François Dallegret's Astrological Automobiles: Occult Commodities for France in the 1960s

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> By far the most important feature of the addressee [in astrology] is his socio-economic status. The image presented in this area may be called, with some exaggeration, that of the *vice-president* (Theodor Adorno, 'Stars Down to Earth', 1953)[1]

> Astrology *is* the Literature of the petit bourgeois world. (Roland Barthes, 'Astrology', 1957)[2]

> Pas d'horoscope (Michel Poiccard complaining about *The Herald Tribune* in *A bout de souffle*, 1960)

In October of 1962, when François Dallegret exhibited twelve etching plates of 'astrological automobile' designs at the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris, he also constructed a large wooden cutout version of the Leo model, and posed next to it for a publicity shot (Fig. 1). His would later describe that model's particular allure:

> The Lion is the sign of a king or a president. Leo people are proud, generous, trusting, energetic, domineering, authoritative. They have a radiant, vibrant and dynamic personality. An ideal Leo car would have an open work hood set off with sheets of beaten gold. The coachwork would be in platinum, the radiator cap of massive zircon, the interior in red mink with a ceiling decorated with teardrop diamonds. But the Leo person today probably owns a Rolls Royce, a Bentley or a Cadillac.[3]

Dallegret exaggerated the monarchic aura of his Leo for the benefit of the photographer. Striking a supercilious pose, his nobility suggested by the neo-Edwardian outfit and the rakish angle of his cigarette holder, Dallegret leaned an elbow against his metaphor and basked in its majesty. Like Yves Klein – another Iris Clert artist who frequently stoked his reputation as an artist-aristocrat by appearing in tuxedos (and who just a few years earlier had proposed that those with the greatest aesthetic sensibility should govern) – Dallegret staged himself as an artist of the ruling elite. Of course, his bug-eyed expression did make all the pomp and circumstance seem a bit silly, as did his grandiose gesture of leaning against a car that was at once a luxury item and a cheap fake.

Few of the remaining eleven models in Dallegret's exhibit were as regal as the Leo, though most were similarly designed to resemble Edwardian roadsters and all were to be made of expensive materials – the subtitle of the show, after all, was 'The Automobile of the Elite'. Each car also showcased fantastic technologies calibrated to fit its individual zodiac sign. The eight pistons of the Pisces engine, for example, would 'impart a gentle rocking motion to the passenger seat' approximating the tides of the ocean (Fig. 2).[4] The finned hood ornament would swim through the air as the automobile sped forward, but, because the Pisces is phlegmatic by nature, the seat would be in a permanent recline so that the driver

1 Theodor Adorno, 'The Stars Down to Earth: The Los Angeles Times Astrology Column', *Telos*, no. 19, Spring 1974, pp. 38–9.

2 Roland Barthes, 'Astrologie', in *Mythologies* (Éditions du Seuil: Paris, 1957), reprinted in Eric Marty, ed., *Roland Barthes, Œuvres complètes*, Vol. I (Éditions du Seuil: Paris, 2002), p. 666. All translations from the French are mine unless otherwise noted.

3 François Dallegret and Scott Bailey, 'Astrological Automobiles of François Dallegret', *Automobile Quarterly*, Vol. 3, no. 1, Spring 1964, np.

4 Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, 'François Dallegret', *Aujourd'hui*, no. 39, November 1962, p. 36.

doi:10.1093/oxartj/kcn008

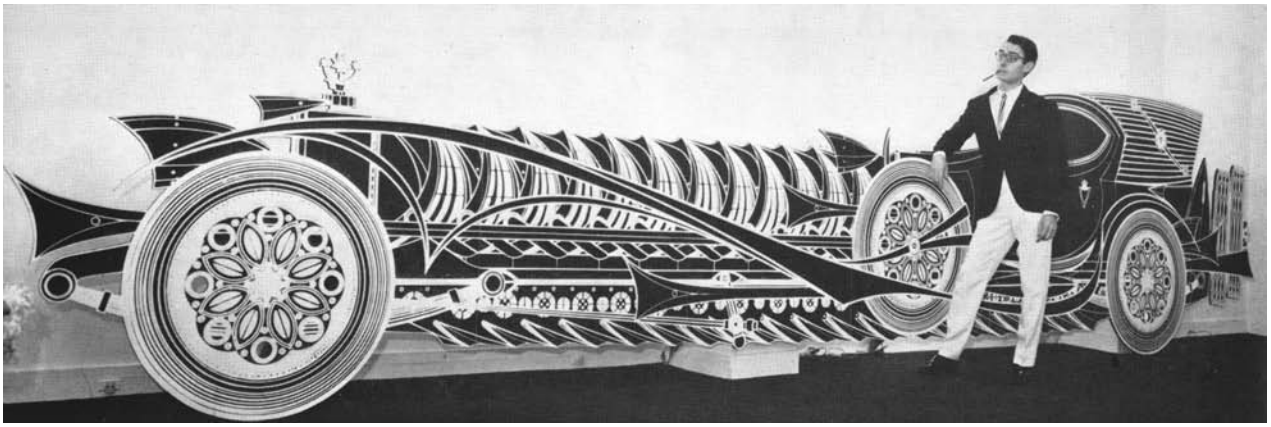

Fig. 1. François Dallegret posing in front of his Super-Leo at the Iris Clert Gallery, 1962. Photograph by Daniel Frasnay. © Daniel Frasnay/akg-images, London.

might relax during the trip. The stubborn Taurus would drive a multi-ton behemoth equipped with a powerful engine but lacking brakes, transmission, gearbox, clutch or steering, as it was unlikely anyone would ever convince a Taurus to change speed or direction. By contrast, two steering wheels would be installed on opposite sides of the passenger cabin in the Libra (along with two sets of headlights on either end of the vehicle) so that the driver, suffering from the indecisiveness characteristic of that sign, could change direction by 180 degrees simply by performing an about-face in his or her seat. The reclusive Scorpio could avoid the gazes of envious gawkers by driving a car equipped with its own lush, balustraded garden (Fig. 3). The zodiac regulated the objects' designs, but it also governed the arrangement of objects in the show: the etching plates were arranged serially along the wall with the Aries car placed first, Pisces last, as was the usual order of signs in horoscopes.[5] Iris Clert also mounted each etching plate on a piece of coloured paper that was appropriate for its sign: the Aries plate was shown against a red backdrop, Pisces against turquoise.

The exhibit might strike one as idiosyncratic, and it has certainly dropped away from recent histories of French mid-century art, though Clert claimed that it was her best attended exhibit that year. Part of its success could no doubt be attributed to its trendy recruitment of astrology as its chief organizational principle. 'Une vieille science devient, cet été, un jeu a la mode', the magazine *Paris-Match* reported in 1960, and, indeed, the ancient method of prediction had become all the rage in France by that time.[6] In the early sixties, French readers could peruse a growing number of astrology magazines like *Astral*, *Astrologie*, *Astrologue*, *Astres*, *Les Cahiers Astrologiques*, *Planete*, and *Votre Avenir*. The newspaper *France-Soir* capitalized on the growing fascination with the zodiac by publishing a ten-article investigative report on the subject over the course of two weeks in 1963, and the trend was sufficiently conspicuous that the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique sampled the opinions of two thousand people regarding their relationship to astrology that year.[7] The IFOP reported that 53% of the French population regularly read horoscopes in the papers, and 37% claimed to believe that astrological signs accurately categorize character traits.[8]

5 For a full description of Dallegret's exhibit, please consult Iris Clert's memoir *iris-time: l'artventure* (Éditions Denoël: Paris, 1978), particularly pp. 286–8.

6 Jack Chargelègue and Yves Marguerite, '12 Personnages célèbres font parler les astres', *Paris-Match*, no. 591, 6 August 1960, p. 38.

7 Odette Valeri, with Christiane Caron and Marthe Lejcel, 'Tout ce qui'il y a derrière votre horoscope', *France-Soir*, 24 January 1963 through 3 February 1963.

8 The results of the poll were published in Valeri, 'Tout ce qui'il y a derrière votre horoscope', 24 January 1963, p. 9.

The trend was commonly perceived as being particular to the French. Poiccard's quip in *A bout de souffle* that the *Herald Tribune* was inferior to French papers precisely because it had no horoscope relied upon the zodiac as an emblem of national difference. But if American papers did not, apparently, publish as many horoscopes, they certainly did publish articles about French fondness for the zodiac. With the article 'Fraud in your Future? Popularity of Astrology in France', *Newsweek* gloated that the birthplace of the Enlightenment was now home to crowds of superstitious naïfs eager to pay for astral prognostications.[9] *Time Magazine* ran a similar story a few months later, gleefully reporting that politicians and military figures in France often waited for confirmation from astrologers before making major policy decisions.[10]

Artists were not exempt from the trend. Niki de Saint-Phalle was consulting star charts by the early sixties too. She had first been introduced to astrology though sculptor (and wife of Jean Tinguely) Eva Aeppli, who consulted her astral advisor on a regular basis and would eventually develop an entire sculpture cycle premised upon signs of the zodiac.[11] Drawing upon the predictive power of the zodiac, Saint-Phalle included a star chart along with its optimistic predictions about her financial and artistic success in an invitation to her 'Tirs' paintings in December 1962 (Fig. 4). The chart seemed a tad eccentric to some, particularly Donald Judd, who seized upon the astrology gimmick as a means of commencing his uncharitable review: 'The astrological report accompanying this exhibit predicts that America and Italy will welcome Niki de Saint-Phalle's work. So much for astrology'.[12]

Iris Clert – arguably the most important gallery owner in Paris during the fifties and early sixties – hardly made a decision without consulting her personal astrologer first. Her astral advisor Elzine, for example, determined the most auspicious date for the gallery's grand opening, as well as the openings of important exhibits such as that of the Micro-Salon in 1957 and Klein's *Le Vide* in 1960.[13] Elzine also sometimes 'assisted' artists in Clert's stable, as when she advised the sculptor Takis to stop working in steel (iron was a better metal for him because Mars was his ascendant planet). Even when Clert needed an emergency infusion of cash, Elzine came to the rescue. Elzine determined the best week for a Taurus to gamble, at which time Clert visited a casino, apparently won 100,000 Francs, and saved her business from bankruptcy.[14]

Some members of the French avant-garde, however, indulged in astrology with a touch of irony. Situationist Michèle Bernstein actually wrote astrology columns for racehorses in the late fifties. In an interview with Kristin Ross, Henri Lefebvre once reminisced about Bernstein's job:

> Michèle Bernstein had come up with a clever way to make money, or at least a bit of money. Or at least this is what she told me. She said she did horoscopes for horses, which were published in racing magazines. It was extremely funny. She determined the date of birth of the horses and did their horoscopes in order to predict the outcome of the race. And I think there were racing magazines that published them and paid her.

Ross then asks, 'So the Situationist slogan "Never work" didn't apply to women?' to which Lefebvre responded:

> Yes, it did, because this wasn't work. ... To do horoscopes for racehorses, I suppose, wasn't really work; in any case, I think it was fun to do it, and they didn't really work.[15]

9 'Fraud in your Future? Popularity of Astrology in France', *Newsweek*, Vol. 64, 14 September 1964, p. 56.

10 'Quel est Votre Signe? French Astrologers', *Time*, vol. 85, 15 January 1965, p. 32.

11 For more information about Aeppli's zodiac work, see the essay by her Astro-Psychologist Jacques Berthon in Vera Mertz Mercer, *The Astrological Sculptures of Eva Aeppli* (Old Market Press: Omaha, NB, 1983).

12 Donald Judd, 'In the Galleries: Niki de Saint Phalle', *Arts Magazine*, Vol. 37, no. 3, December 1962, p. 44.

13 Elzine Privat was the widow of famous journalist and astrologer Maurice Privat, who was best known for his astrological advice to Pierre Laval in the thirties. His *Prédictions sensasionnelles par l'astrologie scientifique* (Éditions Médicis: Paris, 1936), in which he, Nostradamus-like, attempted to foretell the course of political events in Europe, was a bestseller.

14 Most of Elzine's predictions regarding Iris Clert and her gallery appear in passing in *iris-time*, particularly pp. 91–153.

15 Henri Lefebvre with Kristin Ross, 1983, published in *October* 79, Winter 1997, p. 70. Remarkably, writing horoscopes for pets and racing animals was not that unusual at the time. Francesco Waldner famously predicted the future for animals in the fifties, for example. See Odette Valeri's interview with Waldner in 'Tout ce qui'il y a derrière votre horoscope', *France Soir*, 31 January 1963, p. 9.

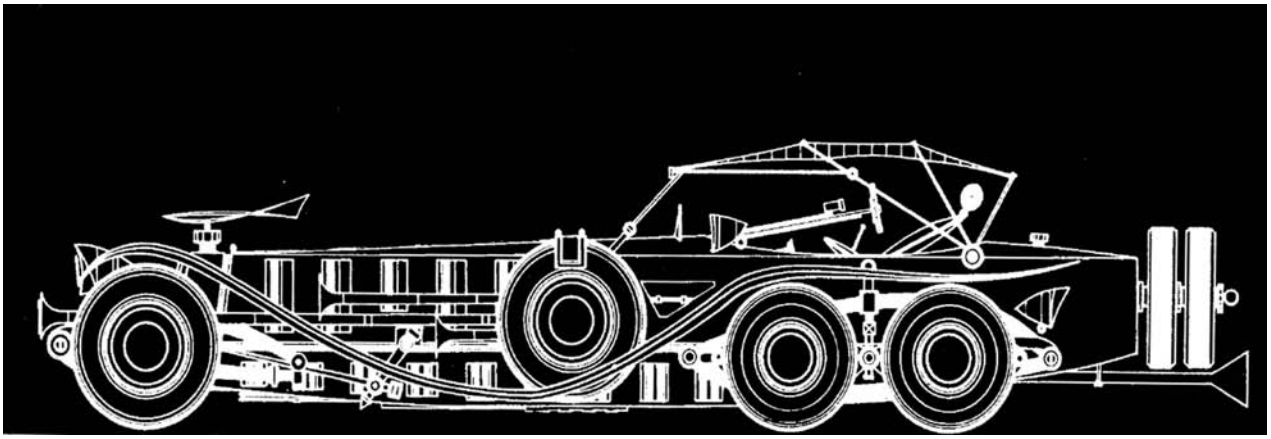

Fig. 2. François Dallegret, Pisces Automobile, etching, 1962. © SODRAC, Montreal and DACS, London, 2007.

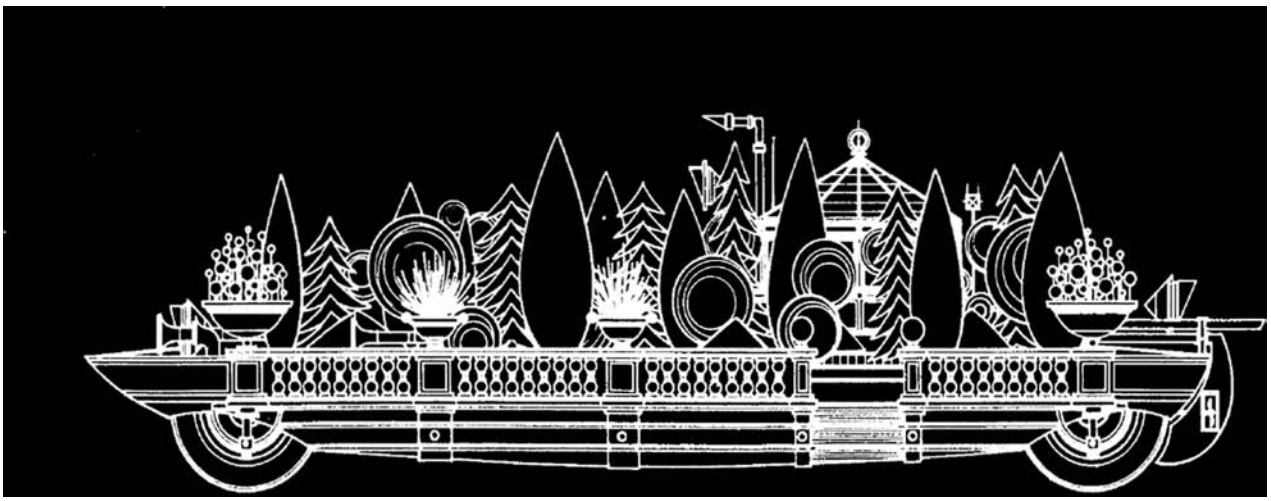

Fig. 3. François Dallegret, Scorpio Automobile, etching, 1962. © SODRAC, Montreal and DACS, London, 2007.

Lefebvre's emphatic tone might strike one as a bit compensatory, as if the philosopher were more concerned about parrying (perhaps justifiable) accusations of sexism among the Situationists than about attending to the specifics of Bernstein's erstwhile employment. Nevertheless, this anecdote returns us to some of the themes upon which Dallegret would touch. For Dallegret's exhibit, like Bernstein's anti-job, mischievously linked astrology to the operations of capitalism. Bernstein and Lefebvre delighted in horoscope composition as a dissimulation of work – a sort of moonlighting in which one was inexplicably paid for the most ridiculous kind of labour. Even better, through this odd job Bernstein could be an accomplice to gamblers on their quest to make money without, in fact, working. If Saint-Phalle's star chart was offered as a notary stamp of heavenly validation, Bernstein's horoscope turned heaven on its head; rather than sanctioning artistic labour, it was a means of emptying work of its moral weight. Dallegret's interest in the economic implications of the zodiac was slightly different, however. His exhibit was not about labour or

Fig. 4. Niki de Saint-Phalle, invitation to a reception at the Alexandre Iolas Gallery, New York, December 1962. Courtesy of the Niki Charitable Art Foundation. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2007.

its dissimulation, but rather about the occult allure of commodity objects and the complex class positions that those commodities can stipulate.

The connection between the zodiac and commodity culture was established in part by the spectacle Dallegret and Clert conjured around the show. The exhibit, with its conspicuous display model seducing passersby, transformed the Iris Clert gallery into a showroom similar to that of the 'Salon de L'Automobile' – the annual exposition of cars at the Porte de Versailles through which major manufacturers debuted the new year's models.[16] The yearly ritual (which took place in October, as did Dallegret's show) attracted thousands of car enthusiasts, and was featured prominently in newspapers and periodicals with extensive descriptions of the new technologies and styles offered there. Encouraging visitors to compare his exhibition to that of the Salon d'Auto, Dallegret and Clert also set up a turnstile at the gallery door, such that visitors to the show would, like attendants of the Salon, have to insert a one Franc piece to enter.[17] Appropriately, Dallegret and Clert also circulated a publicity pamphlet to accompany the exhibition, the *iris.time*, which advertised the exhibit as 'The First Iris Clert Automobile Salon – the Automobile of the Elite' (Fig. 5). On the front page Dallegret was pictured caressing the bumper of an antique automobile designed by Ettore Bugatti – the late luxury car manufacturer to whom the artist's show was dedicated. Also included in this, the first of many issues of *iris.time*, were laudatory if facetious descriptions of Dallegret's vehicles by engineers, as well as short reassuring blurbs promising readers that his cars, because they were connected to the supernatural power of the zodiac, would be safer than those in which so many celebrities had recently met their demise.[18] Like most French newspapers of the day, the circular also included a horoscope, though only for the artist's sign: the moon rising in Venus foretold Dallegret's genius for art and financial success.

This was not the first time an artist had dramatically transformed Iris Clert's gallery, of course. In 1958 Yves Klein's *Le Vide* exhibition had famously left her space empty except for the invisible and immaterial presence of his 'pictorial sensibility'. Two years later Arman reciprocated with his exhibit of *Le Plein* by packing the space with garbage. Both installations had notoriously engaged ideologies of bourgeois identity – Klein by parodying notions of transcendence and privilege, Arman by showcasing the debris of consumer culture.[19] If formal similarities between the work of Dallegret and that of other Iris Clert artists like Klein or Arman are scant, Dallegret nevertheless shared with them a similar predicament, as they all attempted to finesse an ambivalent position for the avant-garde in postwar Europe. Indeed, when Benjamin Buchloh famously summarized that Klein and Arman exemplified a new aesthetic for the neo-avant-garde in France in which 'the dialectic of inexorable amnesia and inevitable spectacularization is continually played out', he might also have been speaking of Dallegret.[20] Like those artists, Dallegret questioned the critical potency of previous avant-garde practices and tested the operations of bourgeois identity in a new artistic environment in which the spectacle of consumerism was gaining momentum.

At the same time, however, there were important differences between Dallegret and Nouveaux Réalistes like Klein and Arman. More than any other artist previously to have shown at Iris Clert, Dallegret conspicuously recoded the gallery environment according to very legible and specific rituals of consumer culture. Dallegret's exhibit, with its admission fees,

16 To sample coverage of the Salon de L'Auto in 1962, see Daniel Clavaud, 'Le Salon de L'Automobile', *Le Monde*, 5 October 1962, p. 13 and additional reports without bylines pp. 13–15. See also Didier Merlin, 'La Grande Parade', *Le Figaro*, 5 October 1962, p. 18; Philippe Bouvard, 'Les Voitures du Salon 62 à la Verticale', *Le Figaro*, 5 October 1962, pp. 23–4, and additional pieces in *Le Figaro* without bylines in the same issue on pp. 18–19.

17 Clert, *iris.time*, pp. 286–8.

18 As Kristin Ross explains in her *Fast Cars and Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1995), p. 27, by the early sixties, many famous French citizens had perished in car wrecks, among them Albert Camus and his publisher Michel Gallimard in 1960, the two sons of André Malraux in 1961, and the novelist Roger Nimier in 1962.

Fig. 5. The front page of *iris.time*, October 1962. © SODRAC, Montreal and DACS, London, 2007.

turnstile and large display model, converted the gallery into the kind of industrial exposition typically given over to generating consumer appetite for commodities forthcoming. Dallegret's etchings – drawn in such a way as to evoke traditions of the blueprint – would also directly interrogate attributes of *design* and its prediction/promotion of future consumer acts, thus marking a departure from the paintings and junk/found-object sculpture typically exhibited by Clert. Indeed Dallegret's continued interest in the function of the blueprint would link him more explicitly to operations of market proposals and commercial draftsmanship with which people would have been familiar in visits to events such as the Salon de L'Auto. And with his exhibit of twelve etching plates (each a prototype

19 For a discussion of the Klein and Arman installations at Iris Clert, see Benjamin Buchloh, 'Plenty or Nothing: From Yves Klein's *Le Vide* to Arman's *Le Plein*' (1998), reprinted in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 2000), pp. 257–83.

20 Buchloh, 'Plenty or Nothing', p. 279.

for further reproduction) serially displayed along the wall, the entire show referenced the reproductive arrangements that industrial displays favour.

It should not be surprising, then, that when Dallegret finally allowed his designs to be illustrated in the American periodical *Automobile Quarterly* two years later, he ended the description of each car with recommendations for actual car purchases that each person would make according to their sign.[21] A Leo would drive a Bentley. A Taurus would get a Land Rover or a Jeep. The exhibit at Iris Clert, in other words, had been a showroom of design ideals that would govern future purchases or sanction present possessions.

Remarkably, the astrological conceit of Dallegret's show also tapped into merchandizing techniques that were increasingly familiar in postwar France. Such techniques were described explicitly in 1966 by sociologist Jacques Maître in his article for *Diogenes*, 'The Consumption of Astrology in Contemporary Society'.[22] Maître noted that, although astrology was an ancient epistemological system, it was entering a distinctly modern phase, and its growing popularity could be attributed to mid-century shifts in class. Manual labourers and service workers were now literate, Maître argued, and thus generated ever-greater demand for newspapers and magazines. However, this newly literate population had insufficient access to an education that would allow them to comprehend the quickening scientific and technological changes around them. Hoping to resolve the mysteries of daily experience in modernity, but lacking the knowledge necessary for the appropriate scientific explanations to be understood, the masses resorted to the misinformation of astrology columns.[23] Industry and commodity culture were thus the cause and effect of this development. Industrial capitalism had generated the newly literate (yet undereducated) masses now hungry for occult explanations, just as industrial reproduction could saturate mass readerships with more horoscopes than ever before. And, because astrology in its modern phase was conceived according to the logic of industrial production, it was not too surprising, at least to Maître, that a growing number of commodities were explicitly designed according astrological principles:

> A whole industry is now in the process of development for the production of personal items with signs of the zodiac or planets: bracelets, medallions, postcards, key chains, ashtrays, ties, pendants, matchbox covers, engagement books, handkerchiefs, fruit juice glasses, T-shirts – all these are widely circulated astrological items, though many stores hesitate to stock them because of the necessity of carrying twelve models of each item.[24]

Though his analysis might over-simplify the beliefs and desires of working class populations (indeed, its arguments seem reminiscent of Clement Greenberg's essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch') Maître's article nevertheless mapped important connections, and contradictions, between the zodiac and demands of consumer culture. Part of the allure of the zodiac, according to Maître's description, was its readymade serial system of twelve signs. The repetition of roughly equivalent categories that would only differ from each other according to slight qualitative shifts offered a plenitude of objects with which the buyer might be seduced.[25] Like a rack of similarly tailored shirts offered in different colours, or a display case of key chains, each identical except for the heraldry of its zodiac insignia, conjured a vision of plenty to which one might gain access by buying a single specimen.

21 François Dallegret and Scott Bailey, 'Astrological Automobiles of François Dallegret', *Automobile Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 1, Spring 1964, np.

22 Jacques Maître, 'The Consumption of Astrology in Contemporary Society', *Diogenes* no. 53, Spring 1966, pp. 82–98. Maître was a researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research and the Centre d'Études Sociologiques. His work in the sixties focused on the sociology of religions – a subject on which he continues to publish today.

23 This sort of explanation, of course, was predicated upon those provided by Theodor Adorno and Roland Barthes, whom I discuss later in this essay. In addition to these Marxian discussions, there were other, less politicized attempts to explain astrology's popularity. In 1963, the Paris University 'Que Sais-Je' series reprinted Paul Couderc's 1951 book *L'Astrologie* (Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, 1963) – an historical study that bemoaned the influence of astrology among the French in the postwar era. Couderc argued that the popular fascination with star-casting and other superstitious practices could be attributed to the general climate of fear that characterized Western Europe. Other scholars frequently linked the popularity of astrology to the mutinous tendencies of youth in the sixties, who used astrology as a strategy of rebellion against organized religion. For a thorough summary of this international trend, see Marcello Truzzi, 'The Occult Revival as Popular Culture: Some Random Observations on the Old and Nouveau Witch', *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 13, Winter 1972, pp. 16–36.

24 Maître, 'The Consumption of Astrology in Contemporary Society', pp. 88–9.

25 John Klein describes the relationship between consumerism's illusion of plenitude and serially arranged objects in his article 'The Dispersal of the Modernist Series', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1998, pp. 121–35.

More important, such zodiacal design relied upon one of the essential ideological underpinnings of consumer culture – the notion that a specific commodity is in some way one's fate. This was, no doubt, part of the rationale for the Ford Motor Company's marketing of its luxury Zodiac car in France during the fifties and sixties (Fig. 6). The name Zodiac exploited the growing French interest in star charts (market forecasters could anticipate the continuing popularity of horoscopes in France – no astrologers were necessary for that). But the name also tapped into the more general commodity logic that astrology complemented: somehow the automobile was the consumer's destiny. The car's charm was magical. Celestial forces mandated its purchase.

Fig. 6. French publicity pamphlet for the Ford Zodiac, 1960. Reproduced with permission from the Ford Motor Company, 2007.

Maître described a more fine-tuned version of this magical thinking in the capacity of individual zodiac signs to suggest that a commodity is precisely 'destined for *me*'. While any given consumer might believe that a particular hat is perfect for her, that it was serendipitously produced to match her style, a 'Taurus' hat promises an even closer fit. Supposedly calibrated to the specific character traits of the purchaser, such a Taurus accessory, apart from the other eleven zodiac designs, has ostensibly been pre-ordained, tailored by the heavens, to rest upon a head like hers. Of course, just as one might fabricate evidence of the personal in any astrological prediction, one must engage in self-mystification in order to believe in the personalized attributes of any commodity object. In one of the chief contradictions of consumer culture – the nostalgic fantasy that industry cares about the needs of the individual consumer, vs the economic reality that the individual consumer is valuable to industry only to the extent to which he or she engages in mass behaviours from which profits might be made – a great number of people must be convinced that such a product is 'for them'. The zodiac seems well designed for this. It is a system just personalized enough to make the buying event feel intimate and individualized, yet not so personalized that anyone would be excluded from buying (everyone has a zodiac sign).

So it was with great joy that Iris Clert remarked upon the strong sales of prints pulled from the etching plates at Dallegret's show. 'Everyone wanted a print of their sign', Clert boasted, 'and with as many as nine prints pulled from each plate, well, you can imagine our great success'.[26] By redistributing the zodiac principle across a variety of objects in his production line, Dallegret exploited the occult allure of consumer objects that Maître would describe. Casting his automobile showroom in an aura of magic by proffering objects linked to supernatural powers of the stars, Dallegret amplified the mystique of commodity systems. Beckoning fantasies of the personalized custom-made object, but presenting such a fantasy in a showroom serial arrangement that was unmistakably connected to industrial production, Dallegret's automobiles provoked the illusion of the celestially personalized object, only to submerge it back within the operations of industrial homogeneity.

At the same time, however, the zodiac structure that Dallegret chose retained archaic characteristics that *prevented* perfect symmetry with modern consumer culture. The stability of the zodiac system, in which one's identity and subsequent purchase was locked in by fate, in fact made it problematic, as Maître said, because retailers 'hesitate to stock [such objects] because of the necessity of carrying 12 models of each item'. In this respect it might be fruitful to compare Dallegret's twelve blueprint plates to Seymour Rosen's photograph of Andy Warhol's soup cans as they

26 Clert, *iris.time*, p. 287.

Fig. 7. Andy Warhol, 32 Soup Cans, silkscreens on canvas, as photographed by Seymour Rosen, 1962. © Andy Warhol Foundation/ARS, NY/TM Licensed by Campbell's Soup Company Co. All rights reserved. Photograph © Seymour Rosen, courtesy SPACES and the estate of the artist.

were exhibited at the Ferus Gallery just three months before the astrological automobile show (Fig. 7). The size of Warhol's series depended upon the variety of flavours provided by the Campbell's soup company – thirty-two flavours dictated that Warhol produce thirty-two canvases.[27] Such an array of flavours is typical for any company that hopes to capture consumer interest by developing a sense of variety within a brand. Businesses benefit from a certain amount of mobility within such a flavour system. Any given consumer might sample any flavour of soup, and a choice of one flavour at one time would not doom one to identical choices in the future. A fan of Beef Barley might later choose Chicken Noodle, as the arbitrariness of the system assumes that there is nothing inherently 'Beef Barleyish' about consumers of that soup. Should someone tire of a single flavour, a business might still benefit by coaxing that consumer into trying a new flavour, thus allowing a change while maintaining brand loyalty. New flavours may be introduced to encourage new consumption, and a company may discontinue a flavour in order to curtail losses if demand for it wanes. This flexibility of the 'flavour system', an arbitrariness that absorbs and even encourages the mobility of consumer taste, is, however, distinctly lacking in the antiquated 'zodiac system'. A person born under the sign of Taurus must choose a Taurus product and will always do so. There is never a possibility of changing one's sign, as consumer taste is imagined as congenital. And the Taurus model, unlike a certain flavour of soup, can never be discontinued by the producer. The zodiac commits a business to the production of twelve categories, and if the variety of signs is ever too big for a given market – if they hit the point of diminishing returns – there is nothing to be done except scrap the whole product line.

In other words, the zodiac might support fantasies of personalization upon which consumer culture often relies, but the motivation that resides in the relationship between zodiacal sign and the purchase event disallows the arbitrariness that capitalism prefers. Such was the odd fit of Dallegret's show with the general processes of postwar consumption. While his zodiac series of mock commodities in some ways mimicked industrial production and display, Dallegret's automobiles, unlike Warhol's cans, suggested themes that could also abrade the smooth operation of consumerism at its most efficient moments. Part of the odd fit was the hint of motivation that lurked beneath the otherwise arbitrary arrangements of capitalism. Part of it, though, was also its general antiquated quality. Though astrology was the newest trend, it was also a conspicuous carryover from an older era. The exhibition thus framed a mode of magical thinking that one typically assumes has been discounted under modernity.

This manoeuvre of embedding of an antiquated quality within a larger, visibly modern context was typical of Dallegret in the period, though to understand how, one needs to back up a bit and gain a larger view of the artist's remarkable career. Though Dallegret's work has been neglected in recent art historical scholarship, during the sixties he was rather well known, his work appealing to a large community of architects and designers. He was a friend and occasional collaborator with members of Archigram and their chief apologist Reyner Banham, for example. Dallegret's whimsical illustrations for Banham's 1965 essay 'A Home is Not a House' (Fig. 8) are frequently reproduced in scholarship on British postwar architecture, and his designs sometimes appear in Archigram publications as well.[28] Dallegret also enjoyed an American following, thanks in part to consistent interest from the editors of *Art in America*,

27 Please see Benjamin Buchloh's important discussion of the series in 'Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art', *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, Kynaston McShine, ed. (Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1989), pp. 39–61.

28 Reyner Banham's 'A Home is Not a House', *Art in America*, vol. 53, April 1965, pp. 70–79. A device that Dallegret called the *Introconversomatic* also appears in Warren Chalk's 1966 photomontage *Ghosts and Phantoms* in the seventh issue of *Archigram*. The image is reproduced in Peter Cook (ed.), *Archigram* (Praeger: New York, 1973), p. 85.

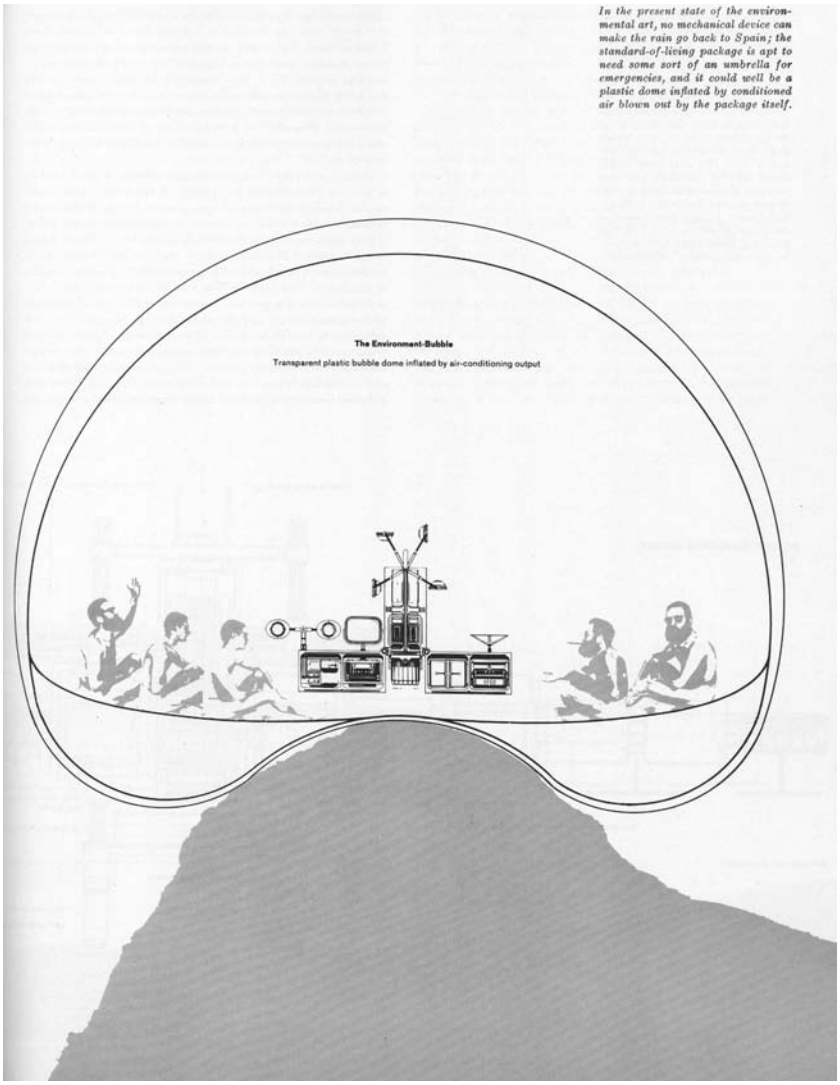

Fig. 8. François Dallegret and Reyner Banham appearing in Dallegret's illustration for Banham's article 'A Home is Not a House', 1965. © SODRAC, Montreal and DACS, London, 2007.

who frequently commissioned special projects from the artist in the sixties.[29]

Dallegret has since lapsed into relative obscurity, as far as Art History is concerned. Part of the cause is geographical, as Dallegret chose to spend his most productive years away from established art capitals. Born in Morocco, Dallegret studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris from 1957 to 1963, lived in New York for a few months, only to then follow his wife to Montreal where he continues to work today.[30] The media in which Dallegret typically worked also left him at a disadvantage. Because his blueprint-style etchings were just as likely to be reproduced in design or trade monthlies like *Automobile Quarterly* as they were to appear in periodicals like *Art in America*, his work has been difficult to categorize (or even find) by art historians. Then again, architect Peter Blake would simply attribute the artist's invisibility in later scholarship to Dallegret's unruly sense of humor and creativity.

29 See, for example, his 'Desertomania', *Art in America*, vol. 55, no. 2, July–August 1967, pp. 32–9. Dallegret also participated in *Art in America*'s frequent invitational segments in which artists submitted designs for practical items such as stamps or playing cards; see his contributions to 'Toys by Sixteen Artists', *Art in America*, vol. 53, no. 6, December–January 1965–1966, pp. 25–6; and 'Projects for Playgrounds', *Art in America*, vol. 55, no. 6, November–December 1967, p. 52.

30 Brief biographical information was published in Julien Alvard, 'School of Paris Dropouts', *ARTnews*, vol. 65, no. 7, November 1966, pp. 56–7 and 71–2. Though there was a retrospective of his work at the Musée de Québec, held between 21 January and 16 May 1999, and accompanied by a short explanatory

> [T]here are some people, like Bucky Fuller, for example, who make you look at the world around you in a totally unexpected and rather unhinging way—the world around you, from a toothpick to an atom bomb. François is another. François' world is a world of surprise and pleasure and delight that I did not know until we became friends. I think that François Dallegret is, probably, unemployable in that world. *Tant pis* for him more so for our world (it could, I think, benefit considerably from his unlimited imagination).[31]

That imagination would conjure an idiosyncratic body of work in the sixties. In 1965, for example, he designed and built a café/pharmacy/bookstore/boutique/disco in Montreal subtly named Le Drug, which featured an undulating white 'plastified cement' interior that cradled its occupants in what looked like a petrified lava lamp; it also contained a gallery space in which Dallegret showcased works by Pop artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein.[32] That year he also designed a children's toy, the Plook, made of a motorized army helmet that was chromed and flipped upside down on spindly legs so that, when it moved, the gizmo looked like a militarized if somewhat disoriented turtle.[33]

Before those enterprising creations, however, Dallegret released a series of etchings entitled Art Fictions between 1962 and 1964 in prominent art, design and architecture magazines. Typical of the Art Fictions was the perilous The Cliclacrocotartomatic of 1963 (Fig. 9). The artist's commentary about the object, first published in 1964 by Jacques Pauvert in his eclectic *Encyclopédie des farces et attrapes et des mystifications*, and later appearing in *Industrial Design*, was almost as treacherous as the object proper. The Cliclacrocotartomatic was, Dallegret said, a

> mobile bureau with three motorized parts. It delivers slaps, pies, dirty tricks and kicks in the ass. Finally, the automatic form of decomplexing we've all been waiting for.[34]

The name of the object coaxed the tongue into a series of percussive clicks, mimicking the audio effects that the machine itself might produce while in operation. Meanwhile, the elusive neologism 'decomplexing' simulated scientific pretension, even as it promised a 'kick in the ass' of all such seriousness. The adolescent cheekiness of the device – the primary function of which was to hurl pastry at the unwary – was typical of Dallegret's prototypes, in which mechanical mishaps and slapstick features often trumped any earnest design mission.

The Cliclacrocotartomatic made some arguments about temporal aspects of design that would also operate in the astrological automobiles exhibit. Like the automobile drawings, the etched Clic was a future-oriented prototype blueprint. It promised new technology, and its accompanying description in text assured the reader about its eventual function once constructed. At the same time, however, the Clic relied upon mechanical operations that were legibly retrograde in the sixties. The contraption was as archaic as an Erector Set. Rejecting the streamlined forms typical of mid-century design, the Clic referenced elaborate styles of the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Its grandiose scrolls and coffered panels gave it the look of an old-fashioned gentleman's writing desk more appropriate, perhaps, for illustrating stories by Jules Verne or H. G. Wells. The editors of *Industrial Design* grappled with the antiquated character of the Art Fictions like the Clic by claiming that they were 'machines of the mind whose forms are reminiscent of Art Nouveau, but whose spirit is of the new and contemporary modern times'.[35]

pamphlet with essays by Paul Bourassa and Serges Gagnon, there has been little secondary scholarship about Dallegret. The only other recently published source to be devoted to Dallegret is Axel Sowa's short essay '"L'Infra-Ordinaire' de François Dallegret", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*', no. 334, May–June 2001, pp. 106–11. That source briefly mentions two works from the sixties then concentrates mostly upon Dallegret's work from subsequent decades. The vast majority of projects produced during the period of Dallegret's greatest popularity, the sixties, remains neglected by art historians.

31 Peter Blake, 'François Dallegret: A Catalogue', *Arts Canada*, vol. 29, February–March 1972, pp. 66–9.

32 Though the building has since been destroyed, there was a good amount of publicity about Le Drug when it was first opened. For the best discussions of the building, see: 'Le Drug, Montreal', *Aujourd'hui*, vol. 9, 1966, p. 79; 'Un Bar a Montreal di François Dallegret', *Domus*, no. 438, May 1966, pp. 41–2; 'Sexpot: a Drugstore–Boutique–Restaurant–Gallery–Discotheque in Montreal', *Architectural Review*, vol. 138, July 1965, p. 4. Michael White briefly discussed the role that Dallegret's gallery, Le Labo, played in promoting Pop and serial works in Montreal in 'Pop in Québec', *La Vie des Arts*, no. 67, Summer 1972, pp. 88–9.

33 The Plook is reproduced in 'Toys by Sixteen Artists', pp. 25–6.

34 François Dallegret as quoted in Jacques Pauvert (ed.), *Encyclopédie des farces et attrapes et des mystifications* (François Caradec et Noël Arnaud: Paris, 1964), p. 472. When the description was published in *Industrial Design* it was cleaned up a bit and appeared in English as a 'mobile bureau with three motorized parts using hands and feet of the operator, electronic eyes, telescopic arm and leg, and two guns which help the operator slap, trap, and throw pies by "automatic decomplex"'. See 'Fantastic Machines by François Dallegret', *Industrial Design*, p. 50. The editors of *Industrial Design* also spelled the Cliclacrocotartomatic as 'Cliclacrocomatic'.

35 'Fantastic Machines by François Dallegret', p. 48.

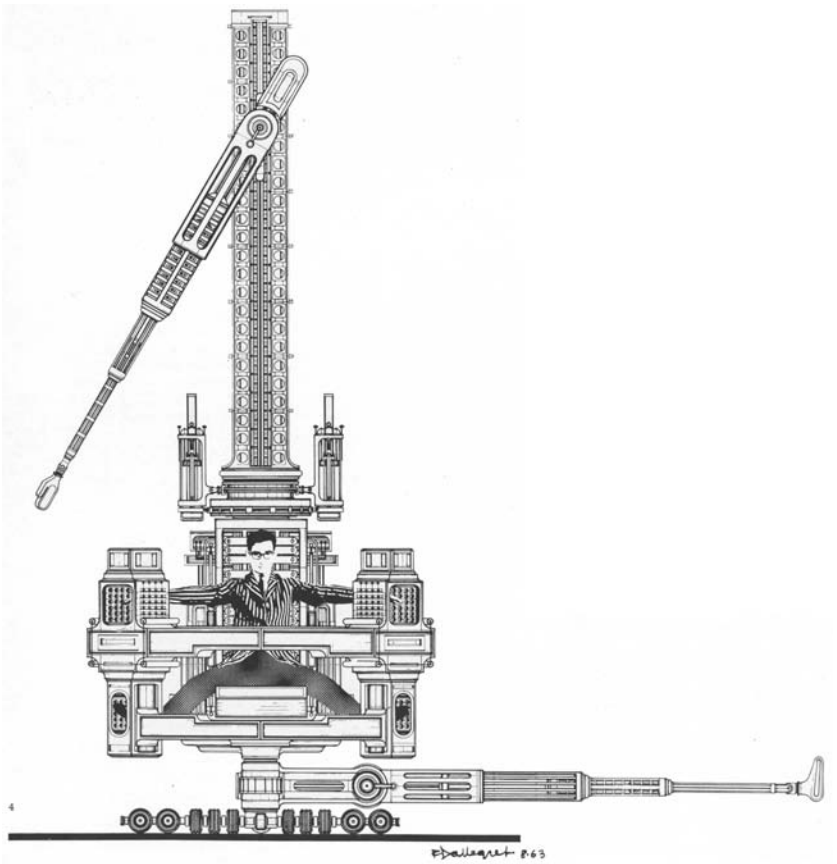

Fig. 9. François Dallegret, Cliclacrocotartomatic, pen and ink drawing, 1963. © SODRAC, Montreal and DACS, London, 2007.

Even when given the task of picturing the future, Dallegret also resorted to archaisms. When *Art in America* dedicated a special issue in 1966 to the topic of 'Art and the Future', Dallegret was chosen to produce the cover image and a short picture essay about embodiments of the artist in centuries to come.[36] In the future, according to Dallegret, the artist would steer beams of aesthetic energy directly to his patron. To facilitate this relationship, the artist's body would acquire cybernetic prostheses allowing him to control such energy: the head would expand into an 'encephalic cap' and be supplemented with a 'head cage' of gears and pulleys that seems to leave the artist openmouthed in shock and/or pain (Fig. 10). The appropriately supplemented artist could transmit artistic energy to a collector with 'refractive electro-esthetic emanation beams' (Fig. 11), though in this instance the 'beams' look more like support girders rather than lasers of energy. While the artist is pictured in elevation, the patron appears in plan connecting his or her own encephalic cap to the solar plexus of the artist.

Though couched in science fiction language, Dallegret's artist of the future showed symptoms of regression. His swirling 'malfunction tail' descends along his spine as an emblem of immanent technological failure somehow connected to de-evolution. Even the general quality of the images suggests that these are specimens of a past moment – the grainy illustrations give

36 'François Dallegret's Art Fiction', *Art in America*, vol. 54, no. 2, March–April 1966, pp. 44–8.

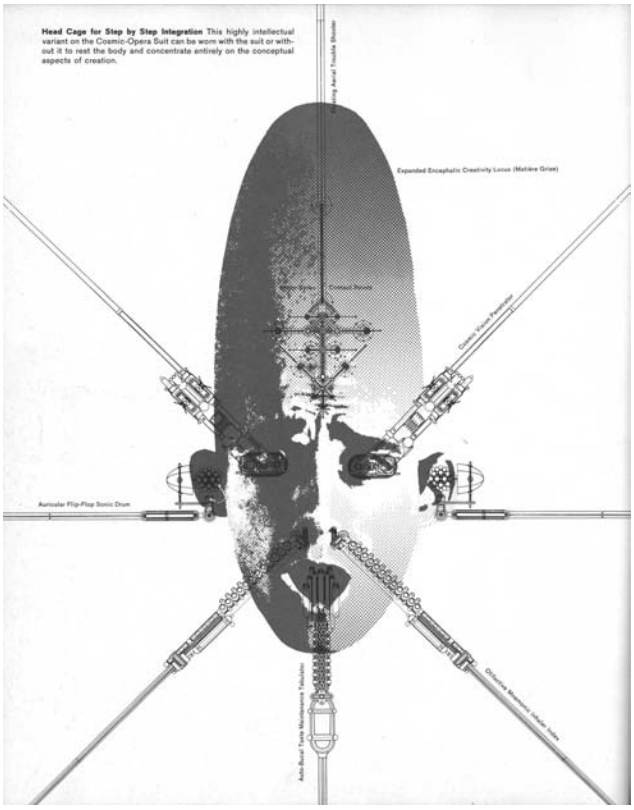

Fig. 10. François Dallegret, Head Cage, pen and ink drawing and photomontage, 1966. © SODRAC, Montreal and DACS, London, 2007.

the impression that one might be looking at decaying celluloid or photographs. There were plenty of art historical regressions in Dallegret's 'art of the future' too. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, Hugo Ball's Dada outfit, and Oskar Schlemmer's Bauhaus costumes all haunt this project. In this respect the series offered to *Art in America* readers a picture of the future as it had already been envisioned by prior generations of the avant-garde. Of course, the political and critical force of those prior artistic moments has dwindled in Dallegret's presentation. Rather than, say, challenging notions of private ownership or bourgeois individuality in a mode similar to that of Dada or even the Bauhaus, Dallegret's Art Fictions imparted a sci-fi mystique to the relationship between the artist and a single wealthy collector. Meanwhile, the physical discomfort visibly suffered by the artist of the future and his patron also suggested that the utopian aspirations of previous avant-gardes remained unfulfilled.

Given the conflict between the futurity of design and dubious historicity characterizing so much of Dallegret's work, one might say that the astrological automobile that best exemplified Dallegret's preoccupation with such temporal conflicts would be the one designed for Cancer (Fig. 12). According to the description of the car, one born under the sign of the crab is,

> a complicated spirit, in love with the past yet oriented toward the future, and is constantly oscillating between the two. An ideal Cancer car would have the forepart streamlined and plated with silver; the old-fashioned body would be of rare woods encrusted with thick mother

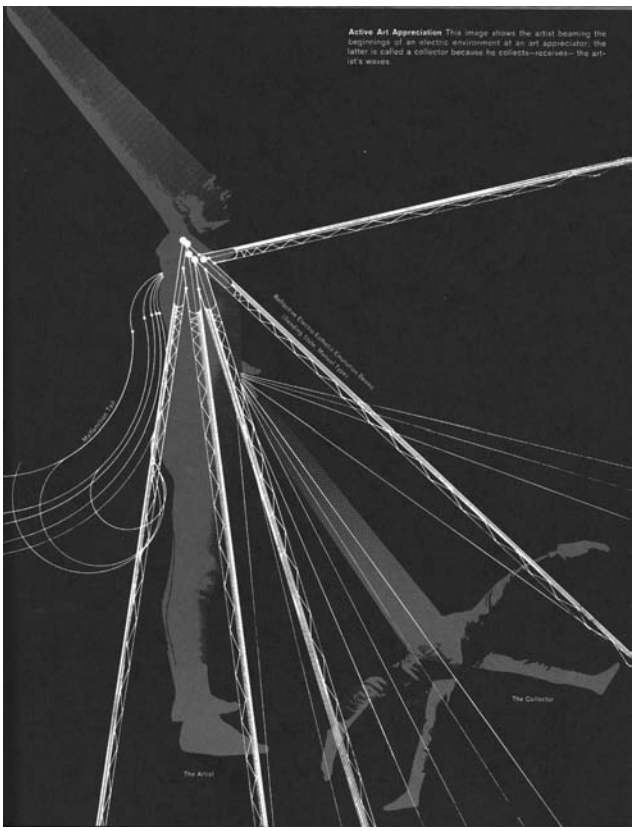

Fig. 11. François Dallegret, Active Art Appreciation, pen and ink drawing and photomontage, 1966. © SODRAC, Montreal and DACS, London, 2007.

of pearl and moss agate. The Cancerian is most likely found today at the wheel of a Bugatti.[37]

Like the Cancer automobile, Dallegret's oeuvre at this time was of two moods: one futuristic that focused upon the project of design as an (often ironic) exercise in novelty, and modernization; the other mood was nostalgic, incorporating antiquated materials and archaic design idioms, as well as recycling the emptied forms of an avant-garde past. Dallegret's exhibit at the Clert gallery was an important part of this continuing project, as it would allow him to explore the temporal paradoxes of commodity culture, even as it was a means by which he could market his work to a larger public.

Dallegret's investment in the tensions between the old and the new as applied to automobile design would have been particularly resonant in during the early sixties, as the previous decade had occasioned accelerating technological change in France.[38] Following the lean years during and immediately after the war, economic conditions had begun to improve, allowing consumers increased purchase power. For the first time, large segments of the population in France could acquire, at an unprecedented rate, a variety of new mechanical labour-saving devices for the home, such as refrigerators, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and, of course, automobiles. Such modernization was, however, accompanied by a panoply of fears about the effects of such novelties upon traditional aspects of

37 Dallegret and Bailey, 'Astrological Automobiles of François Dallegret', *Automobile Quarterly*, np.

38 For an indispensable analysis of the cultural effects of this economic change in France, see Ross, *Fast Cars and Clean Bodies*.

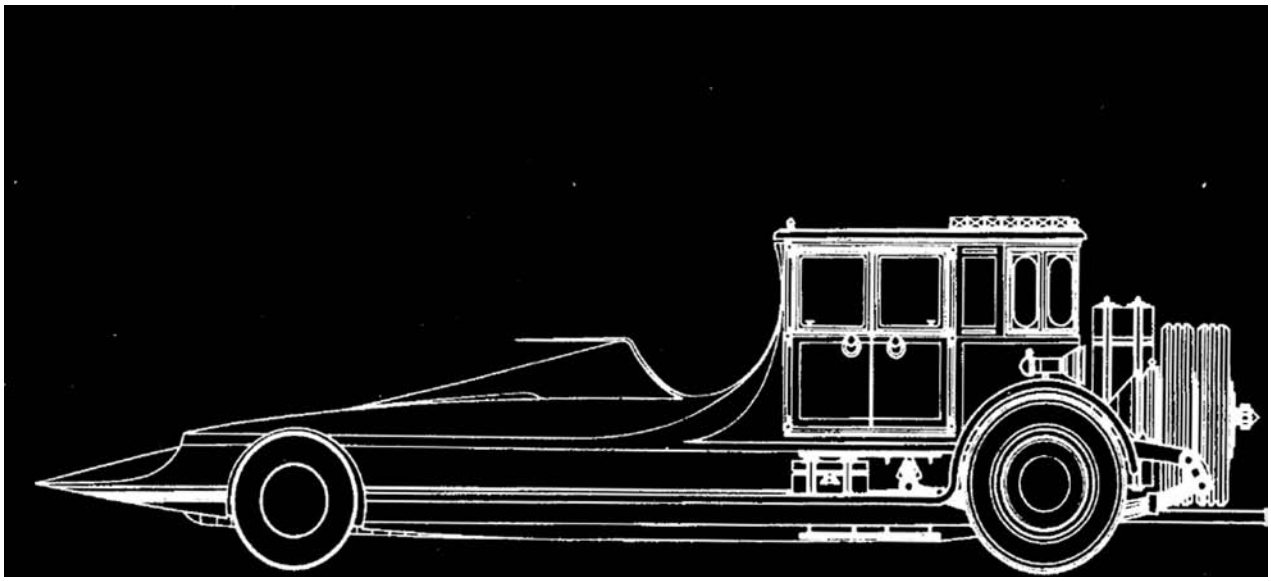

Fig. 12. François Dallegret, Cancer Automobile, etching, 1962. © SODRAC, Montreal and DACS, London, 2007.

French culture – the rural might be lost to the urban, the idiosyncrasies of local cultures might give way to generalized technocracy, upper class European elegance might yield to American middlebrow sameness. Thus, new technologies and consumer products were often insinuated into French markets with discourses promising that the particularities of tradition would not wither in the climate of innovation. As historian Kristin Ross has explained, these discourses were

> built around freezing time in the form of reconciling past and future, the old ways and the new. This is particularly important in a culture like that of France where modernization, unlike in the United States, is experienced for the most part as highly destructive, obliterating a well-developed artisanal culture, a highly developed travel culture, and – at least in the 1950s – a grass roots national culture clearly observable to French and non-French alike. With such and such a product, the ad reads, traditions, the French way of life, are both conserved and gone beyond; past and future are one, you can change without changing. [39]

The automobile occupied a special position in the paradoxical rhetoric of change and tradition characterizing this period in France.[40] The car was a particularly freighted symbol of this conflicted rhetoric, both because of its price and its favoured position in the popular imagination. As a relatively expensive object, it remained just beyond the financial grasp of many French people; and yet, by the early sixties, the automobile had become commonplace in the cinema and popular literature as a symbol of impending prosperity. Thus the automobile had become a staple of the cultural imagination, even if it had yet to achieve such quotidian status on the roads proper. In this sense the car was, in Roland Barthes's words, both a 'banality and fantasy'. The automobile, Barthes wrote in one of his 'mythologies' of 1963,

> poses financial challenges to the great majority of French people, both in terms of purchase and upkeep. Six out of seven Frenchmen do not own a car. Nevertheless, that does not prevent the car from being a totally domesticated object, passed entirely from fairytale to

39 Ross, *Fast Cars and Clean Bodies*, pp. 21–2.

40 See Ross's chapter, 'La Belle Américaine', *Fast Cars and Clean Bodies*, pp. 15–70.

> reality, even if one does not own one. . . . neither an incredible luxury nor a mortal necessity, it occupies an intermediary status. *It is what one is going to buy.*[41]

The automobile thus marked the timeline of consumption in two respects. It first marked an ambivalent boundary between historical categories, between the Modern and the Old, as anxieties about the destructive effects of modernization in France required that novelty be introduced in such a way that it would seem not to conflict with or erase tradition. At the same time, the automobile signified, in a general sense, that category of objects that French consumers were about to afford. Signalling the forecasted purchase event, as an example of 'what one is going to buy', the car stood for the futurity of consumption on the level of the individual consumer.

Dallegret's show would offer similarly layered temporal organizations in his automobiles. Like the streamlined space-age hood and the antique passenger cabin of the 'Cancer' model, his exhibit of newfangled roadsters referenced different extremes of design history: the old and the new, literally welded together. Further, because the images exhibited were blueprint plates, rather than drawings, the exhibition proffered a vision of the automobile as a commodity deferred, as an item that (to paraphrase Barthes) was not an object *owned* so much as an object *planned*. Indeed, Dallegret's fantastic designs flaunted their unproducablity and potentiality. Remaining an ostentatious if immobile fleet yet to be printed, much less produced, the vehicles were clearly better engineered for the draughtsman's line than for assembly line production, incorporating filigrees more calligraphic than mechanical. So it was that these automobiles were perpetually arrested at the state of being about-to-be-produced.

Dallegret's delight in the futurity of consumer culture would meet a similarly strong affection for the antique in design. Such desire to recuperate the old (even if such revivalism was at times comical) would have, of course, abraded against another dominant postwar capitalist discourse – namely that of obsolescence.[42] While the allure of the antique might endow old things with nostalgic value, the quickening rhetoric of the obsolete did not allow for quite the same affection. In discourses of innovation and obsolescence, futurity appears as the promise of better living through acts of consumption yet to come; the past, however, appears not as tradition, but as an accumulation of so much junk the broken promises of which must be erased through the amnesia of continued consumption. Indeed, as Nigel Whitley has shown, in the Cold War era the 'functional' mode of obsolescence, in which an object is discarded because it has ceased to serve its instrumental purpose, gave way to the 'stylistic' mode of obsolescence, in which the fashionability of an object, regardless of its functionality, demands constant upgrading. [43] In the process, by convincing consumers to discard old and buy new objects in the interest of stylistic innovation, marketers could quicken the periodicity of demand.

Perhaps because he was in France, where the rapidity of innovation was often considered traumatic, Dallegret tended to look for districts of capitalism in which industry was capable of co-opting (rather than negating) affections for the old. He did not have to look far, as it was in the sixties that car designers first began to develop what was then and continues to be described as the 'modern vintage' car. Design periodicals in the United States and in Europe began reporting in the sixties that

41 Roland Barthes, 'Mythologie de l'Automobile', in *Roland Barthes: Oeuvre Complète*, Éric Marty, ed. (Éditions du Seuil : Paris, 1993), pp. 1136–7, my emphasis. This essay was originally published in *Réalités*, October 1963, under the title 'La Voiture, projection de l'Ego'.

42 For varied discussions of obsolescence as a theme in contemporary art, see the special issue of *October* dedicated to the subject, vol. 100, Spring 2002.

43 Nigel Whiteley, 'Toward a Throwaway Culture: Consumerism, "Style Obsolescence" and Cultural Theory', *The Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1987, pp. 3–27.

Fig. 13. Publicity Pamphlet for the Excalibur, SS Automobiles Inc., 1965. Printed with permission from the Excalibur Automobile Corporation.

smaller car companies such as Cord, Duesenberg and SS Automobiles Inc. were developing car models that recalled styles of the twenties and thirties.[44] In 1965, for example, Brooks Stevens famously developed the Excalibur for sports car enthusiasts who would like, but could not afford, a restoration of the Mercedes SSK (Fig. 13). The new design would sell for about six thousand dollars, and offered a safe if spirited ride on any highway without the fear of expensive restored parts failures. The name Excalibur likewise suggested that the magnitude of a king could be available even to those who had not inherited money, and could be plucked by Everyman from the showroom floor as a sword from a stone. Reviews of the car further explained the appeal of such an automobile:

> What you've got to understand is that this is a car that captures the functional honesty of the past. The days when men, morals, and radiators stood four-square and upright. When old-world craftsmen toiled lovingly over every tiny niche and facet of automotive embellishment. Honesty! None of this knuckling under to the perverted minions of the styling and sales departments.[45]

It was with such new designs as the Excalibur that the industrial repetitions of commodity culture attempted to rein in nostalgia and harness it to cycles of obsolescence and consumption, converting the allure of the antique from a mode of potential resistance to a mode of future purchase. Rather than resisting commodity culture by choosing to abstain from new purchases entirely, and rather than actually purchasing a used automobile from which no corporation could any longer profit, consumers could be coaxed into purchasing a facsimile edition of the old. In the meantime, businesses could embed (though their advertisements would disavow such conspiracies of marketing) fantasies of anti-modern, one-of-a-kind production within the industrially reproduced car. Such cars would still obsolesce; new versions of the Excalibur would replace old models. But these new models would paradoxically suggest updated versions of the old. And like most facsimiles of the antique, the modern vintage car could also market fantasies of a class position – the well moneyed aristocrat – that was distinctly at odds with the actual consumer base it targeted. Indeed, the middle-class buyer could only afford such a fantasy of the one-of-a-kind at a price made possible through industrial production.[46]

It was not clear to critics if Dallegret's cars perpetuated or criticized such recycled aristocracy, however. To some, the exhibit seemed classist. In *ARTnews* Pierre Schneider dismissed the show of Bugatti-like roadsters as 'mild humor for snob magazines'.[47] But what one critic would read as snobbery, another would read as a mild act of resistance: Gérald Gassiot-Talabot writing for *Aujourd'hui* crooned that the exhibit was 'like revenge exacted by noble machines against the stupidity of contemporary materiality and the anonymity of the mechanical: it becomes what man desires and caresses in his dreams'.[48] Both critics were right, to a certain extent. What 'man desired', *was* 'the noble' as a cipher of otherness in resistance to commodification. The noble was not only the fantasy of distinction, but also the phantom of an elite class position that was conspicuously dwindling in an increasingly bourgeois culture. But the dream of which Gassiot-Talabot spoke was the dream of aristocracy that only a bourgeois consumer could have – a feudal class position evacuated of its past exploitative history and reduced through nostalgia into a mode of fashion that one might purchase at a more affordable rate.[49] To

44 For a discussion of this development in England, see Mary MacNeil, 'Nostalgia on Wheels', *Industrial Design*, vol. 12, no. 1, January 1965, pp. 40–43.

45 'Excalibur SS: In Your Heart You Know It's Right', *Car and Driver*, February 1966, np. For additional discussions of the Excalibur from the period, see John Fitch, 'Spotlight on the New Excalibur SS', *Popular Mechanics*, vol. 123, no. 2, February 1965, pp. 32–4.

46 At times, the roadster could also emerge as an emblem of resistance to or anxiety about rates of novelty and style obsolescence. One year after Dallegret's showm British author Ian Fleming published his *Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang* (New York: Random House, 1964) – a children's book featuring a miraculous antique car that simultaneously exemplified good design of the past and futuristic properties surpassing all known technologies. The product of an individual, self-employed tinkerer, the renovated antique Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang (unlike the movie, the book is set in the 1960s) turned away from mass marketed commodities, and taught the young reader that the old could surpass the new, and that acts of purchasing were less important than imaginative acts of making and improving.

47 Pierre Schneider, 'Art News from Paris', *ARTnews*, vol. 61, no. 8, December 1962, p. 52.

48 Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, 'François Dallegret', p. 36.

49 Remarkably, it was Roger Fry who offered one of the first commentaries upon this operation of nostalgia in commodity culture. In his 1919 essay 'The Ottoman and the Whatnot', Fry suggested that, in order for Victorian design to come back into fashion, the social and political realities of that era had to be forgotten. Beginning with a pithy meditation on the cliché 'distance lends enchantment to the view', Fry attempted to map the exact distance necessary in order for the enchantment to kick in: 'with our passion for science and exact measurement, we

reference this dream of noblesse embedded within middle-class purchase activity, Dallegret's exhibit relied upon the example of the 'modern vintage' automobile, but also upon the use of the zodiac.

Dallegret's 'Automobiles for the Elite' emphasized power, wealth and glamour. Deluxe materials were used in all of the cars, and descriptions of the automobiles usually referred to elevated social rank: according to Dallegret's descriptions, Libra was the sign of the statesman or manager; Scorpio was the sign of the governor or inspector; Capricorn was the sign of the priest or ambassador; Leo was the sign of the king or president. The suggestion was that an allotment of luxury should be one's birthright, and that social station, like taste in cars, is pre-ordained at birth. In this sense, the exhibit was a sort of cardboard cutout of nobility – that form of social organization in which identity was also congenital. In Dallegret's exhibit, high class rank could be sold as a 'modern vintage', as the show established a dissonance between the bourgeois mode of identity as something that is purchased (an activity Dallegret suggested in his descriptions and in the serial arrangement of the cars in his 'Salon d'auto') and the older aristocratic mode of identity as a thing into which one is born.

If astrology, as that set of beliefs in which one's identity, prosperity and future success were established by birth, easily conjured aristocratic modes of identity, 'aristocracy' was still an antiquated class category undergoing renovation in this period. In fact, the aristocratic mystique of the zodiac as something connected to wealth and power was entering a more Warholian mode, as the popular media often enforced an association between astrology and celebrity. Astrology magazines, for example, frequently included the star charts of famous figures so that fans might read about the effects of planetary movement upon, say, Brigitte Bardot's love life. In 1960 *Paris-Match* made this connection most visibly when it ran a series of articles on the zodiac illustrated with photographs of media stars personifying different signs (Figs 14 and 15). A pantheon of celebrities, from Françoise Sagan to Sophia Loren, was costumed and equipped with attributes respective of each sign. New Wave cinema starlet Jeanne Moreau, an Aquarius, reigned over the cover as a classical goddess, asserting familiar links between the zodiac and deities of mythology (the stuffed raven apparently was a mascot of the water-bearer). A few pages later a crowned lion (the taxidermist was busy that week) representing the sign of Leo stretched out at the feet of the Coco Chanel, whose regal qualities were further ornamented by coins and a baroque sunburst.[50]

This unification of star power and the power of the stars spoke to a significant transformation taking place within older forms of class privilege. On the one hand, Jeanne Moreau and Coco Chanel assumed roles previously occupied by heavenly rulers of myth, and as such their representation in astrological glory suggested that privilege was, still, congenital. Just as an aristocrat's status was innate, so these new media nobles enjoyed power that, when connected to astrology, seemed to be a consequence of being born under the right star. We should be careful here, though, to notice the ways in which such a formulation also allowed the reader to join the astrological court. These were media stars, after all, and as such their fame was contingent upon public adoration – no matter what the planets said. Fame, as well as fortune, could be fleeting, dependent as these figures were upon their attractiveness to the public. And part of the thrill of reading spreads like the one appearing in *Paris-Match* grew from the intimacy one might feel in knowing that one's

Fig. 14. Jeanne Moreau as Aquarius on the cover of *Paris-Match*, 13 August 1960. Photograph by Willy Rizzo. © Willy Rizzo/*Paris-Match*.

Fig. 15. Coco Chanel as Leo for *Paris-Match*, 13 August 1960. Photograph by Willy Rizzo. © Willy Rizzo/*Paris-Match*.

shall wish to discover the exact distance at which enchantment begins. And this is easier than might be supposed; for anyone who has lived long enough will have noticed that a certain distance lends a violent disgust to the view – that as we recede there comes a period of oblivion and total unconsciousness, to be succeeded when consciousness returns by the ecstasy ... And in order that this process of selection and elimination may take place, precise and detailed knowledge must have faded from the collective memory, and the blurred but exquisite outlines of a generalization must have been established'. Roger Fry, 'The Ottoman and the Whatnot', (1919) reprinted in

own character traits as a Libra were shared by Catherine Deneuve. 'You will recognize yourself in these portraits of the Zodiac', *France-Soir* promised its readership in 1963, when it provided brief descriptions of movie stars who illustrated the attributes of each respective sign. The newspaper proceeded to make conspicuously intimate observations about each of the celebrities:

> There is something of the mother hen in the [Virgo]: she is the economical housekeeper who organizes the drawers, loves her house, is preoccupied with chores, cooks nice little meals ... About Virgo Ingrid Bergman, ex-husband Rossellini complained that she lacked imagination and was unable to handle bohemian life or spontaneity.[51]

While there was something of the royal in astrology, something of the well-born aristocrat, there was also something much more vulgar and mundane at work. Readers could at once fantasize about occupying a position of elegant affluence enjoyed by Sophia Loren, but they could also envision Ingrid Bergman doing her laundry. The pantheon of celebrities was both well born and subject to a system of preordained character traits that governed all people – and to which all people now had access through industrially reproduced popular media. The stars had been brought down to earth.

Which brings us to the first two epigraphs with which this study began. It should now be obvious why two thinkers, Roland Barthes and Theodor Adorno, would, in the fifties, see astrology as speaking to the predicament of class-consciousness in the postwar era. Barthes connected horoscopes directly to the ideological underpinnings of the petit-bourgeoisie. Looking at astrology columns in *Elle*, Barthes concluded that such columns legitimized the status quo for low-level white-collar workers by accommodating and endorsing their rhythms of labour. Because horoscope recommendations regarding conduct were always embedded within temporal compartments already established by the office environment ('Go out with friends after work today!' or 'put on lipstick in case you see Mr. Right at lunch'), horoscopes naturalized the peculiar scheduling of life under capitalism. And, of course, the stars never recommended anything that might throw a wrench (or a *sabot*) into the machinery of capitalism. No one's horoscope ever suggested that workers quit their jobs, and they certainly never recommended that they rise up and take control of the mechanisms of production. Rather, the mystique of the heavens made even the most tedious conditions seem like a universal rule.

Though Adorno's analysis was similar to that of Barthes, he was more dialectical in his approach. Writing about horoscope columns published in the *Los Angeles Times* in the early fifties, Adorno maintained that astrology columns were ideologically complex and appealed to the inherent 'pseudo-rationality' characteristic of capitalism. In other words, astrology columns did not attract ignorant readers unable to comprehend modernity (as Maître argued), nor did they simply mystify and confirm rhythms of labour under capital (as Barthes argued). Rather, astrology appealed to those readers who 'knew better' but nevertheless found incentive to subscribe temporarily to its myth systems so that contradictions inherent within modernity might be briefly assuaged.

Adorno argued that astrology columns were written for petit-bourgeois readers for whom economic success was always characterized as immanent, though continually postponed. As such, the narrative voice of most horoscopes crafted the ideal reader as someone operating under the fantasy

Vision and Design (Oxford University Press: London, 1981), pp. 28 and 30.

50 See Jack Chargelègue and Yves Marguerite, '12 Personnages célèbres font parler les astres', *Paris-Match*, no. 591, 6 August 1960, pp. 37–45; and *Paris-Match*, no. 592, 13 August 1960, pp. 41–50. Jean Maquet, 'Qu'y a-t-il de vrai dans l'astrologie', *Paris-Match*, no. 591, 6 August 1960, pp. 46–9; and *Paris-Match*, no. 592, 13 August 1960, pp. 40, 51–3.

51 Valeri, 'Toute l'astrologie derrière votre horoscope', *France-Soir*, 28 January 1963, p. 8.

of being 'vice-president'. Such columns assumed a fictional reader who supposedly held a superior place in life that forced them to make decisions all the time. 'One may think of the well-known technique of magazines such as *Fortune*', Adorno suggested,

> which are written to give the impression that each of their presumably very numerous readers were a big shot in some major corporation. The vicarious gratification thus provided, the strong appeal exercised by the transference of the American ideal of the successful businessman upon the none-too-successful is obvious. Yet – and this is why the column addresses vice-presidents rather than presidents – the reality of the situation is never lost sight of. Whereas the illusion of importance and autonomy is superficially kept intact, the fact is not forgotten that these much desired assets are really not being fully enjoyed by the addressee. He is therefore presented as someone who although fairly high himself in the business hierarchy has essentially to depend upon those who are even higher. [52]

52 Theodor Adorno, 'The Stars Down to Earth', pp. 38–9.

The addressee of astrology columns is thus both flattered and frustrated. The reader receives sufficient praise and thus incentive to continue consulting and buying the column. But the gratification the column promises must always be held in a state of futurity. It must forever be delayed in order for the consumption of the column to continue, and (more important) in order for the apparent dissonance between the fantasy and the reality to be tolerated. Relying upon *magic* to muster an inflated self-image more tolerable than the social position actually occupied by the reader (the only position possible under the current economic system), that reader engages in continuous deferral. It is the inherent futurity of horoscope predictions that allows the 'belief' in magic to continue. Adorno's study therefore suggested the myriad ways in which people under exploitative economic systems might resort to occult thinking – a category under which Adorno included Fascism. Temporarily suspending disbelief in what is clearly an illogical system, devotees of horoscopes (and followers of despots), watch themselves self-deceive through this ideology of futurity in order to survive.

I doubt that Dallegret shared Adorno's disdain for the pernicious workings of capitalism as they might have lurked within newspaper astrology columns. There was something too exuberant in the automobiles' designs for them to register as an indictment of the culture industry. Dallegret and Clert were too gleeful in staging the spectacle of their exhibition. And the artist's pompous pose against the at once formidable and flimsy Leo cutout was too absurd to be recognized as a solemn critique. That said, Adorno's interpretation of astrology serves as a useful corollary to the show, in that it makes some of its procedures regarding class a bit more legible. Dallegret's 'elite' cars assured everyone that they were privileged. All viewers possessed an inborn right to luxury. All were ambassadors and kings. But, as in astrology columns themselves, the sales pitch was as flat as the cars mounted in Dallegret's show. Indefinitely deferred, always in the design stage, the automobiles advertised an identity that brushed along the side of aristocracy, without ever quite providing the gratification such a rank might supply. The show claimed to offer access to the elite, and as such it suggested a sort of escape from mundane consumer culture. But the very mode of access was, like horoscope columns, thoroughly saturated by the ideological underpinnings of petit-bourgeois consumer culture. Formally and structurally relying upon the display techniques of common commodities, the show was a giant display model for the occult fantasies upon which astrology and consumption in general rely.

In the process, just as the formal attributes of Dallegret's etchings explored the temporal contradictions operating in contemporary design and consumption, so his use of the zodiac likewise tested the temporal dissonances of class formulation that design could provoke. The zodiac as a predictive system always leans toward futurity, and Dallegret's show certainly did as well. In their science fiction fantasies of new technology, the automobiles joined the futurity towards which the zodiac is always trained, and the futurity (the decision regarding what one is *going* to buy) upon which consumer culture depends. Nevertheless, the zodiac was also an antiquated epistemology. And the automobile designs, in their lingering looks toward antique design idioms and even fantasies of expiring class identities, attempted to test the shelf life of nostalgia in postwar France. To this extent, Dallegret's automobiles investigated the ways in which consumer culture sells the future rather than tells it, and does not remember the past – so much as repackages it.

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