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Published in:
<i>Screening the Art World</i>

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen’s University Belfast - Research Portal:
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Download date: 14. Sep. 2023
Chaos ex machina: The Art of Jean Tinguely and the Documentary Image

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[This chapter explores the relations between documentary forms and Jean Tinguely’s auto-destructive, kinetic and architectural sculptures. In particular, it discusses D.A. Pennebaker’s Breaking it Up at the Museum (1960) and Robert Breer’s Homage to Jean Tinguely’s “Homage to New York” (1960) in relation to their contrasting approaches to Tinguely’s famed Homage to New York; the formal strategies adopted in Hiroshi Teshigahara’s Sculpture Mouvante (1963); and the significance of Tinguely’s Le Cyclop to Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville’s The Old Place (2000). In their respective engagements with Tinguely’s work, these films expand the conventional notion of the documentary, rendering it as a modern art form in its own right, comprising associative montage strategies, and their own assortments of found, appropriated, ‘readymade’, and ephemeral images.]

In January 1960 Jean Tinguely travelled to New York on board the RMS Queen Elizabeth, at that time still the largest ocean liner in the world. There can be a fine line between suspected arson and creative auto-destruction, and for this former passenger the manner of the Queen Elizabeth’s subsequent demise may have looked like a case of life imitating art: in 1972, the ship – recently renamed Seawise University – capsized into Hong Kong’s Victoria Harbour, engulfed in thick smoke and flames; a haze of water spraying from the fireboats gathered to pay their last respects. It was during his transatlantic voyage, after all, that Tinguely first “conceived of a plan, a sculpture whose sole purpose would be to self-destruct […] “like a burst of Chinese firecrackers” in the Museum of Modern Art!”¹ Originally invited to exhibit at the newly opened Staempfli Gallery in Manhattan’s fashionable Upper East Side, Tinguely’s growing reputation as a kinetic artist had been further boosted by recent European exhibitions of his méta-matic machines; at the 1959 Paris-Biennale, for example, his “Méta-Matic No. 17” had produced

¹ Selz, Unstill Life, 81; Hultén, Jean Tinguely, 68.
40,000 drawings. Meanwhile, the “sculpture whose sole purpose would be to self-destruct” duly became *Homage to New York*, a twenty-three-foot-long by twenty-seven-foot-high white machine sculpture that proved an immediate *succès de scandale* after its ‘suicide’ in MoMA’s outdoor Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden. Even at this stage in his career, Tinguely was a shrewd opportunist who understood that in the new world of modern art – never mind the antic-orientated realms of Neo-Dadaism or Nouveaux Réalisme – cultural provocation and a flamboyant public image was integral to artistic success.²

In exploring how various filmmakers have tried to make sense of Tinguely’s work and persona, this chapter focusses on the relations between his auto-destructive, kinetic, and monumental sculptures, and various documentary film forms – especially, those involving experimental approaches to montage, and the use of found, appropriated, ‘readymade’, and ephemeral images and sounds. Tinguely’s emergence as a significant figure in the post-war avant-garde also coincides with the renewed and wider critique of structures of representation pursued by other art ‘movements’ at this time: Nouveau Réalisme, like the Nouveau Roman (writing) or the Nouvelle Vague (filmmaking), for example, also blurred the boundaries between fiction and document, fragment and whole, chance and certainty, order and chaos. Importantly, as Kaira M. Cabañas comments, “its rhetorical force served to signify the individual artist’s engagement with modern technological culture and challenge the preceding generation’s model of expressive, politically *engagé*, and Socialist Realist artists alike.”³ Beginning with a discussion of *Homage to New York*, the chapter compares the formal strategies adopted in D.A. Pennebaker’s *Breaking It Up at the Museum* (1960) and Robert Breer’s *Homage to Jean Tinguely’s “Homage to New York”* (1960), assessing how both films respond to this seminal moment in Tinguely’s international career – films made by figures who were themselves associated with the American avant-garde

² Berghaus, “Neo-Dada Performance Art,” 77-90.
at this time. Staying within the ambit of the experimental Sixties, the chapter then considers Hiroshi Teshigahara’s *Sculpture Mouvante: Jean Tinguely* (1981 [1963]), which takes as its subject Tinguely’s 1963 solo exhibition at the Minami Gallery, in Tokyo. As well as emerging as a key figure in Japanese New Wave cinema at this time, Teshigahara (whose first major feature film, *Pitfall/Kashi To Kodomo*, was released in 1962), was at the forefront of new collaborations between Japanese and American avant-garde artists in his role as curator at Tokyo’s Sogetsu Art Centre. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville’s *The Old Place* (1999), a complex, associative, iconoclastic rumination on MoMA that incorporates images of kinetic and public sculpture, including Tinguely’s ‘indestructable’ *Le Cyclop* (1969-1994).

**Cinéma cinétique**

Critical and art historical approaches to Tinguely’s relationship with film have tended to focus on television and his appearances in a variety of newsreel and arts magazine programs, often with Niki de Saint Phalle, his long-term partner and artistic collaborator. From the late 1950s onwards, for example, Tinguely featured several times on *Schweizer Filmwochenschau* (Swiss Weekly Film Show), and on *Personnalités Suisses* (Radio Télévision Suisse, 15 November, 1962), and he was also no stranger to Italian, French, Dutch, and German news and arts programs. His televisual appeal derived from both his association with figures like Pierre Restnay and Yves Klein, and from a desire amongst contemporary public broadcasters at this time to produce short documentaries on modern art exhibitions and artists. However, it was also the case that, as Kerry Brougher has noted, “Tinguely understood [the concept of spectacle supplanting genuine activity] and the potential of spectacle, as well as the power of television for relaying it.”

In this regard, his attitude towards film and broadcast media differed markedly from that

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5 Brougher, “Radiation Made Visible,” 57.
of Restnay, who “throughout the early 1960s, seized new media opportunities such as the television program *En Français dans le texte*, and the popular bi-monthly *Revue Planète* to promote Nouveau Réalisme as an entertaining but ultimately non-subversive avant-garde.”* In discussing the importance of (color) television to Tinguely’s *Study for an End of the World, No. 2* (1962) (which was broadcast on a NBC weekly magazine programme, *David Brinkley’s Journal*), for example, Cabañas suggests that rather than simply “adapt[ing] his work completely to the homogenising pressure of the media […] reducing art and its effects to a system of pure equivalency […] divest[ing] these once radical forms of their materiality and force of negation,” *Study for an End of the World, No. 2* instead foregrounds the “inability [of contemporary network television] to redress or dialectically negate an ever-expanding perceptual and commodified image regime.”* For all his showmanship and headline-grabbing theatrics, Tinguely wanted to avoid being ‘framed’ by the medium, becoming simply the subject of another documentary treatment or news item about modern art (and eccentricity). If anything, his preference involved making these promotional activities part of the spectacle itself, integral to the event and not kept at a safe distance from it: Tinguely was nothing if not alert to “how destruction could be repackaged as entertainment […] how artistic production would increasingly become part of the culture industry, inhabiting its modes of distribution and image production.”*8

Although de Saint Phalle was directly involved in making films—including two feature-length avant-garde works, *Daddy* (1973), and *Un rêve plus long que la nuit/A Dream Lasts Longer than the Night* (1975)—Tinguely’s relationship with the language and the apparatus of cinema tended to be more metaphysical than practical. As well as appearing in a short 1956 Swedish anarchist film, *En Dag I Staden/A Day in the City*, characters (caricatures) based on Tinguely featured in two

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* Carrick, *Nouveau Réalisme*, 57.
Hollywood films from the 1960s—*What a Way to Go!* (J. Lee Thompson, 1964) and Arthur Penn’s *Micky One* (1965)—and frequent references to de Saint Phalle and Tinguely as “Les Bonnie et Clyde de l’Art” were doubtless inspired by the popularity of Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) rather than any resemblance to the real-life outlaws, or even de Saint Phalle’s *Tirs* series (works created throughout the 1960s involving her and others taking pot-shots with a .22 calibre rifle at white canvasses or reliefs concealing paint ‘bombs’). Aesthetically, the mechanical, silhouetting and other image-making (or méta-matic) properties of Tinguely’s “peintures cinétiques” and sculptures possess a certain cinematic quality. This kinetic kinship can also function as a commentary on the representational technologies of film production, projection, and consumption, as if taunting cinema (*qua* technology) by subverting its instrumental role in consumer culture. The description of Tinguely’s “kinetic performances”—especially, auto-destruct sculptures such as *Homage to New York*—as “an orchestration of duration, anticipation, and suspense to confront the audience with a new awareness of time” can likewise apply to much modernist cinema, as well as the popular films of a Hitchcock or a Charlie Chaplin, whose *Modern Times* (1936) is frequently invoked in relation to the post-industrial and anti-consumerist social philosophy behind Tinguely’s meta-machine art.⁹

**Observation**

Often regarded as a pioneer of so-called Direct Cinema and co-founder of Drew Associates, D.A. Pennebaker’s formative years coincided with an era when the boundaries between documentary, avant-garde and independent cinema were again becoming increasingly blurred, providing him with opportunities to work closely with filmmakers like Francis Thompson and Shirley Clarke. A qualified mechanical engineer, Pennebaker moved to New York in the late 1940s and soon

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began experimenting with Super-8 cameras, and various audio and sound recording equipment.\textsuperscript{10} His first film, \textit{Daybreak Express} (1958), for example, is a jazzy, swirling filmic paean to New York’s iconic “Third Ave El” (elevated train line), a film comparable to other notable experimental city films from this period, such as \textit{Under the Brooklyn Bridge} (Rudy Burckhardt, 1953), Thompson’s \textit{N.Y., N.Y.} (1957), or Clarke’s \textit{Bridges-Go-Round} (1958). Pennebaker also worked with Willard Van Dyke on Clarke’s award-winning short, \textit{Skyscraper} (1959), and several of his films in the 1960s and early 1970s involved collaborations with contemporary avant-garde figures such as Alfred Leslie, Merce Cunningham, and Yoko Ono, as well as other artists and counter-culture celebrities. Shortly after Pennebaker joined Drew Associates in 1959, he collaborated again with Clarke on \textit{Opening in Moscow}, a documentary about the American National Exhibition in Moscow’s Sokolniki Park, an exhibition that displayed all manner of ‘mod cons’, household utilities, and totems of post-war American consumerism – the antithesis of a Tinguely exhibition, in other words.

Pennebaker’s relationship with the journalistic imperatives of Robert Drew’s project was pragmatic, and his significant contributions were ultimately technological rather than editorial and creative – especially in terms of his successful development of portable equipment for recording synchronous sound. In producing documentaries and television features for network and syndicated news programmes, Drew Associates conceived of documentary as “the visual telling of dramatic stories in order to secure popular acceptance in a way that would potentially supersede conventional forms of reporting.”\textsuperscript{11} While the fusion of \textit{faux} informality with dramatic ‘crisis’ narratives proved successful in films such as \textit{Primary} (1960) or \textit{Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment} (1962), the increasingly formulaic nature of this approach constrained Pennebaker’s expressive curiosity, and his interest in exploring alternative modes of documentary engagement and

\textsuperscript{10} Beattie, \textit{D.A. Pennebaker}, 3-11.
\textsuperscript{11} Saunders, “The Triumph,” 159.
representation. This is not to say that he ever fundamentally abandoned the tenets of the American Direct Cinema tradition (as Godard, for example, discovered in 1968, when he unsuccessfully tried to make One A.M. (One American Movie) with Pennebaker and Richard Leacock), or that his work can be excluded from the more general assessment that the problem with Direct Cinema “is essentially what its exponents said about what the films did, not necessarily what the films themselves achieved.” In initially agreeing to commit himself to Drew’s project – like his subsequent decision to join with Leacock in 1963 – Pennebaker further dissociated his work from its earlier avant-garde influences, revealing a tendency towards the more conventional style of documentary filmmaking that would become the hallmark of his later career.

*Breaking It Up at the Museum* was made just three weeks before *Primary*, Drew Associates’ iconic portrayal of the 1960 Democratic Party presidential primary in Wisconsin. Shot by Richard Leacock and Albert Maysles, Pennebaker’s role in the production of *Primary* chiefly involved “coordinat[ing] a portable sound editing and mixing machine that enabled him to add sound to silent footage as the five-day shoot progressed,” a technique that was also employed in *Breaking it Up.* Although just over six minutes in duration, *Breaking it Up* has a discernible four-part structure: an ‘interview’ with Tinguely (prologue); the intact sculpture filmed as a marvel of movement and mechanical ingenuity (subject); the incomplete auto-destruction (climax); the fire being extinguished by Tinguely and Billy Klüver, and the authorities arriving (aftermath). The film largely conforms to the Direct Cinema style, although with a greater dependence on framing and montage rather than the hand-held cinematography that would characterise some sequences in *Primary,* and much of *Yanki No!* (Drew, 1960). Although not a Drew Associates production, or a Time Life Inc. commission, *Breaking It Up* was a typically collaborative enterprise: as the end-title acknowledgements indicate, in addition to Maysles and

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Clarke, the film also lists Tom Schwartz (the sound archivist), Marie Winn (a journalist and activist), and Nick Proferes (the cinematographer who would go on to work with Pennebaker on his projects with Norman Mailer, before shooting Barbara Loden’s *Wanda* (1970)).

After a title card, *Breaking it Up* opens into a white screen which – as the camera pulls back – turns out to be a full-screen close-up of a welding torch being used by Tinguely, as he constructs *Homage to New York* amidst the “junk”, noise, and disorder of his on-site studio (a Buckminster Fuller geodesic dome left over from the previous exhibition in the Sculpture Garden). Tinguely removes his helmet and approaches the camera, answering Pennebaker’s question: “What is that machine?” Given the racket in the background (no doubt amplified by the acoustics of the dome) combined with Tinguely’s idiosyncratic English, it is perhaps surprising that Pennebaker stuck with his sync-sound hand-held camera during this sequence. In response to Pennebaker’s question, Tinguely nonchalantly refers to his “machine” as “a sculpture […] it’s a picture […] it’s an accompanist, it’s a poet […] a declaration […] it’s a situation […] the intensity of the life of the machine is the cause of its destruction.”

The next sequence comprises highlights of *Homage to New York*’s twenty-seven-minute ‘performance’. An establishing long shot frames the sculpture, before the film cuts to a series of close and medium shots of its principal mechanical and found components (gleaned by Tinguely, Billy Klüver, and Robert Breer from Manhattan junk shops, street markets, and even the Newark city dump): a piano clunking out notes; hammers frantically hitting the side of a large metal pot; numerous bicycle and pram wheels spinning; a deranged addressograph machine; electric motors coughing and clunking; smoke produced by a mixture of ammonia and titanium tetrachloride; a meteorological trial balloon, a money-throwing contraption (compliments of Robert Rauschenberg), bottles containing various pungent concoctions, a go-kart automatically pushed back and forth; the so-called “suicide carriage” (which Tinguely donated to MoMA the next day), and so forth.
Even at this early stage, the cacophony of sounds seems overwhelming, and includes a loudspeaker blaring out a recording of Tinguely talking about the work, as well as gasps and cheers (or jeers) from the assembled spectators. Benefitting from Schwartz’s influence, the film’s soundtrack and use of noise offers a remarkably sympathetic sonic assemblage to accompany the images. Painted white and illuminated by various lights, the sculpture contrasts spectacularly with the darkness of night – although according to Klüwer, “Tinguely was a little worried that the machine would look too beautiful.”14 His anxiety was not misplaced: if anything, its whiteness gave *Homage to New York* a distinctly ghostly appearance, a spectral photogenicity that Pennebaker exploits throughout his short film.

After a brief cut-away to the crowd of two hundred and fifty invited guests, the third part of the film portrays the sculpture’s attempted auto-destruction, as flames appear in the centre and begin to leap and consume it. Beginning with the same pattern of shots as the previous sequence, Pennebaker’s camera tilts up to follow the fire before cutting to another establishing shot of the sculpture, by now virtually invisible amidst the accumulating smoke, and mist. Another close shot of the piano follows as it too is soon engulfed in flames; the bathtub jumps fitfully, as if being electrocuted or primed for take-off. A press photographer is briefly silhouetted against the now clattering, burning, disintegrating machine sculpture, soon to be followed by a shot of a fire department officer talking to Klüver, before he and Tinguely are shown dismantling parts of the sculpture, and dousing the fires down with a hose. Pennebaker includes one final long shot of the scene (presumably taken from the opposite end of the garden) before Tinguely takes a bow, smiling and waving in front of his now smouldering, tangled, demolished *Homage to New York*. The crowd are heard clapping, and two “vox pop” interviewees praise the event. Tinguely is again seen talking with the fire department official and Peter Selz, MoMA’s curator of painting and sculpture.

exhibitions, before the discordant piano notes return to the soundtrack as the camera frames the rubble and the film cuts to a final aerial shot taken from the roof, showing the wreckage and a few loiterers and souvenir collectors. Famously – and despite Klüver’s best efforts to ensure the reliability of a special timer that controlled the various electrical circuits – Homage to New York did not auto-destruct completely. Not that Tinguely appeared bothered by the evening’s imperfect dénouement: art is not an exact science, and even failures fail to fail sometimes.

**Animation**

Despite having a soundtrack that combines synchronous and asynchronous elements, Pennebaker’s Breaking It Up is consistent with the observational-narrative methods typically associated with the Direct Cinema style. Eschewing Pennebaker’s confidence in the documentary as the purveyor of some objective, transparent representation of reality, however, Breer’s Homage to Jean Tinguely’s “Homage to New York” offers a more experimental and playful treatment, one that combines animation techniques with documentary (and documents), and a range of reflexive filmic practices in its attempt to capture the destructive – or, deconstructive – implications of Tinguely’s sculpture. Unlike Pennebaker, Breer had already known Tinguely for several years, and in 1955 they had been involved in organising the acclaimed Le Mouvement exhibition of kinetic art, at the Galerie Denise René in Paris. Breer – who lived in France during the 1950s – had also collaborated with Klüver at that time, and he later recollected that it was while assisting in the construction of Homage to New York that Tinguely “suggested that I make a film […] at the same time [as] he did his thing […] not a documentary film of it, but something at the same time.”

Breer’s film is not simply a quirky divertissement – or even a dutiful record of – Tinguely’s visit to MoMA. In its formal complexity and eclectic structures of

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relation it consciously translates a neo-Dadaist aesthetic into the language of film, while also representing a departure from the hand-drawn abstract style of his earlier animations, such as the Phases films, or A Man and his Dog Out for Air (1957). Thematically, Homage to Jean Tinguely’s “Homage to New York” emphasises – for comic effect – the incongruous relationship between Tinguely’s seemingly anarchic and madcap methods and the regulated, demure environment of MoMA. The opening title sequence, for example, comprises a hand-held close shot that scans the event programme, featuring Tinguely’s freely sketched plan of his sculpture, accompanied by the sound of a loud clattering metallic din (recorded during the event itself, or during the construction process); at this time, Breer was beginning “to explore [the] live-sound/animated image relationship more thoroughly.”

This shot is followed by a close-up of Breer’s handwritten title, before the sequence returns to the drawing, now filmed in a more extreme close-up before the camera moves down the page and ‘zooms’ in on the printed details of the venue, date, time and full title of the event itself: “Homage to New York: A Self-Constructing and Self-Destroying Work of Art Conceived and Built By Jean Tinguely.” Breer opens his film, in other words, by inviting us to view the programme rather than the exhibition, perhaps suggesting that Tinguely’s “self-destructing” machine sculpture was already being “conceived,” explained, and curated before it had been set in motion.

The ironic tension between creativity and its institutionalisation is sustained in various ways throughout Breer’s film. This opening title sequence, for example, cuts to an image of Tinguely standing with his arms folded (taken from a traced or rotoscoped photograph) that opens like a cut-out or pop-up book to reveal behind it an animated sequence of cogs and spinning wheels, which is soon followed by a cut to an abstract animation based on one of Tinguely’s meta-mechanical paintings (“Relief Blanc sur Noir”, 1958). The soundtrack diminishes as the next sequence

16 O’Pray, Avant-Garde Film, 65.
begins with documentary footage of various people milling around the dome; some talking to Tinguely as he constructs the work – most notably, MoMA’s Director of Collections, Alfred Barr. Here, as elsewhere in the film, the camera tilts upwards to frame the lattice of triangular panels that comprise Fuller’s geodesic dome – perhaps, another counterpoint to the intuitive, imprecise, serendipitous nature of Tinguely’s art. Like Pennebaker, Breer’s documentary footage also focusses on Tinguely welding, and while some of this documentary material may in fact be salvaged footage from that other film production, Breer reconfigures it as a montage of flash frames, repetition, stop-motion, and extreme undercranking to add to the impression of a comedic, chaotic *mise en scène*. Only in the final few minutes, does the film offer images of the self-destructing *Homage to New York*, and the clean-up operation the following day, before returning to that initial cut-out image of Tinguely – now closing, like a door.

Regarding *Homage to Jean Tinguely’s “Homage to New York”*, Sonia Bridge suggests that Breer’s take on the sculpture both “playfully celebrate[s] and at times mockingly redouble[s], quizzically reflecting on the 1960s rehearsal of avant-garde strategies.” While also pointing out that Breer’s film eschews “world-weary pessimism” in favor of “the comic unmelodious tinkering quality of the work,” Bridge implies that the satirical range of the film extends beyond the trope of the heroic artist pitted against the tyranny of the establishment.\(^\text{17}\) It can be argued, as it was at the time, for example, that any artistic event or ‘happening’ that takes place *inside* MoMA is already “thoroughly official”, an avant-garde protest in the form of “a garden party,” as the Nation’s editorial put it.\(^\text{18}\) This irony is also explored by Jacques Derrida in his 1996 lecture (delivered at MoMA) on its attempts to categorise (*certify*) Antonin Artaud’s drawings: “[This] canonizing institution, this place of sacralising legitimation of modern times, this pyramid of father-maternal and speculative commemomarketmummification, we call it, then,

\(^{17}\) Bridge, “Robert Breer,” 87-88.

\(^{18}\) Qtd. in Lee, *Chromophobia*, 139.
MoMA, M-O-M-A.”  

Perhaps, in its arresting configuration of documentary and animated forms, in its playful undercutting of the artist’s myth-making exploits and frantic acts of self-promotion, Breer’s film reminds us that any ‘homage’ to Jean Tinguely without irony would be no homage at all.


Installation

In February 1963 Tinguely travelled to Tokyo for a two-week exhibition at the Minami Gallery, entitled Sounds of Sculpture. A small but influential centre of contemporary arts, founded by Kusuo Shimizu, the Minami was also at the forefront of promoting international avant-garde work in post-war Japan, especially by figures like Jean Fautrier, Sam Francis, and Jasper Johns, as well as emerging artists (for example, Kate Millett, whose solo exhibition, Things, opened

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19 Derrida, Artaud the Moma, 57.
a few days after *Sounds of Sculpture*). The gallery published an elaborate catalogue to accompany Tinguely’s exhibition, which included an introduction by the art critic, Yoshiaki Tono, and a gramophone record, *Tinguely-Sound*, comprising music composed by Toshi Ichiyanagi, based on the noise generated by the sculptures.

Nothing if not ‘site-specific’, Tinguely busied himself in the weeks leading up to the exhibition assembling new “Baluba”, méta-matic, and “radio” sculptures using junk collected from local scrapyards – his creative foraging assisted by the gallery’s proximity to construction sites involved in the building of the city’s new Metropolitan Expressway. By the opening of the exhibition, Tinguely had completed twenty-six works, including a large centrepiece: a wall-mounted motor-driven structure, “Le Chant du Cygne du Bambous” (“The Bamboo’s Swan Song”). As this title suggests, various works in the exhibition reflected his imaginative appropriation of Japan’s recent history and popular culture, including his admiration for its motorcycle industry: for example, sculptures such as “Casoa (à deux têtes)” (“Cassowary (with Two Heads)” and “Ma Fraiseuse” were exhibited alongside “Suzuki (Hiroshima)” and “Honda, No. 1.” Some of these works also coincided with the last phase of Tinguely’s “Baluba” period – a term he coined in honor of the recently murdered Congolese Prime Minister and African nationalist leader, Patrice Lumumba, and the Luba peoples: the spontaneous, forceful, shaking motions of the sculptures representing the tragic violence of that struggle. However, working in Tokyo also introduced him to more traditional Japanese arts and crafts, such as floral art or *ikebana*. Tinguely recognised affinities between his own work and that of those artists who were adopting experimental and avant-garde approaches to *ikebana*, especially the founder of the Sogetsu School, Sōfu Teshigahara (who purchased “Casoa (à deux têtes)”22), and his son, Hiroshi,
whose short documentary, *Sculpture Mouvante: Jean Tinguely*, is ostensibly about Tinguely and this particular exhibition.\(^{23}\)

Although Teshigahara is generally associated with the trilogy of feature films he directed in the 1960s (especially, *Woman of the Dunes/Suna no Onna*, 1964), he was also a documentary filmmaker of note, and the austere cinematographic style developed across the trilogy (also in collaboration with Hiroshi Segawa) typically foregrounds the unstable relationship between reality and subjectivity, a disparity or gap that Teshigahara continually explored through his documentary practice.\(^{24}\) Although more formally conventional than his other art documentaries such as *Hokusai* (1953), *Ikebana* (1957), or his later *Antonio Gaudí* (1984), *Sculpture Mouvante* shares their tendency towards visual whimsy and an emphasis on particular features of given objects, their existence as fragments or ‘documents’ being observed with an *ikebana* artist’s eye for detail, juxtaposition, ironic incongruity, and alternative realities. For example, although the film shows Tinguely at work (outside bending iron rods, welding metal bolts, affixing V10 electric motors, drilling holes into bamboo, or just talking with Ichiyanagi at the opening night), these sequences are incidental to Teshigahara’s main cinematic concern: how to capture something of the strangeness and apparent absurdity of these sculptures.

*Sculpture Mouvante* is framed at either end by montage sequences comprising shots of sculptures from the exhibition, and their key parts shaking, spinning, rattling and jolting. These sequences are characterised by a preponderance of close and extreme close shots. For example, the film opens with the plume from “Casoar (à deux têtes)” shaking violently and loudly, followed by an image of the smoothly spinning wheel from “Honda, No. 1”, then a lid is seen (and heard) rattling automatically with Tinguely’s welding helmet clearly visible hanging on the wall behind it, like a Samurai *kubuto*, before cutting to a longer shot

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\(^{23}\) On Tinguely’s enthusiasm for *ikebana*, see Hultén’s *Tinguely-Méta*, 281.

\(^{24}\) O’Rawe, *Regarding the Real*, 163-175.
of “Suzuki (Hiroshima)” with its rotating (alarm) bell mechanism. At the end of the film, extreme close-ups of details and particular components from sculptures – such as “Mautz II” (with attached golf ball), and especially “Tokyo Gal” – are juxtaposed in medium and longer shots, before the sequence opens into wider views of the exhibition, followed by a final close-up of a spinning object that turns out to be a mechanical toy frog – a Japanese lucky charm associated with returning something, or to somewhere.

Teshigahara’s documentary aesthetic was clearly shaped by post-war Japanese film culture and its debates about social commitment and the problem of realism; nevertheless, the film’s playful subjectivity, tendency towards fragmentation, and fixation on textures and abstractions, exemplifies an approach to the documentary form that successfully conveys something of the remarkable peculiarity of Tinguely’s art. Meanwhile back in Basel, Tinguely would continue to recognise the little god of returns in his own inimitable way:

In 1987, it was scrap from a particularly fashionable kind of deadly toy – Japanese motorcycles – that Tinguely repatriated as hanging chandeliers for a coffee-house in Kyoto. These ikebana-like lighting fixtures mix the brutal with the incandescent, combining images of speed and death with the message of light. The chandeliers were intended as a double homage, to honor a country that abounds in contradictions and to honor an old friend, the filmmaker and ikebana master Hirsohi Teshigahara.25

Citation

Le Cyclop (1994) is a seventy-five-foot-high steel ‘walk-around’ sculpture situated amongst the deciduous treescapes of Milly-la-Forêt, near Paris. It began life in 1969,

25 Violand-Hobi, Jean Tinguely, 133.
when the Franco-American art collectors, John and Dominique de Menil, donated a plot of forest land to Tinguely for a proposed project, “La Tête.” Over the ensuing twenty years, Tinguely, de Saint Phalle, Bernhard Luginbühl, Eva Aeppli, Daniel Spoerri, Larry Rivers, and others worked intermittently on the massive structure. With Tinguely’s death in 1991, de Saint Phalle devoted a considerable amount of time and money to its completion; in its monumental scale and ‘walk-around’ design, not to mention its mirror-mosaic veneer, it is both reminiscent of her own art works (such as Hon: en katedral/She: A Cathedral (1966), or the Gaudiesque The Tarot Garden (1998)), and a testament to the collaborative, contrary, absurd, utopian nature of the entire enterprise. Amidst its various mechanisms, wheels, gears and contraptions, Le Cyclop contains memorial features dedicated to fellow artists who have died (Yves Klein, Marcel Duchamp, and Louise Nevelson, for example), and small rooms, including: a ‘replica’ of the Paris hotel room a penniless Tinguely and de Saint Phalle once shared with Spoerri; a Holocaust railway car; and a Noh-inspired theatre space: “Both frightening and funny, Le Cylop is a total experience – an art funhouse.”

At the end of Godard and Miéville’s The Old Place, Le Cylop appears on screen as Miéville’s voice tells the story of the Á Bao A Qu, from Jorge Luis Borges’ Book of Imaginary Beings/Manual de zoología fantástica (1957). Commissioned by MoMA, the film – although, ‘video poem’ is perhaps a more accurate description – ruminates on the meaning of art, and its relevance to the realities of twentieth century history, or to the gap between the realities and horrors of historical experience and the silence of art. While its aesthetic preoccupations and sceptical tone are not new to the cinema of Godard and Miéville, its origins and relationship to MoMA does create an added complexity. Throughout its montage of ironically juxtaposed images and sequences, Godard and Miéville speak to one another about these matters in the form of a conversation rather than a dialogue, which is

especially appropriate given the etymological scope of the former (*conversari* = “to live, dwell, live with, keep company with”). “The Old Place” is both familiar and strange, a domain of the old in search of rejuvenation, or perfection – like the Á Bao A Qu. Is it modern art itself, or the twentieth century, MoMA, cinema, language, or all of the above?

The sequence begins with another comment on the commodification of art (Citroën naming its latest car, “Picasso”) before Miéville’s tone changes: “Even so, I have a feeling something is resisting, something original, that the origin will always be there, and that it resists.” The next shot frames a white mechanical sheet, jumping frantically like a demented shroud or ghost, a kinetic variation on Man Ray’s striking 1920 photograph, “Sculpture Mouvante” (or “La France”). Created by Patrick Bokanowski and “Pitch” (Christophe Cardoen) for a 1997 exhibition at Le Fresnoy (*Projection, Les Transports de L’Image*), the work wistfully generates its own drama – a loud, berserk and seemingly unpredictable presence in the darkened museum space. It is also emblematic of that ‘resistance’ which contradicts the assumption that *The Old Place* is simply a counsel of despair, a pessimistic elegy to defeated causes and corrupted ideals.

The iconic close shot of the fictional “No Trespassing” sign from the opening (and ending) of *Citizen Kane* fades to an actual “Défense d’entrer, propriété de l’État” sign on the perimeter fence surrounding *Le Cylop*, a juxtaposition Godard would use again in his controversial 2006 exhibition at the Pompidou, *Voyage(s) en Utopie, Jean-Luc Godard 1946-2006, In Search of Lost Theorem*. As Miéville continues with the tale of the Á Bao A Qu, other images, and fragments of sounds and music, contradict or complement the words and intertitle text: shots showing the sculpture sparkling in the sunlight are intercut with an image of books from an oil painting, pressed leaves, Francis Bacon’s “Study of Man Talking” (1981), a

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27 De Baecque, Godard, 887, n304. Godard and Miéville also included this sequence in their 2001 short, *Darkness of Time/Dans le noir du temps.*
nineteenth-century drawing of monsters and dragons, Goya, Witold Wojtkiewicz’s “Jesus Christ and the Children” (1908) gather around the story extending the film’s constellation of visual and cultural associations. Le Cylop, however, remains a constant point of reference. A multiform steel sculpture at home with nature, a museum of sorts that is also a play park, a machine that is also a memorial. In The Old Place, the presence of Le Cyclop serves as a reminder that despite everything there is always a glimmer of hope in the representation of the “something original” that Tinguely’s art represents.

**Coda**

In its concern with technology, time, movement, politics and play, the work of Jean Tinguely clearly raises questions about what art is. In this sense, these sculptures and meta-machines also share something with post-war film modernism, and its critique of the the documentary image as necessarily representing reality and truth. If Pennebaker’s approach to filming Homage to New York, for example, is ultimately constrained by an underlying confidence in – or nostalgia for – the objective integrity of the documentary form, Robert Breer’s whimsical, ironic and intermedial method succeeds as a film because it stays in harmony with the disharmony of its subject matter. The ability to remain available to Tinguely’s seemingly anarchic sensibility is also a feature of Teshigahara’s Sculpture Mouvante, which combines conventional and abstract documentary techniques to convey the bewildering cacophony of movements, interactions, and sounds produced for – and by – a Tinguely exhibition. Godard and Miéville’s The Old Place, meanwhile, is a disruptive archive in its own right, a museum of modernity that foregrounds fragments and associations (the reality of images rather than images of reality). In so doing, it discovers in Le Cylop a kindred spirit, a home from home inhabited by remembrance and metamorphosis, order and chaos.
Bibliography


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