1959.⁴⁸⁰ Some of these machines, which mimic modes of mechanical mass production, were held and operated by hand, while 'they all had the same function: to make abstract drawings on paper'.⁴⁸¹ These works are situated at the antipode of the dominant modes of artistic production at the time: 'Tachisme in Paris and Abstract Expressionism in New York, with their claims to highly individual, emotive works that emerged spontaneously from the unconscious mind'.⁴⁸² By contrast, Tinguely's machines made perfectly acceptable drawings on demand, producing variables time after time, as no two drawings were the same. In the first Paris Biennial 1959, meta-matic number 17 reportedly made 40,000 unique drawings. As the titles reveal, these works both draw upon and challenge surrealist

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-153.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 176.

⁴⁸⁰ Meredith Malone (ed.), *Chance Aesthetics*, (Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri, distributed by The University of Chicago Press: 2009), p. 115. This volume is published in conjunction with the exhibition *Chance Aesthetics* organized by the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis, on view September 18, 2009, to January 4, 2010.

⁴⁸¹ Malone (ed.), *Chance Aesthetics*, p. 115.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*

automatism with its claims to provide direct access to contents of the unconscious mind. At the same time, 'the title metamatic, with its play on the word "automatic" and its definition as a machine that operates autonomously, conjures up images of self-service and commercial vending machines'.⁴⁸³ Indeed, in an exhibition at the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris in 1959, each of the machines were fitted with coin slots and visitors could operate the machines by paying money into the slots, exactly like vending machines. As a kind of certificate or signature, the resulting drawings were stamped as follows: 'painting executed in collaboration with Tinguely's méta- matic no. ____'.⁴⁸⁴

The history of automata, which have been regarded 'as toys or tools to demonstrate basic scientific principles',⁴⁸⁵ stretches back to the ancient world in Alexandria, Egypt, while large-scale automata were later developed as artificial wonders in Renaissance and Mannerist gardens, reaching in the eighteenth century the height of their popularity.⁴⁸⁶ Automata have marked the intersection between machine and human and have provided 'an entertainment scientifically inclined'.⁴⁸⁷ A recent BBC documentary, titled *Mechanical Marvels: Clockwork Dreams* (2013), chronicles the story of automata created in different areas around Europe since the late eighteenth century - 'extraordinary clockwork machines designed hundreds of years ago to mimic and recreate life'.⁴⁸⁸ The film includes one of the most impressive and influential early examples of technical sophistication, *The Writer* (see Figure 5.21), built in the early 1770s in Switzerland by celebrated craftsman and clockmaker Pierre Jaquet-Droz, allegedly as an attempt to 'mechanize reason and automate the passions'.⁴⁸⁹ Comprising around six thousand parts that 'have been refined and miniaturized to fit completely into the body of the boy', to make it appear as if the little writer operates on his own, *The Writer* manages to convey an uncanny semblance of life. Importantly, this type of device, *The Writer* in particular, had a

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ 'Automata (Batteries not Included)' in *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen*, exhibition catalogue, edited by Barbara Maria Stafford (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002), p. 266.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁴⁸⁸ The documentary film *Mechanical Marvels: Clockwork Dreams* is presented by Professor of History Simon Schaffer, produced by BBC, 2013, duration: 1 hour.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0229pbp>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p019ng2n>;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OAA7yn_Km8, last accessed 16 August, 2014.

⁴⁸⁹ Schaffer, *The Writer*, clip from *Mechanical Marvels: Clockwork Dreams* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p019ng2n>, last accessed 16 August, 2014.

lasting influence in the surrealist reception of the automata, given the origins of the movement in literature. [to a different end- a prototype for surrealist psychic automatism that dictates in an allegedly direct and unmediated manner the contents of unconscious thoughts.

The eighteenth-century automata were developed by eccentric designers in the midst of the industrial revolution, and in the context of constant innovation and increasing sophistication of the clockwork production industry, with the objective of creating machines that 'stay stable and working and viable against changes in their environment'.⁴⁹⁰ One of the central scientific principles was that of homeostasis, meaning that 'however the environment changes, (temperature, pressure, the bumps and knocks of everyday life), these machines will keep on going reliably and regularly', and this principle was so crucial that some scientists considered it to be 'the definition of life itself'.⁴⁹¹ Automata makers then often aspired to 'not just imitate but simulate living beings', with the extraordinary example of Jacques de Vaucanson who was convinced that 'there was no significant difference between humans and machines', and created automata such as his celebrated flute player.⁴⁹² Automata bring together elements from engineering, art history and the study of anatomy, and 'these long-forgotten marriages of art and engineering are actually the ancestors of many of our most loved modern technologies, from recorded music to the cinema and much of the digital world.'⁴⁹³

This effect of inanimate objects coming to life, albeit with a comic twist, and the conjunction between art and engineering that we find in Fischli and Weiss's *The Way Things Go* evokes a homemade, amateur version of automata. *The Way Things Go*, however, brings out the precarious nature of these arrangements, it is constructed to function very close to the point of breaking down; in fact, it is when things collapse that the work is successful. Comparing the process to a 'circus act, [with] trained objects', Fischli recounts: 'Strangely, for us, while we were making the piece, it was funnier when it failed, when it didn't work. When it worked, that was more about satisfaction. And that the film created the impression that the things move on their

⁴⁹⁰ *Mechanical Marvels: Clockwork Dreams*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0229pbp>: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OAA7yn_Km8, last accessed 16 August, 2014

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

own, without human help, that they become spirited, living beings.⁴⁹⁴

Conclusion: 'From Dessau to Las Vegas'

Fischli opened his Barbican talk 'From Dessau to Las Vegas', commemorating the formative influence of Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi's seminal book on architectural theory *Learning from Las Vegas* (1968) on his own work and thought, while tracing his personal trajectory from his childhood Bauhaus home and modernist aesthetics, to postmodernism and his coming-of-age as an artist. *Learning from Las Vegas*, which marks one of the artist's first encounters with Pop Art when he was fifteen years old in the mid-1960s, includes photographs of Richard Hamilton's *Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?* (1956) (see Figure 5.22), whose caption describes Pop Art as marked by 'an interest in "popular" and "consumer" products, often used in an ironic manner, and in new practices of reproduction'.⁴⁹⁵ Another featured photograph in the volume shows Claes Oldenburg's soft sculpture of stuffed cloth, from 1962.

The attention that Pop Art brought in the early 1960s to the present moment, pop culture, and the trivial things from daily life, marks for Fischli the juncture when the project of Modernism with its focus in the future was transformed into something different. According to the artist, the key emphasis of Modernism on utopia gradually lost its radicality after the end of WWII, and room was created to look at the present.⁴⁹⁶ The lasting impression Pop Art made on Fischli and Weiss in the 1960s, is reflected on their subject matter, everyday objects and events from daily life, as well as their material, i.e. cheap and modest material like polyurethane, plaster, rubber, or unfired clay that they use to make their sculptures. Their choice of unusual material, however, contrasts with their use of the traditional sculptural techniques of carving, casting and modeling. By bringing the postmodern aesthetics of their material and subject matter to bear upon traditional modes of art-making, they are redefining the premises of sculpture in contemporary art.

In *Learning from Las Vegas*, there is a photograph by Scott Brown of herself with a camera looking in the mirror, 'something like Dan Graham *avant-la-lettre*'.⁴⁹⁷ 'One of the key points in Graham's mirror pieces', Fischli explains, 'is that the spectator is

⁴⁹⁴ Heiser, 'The Odd Couple', *Frieze*.

⁴⁹⁵ Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas*, (MIT Press, 1977), p. 94.

⁴⁹⁶ Peter Fischli, 'From Dessau to Las Vegas', talk at the Barbican Centre, London, 30 May 2012.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RO-x-qOkR5A>, last accessed 15 August, 2014.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

watching himself looking at his image'.⁴⁹⁸ This situation is comparable, for Fischli, to Lacan's mirror stage, when a baby between one and two years old recognises for the first time his or her image and the self in the mirror, which proves fundamental in building up a sense for a self identity. This is the first instance when the child sees his or her body for the first time as a unified whole. Before that, s/he only has a sense of its body in fragments, or deconstructed and distorted. Fischli points out that deconstruction, fragmentation and distortion, a sense of identity before the imaginary unity acquired in the mirror stage, are all characteristic elements of postmodernist aesthetics.⁴⁹⁹

Fischli recounts how this experience, embodied in Graham's glass pavilions (since 1978), and distilled in Scott Brown's photograph, effected the way he was looking at a characteristic example of modernist architecture: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's *Barcelona Pavilion* (1929) (see Figure 5.23). In one of his visits there, the modernist building had transformed, in his eyes, into a hall of mirrors with its 'overlapping semi-reflection, and reflection of the people looking at their reflection mixed with fragments of the building. It became an immaterial, nearly psychedelic experience'. Looking at a modernist building through a postmodern artwork thus helped Fischli 'understand, or even better see the Barcelona Pavilion outside of a cliché'.⁵⁰⁰

To convey the particularities of postmodern theory, Fischli recites an incident from the story of *The Idiot*, the central character in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's book, when he was spending time in a Swiss clinic to treat his epilepsy and mental confusion. The Idiot recollects that his intense melancholic feelings of estrangement were halted when he encountered one evening in the mountains of Switzerland a thing as plain and trivial as a donkey. This encounter alone caused him to reconnect with his past and brought back the memories of his home in this otherwise foreign landscape. Fischli indicates that the effect that the donkey had on the Idiot, bringing together his past and present, was paralleled in his own case with the famous Duck that features in *Learning from Las Vegas* (see Figure 5.24) (an iconic building in the form of a duck that Venturi uses as an example of postmodern architecture). In the postmodern architectural context, the Duck type building has famously served to illustrate a

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

characteristic example of a 'pictographic' or iconographic take on architecture. Surprisingly, the Duck elicited for Fischli a moment of sudden agreement, because he found the example familiar in a twisted way: after all, he grew up in a 'shoebox' house. During his childhood, the modernist house ironically called the 'shoebox' by his schoolmates, had been turned into something pictographic, 'people wanted to see a shoebox'.⁵⁰¹

In Fischli's story, then, Venturi's Duck triggered the realization that a postmodern view was already at play in his father's modernist house. For Fischli, this contradictory account of overlapping, diverse elements and references found in postmodernism often sheds new light and helps understand things better by looking afresh at a situation, or finding new meaning to it by going beyond the clichés that surround it.⁵⁰² This grounding in postmodern theory that the artist intimates here, serves for him to revisit modernism and to find, for example, rather anachronistically, Pop Art elements in Bauhaus, as with the *Cigarette Pavilion* (1924), a design for an advertisement for a cigarette pavilion by Herbert Bayer, included in the exhibition *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity* (November 8, 2009–January 25, 2010) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York that Fischli visited after delivering an earlier version of his talk on Bauhaus at Yale University. 'To provoke art historians', Fischli says, one could argue that 'Pop Art was invented at the Bauhaus. ... I maybe learned in Las Vegas to see the complexity and the contradiction of the Bauhaus', he concludes.⁵⁰³

The main question for Fischli is, I think, how the modernist project, which was structured around the idea of utopia, that is, looking from the present towards the future, while radically breaking with the past, is effectively revolutionized through a postmodern anachronistic history. Emphasis in the present was signaled with the Pop sensibility of the 1960s, which focused on the 'now' by looking at its banal and trivial tropes. For Fischli, postmodernism looks into the present from the past, or into the past from the future while being firmly grounded in the present. This convoluted viewpoint, the artist remarks, is appropriately illustrated with a photograph that the Venturis and their students took in Las Vegas of the replica of a statue depicting a Roman soldier (see Figure 5.25). The camera viewpoint located behind the statue

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

overlooking a parking lot identifies with the gaze of the soldier looking from history into the present, which takes the form of a parking lot in the 1960s in Las Vegas. Alternatively, it can be read as if the Roman soldier were looking into the future, which is our present. For Fischli, this distinctly postmodern vision is further illustrated in a photograph of Robert Venturi and his wife and collaborator, Denise Scott Brown, taken in their car from behind their heads, revealing their viewpoint while including them in the picture (see Figure 5.26). In other words, it shows them seeing the present while being in it. For Fischli, their view is outstanding; 'they saw the present, which is usually our blind spot, without fear, clear-sighted and visionary, without being cynical in their interpretation of it'. This contains a nice paradox, 'as postmodernists they acted like modernists'.⁵⁰⁴ Fischli and Weiss, likewise, revisit modernism through postmodernism. Rather than simply repeating the past in the present, by incorporating methods and techniques of traditional and modernist sculpture, they engage the operational framework of simulation to perform this anachronic reversal – to bring the future to bear on the past while staying grounded in the concerns and particularities of the present moment.

With the projects discussed in this chapter, Fischli and Weiss further call into question the idea of representation with their use of simulation. By bringing forth this crisis of representation, they also effectively undermine traditional notions of sculpture. As Claire Bishop points out with regards to *Quiet Afternoon*, for example, the work 'is a send-up of traditional sculpture and the language with which we read it. Composition, matter, dynamism, weight, pictoriality: all these terms fall flat in the face of ropery materials and bathetic titling'.⁵⁰⁵ To achieve this, the artists incorporate readymade or found objects, banal items from everyday life. At the same time, however, while using it as their subject matter, they put into scrutiny the concept of the readymade by retrieving the traditional sculptural techniques of carving, casting or modeling, in some of their key projects discussed here. By reinventing thus the medium of sculpture via the postmodern trope of simulation in the forms of *trompe l'oeil*, fetish, and automata, while engaging with traditional sculptural techniques, Fischli and Weiss's projects discussed in this chapter shed new light on the programmatic premises of modernism grounded in a utopian agenda, functionalism and the idea of progress. At the same time the works offer an elaborate reflection on

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ Bishop, *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions*, p. 98.

the changing conditions of production and labour in post-industrial western societies during the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, their 'phantom objects' are performing the phantasmatic return of sculpture hovering over contemporary art production like a spectre.

Chapter 6: Urs Fischer: Delirious Objects

*Paranoia is a delirium of interpretation. Each fact, event, force, observation is caught in one system of speculation and 'understood' by the afflicted individual in such a way that it absolutely confirms and reinforces his thesis – that is, the initial delusion that is his point of departure. The paranoiac always hits the nail on the head, no matter where the hammer blows fall.*⁵⁰⁶ - Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*.

In the Spring of 2008, Swiss-born artist Urs Fischer and his New York dealer, Gavin Brown, organised the exhibition *Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?* at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in New York. The exhibition title is, among other things, an oblique reference to Barnett Newman's painting *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?* (1966), which Newman initially intended to name *Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?* The phrase is in turn echoed in Hal Foster's seminal essay 'Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?'⁵⁰⁷ eventually bringing into view a complex system of art historical references what an art critic has described as Fischer's 'hyperawareness of art past and present'.⁵⁰⁸ Ultimately building on this model of repetitions, overlaps, reflections and appropriations, *Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?* was designed to incorporate the preceding exhibition at the Shafrazi Gallery, titled *Four Friends*, a rather conventional show with works by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Donald Baechler and Kenny Sharf, that had remained on view at the gallery for six months, until Brown and Fischer suggested an intervention.

Fischer had the *Four Friends* exhibition photographed, including the guards and every minute detail from the gallery space, and then reproduced it in print on a one-to-one scale. The resulting prints were fitted onto the gallery walls like wallpaper, serving as the backdrop against which a selection of new works was installed. The resulting installation featured 'real' artworks hanging on top of reproductions of works from the previous show. In this series of juxtapositions and overlaps, the show offered a rather disorienting experience (see Figure 6.1). 'Initially, you don't know

⁵⁰⁶ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, (New York : Monacelli Press, 1994), p. 238.

⁵⁰⁷ Hal Foster, 'Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?' *The Return of the Real*, (MIT Press: 1996), pp. 1-33. An earlier version of the essay was published in the art journal *October* in 1994: Hal Foster, 'What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?' *October* Vol. 70, *The Duchamp Effect* (The MIT Press: Autumn, 1994), pp. 5-32. The essay is itself a critical account of the relation between the historical avant-gardes and their re-enactment in the 50s and 60s neo-avant-gardes.

⁵⁰⁸ Faye Hirsch, 'Urs Fischer', *Art in America*, 1 Jan. 2010, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/urs-fischer/>, last accessed 12 Sept, 2014.

what you're seeing. Everything looks as if it's on top of everything else, an optical overload', wrote Jerry Saltz in his review for the Artnet magazine, likening the show to 'some mad replicating vision machine'.⁵⁰⁹

During the early 1930s, Salvador Dalí was developing his method of paranoia-criticism to explore the critical and creative potential of paranoia 'to systematize confusion'.⁵¹⁰ In 'Whatever Happened to Postmodernism?' (*The Return of the Real*, 1996), Hal Foster reflected upon the splitting of the postmodern subject on several levels (spatiotemporal, moral, bodily), to suggest that paranoia might be the most suitable model to capture it. Foster acknowledged in a footnote the landmark importance of Dalí's method, together with Jacques Lacan's contemporaneous thesis on the subject. With this in view, I suggest that the relevance of Dalí's paranoia-criticism to contemporary art, which has gone largely unacknowledged in recent scholarship, has yet to be investigated. I argue, moreover, that any sustained study of it has been overlooked in favour of André Breton's psychic automatism, which Dalí both drew upon and challenged.

This chapter focuses on certain tropes of 'paranoia' in art and aesthetic theory introduced by Dalí, namely simulation, *trompe l'oeil*, and anachronism. It further considers how these are employed in the work Fischer produced between the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, in the historical context after postmodernism. Fischer himself admires Dalí for his ability to challenge and overthrow the limits of art-making, questioning 'what an artist can or cannot do'.⁵¹¹ His work draws extensively on material, motifs and strategies from the history of art, a strategy reminiscent of, but as we shall see different from, Appropriation Art (1980s). Moreover, the work is situated historically at a time marked by a return to sculpture and object-based practices in the aftermath of installation, relational, and immaterial art that gained new ground during the 1990s.

Despite these developments and the subsequent emergence of installation art in the 1990s, Fischer considers himself to be above all a sculptor.⁵¹² His works situate themselves through their many references within a sculptural tradition spanning the period from the Renaissance into the early twenty-first century. In the general context

⁵⁰⁹ Jerry Saltz, 'Two Coats of Painting', *New York Magazine*, 15 June 2008, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/47806/>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

⁵¹⁰ Dalí, 'The Rotting Donkey,' in *Collected Writings*, p. 223.

⁵¹¹ Fischer, *Skinny Sunrise*, p. 13.

⁵¹² Fischer in a conversation with Natasha Adamou during the installation of his exhibition *Melodrama* at the Sadie Coles Gallery, 16 Nov. 2013.

of my thesis, this chapter looks at how contemporary sculpture is redefined through the use of readymade and found objects and furthermore, in the case of Fischer, how the relation between object and image is re-negotiated. This chapter addresses the 'systematization of confusion' that is integral to Fischer's work, through the recurrent themes of simulation, anachronism, and *trompe l'oeil*, in light of Dalí's investigations of paranoia, to propose a subversive model for the production of art, where, firstly, the category of sculpture is revisited and reexamined and, secondly, the hierarchies between object and image is overthrown via the simulacrum.

The chapter begins with a study of Fischer's use of assemblage in work included in the exhibition *Unmonumental*, a survey of sculpture in the first decade of the twenty-first century presented at the New Museum, New York. It then goes on to examine a wide range of objects by Fischer that are either found, or made to resemble found objects – that is, replicas of sorts. Next, it introduces selected texts by Dalí on paranoia-criticism. Drawing on key concepts of the paranoiac-critical method, it then discusses Fischer's work, including his candle wax figurative sculptures that bear a close resemblance to Dalí's iconic melting objects. Finally, it draws particular attention to the exhibition *Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns* (2008), co-curated by Fischer at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in New York, examining notions of simulation, anachronism and *trompe-l'oeil* where the relation between object and image becomes further explored and illuminated, through the writings on *trompe-l'oeil* by postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard.

Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century

The exhibition *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* (2007) at the New Museum in New York, presented a survey of contemporary sculpture drawing on the tradition of assemblage and collage. It included work by Fischer, among artists such as John Bock, Carol Bove, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Claire Fontaine, Isa Genzken and others. In the exhibition catalogue, co-curator Laura Hoptman draws attention to the return of sculpture in contemporary art after an absence of almost forty years, referring to a particular kind of work 'that isn't cast, carved or molded, but rather built, sewn, glued or tied together. It often has many components some of which are

found, some of which are made and some of which are detritus'.⁵¹³ She claims that these 'products of the 21st century', are defined by 'two distinct but intimately related ideas: assemblage and unmonumentality, [where] the former is a strategy to achieve the latter'.⁵¹⁴ Both are a result of the 'excess of choice' that characterizes the early 21st century, which has given rise to 'mechanisms of filtering, selecting and assembling', much like a search engine.⁵¹⁵ Hoptman notes an historical precedent in William Seitz's 1961 celebrated exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, that provided, according to her: 'an origin myth in Picasso's pre-1914 experiments with collage and a close ancestry with Duchamp's readymades, as well as Dada and Surrealist *objets trouvés*'.⁵¹⁶

For Hoptman, dada, surrealist, and neo-dada assemblages that privilege chance juxtaposition over composition, pose 'less as a representation of a world filled with chaos of information, than an actual piece of it'.⁵¹⁷ For her, this process was exemplified in Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines* (1954-64), (see Figure 6.2) through the juxtaposition of different fragments apparently assembled by chance and aiming to make everyday items strange through the random juxtaposition of diverse elements, rather than forming a willfully homogeneous composition. Hoptman refers to the Art of Assemblage catalogue, where John Cage, quoted by Seitz, compares the *Combines* to newspapers: 'there is no more subject in a Combine than there is in a newspaper. Everything that is there is a subject',⁵¹⁸ while in the words of Leo Steinberg, these were discrete elements 'incapable of mixing or attaining homogeneity'.⁵¹⁹

In contrast, Hoptman stresses the predominance, in the contemporary works, of organization over chance, suggesting that the surrealist chance encounter has been replaced by intelligent arrangements that leave no space for 'aleatory musings'.⁵²⁰ For Hoptman, this shift in attitude is due to the ever-increasing information overload at the beginning of the twenty-first century prompted by the technological developments

⁵¹³ Laura Hoptman, 'Going to Pieces in the 21st Century' in *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*, edited by Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman and Massimiliano Gioni, (London ; New York: Phaidon Press, 2007), p. 128.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵¹⁸ John Cage, 'On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist and his Work', *Metro*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (1961), pp. 36-50. Quoted in Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*, p. 116. Quoted in Hoptman, *Unmonumental*, p. 132.

⁵¹⁹ Leo Steinberg, *Encounters with Rauschenberg: A Lavishly Illustrated Lecture*, Menil Foundation, Houston, 2000, p. 67. Quoted in Hoptman, *Unmonumental*, p. 132.

⁵²⁰ Hoptman, *Unmonumental*, p. 133.

of information science, with user interfaces that organize information, applied in cell phones and web browsers, for example. She argues that, like the organization of disparate pieces of information into coherent narratives facilitated by these devices, choice and organization distinguish twenty-first century assemblage from its early and mid-twentieth century predecessors. Rather than being like newspapers, the new works are compared by Hoptman to *McSweeney's* magazine, an innovative media platform, where discrete items coalesce into 'a holistic composition [...] a single form, a narrative told with clarity'.⁵²¹

Among the artists in the exhibition, Rachel Harrison's *Huffy Howler* (2004), (see Figure 6.3) for example, incorporates seemingly random items. However, Hoptman argues that, rather than being a neutral document, the work presents a sophisticated composition that is a 'sharp criticism of a cultural moment', materialized in this case as an attack to the macho heroism of celebrity idol Mel Gibson. In the case of Nate Lowman's *Not Sorry* (2006), a sculpture featuring bullet-riddled bank windows, the work is described as a 'bricolage of references', ranging from Arman, to Donald Judd via Hammons, to Cady Noland and Jeff Koons.⁵²² In the instance of Fischer, his melting wax nude sculpture included in the exhibition is read as a 'direct reference to destruction of the symbols of artistic permanence'.⁵²³

Rather than reducing them to 'witty' commentary or monolithic narrative, I propose reading Fischer's works, which are representative of this tendency, through the model of Dalí's self-induced paranoia. Dalí's method deflects the notion of intentionality by endorsing simulation, providing a far more complex critical model with which to reflect on these works, and the cultural context from which they emerge dominated by information overload and the forms of socialization and identity construction dictated by the new social media. Traditional distinctions such as these, between intentionality and chance, a ground for controversy ever since surrealism, are indefinitely suspended in paranoia-criticism - if anything, this indeterminacy is what makes the method for Dalí a 'reasoning madness'. While Hoptman poses narrative and intentionality as the defining features of these works, seeking to promote an autonomous, rational subject, I suggest that Fischer launches with his work a critical reflection on rationality, artistic agency and intentionality, as it engages in a deliberate

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

and systematic construction of a fragmented and delirious subjectivity, bringing his work closer to Dalí's paranoia-criticism.

Surrealist Objects

Fischer often stages unlikely juxtapositions in assemblages made with found or readymade objects. In works such as *A Thing Called Gearbox* (2004); *The Lock* (2007); *A Place Called Novosibirsk* (2004); *Addict* (2006); *In Dubio Pro Reo* (2007); or *Thank You Fuck You* (2007), to name but a few, the artist brings together disparate objects to produce the effect of the chance encounter that was extensively theorized by the surrealists. *In Dubio Pro Reo* (2007) is an assemblage of domestic objects that comprises a battered wooden chair precariously balanced on top of a wooden cabinet that has been arranged with its drawer open, and a porcelain fruit bowl inside the cabinet drawer, with its price tag affixed. The individual objects look as if they had been smashed to pieces and then hastily reassembled.

Urs Fischer (2010), the documentary directed by Iwan Schumacher, produced on the occasion of Fischer's first survey show at the New Museum in New York, throws light on the artist's work. It records, among other things, different stages in the making of *In Dubio Pro Reo* (2007) (see Figure 6.4), where the artist is filmed indeed smashing the cabinet to pieces with a sledgehammer in a courtyard (perhaps of his Brooklyn studio).⁵²⁴ Following this act of vandalism, the broken pieces are gathered and then laboriously put together like a puzzle or collage, using epoxy and polyurethane glue, and screws. The re-assembling operation takes place in the studio, a patient and time-consuming task performed by the artist and two assistants.⁵²⁵ After the individual objects have been restored, the camera records the artist installing the work for an exhibition, putting together the delicate assemblage. Another assemblage similarly made with found objects, titled *Addict* (2006) (see Figure 6.5), features a milk carton placed on top of a chair precariously balanced on a small round table.

While *In Dubio Pro Reo* and *Addict* consist entirely of modified found objects, other assemblages incorporate replicas of everyday objects. *A Thing Called Gearbox* (2004) (see Figure 6.6), for example, combines the aluminium cast of an office swivel chair with a small cannon attached to its back and mysteriously suspended in mid-air. For this paradoxically hovering cannon, Fischer initially carved the shape of a

⁵²⁴ Iwan Schumacher (dir.), *Urs Fischer*, documentary film, Switzerland, 2010, 98'.

⁵²⁵ Fischer in conversation with Adamou, Sadie Coles, London, 16 Nov. 2013.

miniature cannon in Styrofoam and then reproduced the object in a wafer thin layer of copper through an intricate casting technique. Finally, a metal rod was placed to hold the cannon upright above the chair, while an incorporated motor mechanism caused the object to vibrate slightly giving the false impression of balloon lightness.⁵²⁶ To cite one more example, a similarly absurd assemblage titled *A Place Called Novosibirsk* (2004) (see Figure 6.6), features a common broom cast in aluminium, with its handle seemingly raised by a floating red balloon. This work was based on Fischer's experiments with air balloons in the Kunstgiesserei (the art foundry that has produced many of his works).⁵²⁷

Another work, *The Lock* (2007) (see Figure 6.7), features a replica of a subway seat and a travel bag, both made of coloured epoxy resin, while a hand-painted, pink-glazed cake hovers above the seat. Resembling a magician's trick, this is one more example of sleight-of-hand involving the elaborate use of both craftsmanship and technology. The work comprises a welded chromium steel handrail, while the cake, plate and snail are rendered hollow in polyamide. Some of the elements are held together with magnets placed inside the hollowed objects and an electric inductor located inside the bag, generates a magnetic field causing the plate and cake to suspend. Finally, 'a steering device with a small computer measures the attraction of the field 16,000 times per second and regulates the field of tension so that the magnet always remains in balance'.⁵²⁸

The Lock (2007) was first presented alongside *Thank You Fuck You* (2007), an aluminum sculpture involving the painted aluminum casts of three domestic objects, a washing machine, a ladder and a pillow, placed on top of each other, at the Eva

⁵²⁶ 'The cannon, which Urs Fischer carved in Styrofoam, coated with a thin layer of wax and this was made conductive with silver dust and a conductive lacquer. The model was then electroplated with a wafer thin layer of copper. The Styrofoam was etched out of the inside with acetone and the wax residue melted out. The copper sculpture was then patinated with silver nitrate and the textile molding of the chair painted. A metal rod holds the canon upright above the chair'.
<http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/urs-fischer/a-thing-called-gearbox-2004.html> Last accessed 2 July 2012.

⁵²⁷ 'A balloon raises a broom handle! In order to maintain a uniform inner tension, the balloon was filled with plaster in a water bath. The hardened cast was removed from the skin of the balloon and laminated in a silicon form with wafer-thin epoxy resin – a "balloon" with a minimal weight of its own was created. A workshop broom cast in aluminium was screwed to the floor. The metal rod on which the balloon appears to float was fixed to the end of the handle'.
<http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/urs-fischer/a-place-called-novosibirsk-2004.html> Last accessed 2 July 2012.

⁵²⁸ *The Lock*, 2007, epoxy resin, polyamide, steel pipe, electromagnet, 184 x 75.5 x 55 cm.
<http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/urs-fischer/thank-you-fuck-you-2007.html> Last accessed 2 July 2012.

Presenhuber Gallery, Zürich, 2007 (see Figure 6.8). The elements for this peculiar assemblage relate to a mental image Fischer links with a memory of his grandmother.⁵²⁹ The sculpture was made to order and put together by assembling 'seemingly arbitrarily selected objects according to Fischer's precise instructions'.⁵³⁰ The artist explains that he initially attempted carving the objects in polystyrene, but because this didn't work out he incorporated three-dimensional scanning as a solution instead.⁵³¹ More precisely, after scanning different objects, he compiled them together in the computer, creating datasets, which he treated like *objets trouvés*, to make digital assemblages where he finally inserted structurally precarious digital cuts with the computer tomograph.⁵³² Once the final visual arrangements were in place, 3D prototypes enlarged by 120-percent were produced in epoxy resin with the method of stereo-lithography (3D printing), and the different resin segments were either glued or secured together by metal pegs. These sculptures were finally cast in aluminum and painted in acrylic white paint, further emphasizing their phantasmatic, simulacral presence.⁵³³

It has been noted often, but never adequately discussed, that Fischer's assemblages recall surrealist objects, for example Dalí's *Lobster Phone* (1936) (see Figure 6.9) in that they bring together incompatible elements to form peculiar assemblages.⁵³⁴ I will not go further into the complex technical details of this operation, I only wish to highlight the point that it demonstrates a meticulous and laborious approach, which simulates the surrealist chance encounter between disparate elements drawn together arbitrarily (like the improbable encounter between an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table), but its effects are stressed here almost to the point of caricature.

In his text 'Surrealist Objects' (1931), Dalí introduces six different categories of objects: Objects Functioning Symbolically, Transubstantiated Objects, Objects to be

⁵²⁹ Fischer in conversation with Adamou, Sadie Coles, London, 16 Nov. 2013.

⁵³⁰ <http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/urs-fischer/fuck-you-thank-you-2007.html>

<http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/model-building/stereo-lithography.html> Last accessed 2 July 2012.

⁵³¹ Schumacher, *Urs Fischer*, 2010.

⁵³² <http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/urs-fischer/untitled-big-clay3-2008-2011.html>, last accessed 23 Dec 2013.

⁵³³ <http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/urs-fischer/fuck-you-thank-you-2007.html>;

<http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/model-building/stereo-lithography.html>, last accessed 2 July 2012.

⁵³⁴ Fischer, *Skinny Sunrise*, p. 17.

Thrown, Wrapped Objects, Objects-Machines and Objects-Moldings.⁵³⁵ Dalí proclaims Giacometti's mobile objects as their precursors, however, he stresses that Giacometti's works maintain a relation to the traditional category of sculpture, while surrealist objects break with traditional artistic categories, with sculpture, in particular. According to Dalí, the originality of these objects is that they have no formal concerns, they are 'extra-sculptural'.⁵³⁶ This function advances a new era in art away from modernist discourses on beauty and formal appreciation. One such object is Dalí's own *Surrealist Object Functioning Symbolically* (1931/73), apparently featuring his companion Gala's red shoe in an assemblage triggered by a stream of consciousness, embodying sexual fantasies. Under the category of Objects Functioning Symbolically, Dalí writes, '*These objects, which have a minimal mechanical function, are based on phantasms and representations susceptible of being provoked by the realization of unconscious acts*'.⁵³⁷ (italics in original text)

In 'The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment' (1932), he declares that 'the world of objects, the objective world, as the true and manifest content of a new dream, is attained by an active simulation of a paranoiac state in which the objective phenomena will combine with subjective concerns to form a complex delusional system'.⁵³⁸ Dalí's description of surrealist objects further stresses their anti-functional, fetishistic and delirious character: 'The surrealist object is one that is absolutely useless from the practical and rational point of view, created wholly for the purpose of materializing in a fetishistic way, with the maximum of tangible reality, ideas and fantasies having a delirious character'.⁵³⁹

With regards to *A Place Called Novosibirsk*, Fischer explained that the image of a broom handle suspended by a balloon 'kept popping up in his head'.⁵⁴⁰ His description denotes the automatic or obsessive origin of surrealist objects, and while some of his assemblages may result from mental images based on memories or generated by the unconscious, Fischer's work is not aimed towards a psychoanalytic investigation. This shift of emphasis away from psychoanalysis may be related to the

⁵³⁵ Dalí, 'Surrealist Objects' in *Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution (Le Surrealisme au service de la Revolution)*, issue no. 3, Dec. 1931.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁵³⁸ Finkelstein, *Dalí*, p. 216.

⁵³⁹ Dalí, 'The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí', New York, *Dial*, 1942, p. 312. Also quoted in W.C. Seitz, *Art of Assemblage*, (New York: MoMA, 1961).

⁵⁴⁰ Fischer, *Skinny Sunrise*, p. 12.

changed status of psychoanalysis in the late twentieth century. As Dawn Ades rightly points out in her monographic book on Dalí, what had been a brand new area for consideration and analysis in the Thirties, sexual symbolism, in particular, is collectively digested and over-processed in the Nineties. Ades writes:

While for the surrealists, the new science of psychoanalysis and the unconscious presented itself as a fertile site for exploration and self-knowledge, this is not the case for contemporary artists. Today's state of psychoanalysis is very different. And artists seem to value keeping an area of their work hidden, resistant to interpretation, rather than over-interpreted. Once certain features and motives appear they are instantly subjected to interpretation alongside themes of fear of castration etc. [...] resulting in a readymade interpretation [...].⁵⁴¹

Despite similarities, in that they bring together disparate elements in unexpected combinations or stem from automatic, unconscious imagery, Fischer's assemblages are technologically challenging experiments, setting them apart from surrealist objects which are fragile assortments of found objects, more intimate in scale, and charged with symbolic meaning.⁵⁴² The artist's intention for these works is to deceptively convey lightness, spontaneity and fragility, while in fact they are cast in resistant industrial material, such as aluminum, going against the grain of surrealist objects. Fischer's treatment of datasets as *objet trouvés* is further indicative of his attitude to the transposition of the material object into the virtual realm and vice-versa, managed in these works with the use of 3D scanning and printing. Indeed, even though the initial experience of these assemblages may evoke the surrealist chance encounter and the wonder it provokes, soon enough the experience is marked by the simulacrum, with the emphasis placed on the tension between fake and real, where aluminum sculptures fool the eye and pose as everyday objects.

Finally, in contrast to the surrealist objects, which were 'extra-sculptural', in these works there is a pronounced return to sculpture. However, as I argue in this thesis overall, the readymade and found objects that feature prominently among

⁵⁴¹ Ades, *Dalí*, p. 75.

⁵⁴² 'For example, we worked with Urs Fischer on his pieces *A Place Called Novosibirsk* (2004) and *Untitled (Big Clay #3)* (2008–11). He wanted them to convey a lightness and spontaneity of approach and to look fragile – but they still had to be solid and carefully made. Achieving something like that often takes several attempts. The works and materials need to be durable' in Ariane Roth and Felix Lehner, 'Whatever Works', translated by Nicholas Grindell, *frieze d/e*, <http://frieze-magazin.de/archiv/kolumnen/whateverworks/?lang=en>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014. First published in *Frieze*, issue 10, June – August 2013.

Fischer's oeuvre, often brought together in absurd pairs and assemblages, serve to advance his preoccupation with sculptural concerns without simply regressing into a modernist formalism. Art historian David Lomas observes that Dalí, unfortunately, came into painting, with all his passion for the craft, after the 'end of art': 'Thus painting could only ever be for Dalí a simulacrum of painting', Lomas writes.⁵⁴³ Fischer's desire to return to sculpture after the 'end of art', is marked by a similar belatedness. Just as Dalí's paintings after the end of painting were characterized by their revisiting certain great moments in its history, so Fischer's celebration of sculpture, after its demise, happens through the allusion to such historical moments – importantly by incorporating, among other references, the 'anti' or 'extra-sculptural' concerns of the readymade and surrealist object into the history of sculpture. Fischer thus returns to sculpture through the very means that had proclaimed the very end of it, namely the readymade and the surrealist object.

Readymades, Found Objects, Replicas

The juxtaposition and merging of copy and original, cast and found object, has great resonance throughout Fischer's entire oeuvre. More recently, as the artist explains, replicas have increasingly dominated his work, due to concerns about conservation. Fischer has everyday objects replicated in more durable materials because found objects age fast and look battered when brought back to the studio for conservation, implying the difficulties entailed in their restoration and how this may interfere with the production of new works at a busy workplace which operates like a small factory.⁵⁴⁴ The shadow of Marcel Duchamp's readymade is prominent in these found and manufactured objects. Fischer is, moreover, well aware of the practice of replication being engrained in the history of the readymade and Duchamp's longstanding interest evinced with *Boîte-en-valise* (1935-41), and later on with the production of editioned replicas of readymades by Arturo Schwarz in the 1960s, signed and supervised by Duchamp himself. Likewise, many surrealist objects were replicated at a later stage in order to be included in museum collections, because the 'originals' had either been damaged, destroyed or lost. One aspect of Fischer's works can be understood to evoke a link between Duchamp's readymades and the surrealist

⁵⁴³ David Lomas, 'Simulation and the Order of Mimesis in Dalí and Glenn Brown', *KONSTHISTORISK TIDSKRIFT*, vol. 80, issue 1, 2011, p. 19.

⁵⁴⁴ Fischer in conversation with Adamou, Sadie Coles, London, 16 Nov. 2013.

objects, further involving the pervasive theme of replication. The controversial history of readymades remade as replicas, which often opens this practice to charges of commodification, has been explored since Duchamp in a variety of works such as Jasper Johns' *Painted Bronzes* (1960), Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964), Jeff Koons' series of painted aluminum sculptures simulating balloon toys (2003, 2007-11) (see Figure 6.10 and 6.11), as well as Fischli and Weiss' 'phantom objects', the painted polyurethane sculptures of everyday objects (ongoing, since 1982), to name a few important examples.

In an interview, Fischer comments on the practice of replication with regards to readymades and the idea of the inflated value of mass-produced commodities which are being 'replaced, remade as expensive, individual things'.⁵⁴⁵ Here, he draws on the perceived distinction between mass production, commodity and art, and shows how these ideas become undone and complicated in sculptures of everyday objects. He observes: 'As a sculpture of a mass-manufactured object, to have that object remade as a one off seems almost perverse and is extremely unresourceful. It's actually almost anti-industrial'.⁵⁴⁶ Industry and craftsmanship are an important part of Fischer's sculptures and his extensive use of casting poignantly brings up issues of 'originality' and 'reproducibility,' as Hopkins has suggested in the case of Johns. While it can be argued that both works thematize the difference between mass-produced commodity and unique art object, Johns directs his attention to standardized, banal everyday objects, engaging with the Duchampian withdrawal of aesthetic content and artistic expression, while Fischer's idiosyncratic assemblages originate in the mental and psychological domain and are linked to different states of mind. Their improbable arrangements indicate the construction of a delirious subject, very distinct from the indifferent position Duchamp's readymades advocated.

In the same interview, Fischer refers to the widespread view of readymades as 'appropriated industrial objects', commodities that have been turned into art.⁵⁴⁷ Speaking of Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* (1914), for example, the artist attends to the materiality of the piece, expressing his concern with the object's ageing as well as its obsolescence and exclusion from the functional realm, which he describes as an aesthetic quality he cherishes. He comments: 'Did it ever look new? It has gone out of

⁵⁴⁵ Fischer, *Skinny Sunrise*, p. 17.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

use, become exotic. I find this transformation very beautiful'.⁵⁴⁸ At the same time, Fischer considers Jeff Koons's vacuum cleaners (see Figure 6.12), as objects that are falling apart rather than ageing.⁵⁴⁹ Koons commented on these objects, which make up a body of work titled *New*, as follows: 'I was interested in a psychological state tied to newness and immortality: the gestalt came directly from viewing an inanimate object – a vacuum cleaner – that was in a position to be immortal'.⁵⁵⁰

Fischer's response to Koons is aptly demonstrated in one work that engages in a playful, even irreverent manner with the latter's glossy aluminum *Balloon Dog*, (1994-2000). On the occasion of his solo show titled *Madame Fisscher* (2011) at the Palazzo Grassi, Venice, Fischer presented next to the iconic *Balloon Dog*, which was installed in the ground floor of the exhibition space, a work titled *Keep It Going Is a Private Thing* (2001) (see Figure 6.13), a life-size mechanical dummy of a dog wagging its tail. From a distance, the work was easily mistaken for a real, living dog smuggled into the museum space, as the visitor got a glimpse of its animated tail half-hidden behind a column.⁵⁵¹ As soon as one approached, however, the artifice became exposed, revealing the mechanical cadaver of a dog cut in half, the inside of its belly exposed to reveal the motor mechanism. Fischer's dissected automaton, the mechanical dummy, the artificial and deceptive semblance of life, which speaks of death and decay, offers a striking contrast with a tongue-in-cheek riposte to the spectacular, eternally new, mirror-shiny *Balloon Dog* (see Figure 6.14).⁵⁵²

Sculpture and Everyday Objects

In historic art museums (Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Capodimonte in Naples, Museo Capitolino in Rome, Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, etc.) you find tables and chairs in the exhibition spaces that are not to be used. I used to ask myself the same sort of questions that they would ask, like 'Is that art disguised as furniture or is it furniture disguised as art?' or 'What gives these items of furniture the right to be in these rooms?' A question that I couldn't answer and now don't even want to answer

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁰ Jeff Koons on *New Hoover Convertibles; New Shelton; Wet/Dry Doubledecker*, 1981-86, in *The Jeff Koons Handbook*, (London: Thames and Hudson; Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1992), p. 48.

⁵⁵¹ A latter version of this work is *Gypsy*, 2002, Metal, styrofoam, synthetic fur, wood, wood glue, screws, aluminum tubes.

⁵⁵² Koons is admittedly influenced by Dali, whom he met briefly in New York as a young artist, recognizing in Dali's work the capacity to 'move from a subjective realm into mass iconography'. Koons cites Dali's *Portrait of My Dead Brother* 1963 as an example, which for him moreover anticipated Pop Art and Andy Warhol's screen-prints. <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/who-paints-bread-better-dali>

*any more. Whatever the case, I enjoyed their presence, perhaps as the presence of the trivial in the sublime.*⁵⁵³ - Franz West

The above quote by Franz West features among other elucidating citations in the small volume conceived and edited by Fischer and curator Alison Gingeras, produced on the occasion of the artist's project at the exhibition space *315, espace trois-cent-quinze*, at the Pompidou Centre, Paris, in 2004. It reveals shared concerns to do with the increasingly ambivalent status of everyday objects appearing in the museum context, but what is important here is that rather than scrutinizing their conditions, West eventually succumbs to the ambivalence raised by the unresolved tension between the trivial and the sublime. Further to these aesthetic concerns, Fischer described the objects that feature in his works as follows: 'I don't use objects as stand-ins for humans, but for states of mind. Objects are always about human relations to them. They're extensions of us; they're part of us'.⁵⁵⁴ What states of mind could these objects represent? What kinds of relations do they evoke? What can they tell us about the subjects that relate to them? Gingeras, Fischer's close friend and collaborator who pays frequent visits to his studio, gives her own account:

The ordinary domestic articles that Fischer modifies or creates are often as awkward, perplexed, or burdened as the subjects who might use them. Among the household accoutrements that pepper Fischer's oeuvre (beds, tables, shelves, cabinets, glasses, plates, and so on), chairs are by far Fischer's favorite prop. Somewhere between the heavy symbolism of Beuys's *Stuhl mit Fett* (Chair with Fat, 1963), and the casual functionality of Franz West's seating arrangements, Fischer's chairs are not simple receptacles for the human body. Instead they are like prosthetics for the psyche, and they have as many variations as Fischer has moods and ideas.⁵⁵⁵

Elsewhere, the artist says: 'Some of these objects are just good errand boys for things I have in mind. In most cases, I don't even think about the object, I think about a situation. About what's going on between elements in a work. Not compositionally, but almost politically, and definitely structurally. A chair is never a piece of furniture

⁵⁵³ 'In Disguise: Furniture or Art?' in 'Hot Dog: Email Exchanges between Franz West and Anthony Spira', in *Franz West: I Read Art Like a Magazine at the Barber's* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2003) p. 147. Quoted in Alison M. Gingeras and Urs Fischer (eds.), *315, espace trois-cent-quinze*, (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2004), p. 28.

⁵⁵⁴ 'Darren Bader interviews Urs Fischer', May 2008, <http://www.christies.com/features/urs-fischer-untitled-lamp-bear-1407-1.aspx>

⁵⁵⁵ Alison M. Gingeras, 'Moods and Ideas' in *315, espace trois-cent-quinze*, p. 61.

for me; it is part of a situation that establishes a real clash in space'.⁵⁵⁶ Can these objects tell us anything about the status of sculpture, as well as the status of material culture today?

Simulacrum: Double, Shadow, Ghost

In the chapter on Fischli and Weiss, I mentioned that Peter Fischli had described their carved and painted polyurethane sculptures, that are precise copies of everyday objects, as phantoms, because they are 'there in visual terms but not corresponding in terms of touch', stressing the discrepancy between vision and physical reality.⁵⁵⁷ The term 'phantom' introduces precisely a complex dynamic between image and material object; these works are both material objects, and at the same time, images, apparitions, 'phantoms'. Philosopher Boris Groys described Fischli and Weiss's polyurethane sculptures as 'simulated readymades', because they only appear to function in the manner of Duchamp's readymades - that is, as commodity objects presented in the context of an art museum while they are in fact meticulously crafted sculptures that mimic everyday objects. Art critic Rainald Schumacher poignantly remarked about *Empty Room* (1995-96), at the Walker Art Centre, an installation of carved polyurethane sculptures that rendered hardware tools arranged in an empty gallery setting to give the false impression of the gallery being under construction, that 'it pretends that it is not an artwork', functioning in a reverse way to Duchamp's readymades.⁵⁵⁸

Such preoccupations with a phantasmatic or simulacral presence are further indicated in Fischer's works such as *Routine* (Automatic Melancholy) (2002) (see Figure 6.15).⁵⁵⁹ The work features a wooden chair painted white, with its negative shadow rendered on the floor also in white acrylic paint, a negative and ghostly representation of a real shadow. The title *Routine* (Automatic Melancholy), can be read as an allusion to surrealist automatic writing, however there is also a strong resonance with doubling, replication and the negative in the form of the shadow. Another example of a similar work is the *Study for a table with painted shadow as a chair*, photographed in the artist's studio, London (2001) that comprises a writing

⁵⁵⁶ From the leaflet for the exhibition *Madame Fisscher* at the Palazzo Grassi, with works from the François Pinault collection, Venice, Italy, June – July 2012, unpaginated.

⁵⁵⁷ Heiser, 'The Odd Couple: An Interview with Fischli and Weiss', *Frieze*, p.205.

⁵⁵⁸ Rainald Schumacher, *Peter Fischli, David Weiss*, Sammlung Goetz, Munich, 2010, p. 108.

⁵⁵⁹ *Chair with painted shadow*, photo in 315, *espace trois-cent-quinze*, p. 16.

desk with a chair, and their painted shadows.⁵⁶⁰ In his essay 'Simulation and the Order of Mimesis in Dalí and Glenn Brown' (2011), David Lomas refers to Otto Rank's study *The Double*, where Rank 'traces the idea of the soul to the shadow as the first double or replica'.⁵⁶¹ In these works by Fischer, the negative shadow indicates the artist's early preoccupation with issues of simulation.

Besides the replicated everyday objects, Fischer further implements the logic of simulation, as well as the negative, in another work, featuring an iconic intervention that involved digging a hole in the ground of the gallery floor, for his celebrated exhibition at the Gavin Brown Enterprise in New York in 2007. For the work entitled, *You* (2007) (see Figure 6.16), the artist excavated a pit measuring eight feet deep, which extended almost to the entire area of the gallery leaving only a fourteen-inch ledge of floor close to the walls. The intense physicality of the work was acutely reflected in the warning sign accompanying the exhibition that read: 'The installation is physically dangerous and inherently involves the risk of serious injury or death'.⁵⁶² The intervention immediately brings to mind the art historical tradition of earthworks and architectural interventions which proliferated during the Sixties and Seventies in the US, for example, Walter De Maria's, *Earth Room* (1977), the long-term installation at 141 Wooster Street, New York, Robert Smithson's monumental earth works, and Gordon Matta-Clark's building cuts.

In particular, *You* has been compared to Chris Burden's piece *Exposing the Foundation of a Museum* (1986) (see Figure 6.17), at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.⁵⁶³ During an interview in 2012, Fischer objected to the comparison with Burden's piece, on the grounds that his own work is not a didactic exposing of the museum foundations, literally and symbolically, emphasizing instead an emotional (thus highly subjective) point of view.⁵⁶⁴ 'There are lots of holes that are not as profane as showing the foundation of the institution', Fischer observed,

⁵⁶⁰ Photo: *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵⁶¹ Lomas, 'Simulation and the Order of Mimesis in Dalí and Glenn Brown', p. 6.

⁵⁶² Jerry Saltz, 'Can You Dig It? At Gavin Brown, Urs Fischer Takes a Jackhammer to Chelsea Itself', *New York Magazine*, 3 December 2007, pp. 90-92. <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/41266/>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

⁵⁶³ Calvin Tomkins, 'Urs Fischer: The Imperfectionist' *The New Yorker*, Oct. 19, 2009, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/10/19/the-imperfectionist-2>, last accessed 24 September, 2014.

⁵⁶⁴ Sarah Douglas, 'Bed Piece: Visiting Urs Fischer's New York Studio', *The Observer*, 5 March 2012, p. B5. <http://galleristny.com/2012/02/bed-piece-visiting-urs-fischers-new-york-studio/>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

implying, with his statement, the different attitude that exists between his work and the more polemical stance of institutional critique.⁵⁶⁵

On that note, Jerry Saltz writes that: '*You* simultaneously attacks and fetishizes the attributes of galleries, the qualities that the critic Brian O' Doherty has described as "something of the sacredness of churches, the austerity of courtrooms, the mysteriousness of research laboratories, something that, together with stylish designs, makes them unique cultic places of the aesthetic"''.⁵⁶⁶ It is this irreverent and at the same time iconic quality of the work, (*You* functions perfectly well as an image as I will explain below, as well as a physical space, and this is intentional), that introduces an ambivalence which sets the work apart from institutional critique precedents.⁵⁶⁷

Interestingly, Fischer considered the monumental earthwork by Michael Heizer titled *Double Negative* (1969) (see Figure 6.18), to be more relevant to *You*. Heizer's work comprises two enormous trenches, measuring 30-foot-wide, 50-foot-deep, 1,500-foot-long, dug into the Nevada desert. Similarly to *Double Negative*, Fischer's piece has a prominent visceral quality, which creates, however, a different kind of tension as it is brought into the gallery space. Besides the obvious relation with having excavated large pits out of raw earth, there is also the idea of doubling at play in both works. Doubling is important in *You*, for there is a 1:3 replica of the main room installation prior to entering the full-scale excavated gallery (see Figure 6.19). In addition to the raw energy of the main room, that relates to the tradition of earth works and minimalism by evoking a similar phenomenological experience, the function of the smaller replica both subverts and accentuates this experience while placing the work in a dramatically different realm, that of the simulacrum. The change of scale in the smaller replica thus results in an experience that Jerry Saltz described in terms of the hallucinatory world of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

There's also a cramped antechamber, superfluous but well executed: A smaller reproduction of the main gallery, down to the air ducts and electrical outlets, it's sort of a mini-Me *You*.

⁵⁶⁵ Chris Burden: 'Exposing the Foundations of the Museum and Samson, yeah, they're about the nature of an institution and whether it resides in the bricks or, you know, I think at the time I did both of those works, the inertia, it's always easier for museums to raise funds for a new building, a new signature hailed architect building than it is for a collection. So I think both of those were sort of bleak criticisms of that...' http://www.portlandart.net/archives/2011/11/interview_with_16.html, last accessed 24 September, 2014.

⁵⁶⁶ Saltz, 'Can You Dig It?', 2007, pp. 90-92, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/41266/>

⁵⁶⁷ From a conversation between Fischer and Jessica Morgan, 'ICA *Quickfire*: Urs Fischer and Jessica Morgan' from the *Quickfire* series, ICA, London, 12 Nov. 2013.

Ducking through its pint-size entrance is like going through a door in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. You have to crouch as you enter and watch where you step in preparation for the more precarious and thrilling main event beyond.⁵⁶⁸

You also recalls another work by Heizer, titled *North, East, South, West* (1967/2002) the completed version of which is part of the permanent installation at Dia: Beacon. *NESW* features four negative sculptures of elemental geometric forms, made in steel, and inserted in the floor of the institution. The work 'literally displaces the floor on which the visitor walks [and] creates a sense of potential physical danger that further challenges the viewing experience'.⁵⁶⁹ Unlike the austere, geometric minimalism of *NESW*, however, Fischer's more raw *You* feels like an assault on the body of the gallery.

Still, the idea of Heizer's 'negative sculpture' resonates with yet another work by Fischer closely related to *You*, the *Untitled (Hole)*, (2007) (see Figure 6.20). This work comprises a pit cast in aluminum, measuring 200 x 200 x 200 cm, presented in Fischer's solo exhibition *Uh ...* at Sadie Coles HQ, London, in 2007, the same year with the Gavin Brown installation. Making the cast for *Untitled (Hole)* was a laborious process: '[the work] consists of the molding of a pit in the ground measuring approximately two meters long and two meters deep and the earth excavated from it. In the Sadie Coles gallery, a piece of the floor was removed and the aluminum casting of the pit hung into it. The work penetrates two stories. On the upper story, one can approach the abyss and look into the depth of the hole, on the lower story, the surface of the earth is depicted as an inversion in the negative' (see Figure 6.21).⁵⁷⁰ The work was cast in a Chinese foundry, and then transferred to the

⁵⁶⁸ Saltz, 'Can You Dig It?', <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/41266/>

⁵⁶⁹ 'The first such "negative" form in Heizer's work was *North, East, South, West*, which the artist produced in wood and sheet metal in 1967, putting two of the four elements, *North* and *South*, in the ground in the Sierra Nevada in California. The work has now been constructed in its entirety as a permanent feature of Dia's museum in Beacon, in the size and material (weathering steel) that Heizer originally specified for it. These four diverse sculptural elements—two stacked cubic forms, one larger and one smaller (*North*); a cone (*South*); a triangular trough (*West*); and an inverted truncated cone (*East*)—together measure more than 125 feet in length, and sink from the floor of the gallery to a depth of 20 feet. When the work was first developed, such dimensions had no precedent in the art of recent times'. <http://www.diaart.org/exhibitions/introduction/83> last accessed 17 January, 2014.

⁵⁷⁰ '*Untitled (Hole)* was molded in cooperation with our partner foundry in Shanghai. Due to the low ground-water table there, a hill of soil first had to be created with the appropriate dimensions, and in which it was possible to excavate the hole. From the pit and the excavated soil that resulted, a plaster negative was produced in segments. In days of work, soil and stones were removed from the negative. In order to be able to depict the pit from both sides, a double-walled casting was necessary. In order to create an elastic positive of the inner wall that allowed the indentations of the stony surface of the soil

London gallery where an area of floor was removed to make space for the cast to be inserted, so that it hung through the ceiling of the level below. While fabricating the piece, Fischer's instructions were to make it rather steep, so the viewer cannot see how it goes down, with the intention to make the experience of looking down in it frightening. Importantly, for Fischer, *Untitled (Hole)* is very different than *You*, because it is more like an *image*.⁵⁷¹ Fischer was trained as photographer and perhaps the idea of the photographic negative, the negative image, has resonance in his imagination as a sculptor in the form of the cast object. The artist moreover observes that, 'such an image can be optical, but also physical. I hope that when you stand in front of it, it pulls you down [...]', stressing the important convergence between image and material object in his work, while somehow paradoxically maintaining a raw physicality in the experience of the simulacrum.⁵⁷²

'Paranoia-Criticism'

As stated in my introductory chapter on surrealist objects, Dalí began to write on the theme of paranoia-criticism in 1930, and these writings culminated with the belated publication of *The Tragic Myth of Millet's L'Angélus: Paranoiac-Critical Interpretation*, in 1963.⁵⁷³ I shall revisit here some of the main themes and issues that were pertinent in Dalí's paranoiac-critical method, including the crucial notion of simulation, as well as related ideas of the *trompe l'oeil* and anachronism, in order to connect these issues with my discussion of Fischer's works. Haim Finkelstein, the editor of the *Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, has argued that Dalí's paranoia-criticism was developed in the context of surrealist automatism, on the one hand, while challenging its basic assumptions, on the other, in order to 'bring new life to a

to be depicted in a sand mold, the plaster negative was coated with a silicon skin. The exterior wall was created in silicon over an additional negative of the plaster impression. The exterior wall was slightly enlarged, the inner and outer sides of the pit attached to one another, and the entire work then given a black patina'. <http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/urs-fischer/untitled-hole-2007.html>

⁵⁷¹ Fischer in conversation with Adamou, Sadie Coles, London, 16 Nov. 2013.

⁵⁷² Schumacher, *Urs Fischer*, documentary film, 2010.

⁵⁷³ Arguably written in the 1930s, but not published until 1963, because the manuscript was lost during the German occupation. Iversen notes in a footnote: 'Although Dalí is not exactly a reliable source, the original text from 1933 has been located by Dawn Ades, who will soon publish her findings' in Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure*, p. 42. Steven Harris has suggested to Iversen that the non-publication of *The Tragic Myth* may have something to do with Dalí's break with the surrealists. See: Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Finkelstein argues that it was heavily rewritten in the early 1960s on the grounds that its autobiographical revelations are out of character with Dalí's earlier prose (*Collected Writings*, 274).

weakened and, indeed, outmoded, theory and practice'.⁵⁷⁴ The convergence, in the work Dalí, of surrealist automatism and simulation is perfectly illustrated in a phrase from Dalí 'Millet's *L'Angélus*', the short text that accompanied the invitation to a Dalí exhibition. Here, the artist adapted Lautreamont's phrase in the context of Millet's painting: 'Millet's *L'Angélus*, beautiful like the fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table of sewing machine and an umbrella!'⁵⁷⁵ effectively merging the origins of surrealism in automatism and his own paranoia-criticism.

The text by Dalí where he introduces the paranoiac-critical method, as an addition and extension of surrealist automatism, is 'The Rotting Donkey' (1930), writing that: 'the moment is drawing near when, by a thought process of a paranoiac and active character, it would be possible (simultaneously with automatism and other passive states) to systematize confusion and thereby to attribute to a total discrediting of the world of reality'.⁵⁷⁶ While the automatic state is passive, for Dalí the paranoiac-critical method enables a more active engagement with reality, with the important effect of intervening and changing this very reality: 'Paranoia makes use of the external world in order to set off its obsessive idea, with the disturbing characteristic of verifying the reality of this idea for others',⁵⁷⁷ he writes. Dalí introduces in this text the concept of the simulacrum, the very product of paranoiac thought, demonstrated with the phenomenon of double and multiple images, manifest, for example, when Dalí's misapprehended the reproduction of a photograph on a postcard depicting a group of Africans sitting in front of their straw huts, for a drawing of a face by Picasso. This realization came as he turned the image horizontally, which immediately revealed his visual misconception.⁵⁷⁸ The important thing with this phenomenon is that, Dalí explains, it is 'a representation of an object that is also, without the slightest pictorial or anatomical modification, the representation of another entirely different object'.⁵⁷⁹ According to Dalí, no one can deny, once it's

⁵⁷⁴ Finkelstein, *Dalí*, p. 213.

⁵⁷⁵ Dalí, 'Millet's *L'Angélus*' (1934) in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, p. 279. Millet's *L'Angélus* (1934) Invitation to the exhibition *Salvador Dalí: Les Chants de Maldoror*, Paris: Galeries des Quatre Chemins, 1934; the text appeared also under the title 'Explication d'une illustration des *Chants de Maldoror*' as an appendix for *Le Mythe tragique de L'Angélus de Millet* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963), pp. 93-7.

⁵⁷⁶ Dalí, 'The Rotting Donkey', in *The Collected Writings*, p. 223.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁸ Dalí, 'Paranoiac Face' reproduced in the fourth issue of *LSASDLR*. Dalí, 'The Rotting Donkey', in *Collected Writings*, p. 224. Dalí, 'New General Considerations Regarding the Mechanism of the Paranoiac Phenomenon from the Surrealist Point of View' in *The Collected Writings*, p. 260.

⁵⁷⁹ Dalí, 'The Rotting Donkey', in *The Collected Writings*, p. 224.

been pointed out to them, the reality of these images. In this context, Dalí assumes simulation as a critical strategy, undermining the hierarchy between copy and original.

Dalí insists that automatism (like dreams) is subject to interpretation only retroactively, while the paranoid delirium already constitutes in itself a form of interpretation.⁵⁸⁰ Importantly, Dalí found support for this idea in Lacan's doctorate thesis on paranoia published in 1932, which 'perfectly accounts for the objective and "communicable" hyperacuteness of the phenomenon, thanks to which the delirium assumes a tangible character that cannot be contradicted and that situates it at the very antipodes of the stereotypy of automatism and dream'.⁵⁸¹ Moreover, 'the delirium would suddenly appear *fully systematized*', resulting in the 'profound change of the object', manifesting thus its concrete, active and intervening character.⁵⁸²

For Dalí, this systematization of confusion is inherent to the 'objective and communicable hyperacuity' of the paranoid thought, that generates not only new associations, but also new objects (simulacra). Importantly, the delirium already constitutes in itself a form of interpretation, yet paranoia does not involve a 'voluntarily directed thinking' or '*a posteriori* systemitization'.⁵⁸³ Indeed, Dalí describes paranoia as a 'reasoning madness', because it contains and builds upon the contradiction between reason and madness.⁵⁸⁴ In her book on Dalí, Dawn Ades explains that this 'delirium of interpretation' consists of 'suites of images, ideas or events perceived as having causal connections, or are all related to one central idea, and are internally coherent for the subject of the delusion though meaningless to an outside observer'.⁵⁸⁵ In other words, its systematic character is owing to the fact that the paranoid delirium is organized by establishing causal links that connect seemingly random images, ideas or events, or by relating different events to one central idea in an internally coherent and systematic way, thus attesting its active (intervening), and concrete, objective nature.⁵⁸⁶

As I mentioned previously in the chapter on the object in surrealism, David Lomas has pointed out that Dalí's theory of simulation, in the context of paranoia-

⁵⁸⁰ Dalí, 'New General Considerations' in *The Collected Writings*, p. 260.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵ Ades, *Dalí*, p. 122.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

criticism, anticipates postmodernism, while in his recent book *Simulating the Marvellous*, he proposes a re-reading of surrealism (including automatism) as simulation. Lomas moreover registers simulation as an intrinsic part of surrealism right from the start, implicit in the very concept of automatism, challenging the more widely received notion of a pure, unmediated, automatic state, where content is perceived to flow directly from a plentiful unconscious. The author recognizes in 'surrealism's desire for materialization' the surrealist object as 'a kind of ersatz object, or simulacrum',⁵⁸⁷ while further noting the surrealist's 'fondness for masks and imaginary portraits of precursor figures such as Lautréamont and Sade for whom no actual likeness existed'.⁵⁸⁸ This emphasis on a copy without an original reinforces, for Lomas, surrealism's challenge to the idea of authorship. At the same time, it supports a decidedly anachronistic view of history, where historical precedents, figures from the past, become retroactively claimed as part of surrealist history by Breton – as is the case with Lautréamont.

Wax and Anachronism

What if the Phone Rings? (2003) (see Figures 6.22) comprises three life-size, hand-colored, burning candle wax sculptures of nude women in classical poses – a version of the three graces.⁵⁸⁹ These sculptures marked the first instance when I encountered work by Fischer, when I was helping to organize the exhibition *Monument to Now* that featured works from the Dakis Joannou Collection, at the Deste Foundation, Athens, where the piece was exhibited in 2003. The exhibition, which inaugurated Deste's new space, a converted former sock factory in New Ionia, Athens, was guest-curated by an impressive array of five prominent curators: Dan Cameron, Jeffrey Deitch, Alison M. Gingeras, Massimiliano Gioni and Nancy Spector. *What if the Phone Rings?* was situated right before the exit, at the very end of a massive show

⁵⁸⁷ Lomas, *Simulating the Marvellous*, pp.179, 269.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁹ Alison Gingeras: 'For his exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ in London this past January, *need no chair when walking*, Fischer produced three life-size, handmade, painted wax sculptures in the form of nude women. While these figures were rendered in a slightly cartoonish manner with exaggerated features and whimsical coloring (bright red nipples, honey-hued locks), they nonetheless alluded to canonical sculpture-but Fischer's "three Graces" were in fact candles. Their wicks were lit at the exhibition's opening, and the painstakingly made figures gradually melted away over the course of the show, eroding into a baroque pool of Technicolor wax and barely recognizable body parts'. Alison Gingeras 'Openings: Urs Fischer', *Artforum*, vol. 41, no. 9, May 2003, pp. 158-9, p. 158.

<http://www.mutualart.com/OpenArticle/Urs-Fischer/EC0729B92C1D8D5A>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

with large-scale works by fifty-eight artists, including Jeff Koons, Mike Kelley, Fischli and Weiss, Maurizio Cattelan, Robert Gober, Paul McCarthy and Martin Kippenberger, among others.

Fischer's intervention fascinated and unsettled me at the time with its unusual material, ceremonial presence, fragility and unlikely function - burning matter is a rarely used in an art space because of health and safety regulations - but also as an important statement, concluding an exhibition narrative concerned with themes of identity (both of the collector and the artist), power, vanity, mortality, legacy, monumentality and impermanence. To produce these works, Fischer rapidly carves the figures in polyurethane foam then makes latex molds in which the wax is finally cast.⁵⁹⁰ In an article in the *The New Yorker*, art critic Calvin Tomkins explains how after the end of the show, the collector could have the figures recast and painted, a process costing twenty-five thousand dollars, a reminder of the mission of collections and museums to conserve things, with the casting technique ensuring the survival of sculptures in a material as ephemeral as wax.⁵⁹¹

Fischer has since made a number of works with candle wax, including *Untitled* (2011) (see Figure 6.23), shown at the 54th Venice Biennale, featuring a full-scale wax cast of Giovanni Bologna's sixteenth-century sculpture, *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, witnessed by a life-size wax cast of his friend, the artist Rudolf Stingel, next to that of an office chair - all set aflame.⁵⁹² Stingel's cast featured in another arrangement alongside a cast of Fischer, both seated in wax candle chairs around a table cast in the same material, melting slowly, during *Madame Fisscher* (2011), the

⁵⁹⁰ Schumacher, *Urs Fischer*, 2010.

⁵⁹¹ Calvin Tomkins, 'The Imperfectionist', p. 34.

⁵⁹² *Untitled*, 2011, wax. 'For the Venice Biennale 2011, Urs Fischer had a wax copy of the 6.5-meter-high Mannerist sculpture "The Rape of the Sabine Women" by the Flemish-Italian sculptor Giambologna produced in the Kunstgiesserei. The figure on the Piazza della Signoria in Florence was digitalized in an extremely precise manner using the newest optical scanner from Goms. The data was then used to mill a 1:1 model made of polyurethane foam, which Urs Fischer then continued to work on in his studio in New York based on the original. In the Kunstgiesserei St.Gallen, a negative was then made and finally filled with colored wax that imitates the pattern of the marble of the original through and through. A wick system was developed for the interior of the wax sculpture, which then made it possible for the work to be lit like a huge candle. While it burned down over several months in the Venice Arsenal during the course of the Biennale, it changed constantly, became gradually smaller, crumbled away, and finally resulted in a sculpture consisting of only fragments and remains. This work also includes the slightly enlarged sculpture "Rudy" - a portrayal of Urs Fischer's artist friend Rudolf Stingel that is also made of wax - as well as an office chair from Fischer's studio. Both of them were positioned next to the Giambologna sculpture and also burned down as a candle'. <http://www.kunstgiesserei.ch/en/artists/urs-fischer/untitled-2011.html>.

A photographic reproduction of this work appeared on the cover of the *Oxford Art Journal* special issue on wax, edited by Hanneke Grootenboer and Allison Goudie, but without an accompanying article.

artist's solo exhibition in the magisterial interiors of Palazzo Grassi in Venice which houses the art foundation of collector François Pinault. The melting figures may bring to mind Dalí's paintings of soft objects, i.e. his trademark soft watches, bending time and space relations (Dalí's motif of soft watches is found in reproduction as part of a printed wallpaper in Fischer's kitchen in his Brooklyn studio).⁵⁹³ In a discussion with the artist, however, Fischer mentioned that the idea for the wax sculptures developed when a collector asked him to make something to light up his apartment. The collector in question also enjoyed the casual company of women, and Fischer came up with the three reclining and seated nudes, a contemporary version of the Three Graces, for *What if the Phone Rings?* The artist's narrative then sets the origin of these works in terms of functionality, after all the works responded to an appeal for some sort of lighting appliance, while also alluding to sexuality and desire.⁵⁹⁴

The material peculiarity of *What if the phone rings?*, their perishing in the course of the exhibition, yet their potentially eternal reproducibility owing to the cast process after they are consumed, raises issues of a complex temporality. Georges Didi-Huberman has discussed wax casts in terms of anachronism, arguing that the distinctive temporality of wax puts to the test the notion of art history as linear chronology and the teleological assumptions that define the discipline since its inception from Vasari to Gombrich.⁵⁹⁵ Wax, moreover, signifies a crisis that resulted in a paradigm shift in thinking about traditional art historical categories. According to Didi-Huberman, wax displays a 'contradiction of material qualities', because it is 'a fragile and temporary material, but is most often used for objects destined to endure'. The author is particularly concerned with the 'surviving' or transhistorical character of these *images*, as he calls the wax effigies which were habitually coloured to achieve an 'extreme resemblance' to the personage they depicted. In virtue of the

⁵⁹³ Gavin Parkinson unpacks the complex spatio-temporal issues implicated here, with his inquiry on scientific theories of relativity in *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science: Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, Epistemology*, 2008, that closely examines Dalí's fascination with quantum mechanics and the impact it had on his theories and work.

⁵⁹⁴ Fischer in conversation with Adamou, Sadie Coles Gallery, 16 Nov. 2013.

⁵⁹⁵ Georges Didi-Huberman, 'La Ressemblance par contact. Archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte', in exhibition catalogue *L'Empreinte*, (Paris : Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997); Didi-Huberman 'Wax Flesh, Vicious Circles: A Complete Collection of Anatomical Waxes', in *Encyclopaedia Anatomica*, with contributions by Monika V. Düring, Georges Didi-Huberman, Marta Poggesi, (Köln; London: Taschen, 1999); Didi-Huberman 'Viscosities and Survivals: Art History Put to the Test by the Material' in Roberta Panzanelli (ed.), *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Body* (Los Angeles: Getty; Hove: Roundhouse [distributor], 2008).

exceptional translucence of the material, the wax becoming 'like flesh', wax casts attain an effect Didi-Huberman vividly describes as 'simulacra of the flesh'.⁵⁹⁶

Moreover, Didi-Huberman observes that contemporary aesthetics have absorbed and radicalized the anachronistic time of the wax casts, finding expression in Nietzsche's notion of the 'eternal return' to oppose 'any kind of "biological" progress in the arts since Vasari'. In this context, Didi-Huberman also considers Freud's notion of the *Uncanny*, which the psychoanalyst attributed to our sense of wax figures as well as automata, putting in operation a vicious circle of desire and mourning to counteract the idealism and enduring materiality of marble sculpture. The author concludes that wax exemplifies these vicious circles and describes it as 'a *trap-material* to catch our fantasies. A *flight-material* where resemblance is plastically exchanged for dissemblance, appearance [...]. A material where the compact mass of flesh is exchanged for the 'indistinct breath of the image'.⁵⁹⁷

In the general context of paranoia-criticism, Dalí discusses anachronism, the embodiment of what he calls, the 'delirious-concrete'. He develops this notion in his essay titled, 'Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture' (1933), introducing a vertiginous time and space where 'elements of the past are summoned to life again, combined and being merged with one another to attain the highest degree of aesthetic depreciation in a feast of terrible impurity, an immaculate purity of oneiric intertwinings', forming yet another expression of the vicious circle which Didi-Huberman describes.⁵⁹⁸

In another essay the following year, titled 'The Latest Modes of Intellectual Stimulation for the Summer of 1934', Dalí begins with the question: '*How to become anachronistic?*' and identifies anachronism as the embodiment of the 'delirious concrete'.⁵⁹⁹ Further, he writes: 'Anachronism is the single "*imaginative constant*" capable of perpetual "*traumatic renewal*", thanks to which it becomes possible to snatch raw and living lumps from that hard and extremely thick thing which is the sentimental fog from which are formed the very cheeks of memory'.⁶⁰⁰ Dalí alludes here to the notion of repetition and trauma that resonates with the return of the repressed, a key feature of the Freudian uncanny. Here Dalí thinks the spectral quality

⁵⁹⁶ Didi-Huberman, 'Wax Flesh, Vicious Circles', in *Encyclopaedia Anatomica*.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ Dalí, 'Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture' in *The Collected Writings*, pp. 193-200. First published in *Minotaure*, 1933, pp. 193, 195.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

of these images rendered in sculptural form in conjunction with the uncanny and the eternal return of the repressed; in other words, in this essay about anachronism, the simulacrum and the uncanny converge.⁶⁰¹ The simulacrum then, of which one important expression is the wax cast, embodies anachronism, through a series of substitutions as Didi-Huberman implies.

Fischer's wax figures become caught in this chain; they are ephemeral yet enduring, via the possibility for substitution, work for work, recast from the same mold, similar yet different. Besides his wax sculptures, and the issues they raise with regards to simulation, anachronism, and the uncanny, Fischer's interests in anachronism are directly reflected in the title of his work *Nach Jugenstiel kam Roccoko* (After Art Nouveau came Rococo) (2006). The title itself bears no obvious relation to the work, which features an empty, crumpled pack of Camel Lights cigarettes being swirled around the gallery floor by a (not immediately visible) motor mechanism. In the title, Fischer conjures up an anachronism to reverse the chronology of art historical styles and to incorporate the past into the present, further evoking Dalí's treatise on the fundamentally anachronistic character of art nouveau.

Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?

*Art is the science of reproducing art's own limits. Art history is a dubious genealogy of these reproductions.*⁶⁰² - Howard Hawks.

The spectral and anachronic qualities related to the simulacrum find their fullest expression in the exhibition *Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?* curated by Fischer (see Figure 6.24). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in the Spring of 2008, Fischer and his New York dealer Gavin Brown co-curated the exhibition at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York. The exhibition setting included a photographic reproduction of the previous show titled *Four Friends*, printed as life-size wallpaper against which Fischer installed works by artists from different generations and backgrounds, such as Francis Picabia, Francis Bacon, John Chamberlain, Jeff Koons,

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 255. Dalí: 'Gala and Myself: The most spectral anachronism of this summer will be that of Gala and myself, wearing a red "barretine," near the large fossil rotting donkey of Cape Creus, etc.'

⁶⁰² Urs Fischer and Darren Bader, 'The Bearded Island (The Artist Laments)', an essay commissioned for the exhibition *Remembering Henry's Show* at The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Ct, 2009, unpaginated. Darren Bader is an artist and was Fischer's former studio assistant.

Cady Noland, Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, Sarah Lucas, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Rudolf Stingel among others.

The show received that year's prize by the International Association of Art Critics, AICA,⁶⁰³ for the Best Show in a Commercial Gallery in New York City, and was widely reviewed both in the New York and international press. Jerry Saltz described it as 'some mad replicating vision machine'.⁶⁰⁴ Howard Halle wrote in *Time Out*: 'Art becomes a real fake [...] The gallery has been sheathed in a *trompe l'oeil* replica of itself', while he says of the installation: 'The effect is uncanny: Entering the space, you're absolutely convinced at first that the exhibit indulges in the curatorial heresy of hanging one work on top of another'.⁶⁰⁵ Halle reads this *trompe l'oeil* manner of exhibition as a take on Jasper Johns' oeuvre, referring to the *Three Flags* (1958) in particular, where three paintings were stacked on top of each other.⁶⁰⁶ Another precedent can be found in Andy Warhol's wallpapers. A review, in *Frieze* magazine, notes: 'These juxtapositions provoke a confused state of misrecognition', and describes the show as 'a messy *bricolage* situation that demands deductive, critical thinking'.⁶⁰⁷

The wallpaper technique was developed in collaboration with Scipio Schneider, a graphic designer and Fischer's friend since high school.⁶⁰⁸ The artist initially implemented this mode of presentation for his first show, titled *Where Are we Going?* (2006-7), at the Palazzo Grassi, in Venice.. In that show, Fischer hung his work over black-and-white reproductions of paintings by Mark Rothko, Richard Serra and Brice Marden that were exhibited in Palazzo Grassi's inaugural exhibition the previous year. Fischer asked Alison Gingeras, who was the curator of the exhibition, for images of the works in order to produce the black-and-white prints over which he would hang his own works. Gingeras described his attitude in handling the works by the older artists as 'irreverent', with the wallpaper technique creating 'a ghost of

⁶⁰³ The American section of the International Art Critics Association.

⁶⁰⁴ Saltz, 'Two Coats of Painting', <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/47806/>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

⁶⁰⁵ Howard Halle, "'Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?' Art Becomes a Real Fake' in Time Out New York, 22 May 2008. <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/whos-afraid-of-jasper-johns>, last accessed 24 September, 2014.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁷ Christopher Bedford, 'Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?' *Frieze*, 3 July 2008, http://www.frieze.com/shows/review/whos_afraid_of_jasper_johns/, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

⁶⁰⁸ Roberta Smith, 'Exploration of Space', *New York Times*, 30 October 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/30/arts/design/30urs.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

exhibitions past, but also humorously deflating the myths of modernism [and the] macho heroes of modernist painting'.⁶⁰⁹ Apparently, the idea evolved from Fischer's playful decoration of his studio, where he used wallpaper printed with the name of Franz West, Franz Kafka, images of Dalí's melting clocks, Francis Bacon's photographic portrait by Bill Brandt, part of the *Kafka* wallpaper (2005) (see Figure 6.25).⁶¹⁰

The incessant replication and mixing of copies and originals in *Who's Afraid*, effectively complicates the works' genealogies, to evoke the complex interplay between past, present and future. By organizing the exhibition through erasures, reflections, overlaps, disruptions and anachronisms, enabled by a unique use of assemblage, Fischer provides an elaborate staging for his own oeuvre within the New York art historical milieu, while also paying tribute to both contemporary and older artists. By juxtaposing diverse elements and setting up copies against 'real' artworks, (some of the works are collages themselves, setting in motion this mechanism *en abyme*), the exhibition engages in an intricate set of appropriations, while at the same time effectively fusing different temporalities. In doing so, I suggest that the act of interpretation is implicit in the very format of display. That is, interpretation happens through the visual organization of the exhibition material, which is as delirious as it is systematic. In this confused state of misrecognition, Fischer upsets chronology, questions the distinction between real and fake by means of replication, and puts pressure on the distinction between image and object.

The exhibition poster provides another clue to what triggered the idea for the show; it features a black-and-white photograph of Tony Shafrazi being arrested in 1974 for defacing Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* at MoMA. On February 28, 1974, the 30-year-old Iranian-born artist entered the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where *Guernica* hung at the time, and sprayed across it with red paint the words 'KILL LIES ALL'. While being arrested by the museum guards he allegedly yelled: 'Call the Curator. I am an artist'. When asked about it later, Shafrazi stated he wanted to bring *Guernica* 'absolutely up to date, to retrieve it from art history and give it life'.⁶¹¹ Some years later in the early Eighties, Shafrazi went on to open a gallery in SoHo

⁶⁰⁹ Schumacher, *Urs Fischer*, 2010.

⁶¹⁰ *Kafka* wallpaper (2005), probably destroyed when Fischer moved studios. From email communication between Natasha Adamou and his archivist on 5 Feb 2014.

⁶¹¹ Saltz, 'Two Coats of Painting', <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/47806/>, last accessed 12 Sept, 2014.

representing artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. The gallery soon became a hot spot in the booming New York art scene, but by the time of *Who's Afraid* it had long fallen from prominence - Shafrazi now mostly dealing in the secondary art market and blue-chip artists. Among other things, then, *Who's Afraid* can be seen as a kind of homage to Shafrazi and the history of the gallery, and at the same time as an attempt to 'bring it up to date, retrieve it from art history and give it life'. Moreover, it does so in a similar spirit of sacrilege because, as Jerry Saltz notes, 'an otherwise conventional survey is transformed into a sort of reenactment of Shafrazi's genuine assault on *Guernica*. And much as Shafrazi sometimes spoke of "collaborating" with Picasso, Fischer, with Brown's help, communes with art history to offer an homage from one bad-boy artist to another'.⁶¹²

Dalí's notion of the 'delirious-concrete', discussed in the section on wax and anachronism, that creates a vertiginous time and space where 'elements of the past are summoned to life again, combined and being merged with one another [...]', is also pertinent in *Who's Afraid?*⁶¹³ In 'Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture', Dalí demonstrates the superiority of his method over automatism and dreams, by invoking Antoni Gaudí's buildings, constructed, as he writes, 'with the reflections of crepuscular clouds on the water of a lake [...] requiring the most Naturalist and *trompe-l'oeil* strictness'.⁶¹⁴ He regards these buildings as 'a gigantic progress over the simple submersion of a drawing room at the bottom of a lake envisaged by Rimbaud'.⁶¹⁵ This is a dream-like image by another poet anachronistically endorsed by the surrealists. Bringing into relief the difference between paranoia, and automatism and dream, for Dalí, Gaudí has made instead, not just an image but a real house for the 'living lunatics'.⁶¹⁶ Dalí concludes the essay, writing that, as opposed to being 'the unusable, so called "stuffed thing", deemed inoffensive by the intellectual pseudo-experience, which ironically disposes of it in the "storehouse of the junk of the ages", anachronism is a living thing, made of flesh

⁶¹² Howard Halle, 'Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?' *Time Out New York*, no. 660, 22-28 May 2008, <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/whos-afraid-of-jasper-johns>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

⁶¹³ Dalí, 'Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture' in *The Collected Writings*, pp. 193-200. First published in *Minotaure*, 1933, pp. 193, 195.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 198, 200.

⁶¹⁵ Dalí refers here to a famous passage from the 'Alchemy of the Word' section in Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer* (1873). *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

and bones'.⁶¹⁷ He means this quite literally, as Gaudi's *Casa Batlló*, to which the passage refers, is called the House of Bones by the locals in Barcelona. Discussed in the context of Art Nouveau, Gaudi's architecture, re-enacts the paranoiac delirium 'in reality', in inhabitable spaces, changing our perception and experience of time and space coordinates. With its violent appropriations of art historical material, *Who's Afraid?* enacts the 'traumatic renewal' invoked in Dali's version of anachronism, that allows us to 'snatch raw and living lumps... from the fog ...of memory'.⁶¹⁸ It provides thus a different model to linear historical narratives, with which to capture and reflect upon the workings of historical memory.

In a conversation I had with Fischer, in the context of the extensive use of replicas and appropriations in his work, he mentioned the cultural discrepancy that exists between East and West notions of history and historicity.⁶¹⁹ More specifically, he referred to the example of Chinese buildings that are under constant renovation, without attempting to preserve their historical character.⁶²⁰ *Anachronic Renaissance*, a book by Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, opens with a citation by Simone de Beauvoir describing the Forbidden City in Beijing in her travel memoir *The Long March* (1957). 'The Imperial Palace does not have a restored look, nor has it an ancient one: this hesitation makes it appear not eternal but precarious and like an imitation of itself', notes Beauvoir, concluding that '[she] would hesitate to call it a historical monument'.⁶²¹ Beauvoir further observed of these buildings that, 'they disguised their own histories of fabrication and subsequent restorations', thus effectively eliminating their very historicity that attests to the passage of time, and the European notion that buildings and artifacts are, above all, products of their time. Nagel and Wood explain that in the West:

It is all too obviously contrived by real agents – human beings, not giants, not gods. The Imperial Palace in Beijing seemed to evade all these conditions. Beauvoir did not feel invited either to contemplate the structure's great antiquity or to read it as the index of its times,

⁶¹⁷ Dali, 'The Latest Modes of Intellectual Stimulation for the Summer of 1934', in *The Collected Writings*, p. 254.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁶¹⁹ Fischer in conversation with Adamou, Sadie Coles Gallery, 16 Nov. 2013.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶²¹ Quoted in Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 7.

and so she saw the palace as inauthentic, as an 'imitation of itself.'
The palace's true self, for Beauvoir, was its historical self.⁶²²

By bringing together the themes of replication and anachronism, together with *trompe-l'oeil*, which I shall analyse below, *Who's Afraid* invites us to consider a different notion of history, one that would retrieve art, in the words of Dalí, from 'the storehouse of the junk of the ages', and return it to us as 'a living thing, made of flesh and bones'.⁶²³

Jean Baudrillard's 'The *trompe l'oeil*'

Who's afraid is marked by an extreme flattening of space, an abolition of perspective that paradoxically permits a vertiginous space to emerge. In his essay on *trompe-l'oeil*, Jean Baudrillard writes about the absence of a horizon and any kind of horizontality: 'There is no fable, no narrative', Baudrillard declares, 'no "set", no theatre. Neither plot, nor characters. [The *Trompe-l'oeil*] forgets all grand themes and distorts them'.⁶²⁴ Instead, objects appear as blank, empty signs, they are anti-representational, without syntax, juxtaposed by the mere chance of their presence. Baudrillard further talks about 'the absence of that figurative hierarchy that gives order to the elements of a picture', referring to 'the ghosts that haunt the emptiness of the stage'.⁶²⁵ These are 'mere objects', 'haunted objects', 'metaphysical objects'. 'They are opaque and matt, sidereal exactness, like surrealist figures, as if denuded of the atmosphere of meaning and bathing in an empty ether', he insists. In them, there is no face, psychology, or historicity: 'Here is all artefact; the vertical field constitutes objects isolated from their referential context as pure signs'. Importantly, 'these are objects that have already endured: time here has already been, space has already taken place. The only relief is that of anachrony, that is to say the involutive figure of time and space'. Other characteristics of these objects are, 'suspense, translucidity, disuse, fragility, a certain culturality without history'.⁶²⁶ *Trompe-l'oeil* is marked by weightlessness, its objects are no longer in use and they induce a slight

⁶²² *Ibid.*

⁶²³ Finkelstein, *The Collected Writings*, p. 254.

⁶²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, 'The Trompe-l'oeil' in Norman Bryson (ed.) *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 53.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

vertigo – that of a previous life.⁶²⁷ Finally, Baudrillard asserts: ‘In trompe-l’oeil it is never a matter of confusion with the real: what is important is the production of a simulacrum in full consciousness of the game and of the artifice [...] counteracting the privileged position of the gaze [renaissance perspective]’.⁶²⁸ To perspectival reality, Renaissance, *trompe-l’oeil* is its *ironic simulacrum*, a more profound simulacrum than the real itself.⁶²⁹ It reveals to us that reality is nothing more than a world *hierarchically* staged (*mise-en-scène*), an objectivity achieved according to the rules of depth.⁶³⁰

In ‘The Challenge to Painting’ of 1930, Aragon writes about Dalí’s use of collage:

He paints with a magnifying glass; he can imitate the chromo (a kind of cheap coloured lithograph) so well that the effect is infallible: the parts of the pasted chromo look painted while the painted parts look stuck on. Does he want to foil the eye, and does he rejoice in provoked error? You could think that, but without finding the explanation of this double game, which cannot be put down to the despair of the painter before the inimitable, nor to his laziness before the ready-expressed [*tout-exprimé*].⁶³¹

Aragon suggests that Dalí’s paintings are incoherent over all – an incoherence closely parallel to that peculiar to collage – because they resemble novels. In doing so they are ‘anti-pictorial’, transgressing the demands of surface unity and autonomy of most post-Cubist painting.⁶³²

In 2009, Fischer accentuated the ghostly overtones of his wallpaper technique with the New Museum’s *Last Call Lascaux* (2009) (see Figure 6.26), by reproducing the institution itself. The artist had the empty gallery walls photographed inch-by-

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁶³¹ Louis Aragon, ‘The Challenge to Painting’ in Pontus Hulten (ed.), *The Surrealists Look at Art* (Lapis Press, 1990), pp.47-72. First published in French, titled ‘La peinture au défi’ (1930), introduction to the exhibition catalogue for the exhibition *La Peinture au défi. exposition de collage*, Galerie Goemans, Paris, March 1930 (including work by Braque, Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, Ernst, Gris, Miro, Magritte, Man Ray, Picabia, Picasso, Tanguy). Also published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution (Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution)* Issue 3, featuring writings by Breton, Éluard, Char, Tanguy, Max Ernst, Pierre Unik, Crevel, and Aragon, and others. Illustrations in this issue of *Minotaure* included photographs of surrealist objects by Breton, Gala Éluard, Valentine Hugo, Joan Miró, Alberto Giacometti, and Dalí. The issue opens with an ad for the books *L’Immaculée conception* by Breton & Éluard, *La Peinture au défi* by Aragon, and *La Femme Visible* by Dalí.

⁶³² Ades, *Dalí*, p. 83.

inch, after the previous show had been dismantled, leaving marks and scars. The walls were subsequently covered with the wallpaper image of themselves printed exactly to scale. In addition, the ceiling was lowered to make it flat so that the artist could fit the wallpaper, and then new lighting was attached to it mimicking the lighting system from the original ceiling above. The re-adjustment of the ceiling was particularly demanding technically, but crucial in order to make visitors feel like they're 'stepping inside a photograph'.⁶³³ One reviewer described the effect as follows:

The visitor, stepping into this doppelgänger of a room, is optically bathed in a purplish meltdown of process colors, which modulate almost imperceptibly, so that some areas are more yellow, and others more magenta. (The wallpaper is actually a photograph of fluorescent light reflected off the walls in colors the human eye normally does not perceive.) The result is a subtly living, breathing space [...]⁶³⁴

The work has been described by Roberta Smith of the *New York Times* as, 'a very precise form of environmental *trompe l'oeil*'.⁶³⁵ Smith explains that, 'the *trompe l'oeil* is clearest when you examine the public-safety signs. These could not, by law, be removed, so they're shadowed by images of themselves. In all, it is as if Mr. Fischer had discovered a space within a space and it were, literally, a twilight zone' (see Figures 6.27 and 6.28).⁶³⁶ *Last Call Lascaux*, the *trompe l'oeil* rendition of the museum space, became the envelope, the foil, which literally contained the spectator.

The work's title refers to the Lascaux caves in southwestern France, containing some of the earliest Paleolithic paintings known by men, drawing thus a connection between one of the oldest 'art galleries' and the modern or contemporary art museum. The paintings in the original Lascaux caves were initially made accessible to visitors, but after a few years they were closed to the public for reasons of preservation, due to the damage the paintings had suffered from the great number of visitors. Around twenty years later, Lascaux II, a replica of two of the caves was opened nearby the original location. By doubling the contemporary museum gallery, Fischer's *Last Call*

⁶³³ New Museum curator Massimiliano Gioni in Schumacher's documentary, *Urs Fischer*, 2010.

⁶³⁴ Hirsch, 'Urs Fischer', <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/urs-fischer/>, last accessed 12 Sept, 2014.

⁶³⁵ Smith, 'Exploration of Space', <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/30/arts/design/30urs.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*

Lascaux further alludes to the history of the Lascaux site (its conversion into a public gallery, and subsequent replication), while pondering the history and conditions of the modern and contemporary museum. In addition to these re-doublings, the poignant repetition of the sound in the work's title, *Last Call – Lascaux*, becomes yet another double, the aural counterpart that echoes the visual doubling of the museum space. Finally, in the haunted, empty room of *Last Call Lascaux*, an artificial tongue triggered by a motor mechanism is unexpectedly poked at the viewer through a hole in the wall, taking him or her by surprise. The piece titled *Noisette* (2009), not only bestows the space with a creepy, double life, as suggested in a review,⁶³⁷ but also by inducing a brief moment of an unlikely *trompe-l'oeil* occurrence, it playfully exposes the artifice that is art.

Object/Image: *Service à la française* (2009)

To paraphrase the Surrealists, New York Beauty will be delirious or will not be. – Hal Foster.⁶³⁸

The convergence between the spectral and material qualities in Fischer's practice becomes more pronounced in his work titled *Service à la française* (2009) (see Figure 6.29), presented during his major exhibition Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty at the New Museum, New York in 2009. The title refers to a meal whose courses arrive all at once, originating in the practice at the French royal court of serving all the dishes of a meal at the same moment to make the greatest impression. Here, Fischer takes the idea of the object-as-image literally, demonstrating the complete overlap between the two. *Service à la française* occupied the New Museum's second floor (located one floor below *Last Call Lascaux*, the *trompe l'oeil* empty room), featuring fifty-one chromed steel mirrored boxes in different sizes and proportions, whose surfaces were laid out with screen-prints depicting everyday, familiar items. Each screen print reproduced one object that had been photographed from five sides, cut out to the shape of the object, and screen-printed onto the four corresponding sides and top of a box.

⁶³⁷ Hirsch, 'Urs Fischer', <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/urs-fischer/>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

⁶³⁸ In a book review on Rem Koolhaas, Foster draws on his own expressed interest in Dalí's paranoia-criticism. Hal Foster, 'Bigness', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 23, No. 23, 29 Nov. 2001. pp. 13-16. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n23/hal-foster/bigness>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

The depicted objects range from the Empire State Building with King Kong on its top, a British red telephone booth, the Eiffel Tower, Rodin's *Kiss*, a full-body celebrity shot of a woman, a sailing ship, a ladder, a porcelain obelisk, and its negative rendition in the form of its white foam case, food stuff like fruit (fresh and then rotten), cheese, bread, meat, and cakes, as well as everyday objects like shoes, a PC, DVD disk, videotape, box of matches, lipstick etc. The scale of the images varies and does not correspond to the real size of each item or relate proportionately to each other. This results in some items being shrunk, and others enlarged, entirely out of proportion, as in the case of an oversized shoe or a pear cut in half.

The mirrored boxes were installed throughout an entire gallery to form an irregular grid. Visitors could walk among them as if wandering among city blocks. Depicted objects and visitors alike were being reflected on the mirrored surfaces, generating an infinitely reproduced, disorienting space. (Michelangelo Pistoletto's series of *Mirror Paintings* (1962) have been suggested as an obvious precedent).⁶³⁹ One reviewer observes that:

Although the boxes are insistently physical, much like Minimalist cubes, the objects depicted are inaccessible, even spectral in feeling. Paradoxically, reconstituting the objects as images on the faces of geometric solids only enhances the quality of flatness. [...] Yet, disoriented though we may feel, we lose our bearings willingly and with pleasure, stepping through the looking glass and into a museum transformed.⁶⁴⁰

New York Times art critic Roberta Smith, notes that, as its title indicates, like the simultaneous presentation of different courses in one meal, the work 'combines Pop and Minimalism, matter and hollowness into a hall of mirrors, full of infinite layers and intersections of sight and meaning that are discovered, and in a sense created, by walking through the piece'.⁶⁴¹ Once more here the phenomenological experience of the here-and-now central to Minimalism, is undercut by the hollowness of images, the phantasmatic presence of the simulacrum.

In an essay that revolves around New York, commissioned for Fischer's

⁶³⁹ Hirsch, 'Urs Fischer', <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/urs-fischer/>, last accessed 12 Sept, 2014.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ Smith, 'Exploration of Space', *New York Times*, 30 October 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/30/arts/design/30urs.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

exhibition *Remembering Henry's Show* at The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Connecticut, 2009, Fischer and his former studio assistant and fellow artist Darren Bader, wrote: 'The natural paranoia of New Yorkers is rooted in the perennial horror of being left out (or horror-of-horrors: being left behind!) That's what this essay's all about. The paranoia of the (Modern) artist is that s/he has failed to make art that will be remembered. [...] Museums are built to contain histories. [...] New histories come about with the potential to raise a myth'.⁶⁴² In this excerpt, Fischer and his co-author invoke paranoia as the fear of the New Yorker being left out, not made part of the city. Importantly, however, they also invoke paranoia as the great fear of the artist being excluded from history. The remarks carry the implicit demand to construct a legacy, a myth around one's artistic practice while considering the important role of the museum in this process. Fischer, a resident of New York, constantly reflects on these conditions in his work, and his essay renders explicit the paranoid element inherent in such constructions.

Service à la française addresses and recreates, through its spatial and visual arrangement, both the paranoia of the city of New York, and the premise of the artist caught within the myth-making process. In *Delirious New York* (1978), the cult 'retroactive manifesto' on Manhattan, the celebrated architect Rem Koolhaas writes: 'It is the arduous task of the final part of this century, to deal with the extravagant and megalomaniac claims, ambitions and possibilities of the Metropolis *openly*'.⁶⁴³ In this book, an architectural history of New York, Koolhaas endorses and engages closely with Dalí's method of paranoia-criticism, the 'frenzied critical synthesis' that dominates the paranoid delirium, where:

Each fact, event, force, observation is caught in one system of speculation and 'understood' by the afflicted individual in such a way that it absolutely confirms and reinforces his thesis – that is, the initial delusion that is his point of departure. *The paranoid always hits the nail on the head, no matter where the hammer blows fall.*⁶⁴⁴

For Koolhaas, the method 'promises that, through conceptual recycling, the worn,

⁶⁴² Fischer and Bader, 'The Bearded Island', 2009, Unpaginated.

⁶⁴³ Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p. 293.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

consumed contents of the world can be recharged or enriched like uranium'.⁶⁴⁵ He moreover finds expression of the paranoiac principles in the Manhattan Grid and Skyscraper (a vertical version of the Grid). He writes: 'The Grid defines a new balance between control and de-control in which the city can be at the same time ordered and fluid, a metropolis of rigid chaos... [It] becomes a mosaic of episodes . . . that contest each other'.⁶⁴⁶ In effect, 'Paranoid-Critical activity is the fabrication of evidence for unprovable speculations and the subsequent grafting of this evidence on the world, so that a 'false' fact takes its unlawful place among the "real" facts'.⁶⁴⁷ Finally, for Koolhaas, 'paranoia is a shock of recognition that never ends'.⁶⁴⁸

In a 2001 book review, following the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, Hal Foster referred to Koolhaas's architecture firm, Office for Metropolitan Architecture, in the context of paranoia: 'OMA was to lead this "second coming of Manhattanism": if the essence of Manhattanism was "to live inside *fantasy*", then OMA would be a "machine to fabricate fantasy", and its first proposals were more surreal narratives than practical programmes (for instance, a model for mass housing in the form of a luxury hotel named the Sphinx)'.⁶⁴⁹ In a similar yet advanced postmodern context of information overload and the ever-proliferating simulated realities of the virtual domain, Fischer's screen-printed, mirrored boxes, and his work in general, provide indeed a 'machine that fabricates fantasy', a delirious appropriation of facts and fictions from the history of art and culture in general.

Conclusion: New Appropriation Art

Fischer's work is always in dialogue with the history of art, displaying an acute awareness of historical and contemporary artworks and issues. In the catalogue for the *Unmonumental* exhibition, Hoptman argues that while early twenty-first century assemblage practices are removed from their dada, and neo-avant-garde predecessors, they are closer to 1980s appropriation art, in their intentional, critical and ironic references to earlier art historical moments. For example, Hoptman argues that the visual similarity of Anselm Reyle's early twenty-first century assemblages of found

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁶⁴⁹ Foster, 'Bigness', <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n23/hal-foster/bigness>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

objects to the neo-avant-garde work of Ettore Colla comes out of a critique of these practices, and is comparable to the way David Hammons or Cady Noland mockingly mimicing the industrial aesthetic of minimalism, by replacing materials like steel and plexiglass with found objects such as metal stanchions and empty Thunderbird bottles.⁶⁵⁰

Indeed, this renewed interest in appropriation art is evident in many artworks and exhibitions, such as the *Tate Triennial* (2006),⁶⁵¹ which presented New British Art that deals with themes of appropriation and repetition, as well as the recent tendency to re-create or re-visit seminal art exhibitions, the most striking example being *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* re-created at the Fondazione Prada in Venice, curated by Germano Celant in collaboration with Thomas Demand and Rem Koolhaas. Other examples include the *Pictures Generation*, 1974-1984 restaged at the The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in 2009, and *Other Primary Structures* in 2014 revisiting the seminal 1966 exhibition *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*, both at the Jewish Museum, New York.

In 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism' (1980), the essay that followed his celebrated 'Pictures' article which accompanied the exhibition with the same title, Douglas Crimp argued that the 'pictures generation' undermined the hierarchy between copy and original in the context of postmodernism.⁶⁵² As a critical response to the narratives of 'authenticity' still prevalent in museums at the time, exhibitions such as 'Pictures' was at first exclusively presented outside the modern museum domain. Around the same time, the term simulacra became synonymous with postmodern cultural theory during the 1980s, with the writing of Baudrillard and Deleuze, for example.⁶⁵³ Today's contemporary art museums, however, have embraced simulation as a crucial part of their programmes. The effects of simulation and its critique of originality and authorship that was perceived as so prominent in Crimp's account on the Pictures generation and the advent of postmodernism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, have been completely absorbed in the full-blown

⁶⁵⁰ Hoptman, *Unmonumental*, p. 134.

⁶⁵¹ Beatrix Ruf and Clarrie Wallis (eds), *Tate Triennial 2006: New British Art*, (London: Tate, 2006).

⁶⁵² Douglas Crimp, 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism', *October*, Vol. 15 (Winter, 1980), pp. 91-101. Crimp, 'Pictures', *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), pp. 75-88.

⁶⁵³ More rare, however, as David Lomas observes, are any sustained studies on Dalí's theories of simulation propagated in his paranoia-criticism, and its impact on contemporary art and postmodern aesthetic theory. Lomas, 'Simulation and the Order of Mimesis in Dalí and Glenn Brown', 2011. Also Lomas, *Simulating the Marvellous*, 2013.

postmodern culture at the end of the twentieth – early twenty-first century.

For David Lomas, one way to think about paranoia-criticism is that paranoia underlies, as Lacan had it, the structure of all knowledge.⁶⁵⁴ While in the 1970s, the ‘pictures generation’ artists responded to the effects of mass-media identity construction, with technological developments since the late twentieth century there emerged new possibilities for knowledge, communication and sociability, dominated by the widespread appeal of the virtual domain. Notions such as simulation, cyberspace, avatar etc. increasingly contribute to the fabrication of individual and collective identities. The means to ‘fabricate fantasy’ and identity as a coherent myth-making process in social media, have become instrumental in the way people in the West communicate and relate to each other.

The most striking, yet disputed, example of re-creating seminal historical exhibitions is the recent exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* at the Fondazione Prada, curated by Germano Celant in collaboration with artist Thomas Demand and architect Rem Koolhaas (see Figure 6.30). The exhibition re-created Harald Szeemann’s seminal show *Live in your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, first shown in Bern in 1969. The attempt to reconstruct an important art historical situation, raised concerns, in the words of Demand, about the ‘irrecoverability of our memories, and that they may have become artificial’, bringing into view issues of historical memory and loss.⁶⁵⁵ The unsettling dynamic of the peculiar space in Venice resulted from the multi-layered temporal overlaps between the eighteenth century Venetian palazzo housing the Fondazione Prada, and the 2013 recreation of the ‘69 exhibition that had been presented in the 1918 Kunsthalle Bern. These temporal discrepancies are evident in Demand’s photographs of details from the exhibition space where the different architectural elements and temporalities meet, displaying, as Germano Celant notes, ‘passages from room to room as in an architectural transit. [i.e.] in the meeting between walls and frescoes...’⁶⁵⁶ According to Koolhaas, the exhibition architect, this spatiotemporal anachronic ‘tear’ brought an experimental dimension to the project, to somehow counteract the scholastic

⁶⁵⁴ Lomas, *Simulating the Marvellous*, p. 245.

⁶⁵⁵ Thomas Demand in ‘Germano Celant in Conversation with Thomas Demand’ in *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* (Venice: Fondazione Prada, 2013), p. 399.

⁶⁵⁶ Germano Celant, *Ibid.*

seriousness of the reconstruction, and to maintain something of the spirit of the 1969', which he says was 'so much about improvisation and artistic freedom'.⁶⁵⁷

In an essay from the exhibition catalogue, Claire Bishop writes that, in order to be used critically, reconstruction should produce 'not an empty replica, a dutiful but inadequate imitation of the past', but an 'anachronic object', where two temporalities co-exist: 'an archival representation of the past, and a voice that speaks to the concerns of today'.⁶⁵⁸ Many critical reviews, however, were skeptical about the effects of this scrupulous re-staging. Catherine Spencer, for example, notes that, at the end, the show felt 'stage-managed, even Disneyfied'.⁶⁵⁹ Even though the author doesn't denounce these aspects per se, she is critical about the lack of willingness, on the part of the organizers, to engage with the nostalgic, antiseptic, fetishistic dimension of this ambitious re-creation.⁶⁶⁰ Perhaps the anachronic dimension pronounced in the clash of the two buildings, which Koolhaas was eager to maintain, was lost to the final exhibition, or became overcompensated by the faithful reconstruction which included, for example, the original floors, or the forensic marking around the space of absent original works.

Fischer's works, on the contrary, engage fully with their innate artificiality, while reflecting on the mechanisms of the fundamentally fabricating role of the museum. His simulated objects and environments, moreover, become an engrossing meditation on history and power. By reverting to violent anachronism rather than melancholic nostalgia, the works re-imagine the past in the present, re-enacting the *traumatic renewal* of historical material, which Koolhaas had also envisaged in his book *Delirious New York* (1978) via Dalí no less, but which perhaps became muted in the Venice re-creation of *When Attitudes Become Form*.

In the installation *Madame Fisscher*, for example, Fischer transposed part of his old London studio to the Palazzo Grassi (see Figure 6.31). Part-reconstruction, part-original, wondering around the messy room that was installed in the middle of the ground floor space, left the visitor perplexed, looking for indiscernible clues as to

⁶⁵⁷ Rem Koolhaas, 'Rem Koolhaas in Conversation with Germano Celant', in *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, p. 414.

⁶⁵⁸ Claire Bishop, 'Reconstruction Era: The Anachronic Time(s) of Installation Art', in *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, p. 436.

⁶⁵⁹ Catherine Spencer, 'When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013' exhibition review in *this is tomorrow*, 2 Sept. 2013, <http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/when-attitudes-become-form-bern-1969-venice-2013>, last accessed 12 Sept. 2014.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

which of the elements were re-constructed, and which objects belonged to the original studio. Notions of the 'auratic' presence of the original site of artistic process and experimentation thus became muffled through re-construction, where re-created elements merged completely with original material, offering a captivating reflection on artistic production as simulation. Fischer's works presented here, moreover, mark the moment when the postmodern notion of the simulacrum folds itself back into the material object.

In surrealism, both automatism and Dali's paranoia-criticism are directed against the ideology of modernist functionalism and instrumental reason. Fischer's work is far from being programmatic in that sense; it rather critically inhabits the space of contemporary subjectivity, highlighting the intricacies of its coming-into-being. With technological developments since the late twentieth century, there emerged new possibilities for knowledge, communication and sociability, dominated by the widespread appeal of the virtual domain. Notions such as simulation, cyberspace, avatar etc. combined with new technologies of material production (i.e. 3D scanning and printing which Fischer uses extensively in his sculptures), increasingly contribute to the fabrication of individual and collective identities and narratives. The critical potential of Fischer's work lies in how it re-creates these conditions, revealing the formation of contemporary subjectivity in response to an increasingly complex and ambivalent environment, while reflecting on the place and role of the artist and the museum in this setting.

Chapter 7. EPILOGUE

The present thesis started as an exploration on the legacies of Marcel Duchamp's readymade and André Breton's found object in contemporary art. One of the main points of departure for this inquiry was Margaret Iversen's article 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', where the author brought attention to the different historical and conceptual legacies of these categories, the readymade and the found object, and the fact that despite their distinct historical departures and intellectual formations the two terms are often 'run together and used interchangeably' in contemporary critical literature.⁶⁶¹ This distinction is obscured not only in current texts by art critics and theorists, but also in the way contemporary artists implement and understand these practices. For example, when Peter Fischli and David Weiss wish to distinguish their practice from that of Duchamp's readymade objects, they claim that: 'In the case of Duchamp the concept of *objets trouvés*, or "found objects", is important, whereas we try to create objects'.⁶⁶² This is just one of the countless examples where the readymade is explicitly conceptualized as being identical with the surrealist *objet trouvé*, or found object.

The important difference that Iversen highlights in her article is that the two types of objects assume fundamentally different relations to the human subject; in other words, they constitute radically diverse types of subjectivity. While the Duchampian readymade is grounded in the notion of 'aesthetic indifference' which has a rich legacy in problematizing the idea of artistic authorship, Breton's found object is a result of unconscious thoughts and impulses. In addition to that, the readymade is a mass-produced commodity object, linked to industrial serial production, while the found object is often found in flea markets and is 'essentially singular or irreplaceable'.⁶⁶³

The two different types of encounter between subject and object, assumed by the readymade and the found object, have also been theorized through Duchamp's notion of the rendez-vous and Breton's idea of the chance encounter, respectively. In the first instance, Duchamp's rendez-vous signals the meeting that occurs between the artist

⁶⁶¹ That this thesis is indebted to Iversen's article is reflected in the first part of the title I have chosen for it: Readymade, Found Object, Replica.

⁶⁶² Fischli quoted in 'Beate Söntgen in conversation with Peter Fischli and David Weiss', in *Peter Fischli/ David Weiss*, p. 22.

⁶⁶³ Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', p. 50.

and the object 'by planning for a moment to come (on such a day, such a date such a minute), "to inscribe a readymade" - The readymade can later be looked for (with all kinds of delays)'.⁶⁶⁴ In the second case, Breton's chance encounter is inspired by Lautréamont's famous phrase: 'Beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella, on a dissecting table'.⁶⁶⁵ This type of encounter with the found object which is 'both lost and found', as Iversen claims,⁶⁶⁶ depends on unconscious associations and suggests a 'less-determined exploration of the relations between subject and object'.⁶⁶⁷

In her article, Iversen takes as a departure point for her discussion the *Surrealist Exhibition of Objects* that took place at the Charles Ratton Gallery in Paris in May 1936, and brought together a wide range of objects including natural objects, readymades, found objects, mathematical objects, surrealist assemblages, as well as ethnographic objects from America and Oceania. Many of the items were displayed in free-standing glass vitrines alongside each other in no particular order or hierarchy, while others, such as Salvador Dalí's 1936 'aphrodisiac' dinner *jacket* with eighty-one glasses of crème de menthe attached to it, were hanging from the walls alongside ethnographic masks. This mode of presentation which placed American and Oceanic objects, next to readymade commodity objects, found objects, and mathematical or natural objects, evaded established categorical distinctions in favour of an all-inclusive anti-hierarchical arrangement.

The positioning, however, of certain objects or artworks, such as Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* (1914), the bottle dryer that the artist nominated as his first unassisted readymade, or Alberto Giacometti's sculpture *Suspended Ball* (1930-31), was highly suggestive of their importance in the construction of certain genealogies relating to the object in surrealism. Duchamp's mass-produced *Bottle Rack*, for example, was symbolically placed at the centre of the main set of glass vitrines, while Giacometti's erotically suggestive *Suspended Ball* was displayed separately in its own glass case. The exhibition was accompanied by a special issue of the *Cahiers d'art* which included Breton's essay 'Crisis of the Object' (1936) where the author further theorized a prominent place for the readymade in the context of surrealist objects,

⁶⁶⁴ Duchamp, 'Specifications for "Readymades"' in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 32-33.

⁶⁶⁵ Lautréamont, *Oeuvres*, p. 327.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶⁶⁷ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, p. 107.

which he described as 'diverting the object from its destination by attaching a new label to it and signing it, thus reclassifying it by the exercise of choice'.⁶⁶⁸

As I discussed in the chapter on the surrealist object, in his book *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, TJ Demos analyses the repercussions of the theorization of the readymade by Breton in the context of the object in surrealism and the prominent place Breton gives to the former as a key precursor of surrealist objects. For Demos, the historicisation of the readymade under the aegis of surrealism is highly problematic, because it jeopardizes the radicality of the readymade by institutionalizing it, while at the same time confusing the discussions around the surrealist object. By collapsing the readymade and the found object, two essentially antithetical concepts, under a single category, that of the surrealist object, Demos insists that Breton abolished the crucial difference between the two, thus 'subjectivising' the readymade, ignoring its fundamental issue of 'aesthetic indifference' and 'returning aesthetic intention to it, even if one of psychoanalytic complexity'.⁶⁶⁹

In this thesis, rather than following this line of historiography which continues in contemporary critical accounts and tends to collapsing the two categories into one and the same, I have argued for a view that takes into consideration the complexity of the dialectic between readymade and found object, or the object in surrealism in general, carefully tracing their overlaps and repercussions in my discussion of the contemporary art works examined here. While Iversen in her article seeks to drive a wedge between them, I take into consideration the complexities of the overlaps between the two, to finally argue that these categories are interrelated but not identical. At the same time, it is clear that contemporary discussions privilege the discourse on the readymade over the found object. By drawing attention to aspects of the found object, or the surrealist object in general, that have been overlooked or suppressed in contemporary criticism, I hope that my analysis allows for the subtle nuances and overlaps between these two key concepts to emerge, further enriching our understanding of contemporary works of art that draw upon them (to either support, modify or challenge them).

Importantly, however, the dialectic between the readymade and the surrealist object has emerged in my work because of a noted tendency in contemporary art since

⁶⁶⁸ Breton, 'Crisis of the Object' *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 280.

⁶⁶⁹ Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, p. 152.

the 1980s that saw the return of the material object. This return to materiality has gradually been emerging following a period in art history between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s that was marked by an increase in artistic practices and related texts that advocated the 'dematerialisation' of the art object. This tendency was famously formulated theoretically in 1968, with Lucy Lippard's and John Chandler's influential essay 'The Dematerialization of Art', followed five years later by Lippard's seminal book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*.⁶⁷⁰

In his introduction to the recent anthology on *The Object* (2014), that examines this increase of interest in the object in art and culture which was particularly pronounced since the turn of the twenty-first century, Antony Hudek remarks on the equivocality of the term 'object' which he describes as 'a trove of disguises, concealments, subterfuges, provocations and triggers that no singular, embodied and knowledgeable subject can exhaust.'⁶⁷¹ The volume includes a wide variety of texts by anthropologists, philosophers, psychoanalysts, sociologists and writers, with excerpts from many of the texts related to issues examined in this thesis, such as Jacques Lacan's 'Das Ding' in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60), Jean Baudrillard in conversation with Guy Bellavance (1983), Mike Kelley's 'The Readymade and the Double' (1993), Boris Groys' 'Simulated Readymades by Fischli and Weiss' (1994), Slavoj Žižek's 'There are Objects and Objects' (1991), and Nancy Spector's extract from her writings on Gabriel Orozco's exhibition *Asterisms* (2012) at the Guggenheim Museum, among others.⁶⁷²

Through the research and study of the material relating to the return of the object in the context of the contemporary artworks and artistic practices examined in this thesis, it finally became apparent that the prominence of object-based discourses that have come to be so central in art and cultural theory alike, pointed to some pressing questions and concerns regarding the redefinition of sculpture. Importantly, I have

⁶⁷⁰ Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art' *Art International*, February 1968. Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

⁶⁷¹ Hudek, *The Object*, p. 14.

⁶⁷² Jacques Lacan's 'Das Ding', *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60); translation by Dennis Porter, in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 45-46; Jean Baudrillard, 'Jean Baudrillard in Conversation with Guy Bellavance' in *Parachute*, no. 31 (1983); reprinted in *The Revenge of the Crystal: A Baudrillard reader*, ed. and trans. Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis (London: Pluto press, 1990), pp. 17-20; Mike Kelley 'Playing with Dead Things', *The Uncanny* (Sonsbeek: Sonsbeek '93, 1993), p. 17; Boris Groys, 'Simulated Readymades', in *Parkett*, no. 40/41, Zurich, 1994, pp. 33-37; Fischli/Weiss: *Flowers and Questions* (London: Tate, 2006); Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 1991, pp. 133-35; Nancy Spector, 'Mapping the Universe', in *Gabriel Orozco: Asterisms* (Berlin: Deutsche Guggenheim, 2012), pp. 62-64.

argued in the present thesis that this return to sculpture is taking place in the works examined here through a reconsideration of a constellation of historical practices engaging with Duchamp's readymade and the surrealist object. My claim is that the incorporation of readymade and found object in the redefinition of contemporary sculpture meant, paradoxically, that while the historical practices originally sought to break with established art categories such as painting and sculpture, they serve in contemporary practices as a way to revisit and reconsider the historical avant-garde imperatives regarding the relation between art and life. At the same time, they are implemented in order to redefine sculpture after 'the expanded field' without resorting back to formalist aesthetics, as defined by Greenberg, or to purely phenomenological accounts of sculpture, as examined in Minimalism, for example.

In the course of my research, it gradually became apparent that many of the artworks that deal with the theme of readymade and found objects engage with the issue of replication and simulation. And it also became clear that these works are probing into issues of replication and craft, already embedded in the history of the readymade, as it is evident with Duchamp's authorized replicas in the 1960s. In the early 1980s, the pertinent issue of simulation re-emerged in philosophy and cultural theory becoming synonymous with postmodernist aesthetics through the writings of key figures such as Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze. In 1993, with 'Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny' the artist Mike Kelley, addresses the issue of simulation in the context of the readymade.⁶⁷³ For Kelley, Duchamp's readymades, which he acknowledges as the most important sculptural production of the twentieth century, effectively problematized the notion of representation by their status as real objects in the museum setting: 'One wonders *when* they are a real object and *when* they are an illusion', further suggesting that readymades 'become their own *doppelgänger*'.⁶⁷⁴ If the readymades are their own doubles, then as Boris Groys has argued in 'Simulated Readymades', Fischli and Weiss's carved polyurethane sculptures of everyday objects are in effect 'simulated readymades', because they

⁶⁷³ Mike Kelley, 'New Introduction to the Uncanny' and 'Playing with Dead Things', *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* (Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou) 93 (Fall 2005): 20-47. 'Playing with Dead Things' originally published in *The Uncanny*. Exh. cat. Arnhem, The Netherlands: Sonsbeek, 1993; a slightly modified version 'Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny' was published in *Foul perfection: essays and criticism* / Mike Kelley; edited by John C. Welchman, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003, pp. 70-99; 'New Introduction to the Uncanny' originally published in *The Uncanny* by Mike Kelley, Exh. cat. Liverpool: Tate Liverpool; Vienna: MUMoK, 2004; Excerpt reprinted in *Colour: Documents of Contemporary Art*. David Batchelor, ed. London: Whitechapel: 195-198.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

only *appear* to function in the manner of Duchamp's readymades, industrial objects inserted in the exhibition space, while they are in fact sculptures of everyday objects.⁶⁷⁵ That is, the sculptures by Fischli and Weiss, rather than simulations of everyday objects, are, in fact, simulations of readymades which are already *representations* of objects.

In 'What is a Picture?', Lacan points out that, unlike representation, the *trompe l'oeil*, a trope related to more to simulation, aims to deceive: 'It paints the veil', in other words the unconscious gaze, revealing the very function of the gaze and of the workings of desire. In *trompe l'oeil*, Lacan says, we derive our pleasure 'at the moment when, by a mere shift of our gaze, we are able to realize that the representation does not move with the gaze and that it is merely a *trompe l'oeil*'. For him, the *trompe l'oeil* concerns, not the philosophical notion of representation, the distinction between the image and the thing itself, but the splitting of the subject that is taking place in mimicry. In mimicry, during this process of luring or fighting for its own life, 'the being breaks up between its being and its semblance, between itself and that paper tiger it shows to the other. ... a mask, a double, an envelope a thrown-off skin'.⁶⁷⁶ Importantly, however, 'the human being, unlike the animal, is not entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. ... He isolates the function of the screen and plays with it'.⁶⁷⁷

In the introduction to *The Object*, Hudek observes that the 'categorical confusions' regarding 'mimetic representation' which Mike Kelley highlighted in his discussion on the readymade, had in fact become apparent long before Duchamp.⁶⁷⁸ In antiquity, the famous example of the contest between the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius, recounted by Pliny the Elder,⁶⁷⁹ reveals the distinction between representation and the effect of the *trompe l'oeil*. In the story, Zeuxis painted with great technical skill a still life with fruits, so realistic that the birds mistook them for real fruits and rushed to the surface of the painting to eat them. Parrhasius, however, painted not just a realistic scene but a veil on top of his painting, with the effect of fooling the eye of the beholder who was urged to lift the veil. Following Lacan's

⁶⁷⁵ Groys, 'Simulated Readymades' in *Fischli/Weiss: Flowers and Questions*, p. 14.

⁶⁷⁶ Lacan, 'What is a Picture?' in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, (London and New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), p. 107.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁸ Hudek, *The Object*, p. 17.

⁶⁷⁹ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, book 35, section 36 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

celebrated reading of the story in 'What is a Picture?' discussed in the previous paragraph, Hudek observes that, for Lacan, 'Parrhasius's theatrical device proved not a mastery of technical means (a trap for the gaze) but rather a successful *trompe l'oeil*, an eye-trick, which brought the subject's unconscious gaze to light'.⁶⁸⁰

With regards to the contemporary artworks presented here, my inquiry into the work of artists who incorporate readymade or found objects in their work started with Gabriel Orozco as an exemplary case of this practice. Indeed, Orozco explicitly acknowledges the extensive use of objects from daily life as a fundamental part of his strategy, noting: 'most of my actions are done with found objects – it is kind of a rule or a system to bring nothing with me'.⁶⁸¹ Orozco has been an important figure in the return of the object in contemporary art practices, at a time no less dominated by 'immaterial art' practices famously theorized in part by Nicolas Bourriaud under the rubric of Relational Aesthetics in the 1990s.⁶⁸² Moreover, he has been particularly influential to a generation of artists from Mexico whose work has also gained prominence in the international art scene. These artists, who also use extensively objects and raw materials from the everyday life, include Abraham Cruzvillegas, Damián Ortega and Gabriel Kuri, visited Orozco's studio for weekly workshops over the period of four years, starting in 1987.⁶⁸³

Fischli and Weiss are the other two influential figures whose practice has been significantly defined by the investigation on the banal, everyday object since the 1980s. The work of these three artists, Orozco and Fischli & Weiss, together with Richard Wentworth, has been the subject of an exhibition in 2000 titled, *Aprendiendo menos = Learning Less*, which presented their photographic work depicting everyday objects. Moreover, they are often discussed together in critical literature on the everyday object, and relevant texts on both can be found, for example, in the Whitechapel series of anthologies documenting major themes and ideas in contemporary art, *The Everyday* (2008), edited by Stephen Johnstone, and more recently in 2014, as I already mentioned, *The Object* edited by Hudek. Finally, Urs Fischer belongs to a younger generation of artists whose involvement with the

⁶⁸⁰ Hudek, p. 17.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁶⁸² Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 1998).

⁶⁸³ Abraham Cruzvillegas, 'G.O. Untitled Workshop', translated by Richard Moszka in *Gabriel Orozco*, edited by Alma Ruiz, (Los Angeles and Mexico City: MOCA and the Museo Rufino Tamayo, 2000), p. 180.

everyday object has taken this inquiry into the realm of new technologies such as three-dimensional scanning and printing, which he uses together with traditional modes of reproduction and replication to revisit and expand notions of simulation.

My research has shown that the complex dialectic between Duchamp's readymade and the object in surrealism deserves a separate extended study. An additional issue that came up during my inquiry in the historical context of surrealism, which begs for further investigation, is the development of the concept of automatism examined in relation to that of the chance encounter with the found object. This trajectory abandons the idea of automatism as an altogether passive procedure, to further probe the tangled interrelations between the subject and the world with the chance encounter, with the aim of establishing a less rigidly determined relation between subject and object.

Another important line of inquiry that has emerged from my research concerns the question of appropriation, both cultural and historical, in recent contemporary art. Besides the individual artworks discussed here that engage with this issue, there is a recent marked tendency to reconstruct historical exhibitions. Prominent examples include the exhibition *Surrealism and the Object*, at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 2013, which partly reconstructed the original displays, often shown in glass vitrines. The exhibition settings were accompanied by black-and-white archival photographic documentation of the historical exhibitions, printed as life-size free-floating screens.⁶⁸⁴ Others, as mentioned in the final chapter on Urs Fischer, re-visit or even meticulously re-create seminal art exhibitions, with the most striking example being *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* curated by Germano Celant in collaboration with Thomas Demand and Rem Koolhaas. Other examples include the *Pictures Generation*, 1974-1984 restaged at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in 2009, and *Other Primary Structures* in 2014 revisiting the seminal 1966 exhibition *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*, both at the Jewish Museum, New York.

Finally, as discussed, the exhibition *Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?*, conceived by Fischer and his dealer Gavin Brown, occupies a peculiar place between exhibition and

⁶⁸⁴ The exhibitions included: Exposition internationale du Surréalisme, 1933; Exposition internationale du Surréalisme, 1938; Exposition Surréaliste d'objets, 1936; Le Surréalisme en 1947; and Exposition internationale du Surréalisme (Éros), 1959-1960.

artwork by implementing a bolder approach to exhibition design and its use of the historical material. As explained in the final chapter, the show was designed to incorporate the preceding exhibition at the Shafrazi Gallery, titled *Four Friends*. Fischer had the *Four Friends* exhibition photographed, including the guards and every minute detail from the gallery space, and then reproduced it in print on a one-to-one scale. The resulting prints were fitted onto the gallery walls like wallpaper, serving as the backdrop against which a selection of new works was installed. The final installation featured 'real' artworks hanging on top of reproductions of works from the previous show. This exhibition, together with other examples of Fischer's practice, and the reconstruction of historical exhibitions mentioned in the previous paragraph, open up the discussion to new modes of appropriation practices emerging at the turn of the twenty-first century indicating a 'return of history', which also deserves further investigation.⁶⁸⁵ The trajectory I have been pursuing throughout this thesis, from the readymade and the surrealist object in the early twentieth century avant-gardes to a contemporary redefinition of sculpture, has led to the consideration of simulation which has in turn opened up the discussion to new practices of appropriation art which could be the focus of a future study.

⁶⁸⁵ Beatrix Ruf and Clarrie Wallis (eds), *Tate Triennial 2006: New British Art*, with an essay by Jan Verwoert, (London: Tate, 2006).

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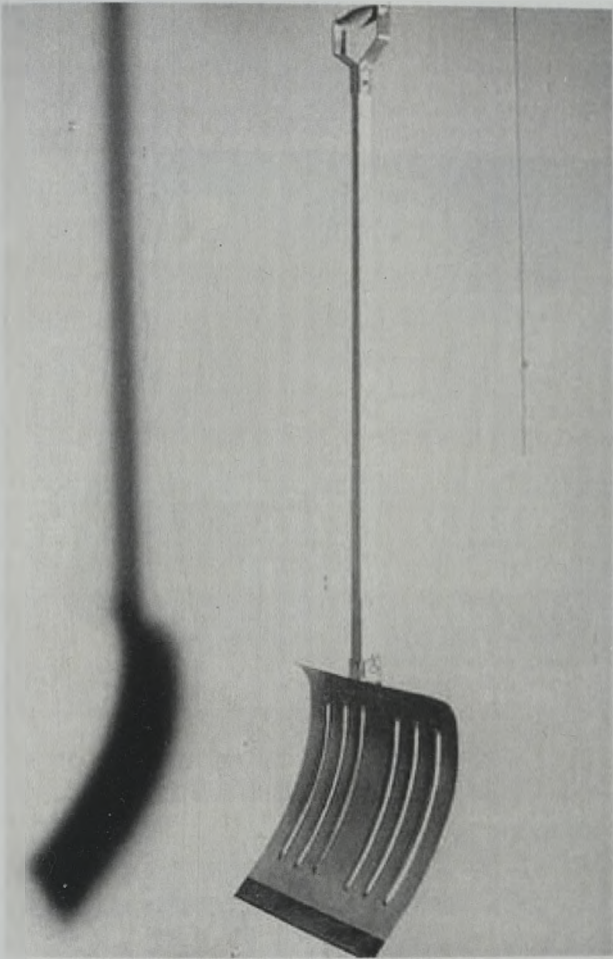
Illustrations



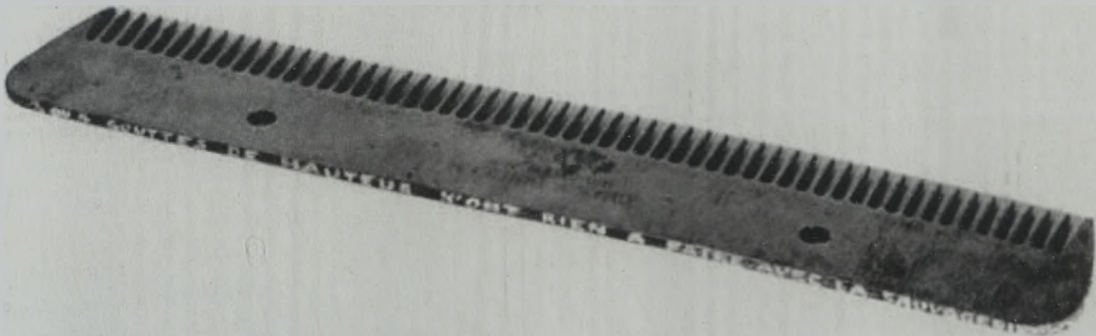
2.1 Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913/1964



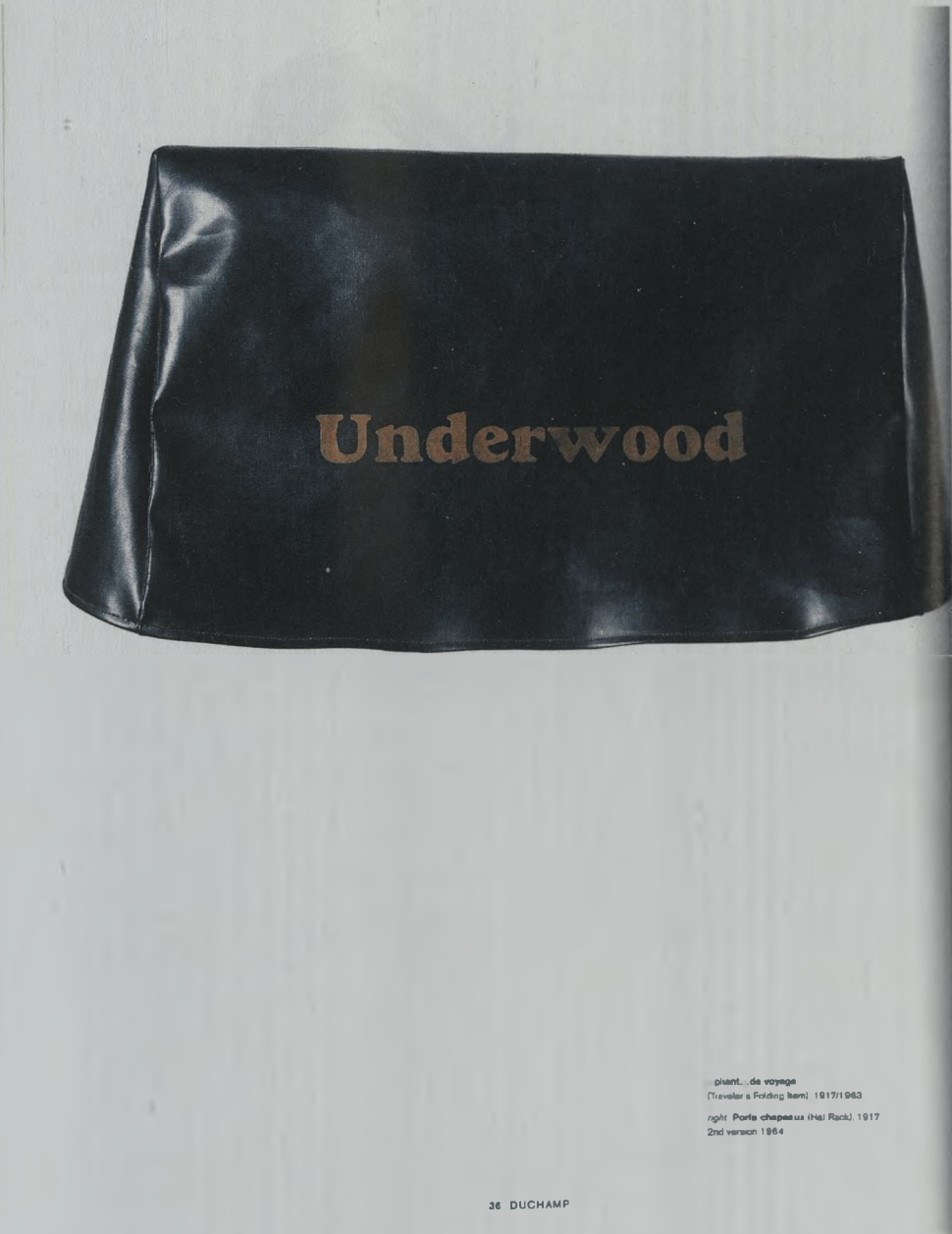
2.2 Marcel Duchamp, *Bottle Rack*, 1914/1964



2.3 Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1915/1964



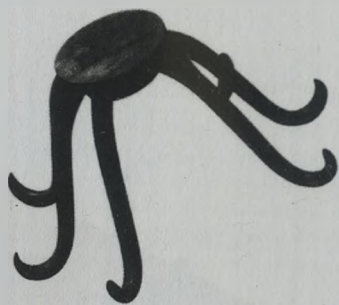
2.4 Marcel Duchamp, *Comb*, 1916



pluie... de voyage
(Traveller's Folding Item) 1917/1963
right: Porte chapeaux (Hat Rack) 1917
2nd version 1964

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2.5 Marcel Duchamp, *Traveller's Folding Item*, 1916



2.6 Marcel Duchamp, *Hat Rack*, 1917/1964



2.7 Marcel Duchamp, *Trébuchet* (Trap), 1917/1964



2.8 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917/1964



2.9 Marcel Duchamp, *Why Not Sneeze Rose Selavy?* 1921/1964



2.10 Marcel Duchamp, *Paris Air*, 1919/1964



2.11 Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise* (Box in a Suitcase, 1935-41)



2.12 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, photographed by Alfred Stieglitz



2.13 Marcel Duchamp, *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette* (Beautiful Breath, Veil Water, 1921)



2.14 Jasper Johns, *Painted Bronze (Ale Cans)*, 1960



2.15 Sherrie Levine, *Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp)*, 1991



3.1 Installation view from the exhibition *Le Surréalisme et l'objet*, Pompidou Centre, Paris, October 30, 2013 - March 3, 2014



3.2 Man Ray, *Beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella, on a dissecting table*, 1935

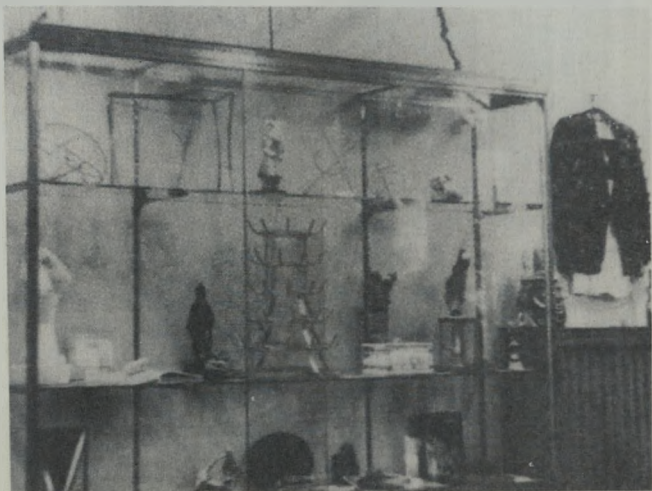


3.3 Man Ray, *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, (*L'Enigme d' Isidore Ducasse*), c. 1920

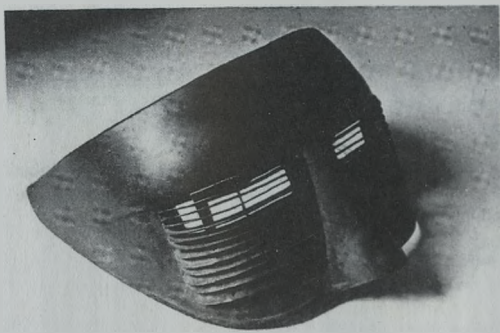


3.4 Alberto Giacometti, *Suspended Ball*, 1930-31. Installation view from the exhibition *Le Surréalisme et l'objet*, Pompidou Centre, Paris, October 30, 2013 - March 3, 2014

2.4.9 Surrealist exhibition of objects, vitrine with Duchamp's bottle rack, Galerie Charles Ratton, Paris, May 22-29, 1936.



3. 5 Top: *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets*, 1936, Charles Ratton Gallery, Paris.
Bottom: Installation view from the exhibition *Le Surréalisme et l'objet*, Pompidou Centre, Paris, October 30, 2013 - March 3, 2014



*A highly evolved descendant
of the helmet . . . (p.28)*
Photograph by Man Ray.
© A.D.A.G.P., Paris
V.A.G.A., New York 1986

Mad Love 29

3.6 André Breton, Metal mask, in *Mad Love*, 1937



*From a little door that was
part of it (p.30)*
Photograph by Man Ray.
© A.D.A.G.P., Paris
V.A.G.A., New York 1986

Mad Love 31

3.7 André Breton, *Cendrier-cendrillon* (Cinderella ash-tray), in *Mad Love*, 1937

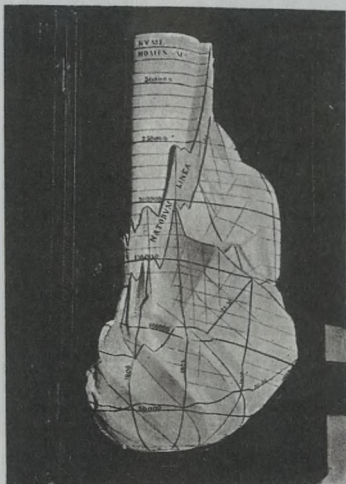


PLATE 15. Even perverse, like that kind of
irregular white half-cylinder . . .
(SEE PAGE 52)

3.8 André Breton, Metric chart, in *Nadja*, 1928



PLATE 16. Also a woman's glove . . .
(SEE PAGE 56)

3.9 André Breton, Bronze glove, in *Nadja*, 1928



3.10 André Breton, Object, c. 1931



3.11 Salvador Dalí, Object functioning symbolically, 1932

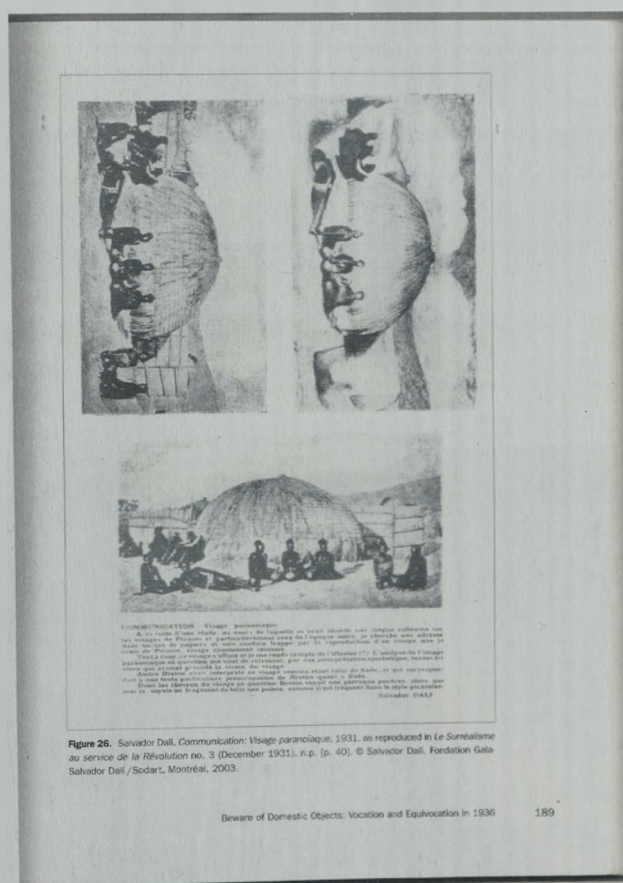
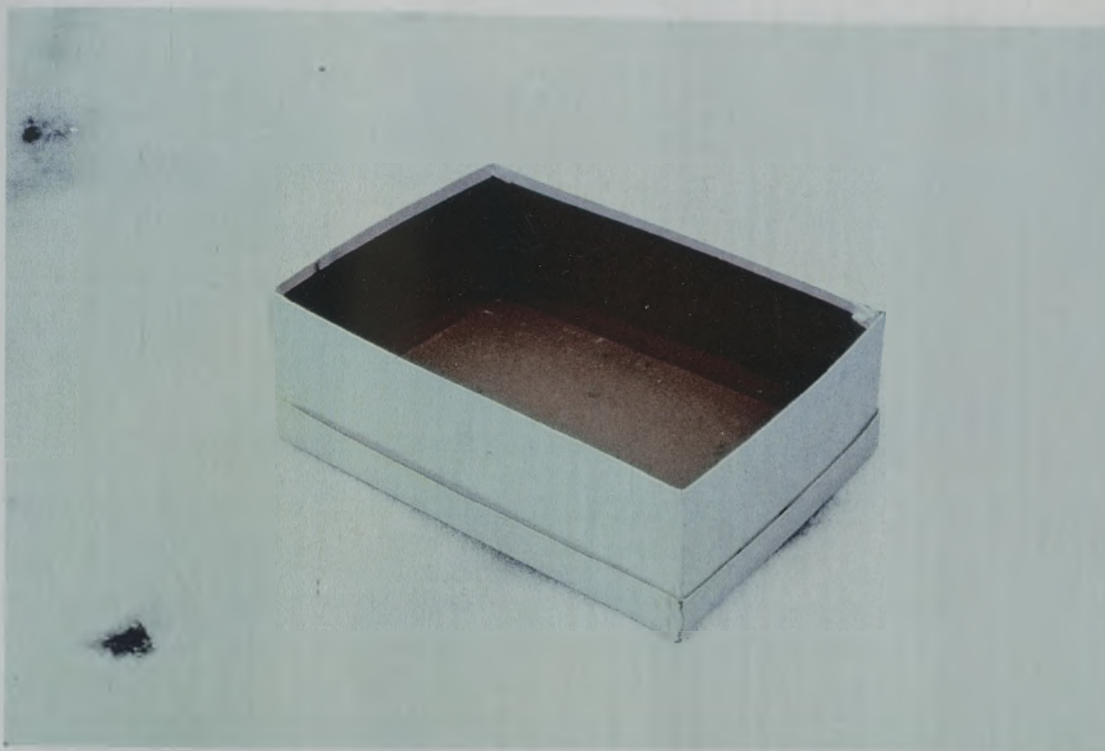


Figure 26. Salvador Dalí, *Communication: Visage paranoïaque*, 1931, as reproduced in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* no. 3 (December 1931), n.p. [p. 40]. © Salvador Dalí, Fondation Gala Salvador Dalí / Sedart, Montréal, 2003.

3.12 Salvador Dalí, Double image



4.1. Gabriel Orozco, *Empty Shoe Box*, 1993, Silver dye bleach print
16 x 20 in. / 40.6 x 50.8 cm



4.2. Gabriel Orozco, *Yielding Stone*, 1992, Plasticine
Approx. 14 x 17 x 17 in. / 35.6 x 43.2 x 43.2 cm



4.3. Gabriel Orozco, *Empty Shoe Box*, 1993, Shoe box
Installation view of 45th International Art Exhibition: The Cardinal Points of Art, Venice Biennale, 1993



4.4. Gabriel Orozco, *Yogurt Caps*, 1994, Four Yogurt lids
3-1/8 in. / 7.9 cm. Installation view at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 1993



4.5. Gabriel Orozco, *Yogurt Caps*, 1994 (DETAIL), Four Yogurt lids
3-1/8 in. / 7.9 cm. Installation view at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 1993



4.6. Robert Smithson, *Asphalt Lump*, 1969

4.7. Gabriel Orozco, *Recaptured Nature*, 1990, Vulcanized rubber
Approx. 29-1/2 x 41-5/16 x 33-7/16 in. / 75 x 105 x 85 cm

4.8. Gabriel Orozco, *Elevator*, 1994, Modified elevator cabin
8' x 8' x 60" / 243.8 x 243.8 x 152.4 cm



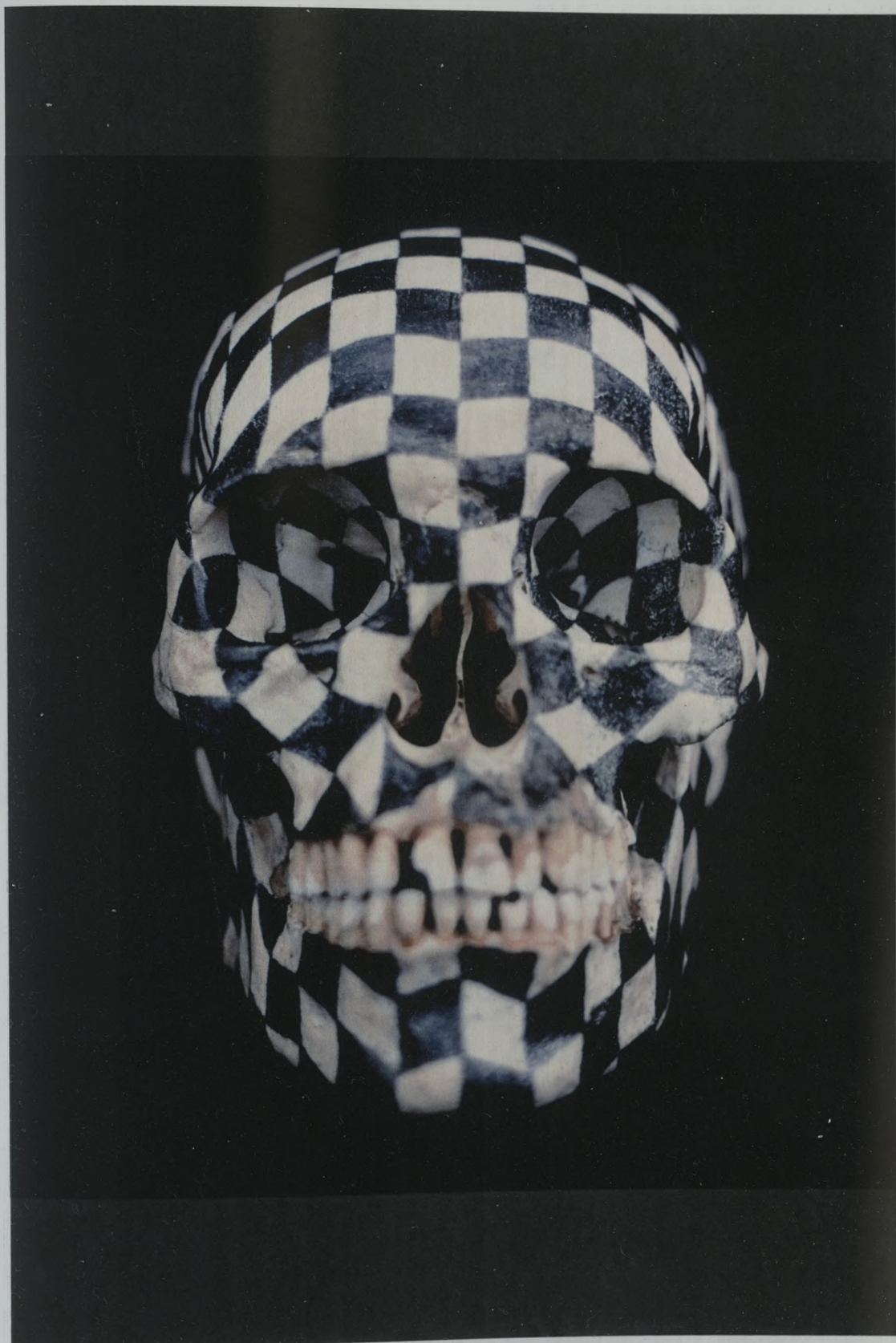
4.9. Gabriel Orozco, *La DS*, 1993, Modified citroën DS
55 3/16 x 15 9-15/16 45-5/16 in. / 140.1 x 482.5 x 115.1 cm



4.10. Gabriel Orozco, *Working Tables*, 2000-2005
Mixed mediums, including unfired clay, straw, egg container, bottle caps, wire mesh screen, string, stones, shells, plaster, bark, polystyrene foam, painted wood elements and pizza dough
Dimensions variable



4.11. Andy Warhol, *Brillo Box*, 1964



4.12. Gabriel Orozco, *Black Kites*, 1997, Graphite on skull
8-1/2 x 5 x 6-1/2 in. / 21.6 x 12.7 x 15.9 cm

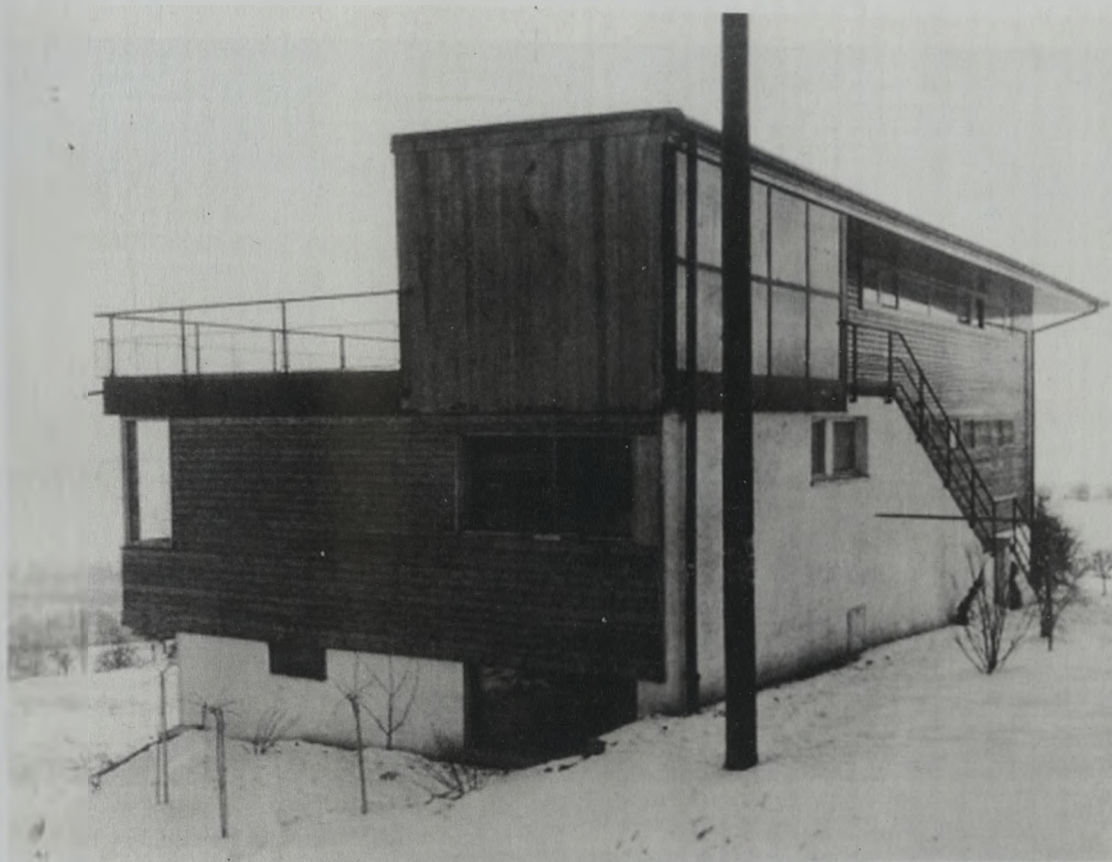


4.13. Gabriel Orozco, *Pinched Ball*, 1993, Silver dye bleach print
16 x 20 in. / 40.6 x 50.8 cm

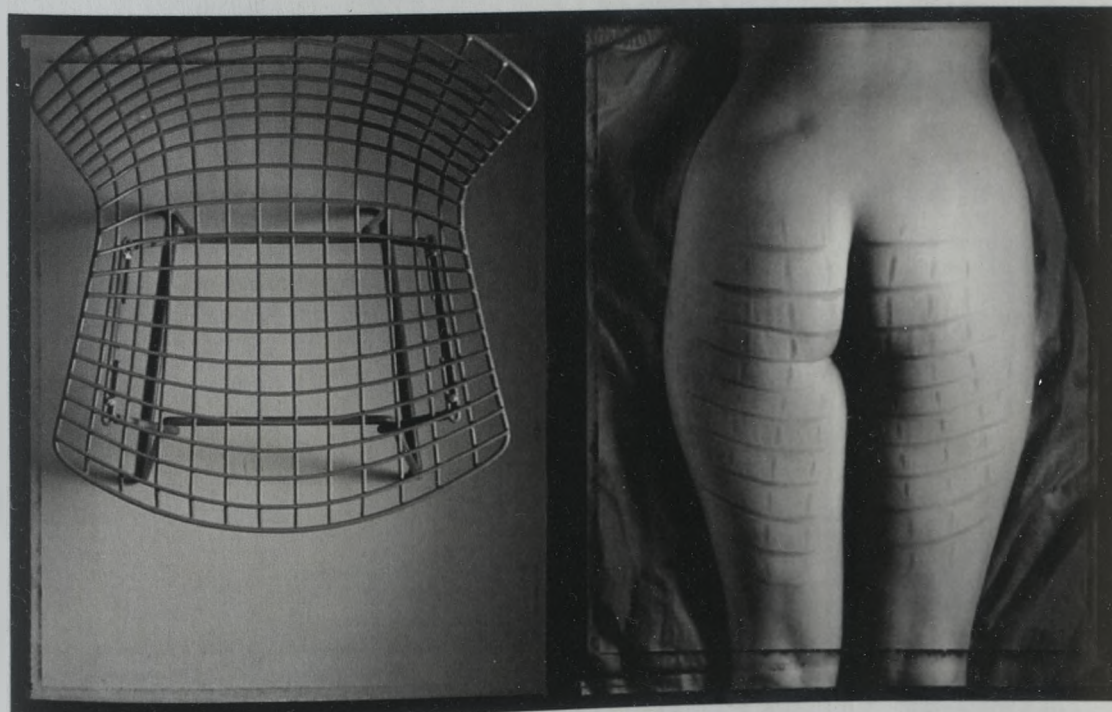


4.14. Gabriel Orozco, *Island within an Island*, 1994

*All Gabriel Orozco images: Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery



5.1 Haus Schlechstud where Peter Fischli grew up in Meilen, Switzerland, designed and built by his father, Hans Fischli



5.2 left: Chair designed by Harry Bertoia. "Bertoia not-upholstered": googled picture from Peter Fischli's talk 'From Dessau to Las Vegas' at the Barbican in 2012



5.3 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Floss*, 1982



5.4 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Untitled (Tate)*, installation at Tate Modern, London, 2007-08



5.5 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Eine Ansammlung von Gegenständen*, 2014



5.6 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Room under the Stairs* (Raum unter der Treppe), 1993



5.7 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Suddenly this Overview*, Galerie Pablo Staehli, Zürich 1981



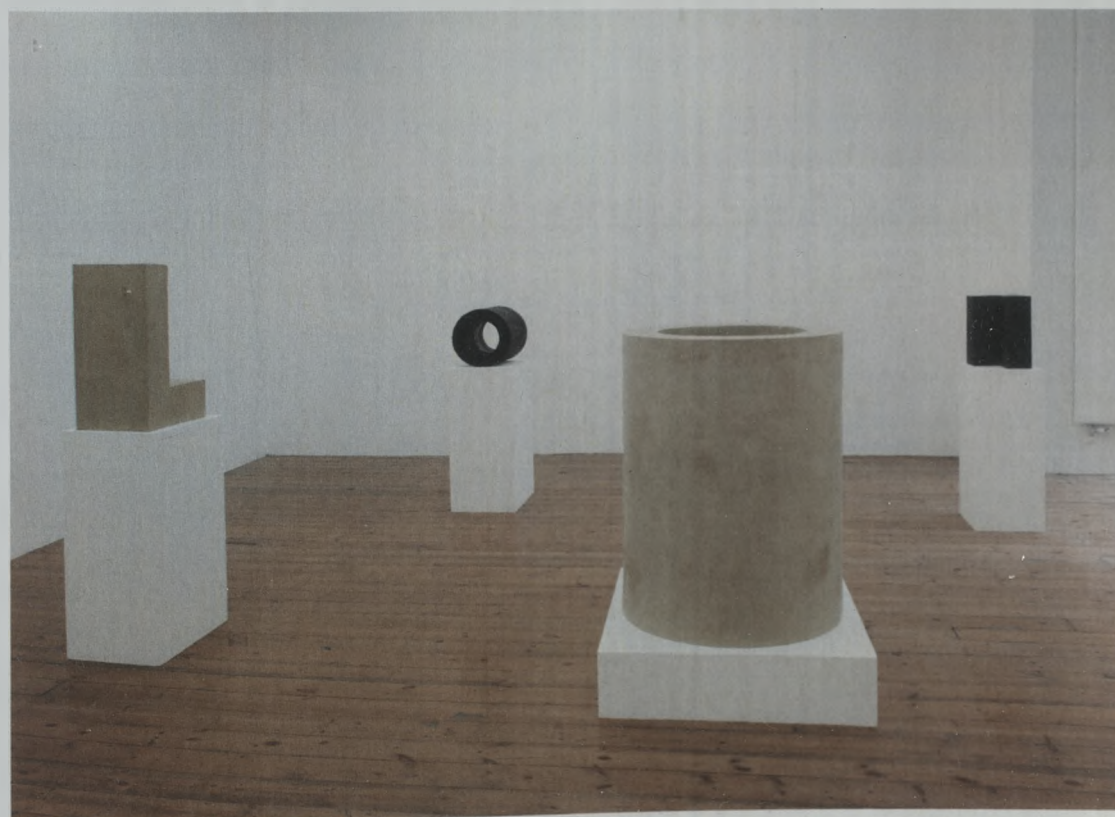
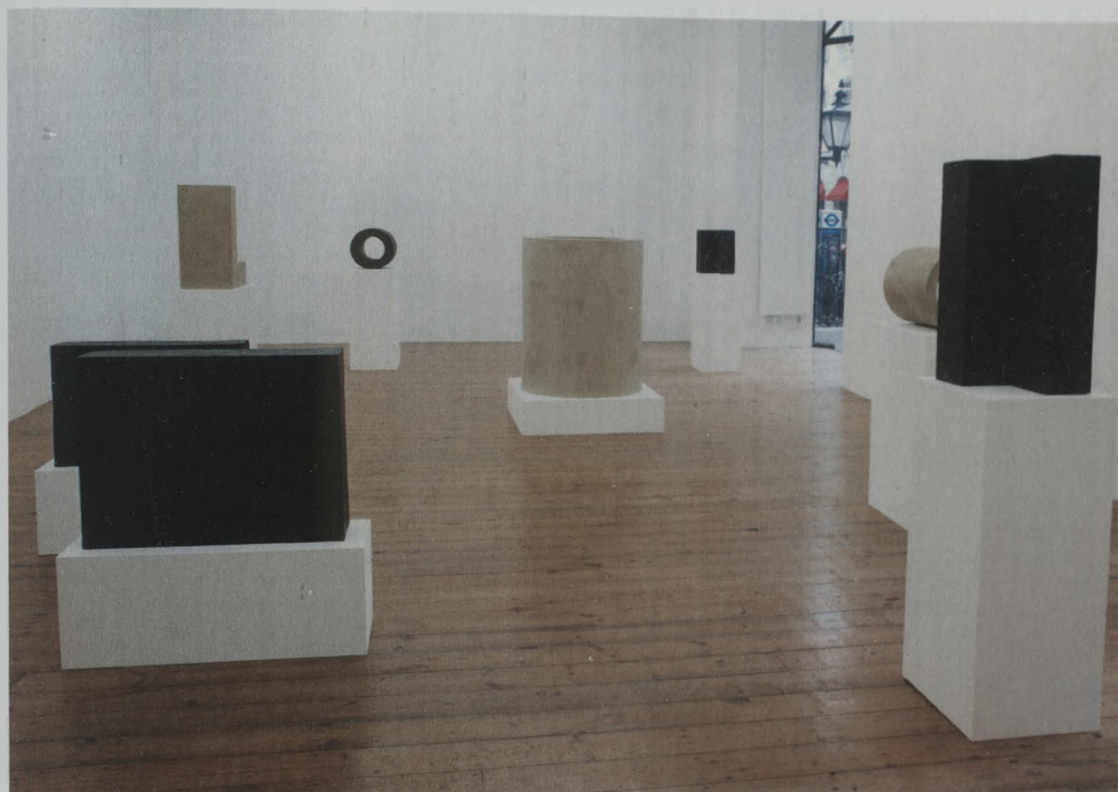
5.8 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Untitled (Small Root)*, 2005



5.9 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Wurzeltisch (Root Table)*, 2005



5.10 and 5.11 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Objects on Pedestals*, 2009, at Sprüth Magers, London



5.12 and 5.13 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Walls, Corners, Tubes*, 2012, at Sprüth Magers, London



5.14 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Walls, Corners, Tubes*, 2012 at Sprüth Magers, London



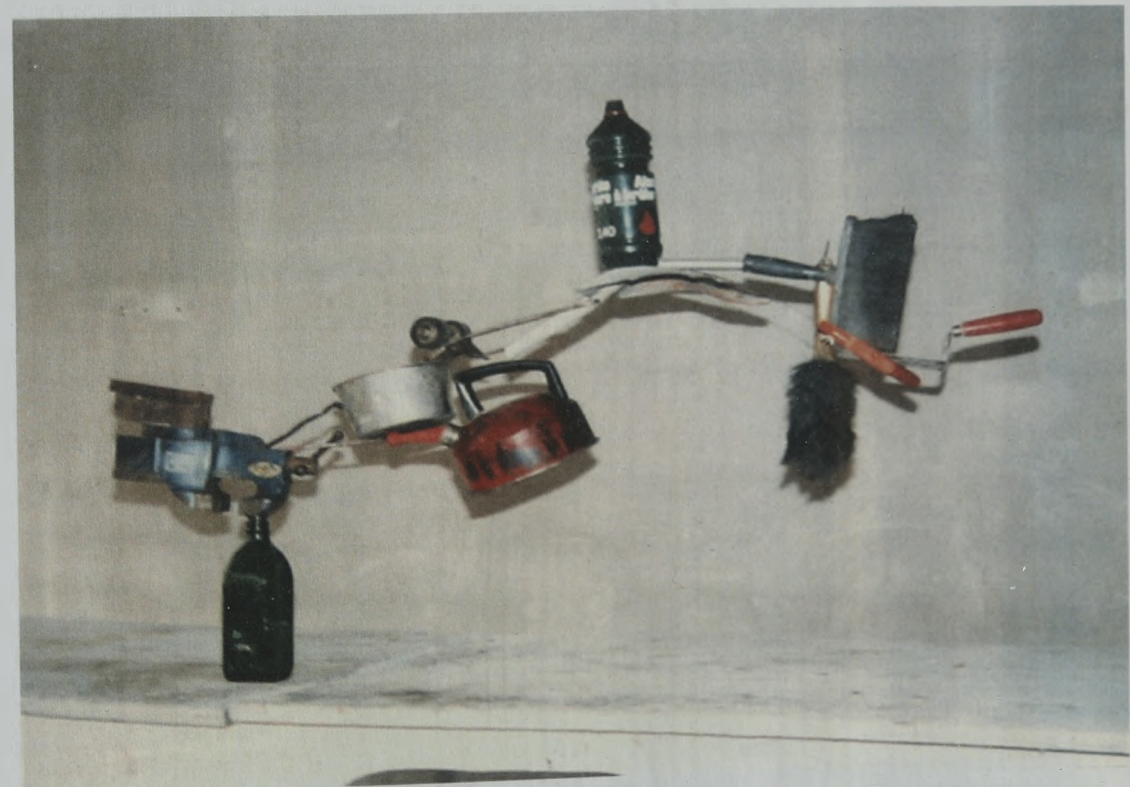
5.15 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, from the series: *Photographs (Fotografías)*, 2005



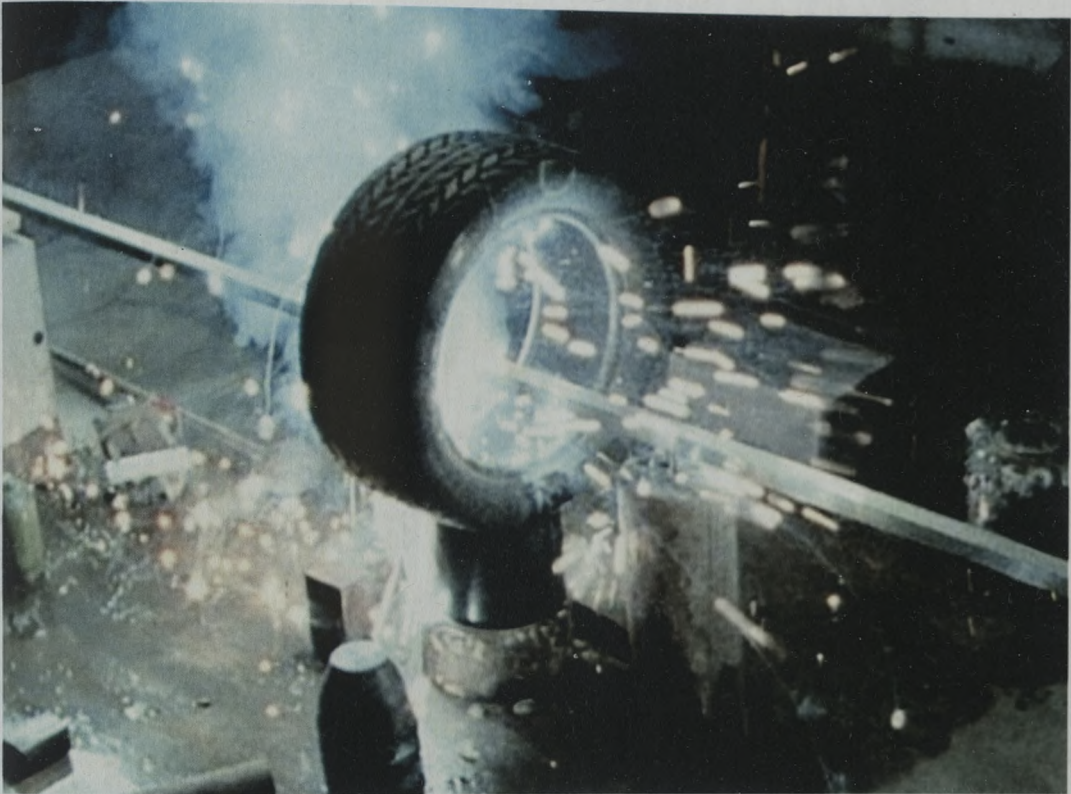
5.16 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Photographs (Fotografias) and Rubber Sculptures*, installation view Cologne 2006



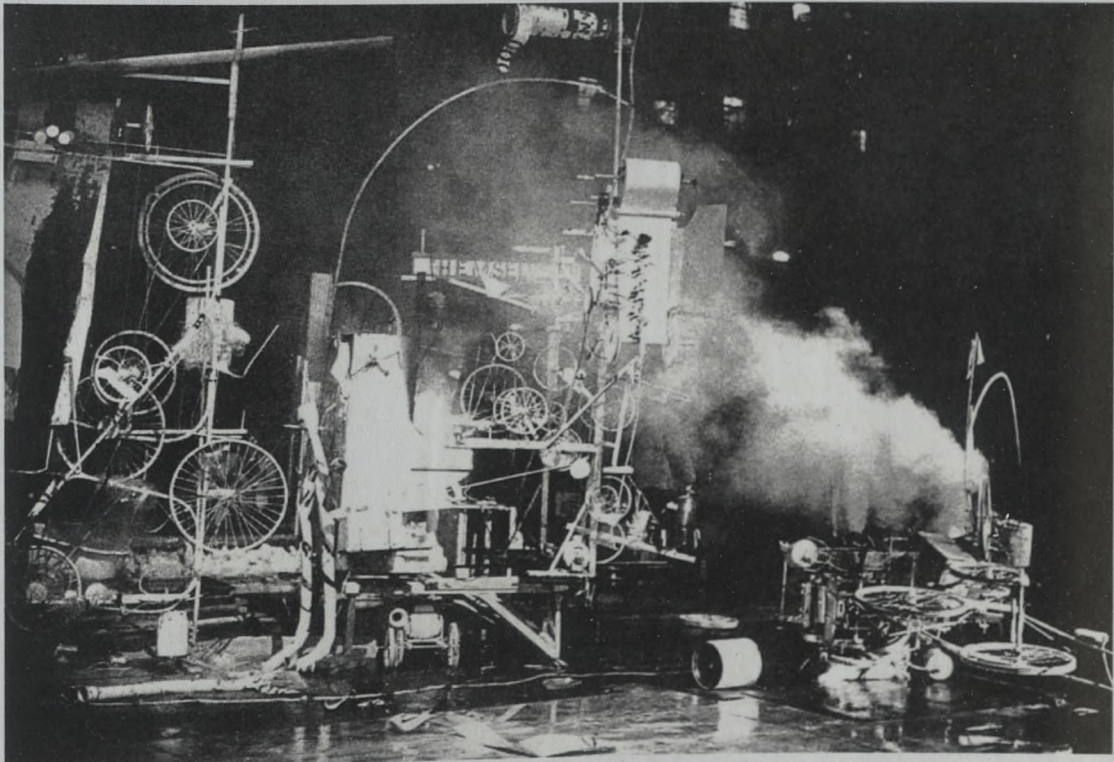
5.17 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Wurstserie*, 1979



5.18 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Equilibres* (1984-85)



5.19 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *The Way Things Go* (Der Lauf der Dinge, 1986-1987)



5.20 Jean Tinguely, *Homage to New York*, 1960



5.21 Pierre Jaquet-Droz, *The Writer*, early 1770s, Switzerland



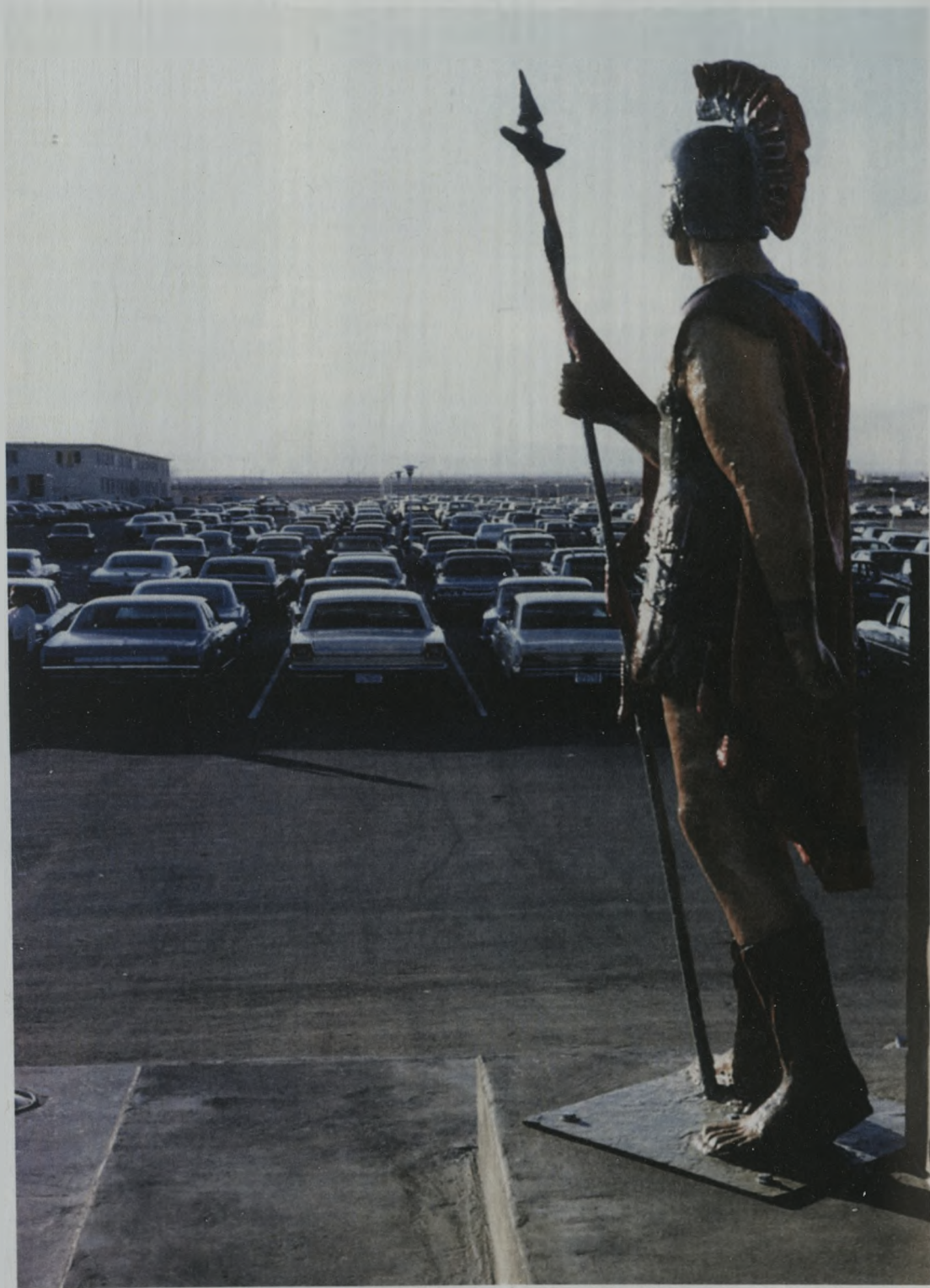
5.22 Richard Hamilton, *Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?* (1956)



5.23 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, *Barcelona Pavilion*, 1929



5.24 Duck in *Learning from Las Vegas*



5.25 Photograph that the Venturis and their students took in Las Vegas of the replica of a statue depicting a Roman soldier



5.26 Photograph of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in Las Vegas

*All Fischli and Weiss images: © Peter Fischli / David Weiss. Courtesy Sprüth Magers Berlin London



6.1 Urs Fischer, *Abstract Slavery*, 2008. Installation view, "Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?," Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York 2008. © Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York. Photos: Stefan Altenburger.



6.2 Robert Rauschenberg, *Combines*, 1954-64



6.3 Rachel Harrison, *Huffy Howler*, 2004



6.4 Urs Fischer, *In Dubio Pro Reo*, 2007, Found cabinet, found stool, found bowl, epoxy glue, polyurethane glue, 61 x 43 ¼ x 31 ½ inches (115 x 110 x 80 cm)
© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich.



6.5 Urs Fischer, *Addict*, 2006, Found furniture, cardboard box, epoxy glue, 61 x 28 ½ x 28 ¾ inches (155 x 72.5 x 73 cm) © Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York. Photo: Rick Gardner



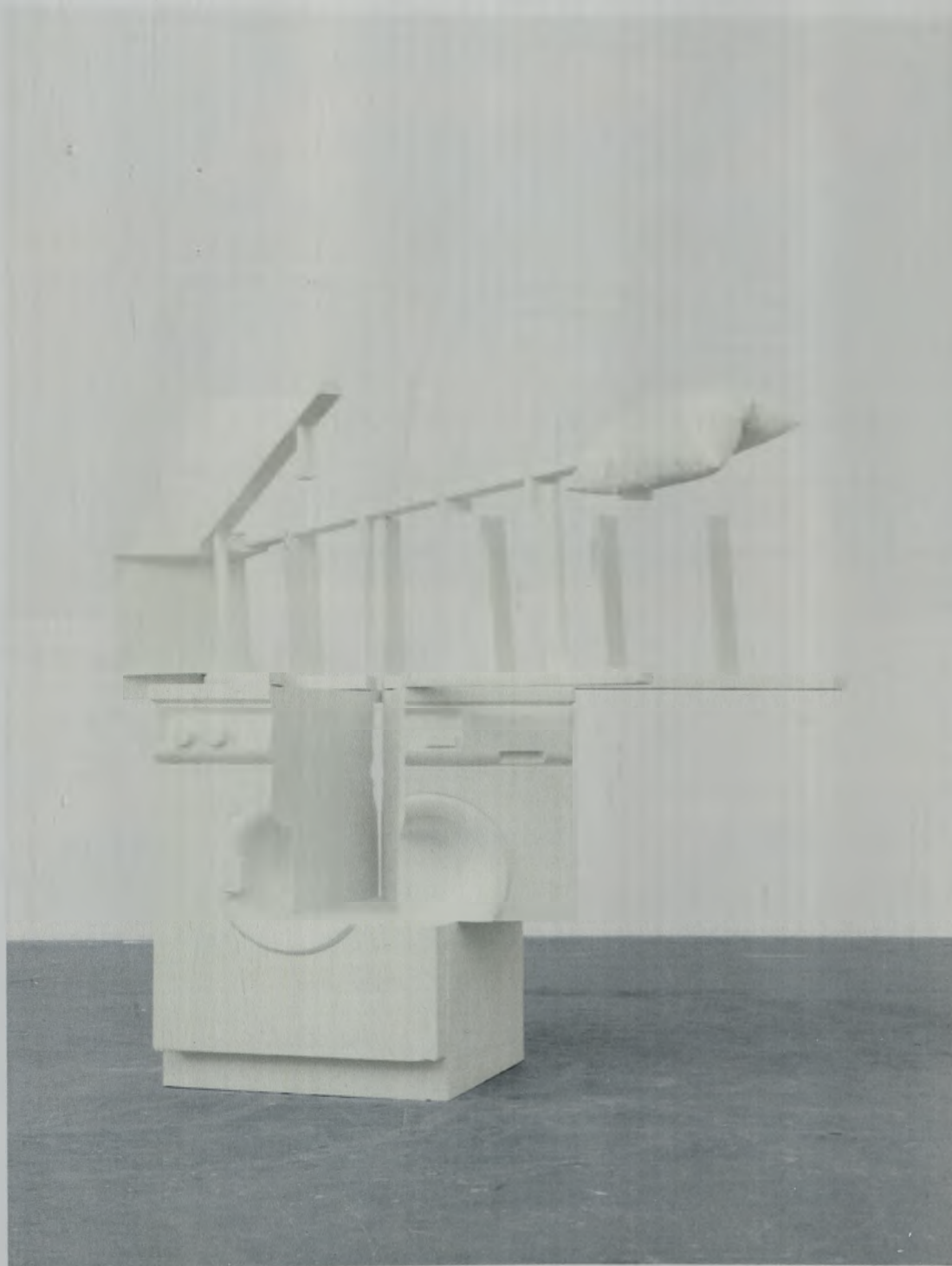
6.6 Left: Urs Fischer, *A Place Called Novosibirsk*, 2004, Cast aluminum, epoxy resin, iron rod, string, acrylic paint, 98 x 30 ½ x 41 3/8 inches (249 x 77.5 x 105 cm) © Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich.

Right: Urs Fischer, *A Thing Called Gearbox*, 2004, Cast aluminum, copper, iron rod, string, acrylic paint, 91 x 26 ¾ x 26 ½ inches (231 x 68 x 67.5 cm)
© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London.



6.7 Urs Fischer, *The Lock*, 2007, Cast polyurethane, steel pipes, electromagnets
72 ½ x 29 ¾ x 21 5/8 inches (184 x 75.5 x 55 cm)

© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich.



6.8 Urs Fischer, *Thank You Fuck You*, 2007, Cast aluminum, acrylic paint
60 ¼ x 72 7/8 x 55 ½ inches (153 x 185 x 141 cm)

© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich. Photo: Stefan Altenburger.



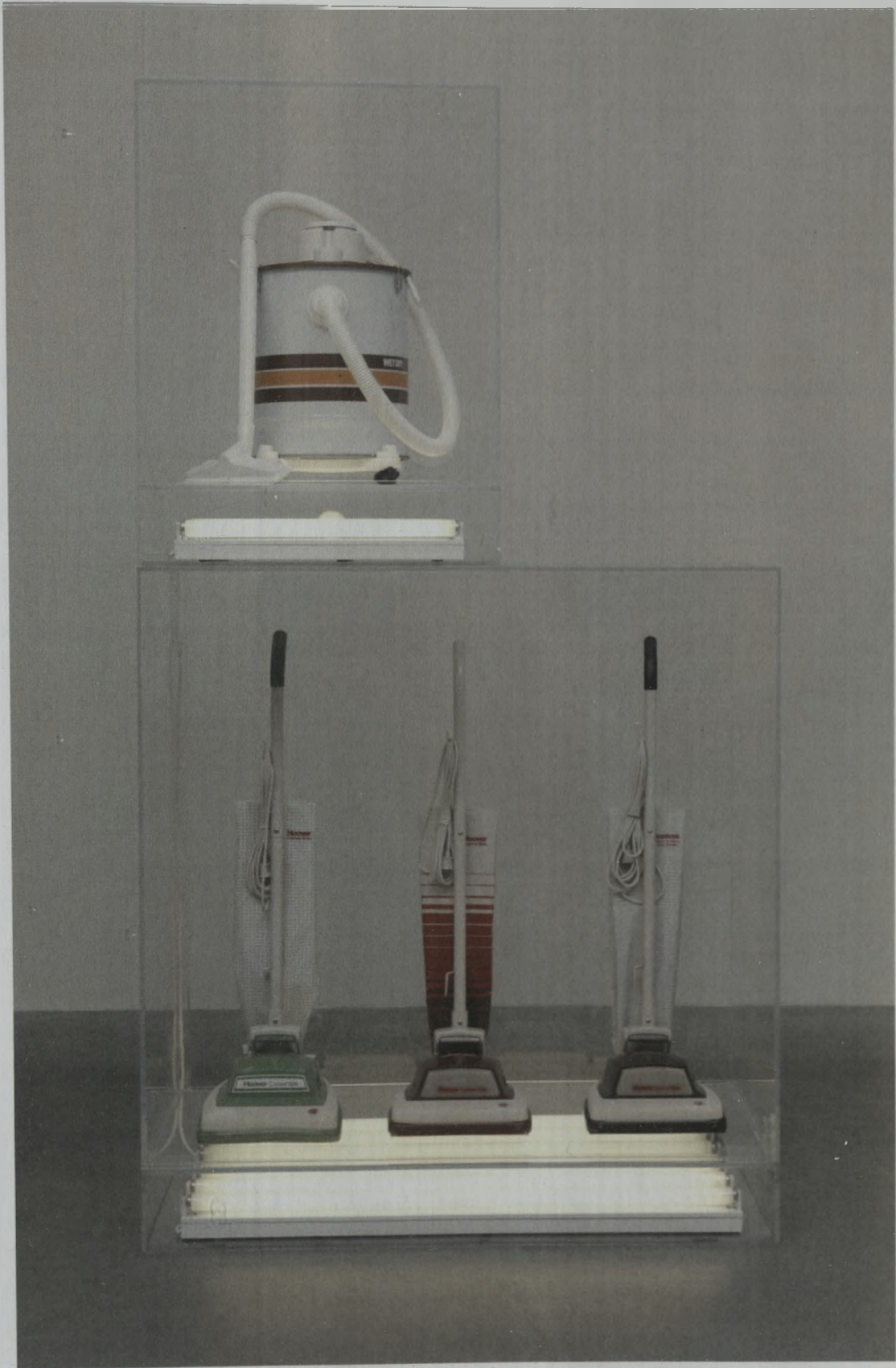
6.9 Salvador Dalí, *Lobster Phone*, 1936



6.10 Jeff Koons, *Lobster*, 2003



6.11 Jeff Koons, *Seal Walrus (Trashcans)*, 2003 and *Elvis*, 2003



6.12 Jeff Koons, *New Hoover Convertibles, Green, Red, Brown, New Shelton Wet/Dry 10 Gallon Displaced Doubledecker*, 1981–7



6.13 Urs Fischer, *Keep It Going Is a Private Thing*, 2001, Mechanical robot half-dog wags its tail, Synthetic fur, polystyrene, electric motor, control unit, acrylic paint, polyurethane foam, wood glue, 27 ½ x 11 ¾ x 31 1/8 inches (70 x 30 x 79 cm)

© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich. Photos: Stefan Altenburger.

Installation view: "Madame Fisscher," Palazzo Grassi, Venice, 2012



6.14 Right: Urs Fischer, *Keep It Going Is a Private Thing*, 2001
Left: Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog* (Magenta), 1994-2006
Installation view: "Madame Fisscher," Palazzo Grassi, Venice, 2012



6.15 Urs Fischer, *Routine (Automatic Melancholy)*, 2002, Polystyrene, polyurethane foam, screws, gouache, Chair: 21 x 35 x 17 inches (53.5 x 89 x 43 cm) Installation dimensions variable

© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York. Photo: Scott Lindgren.



6.16 Urs Fischer, *You*, 2007, Excavation, gallery space, and 1:3 scale replica of main gallery space, Dimensions variable

© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York. Photos: Ellen Page Wilson.

Installation view, "you," Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York, 2007



6.17 Chris Burden, *Exposing the Foundation of a Museum*, 1986



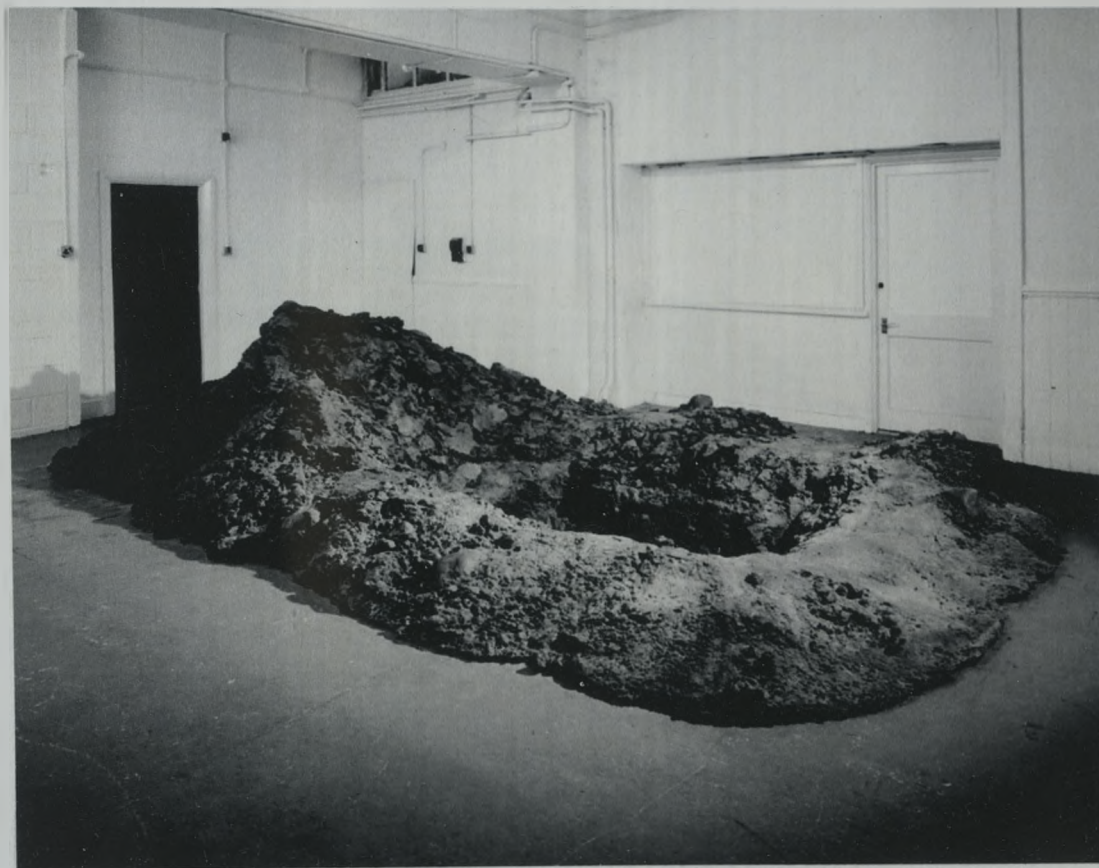
6.18 Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, 1969



6.19 Urs Fischer, *You*, 2007, Excavation, gallery space, 1:3 scale replica of main gallery space, Dimensions variable

© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York. Photos: Ellen Page Wilson.

Installation view, "you," Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York, 2007



6.20 Urs Fischer, *Untitled (Hole)*, 2007, Cast aluminum, 212 ½ x 133 7/8 x 106 ¼ inches (540 x 340 x 270 cm)

© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Sadie Coles, HQ, London. Photo: Prudence Cummings Associates.

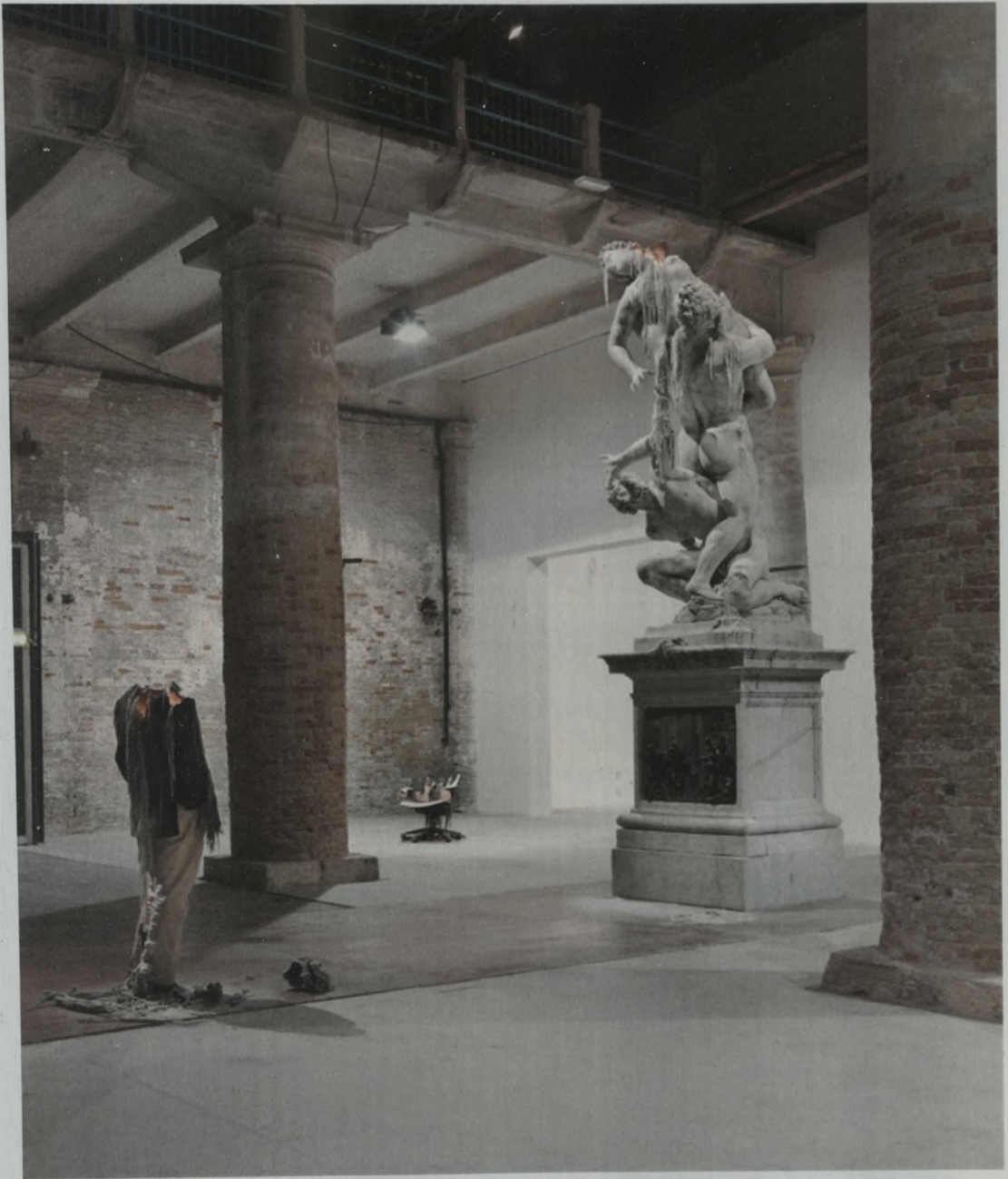
Installation view, "Uh . . .," Sadie Coles HQ, London, 2007



6.21 Urs Fischer, *Untitled (Hole)*, 2007. Installation view, "Uh . . ." Sadie Coles HQ, London, 2007



6.22 Urs Fischer, *What if the Phone Rings*, 2003, Wax, pigment, wick
© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London. Photos: Stefan Altenburger.



6.23 Urs Fischer, *Untitled*, 2011, Wax, pigments, wicks, steel
Giambologna: 248 1/8 x 57 7/8 x 57 7/8 in., 630 x 147 x 147 cm
Rudi: 77 1/2 x 27 1/8 x 19 1/4 in., 197 x 69 x 49 cm
Chair: 45 5/8 x 28 3/8 x 30 3/4 in., 116 x 72 x 78 cm
Installation dimensions variable

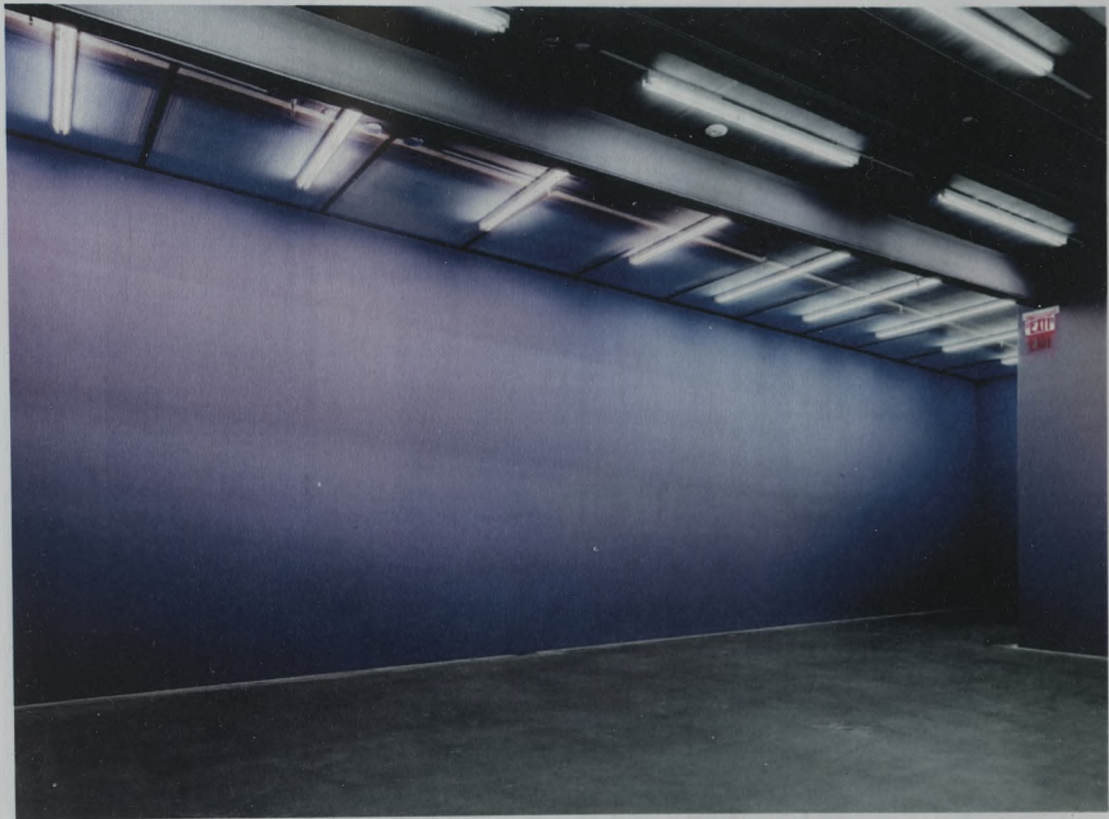
© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich. Photos: Stefan Altenburger. Installation view, "ILLUMInazioni / ILLUMInations," Venice Biennale, 2011



6.24 Urs Fischer, *Abstract Slavery*, 2008. Installation view, "Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?," Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York 2008. © Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York. Photos: Stefan Altenburger.



6.25 Collector François Pinault in front of Fischer's *Kafka Wallpaper*, 2005, at the artist's studio



6.26 Urs Fischer, *Last Call, Lascaux*, 2009

Wallpaper prints of photographic reproductions of interior spaces—content, scale, and lighting determined on a site-specific basis (1:1 scale color photographic reproduction of the empty gallery space illuminated by fluorescent light)

Dimensions variable

© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich. Photos: Stefan Altenburger.

Installation view, “Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty,” New Museum, New York, 2009–2010



6.27 Urs Fischer, *Last Call, Lascaux*, 2009



6.28 Urs Fischer, *Last Call, Lascaux*, 2009



6.29 Urs Fischer, *Service à la française*, 2009, Silkscreen print on mirror-polished stainless-steel sheets, polyurethane foam sheets, two-component polyurethane adhesive, stainless-steel beams, aluminum L sections, screws; in 52 parts

Installation dimensions variable, Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich. Photos: Stefan Altenburger. Installation view, "Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty," New Museum, New York, 2009–2010



6.30 *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* at the Fondazione Prada, Venice, Italy



6.31 Urs Fischer, *Madame Fisscher*, 1999-2000, Mixed media. Dimensions variable
© Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich. Photos: Stefan Altenburger.
Installation view, "Madame Fisscher," Palazzo Grassi, Venice 2012