



Marcel Duchamp's Anémic-Cinéma

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Translating the nine linguistic configurations of Marcel Duchamp's film *ANÉMIC-CINÉMA* is impossible. Not only do these phrases make constant use of alliteration and the pun, both of which devices refer implicitly to the French language, but also Duchamp's particular language may be understood only as it appears in this film. In attempting to make the linguistic aspect of Duchamp's work accessible to those who do not speak French, I have therefore abandoned the normal method of translation, which is to superimpose a corresponding number of

English words on the original film as sub-titles. Rather, what follows is a description of the nine phrases as they function with relation to the film, to Duchamp's oeuvre, and to the French language as a whole.

Duchamp made the film with Man Ray's help in France from 1924-26. He had earlier lived in New York from 1915-21, where he had become notorious for his work with the 'assisted ready-mades'. Simply stated, a ready-made is an object which has been taken out of a context which is in any way conventional and placed into a new and strange one, whereby the function of the object chosen

changes radically. Through the strange juxtaposition of elements, the overwhelming power of their traditional context is contradicted, and through this mitigation, the artist gains freedom to make an original comment and a unique statement.

The ready-mades took relatively little time and effort to assemble, but at the same time they were each the manifestation of a long intellectual process. Likewise, although *ANÉMIC-CINÉMA* is obviously not the product of daily travail in a studio, that it took two years to create is justified in this seven-minute film. Despite Duchamp's reputed

- ☐ Consult original work
 - ✱ Filmed with Duchamp working in America
 - Articles and writings
 - Interviews and articles where Duchamp is quoted
 - ▲ Publications, such as magazines and books, in which Duchamp participated
 - △ Publications of limited editions
 - ✱ Participation in films
 - ☆ Participation in radio programmes
- Chart by A.R.S. / Patrick Padget

flippancy and mockery of art work, this film is a serious and coherent development of the same set of concerns found in his other major works. From *ANÉMIC-CINÉMA*, it is possible to make the connection to the sense of a urinal submitted in 1917 as an *objet d'art*, or to enjoy a very phallic object made in 1951 entitled *objet dard-dard* being common French slang for penis.

Duchamp gave a ready-made thorough consideration and then its actual creation was to him a 'sort of rendezvous: . . . by planning for a moment to come (on such a day, such a date, such a moment), to *inscribe* a ready-made.' In 1916 he wrote a series of four postcards in which he followed established syntax but substituted words which would result in the sentences having no meaning. This he said was a considerable task, since every time a word suggested a meaning, he had to choose another in its place. Significantly, he called these post-cards *Rendezvous du dimanche* or *Sunday Rendezvous*.

Duchamp was fascinated by language and had several plans for the creation of an entirely new one. He wrote that one of these was based on consonance: 'If what you want is a grammatical rule: the verb agrees with the subject in consonance: for instance, *le nègre aigrit, les négresses aigrissent ou maigrissent*, etc.' The film *ANÉMIC-CINÉMA* is one realization of such a plan.

Each word Duchamp chooses for the film has been used before, and they therefore function as *objets trouvés*. In *ANÉMIC-CINÉMA*, Duchamp follows regular syntax, but the apparent reason for his word choice has more to do with alliteration and consonance than with any clear referential meaning. To a French-speaking person, these phrases appear as nonsense, yet the viewer will try to deal with them as he/she is used to dealing with language. To the human animal, words are more than orthographic pictures or phonetic entities, and because of the inevitable linguistic convention of words as symbolic, language is inseparable from some referential meaning. The perceiver of *ANÉMIC-CINÉMA* will struggle to read and so will create a subjective inflection for the words. Since consonance is already emphasized in the phrases, it sets off a gestalt of free association, and Duchamp is enacting a new use of the pun. The words spite themselves as non-referential, and the artist's opaque language ingeniously exploits traditional definition.

A pun itself is already a subtle comment on the function of language, where the consonant arrangement of the words suggests an infinity of potential meaning and at the same time mocks any conclusive definition. By dealing with language as an overall, concrete phonetic entity, the pun questions the value of language as an abstract metaphor.

The film's nine linguistic configurations are written in spiral form on rotating discs and shown separately between each of ten 'optic discs' in revolution. In 1926, this spiralling image alternating between graphic and verbal is itself a pun on the alternating images and titles of silent film. The optic discs

are very like Duchamp's 'Rotoreliefs' of the '20s and '30s. Circles are drawn on them in non-concentric patterns which in rotation create the illusion of spiralling motion, squeezing in toward its centre and dilating out toward the edge of the discs, and of a perspective which simultaneously recedes into space and projects from the screen toward the viewer. Duchamp wrote that he would be disappointed if these discs were taken as 'anything but optics' and it seems as well that the words of *ANÉMIC-CINÉMA* should be taken face-value as simply words. But at the same time, one must reckon with the ironic humour of Duchamp. It is for instance characteristic that he would describe himself as 'a breather' when the French for breathe *respirer* implies also *aspirer* 'to aspire' and *en spirale* 'in a spiral'.

The title of the work is consistent with the ambivalent motion and perspective of the spiralling images. *ANÉMIC* is nearly *CINÉMA* spelled backwards; in the film's first picture, the two graphic words incline towards each other around a vertical axis, mirroring each other back and forth like the motion of the spiral.

Duchamp thought of simultaneous reflection as a representation of infinity and often used glass or mirrors in his work as relevant to this idea. He constructed a special screen for the first showing of the film, which was a piece of translucent glass, like that used for a bathroom window, with a reflective mirror-silver backing. The projected light would penetrate some into the screen before being reflected toward the viewer, and the light then actually does what the film's image suggests: it travels in-out with an infinite dimension.

Toby Mussman has written that the optics are based on: ' . . . the concept that two different people watching the film at the same time would not be perceiving it in exactly the same way all the time. One's perception of the film would oscillate according to one's optical faculties, which we can assume are as widely variable as any of the other physical characteristics.' The same variety must be given to perception of the language. Meaning is perceived as it strikes or pleases the viewer, according to his or her own particular set of linguistic associations. Mussman has also written that: ' . . . the beholder does not have sufficient opportunity to categorize the optical play. Nor does the viewer have time to adjust himself physically to the ambivalence the eye is experiencing.' The language too, richly complex and suggestive, is shown for a limited time, and given the seven-minute duration of the film and the persistency of the elusively spiralling motion, the beholder probably will not be able to elucidate an experience of the film. Fragments of inflected meaning are drawn toward the surface of consciousness, yet attempts to name and control remain frustrated, and all these micro-thoughts remain jumbled in the matter the brain processes continuously. The wide variety of meaning Duchamp's language understates recalls many different images, but these are like the individual frames of a film which cannot be distinguished separately. The viewer

is unable to compile this smattering of material into visualized images representing cinematic representation, or to inflect these words with the linear transition of the normal sentence structure.

In *ANÉMIC-CINÉMA*, definition is implied by orthography and consonance, and yet the film has no sound. The viewer (*voyeur*) reads, hears the words subjectively, and makes associations, perhaps not even consciously. The individual perceiver is in a room darkened for projection, and since some of the film's implications are heavily sexual, he or she may feel scandalized and not even know why.

Thus, while the viewer creates a subjective experience of the film, at the same time he or she remains subject to Duchamp who has created the film. The artist has control, the perceiver does not. Consistent with the developments of the twentieth century, Duchamp has recognized that an artist may no longer claim to present a static 'picture' but instead must deal with ambiguity and motion and with the perceiver as socially conditioned to see selectively, to categorize and interpret. But Duchamp goes much further, for in anticipating various subjective reactions in the perceiver as participant and creator in the work of art, Duchamp retains the upper hand and is actually exploiting even the perceiver. Here again, one must reckon with the humour of Duchamp.

ANÉMIC, part of the title, does not exist in French except as an anagram of *CINÉMA*. *Anémique*, however, means anaemic or unhealthy. *Animé*, another pun, means animated.

BAINS DE GROS THÉ POUR GRAINS DE BEAUTÉ SANS TROP DE BENGUÉ.

This noun phrase may be divided into three word groups:

*Bains de gros thé
pour grains de beauté
sans trop de bengué.*

The sounds as they build upon each other are like a spiral. The associations build upon each other as well and the most appropriate diagram of this would be their own revolving spiral.

The consonant sounds are juggled in groups of three: *b-, gr-, t-, gr-, b-, t-; tr-, b-, g-*. The vowel sounds are also juggled, the first two phrases repeating (rhyming), the last phrase varying the order of the same sounds. The entire phrase is thus three times three, a number and a set which fascinated Duchamp and for him expressed infinity — one is the unit, two is the couple, and three is 'Taken as a refrain in duration — (number is mathematical duration).'

A literal if somewhat ridiculous translation would be: Baths of vulgar tea for beauty marks without too much BENGUÉ.

The first phrase is already an example of vulgarity implied and not actually present. From the phrase *BAINS DE GROS THÉ*, the word *GROS* as a noun is slang for defecation, as in the idiom, *faire son gros*. *Crotte*, which sounds a lot

like *GROS THÉ*, is milder slang for the same thing. The phonetic allusion is almost unavoidable, and yet the viewer may simply have time to sense 'something dirty' without knowing precisely why.

Since the suffix *-té* is used for expressing sentiments (e.g. *liberté*, *fraternité*, *égalité*, *gros-té*, etc.), a pun on *GROS THÉ* is *gros-té*, an easily invented word for the lofty sentiment, 'vulgari-tea.'

GROS means thick or fat and unrefined or vulgar. It also means common, since it is a wholesaler's word for dealings in quantity. *Du gros rouge* is slang for cheap red wine, and thus 'du gros thé' could similarly mean ordinary tea. From the literal translation, the phrase could in mockery really mean vulgar tea. In France, tea has long been considered a rather elegant drink and since the common man there drinks coffee, taking tea can be a bit *snobbe*. Throughout this whole phrase, elegance and vulgarity are simultaneously suggested, inflating each other by contrast, deflating each other by contamination and mockery, and this double dimension relates to the ambivalent perspective of the film's spiralling optics.

BAINS means baths and that is obviously cleanly – but it is no sooner said than it is slurred. From *DE GROS THÉ* comes the vulgar slang *décrotter* (literally: to de-crap, cf. *crotte*) 'to spruce up: to primp, to smarten'.

Duchamp took the pseudonym *Rose Sélavy*, with which he signed this film, after he signed a card to his close friend *Picabia* as, 'Pis qu'habilla *Rose Sélavy*.' This pun can have no literal translation, except that it is a very close phonetic linking of the names *Picabia* and *Rose Sélavy*, since a double *r* needs a vowel as introduction. In fact, it is so close as perhaps to imply a sexual relationship between the two. Although *Pis qu'habilla* is not literal French, it suggests *piquer* 'to prick' and *habile* 'skilful' – obviously these are sexual allusions. The moral judgement and guilt are still there, however, as *pis* means worst and *habillé* means clothed. The pseudonym has been widely interpreted as '*Eros, c'est la vie*,' while *Robert Lebel* interprets it as '*arrose, c'est la vie*' and relates it to the 'malic function.'

I include this explanation since *baigner* 'to bathe' (from *BAINS DE GROS THÉ*) is a synonym of *arroser* 'to wet, to moisten'. This synonym relates to the pseudonym and to the 'malic function'. *Baigner* 'to bathe' means also to touch and to surround, as would the spiralling circles of the optic discs. *DE GROS THÉ* suggests *grotte* 'cavern' which could also be the vagina, and thus *BAINS DE GROS THÉ* ('baths of the vagina') is already an allusion to sexual intercourse. *Dans le bain* (lit.: in the bath) is idiom for a real involvement in something, so that just as we penetrate the spirals are we also drawn into this first phrase and its implied vulgarity, and unavoidably into the sexual connotations of the entire phrase.

Because of the preposition *POUR* 'for' or 'intended for', the receiver of

BAINS DE GROS THÉ is *GRAINS DE BEAUTÉ*. Although *GRAINS DE BEAUTÉ* means beauty marks or moles, the idiom easily refers to beautiful women or perhaps to prostitutes. Also, since tea is related to coffee, the pun *grains de beau thé* (lit.: grains of beautiful tea) seems related to the vulgar idiom *grains de café* (lit.: grains of coffee) which means the clitoris.

... *SANS TROP DE BENGUÉ*

'without too much *BENGUÉ*'. *BENGUÉ* is perhaps its pun, *bain* 'bath', and *gai* 'gay' and also 'tipsy'. It is also the unguent *Ben Gay*, invented by a French doctor *BENGUE*, with such an unguent's erotic connotations – the modern counterpart is 'Deep Heat'. *Ben Gay* advertised in the American Sunday funnies with a little green troll (named *Peter Pain* of all names) who stabbed in the pain and then hopped away vanquished, growling 'Curses, foiled again', as the little wife massaged *Ben Gay* on her hubby's hurting muscles. It seems evident that such an ad, like the ad for *Sapolin Enamels*, would strike *Duchamp's* fancy.

In the rhyming relationship of *GROS*, *BEAU* and *TROP*; *GROS* and *BEAU* are opposites, *TROP* is 'too much' so that even here, the spiral goes in and out.

L'ENFANT QUI TÊTE EST UN SOUFFLEUR DE CHAIR CHAUDE ET N'AIME PAS LE CHOU-FLEUR DE SERRE CHAUDE.

This sentence can also be divided into three:

L'enfant que tête est un souffleur de chair chaude et n'aime pas le chou-fleur de serre chaude.

A literal translation would be: The child who nurses is a sucker (blower) of hot flesh and does not like the cauliflower of the hot glass-house.

This sentence could have very gentle overtones: *L'ENFANT* 'child' is a term of endearment; *souffler* means to blow gently, to sigh or to whisper; *cher* 'dear' is a pun on *CHAIR* 'flesh'; *CHOU* 'darling' is a term of endearment, as is *FLEUR* 'flower' (e.g. 'petite fleur'); *serrer* means to hug.

CHAIR CHAUDE 'warm flesh' refers to the mother's breast, and then the forthright meaning is something like, the child is nursing because he does not like vegetables. *CHAIR CHAUDE* literally means hot flesh, and *souffler* also means to blow on food that is too hot; thus, *SOUFFLEUR DE CHAIR CHAUDE* is: blower of hot flesh-food.

The homonym *chère* (from the idiom: *bonne chère*) is an elegant word for fine quality food. At the same time, *souffler* implies blowing on flesh that hurts, so that *CHAIR CHAUDE* would be painful flesh. Thus this phrase refers succinctly to elegance, heat, food, sexuality, child-mother, and pain. The 'définition' becomes unwieldy, like the perspective of the optic spirals.

TÊTE has several implications as well: 1. (v.) 'to nurse' – and, obviously, mention of nursing in a context so full of sexual innuendoes must imply incest, which is also a spiralling inward – (also, incidental to this theme, in French folklore, children are born in

CHOU-FLEUR 'cauliflower' plants), 2. 'to suck; to booze'. 3. (n.) 'head'. 4. th pun, *les tettes*, 'tits'. 5. also, *TÊTE*, especially in conjunction with *ET N'AIME PAS* 'who doesn't like' implies obstinacy, e.g. *tête* (adj.) 'stubborn' and *tête de lard* (idiom) 'fathead', and also the common insult, 'grosse tête'. Here again is a set of definitions which work together in many different dimensions.

Souffler is slang for swindle. A homonym of *CHAIR* 'flesh' is *cher* 'expensive'. Since in French any adjective may perform as a noun by the addition of an article, *chaude* may be 'the hot one' (feminine gender). *CHOU-FLEUR* relates to *SOUFFLEUR* which can be broken down into *sou-fleur* 'penny flower', which would be a prostitute. *SERRE CHAUDE* 'hot glass house' would be a brothel. The sentence thus taken is that the child who sucks is a swindler of an expensive hot one who (anyway) does not like the prostitute of the brothel.

The sentence contains strong hints of homosexuality and/or oral intercourse, and the tight overlay of words gives a grammatical parallel. *Faire choux-choux* is slang for homosexual love-making. *Souffler* is often used to imply oral intercourse in idioms such as *souffler dans la canne*, *souffler dans le merliton*, etc. *TÊTE* (n.) 'head' with all of its implications in the first phrase relates to *CHOU-FLEUR* in the last phrase in that *CHOU* means head. *FLEUR* can also refer to the genitals, and *CHOU-FLEUR* is related by consonance to *SOUFFLEUR* 'blower, sucker'. If the words *TÊTE* and *EST* were reversed (the sentence would still sound almost the same), the sentence would read: The child who is, sucks a blower (sucker, ravisher) of hot flesh...

Duchamp has said, 'I would like to grasp an idea as the vagina grasps the penis.' *Serrer* (v.) means to grasp, and then... *ET N'AIME PAS LE CHOU-FLEUR DE SERRE CHAUDE* would mean: ... who does not like the flowering genitals of the hot sexual grasp.

Both *Lebel* and *Schwarz* have written of *Duchamp's* interest in alchemy. A *SOUFFLEUR* is someone who is looking for the philosopher's stone, and *Duchamp's* quest lies in the elusive spiral.

SI JE TE DONNE UN SOU, ME DONNERA-TU PAIRE DE CISEAUX?

The form of this sentence is simple. A literal translation is easy: If I give you a penny, will you give me a pair of scissors?

In colloquial French, although it is grammatically incorrect, scissors are not usually referred to as a pair except in wood-working and tool shops. One speaks of *un ciseau* in the singular. *Duchamp's* version may be language contamination from English. It is certainly a deliberate use of the word *PAIRE*. The subject of the sentence is a pair (I, you; you, me), and the pair of scissors refers to a pair of thighs, a pair of legs. 'If I give you a penny, will you give me a fuck?'

In the *Large Glass* there is also a pair of

scissors. They are depicted with a bayonette rising toward them from a chocolate grinder. These at least are transparent allusions, for *la bayonette* is slang for penis, and Duchamp himself wrote of the chocolate grinder in his *Notes and Projects for the Large Glass*: 'Principe adage de spontanéité (qui explique le mvt. giratoire de la broyeurse de sans autre secours) Le célibataire broie son chocolat lui même - trans.: Principe adage of spontaneity (which explains the gyratory mvt. of the grinder without other help) The bachelor grinds his chocolate himself -.

Need I explain that this is generally interpreted as reflexive male sexuality. Corresponding to this, the scissors represent female sexuality, but Duchamp's diagram denies a physical or a sexual union. He portrays sexuality rather as onanism for two, each partner trying to satisfy his/her cravings and finding instead a ceaseless gyratory movement.

The symbol of the scissors (and also of the bayonette) implies frustration and aggression, guilt and castration or death, yet if these strong sexual feelings are contained in this sentence, the forthright structure and meaning remain banal and matter-of-fact.

ON DEMANDE DES MOUSTIQUES DOMESTIQUES (DEMI-STOCK) POUR LA CURE D'AZOTE SUR LA CÔTE D'AZUR.

This is worded like a want-ad. A literal translation is: (Wanted) They are asking for some domesticated mosquitoes (half-stock) for the nitrogen cure on the French Riviera.

The words, 'Moustiques domestiques demi-stock' first appeared written over and over again on the background of bonds for a small gambling venture in Monte Carlo, a scheme invented by Duchamp and Man Ray, dated November 1, 1924.

DES MOUSTIQUES DOMESTIQUES (DEMI-STOCK) is alliteration based again on 3 x 3, or three times the three syllables. **LA CURE D'AZOTE** and **LA CÔTE D'AZUR** are two sets of three syllables which agree in consonance.

INCESTE OU PASSION DE FAMILLE, À COUPS TROP TIRÉS.

INCESTE OU PASSION DE FAMILLE is simply translated as: Incest or family passion. *Passions* is the first person plural, imperfect tense, of the verb *passer*, to pass. This can be in the sense of 'The Passing of the Virgin to the Bride' (the title of one of Duchamp's paintings, '... a title which signifies not a representation of the loss of virginity but rather a succession from one form to another. ... The dialectical notion of "passage", associated with that of transmutation, has a profound significance for Duchamp, or it can be of the passing, or death, of the family.

À COUPS TROP TIRÉS is more difficult to translate since both **COUPS** (n.) and **TIRÉS** (past part.) are ambiguous words having many meanings; **COUPS** 'blows, quick actions; conquests', **TIRÉS** 'stretched,

pulled, dragged or drawn out'. **À COUPS TROP TIRÉS** can mean in blows too drawn out.

Tirer un coup is common in the idiom, *tirer un coup de fusil* 'to fire a shot from a rifle', which Schwarz relates to the breaking of the hymen.⁹ Also, a pun on **À COUPS TROP TIRÉS** is *à couteau tiré* 'with knife drawn'. The knife would symbolize the penis, and the threatening weapons, like the scissors and the bayonette, would equate death-with incest.

Another pun is *à cous trop tirés*, 'with necks too stretched'. In the *Large Glass*, the Bride is referred to as a *Pendu femelle*. This phrase is relevant but difficult to translate. *Pendu* is a gerund meaning hung, or a hanging thing. *Femelle* is female, but in a derogatory sense. The term is something like 'bitch' since it is usually applied to animals. The phrase *Pendu femelle* however does not imply misogyny. Women in particular are not held responsible, as sex objects for a society which has long been male-dominated, for man's doom through sexual incest and family passion, which in turn becomes a basis for man's sexual aggression. That indictment would have called for the phrase *Femelle pendue*, with *Femelle* as the subject and *pendue* as the adjective. *Pendu femelle* is a hanging thing that happens in this case to be female. It could be either sex since both sexes are frustrated - Duchamp seems indifferent.

In this case, *Pendu* 'hanging' and the pun, *à cous trop tirés* 'with necks too stretched', indicate a state of sexual frustration. In the *Large Glass*, intercourse was never achieved. The Bride was left hanging. The passion of the family could therefore be the normal undercurrents which are left unrealized in a 'normal' family.

Asphyxiation is also related to heavy breathing and sexual satisfaction. In some primitive cultures, men have rites of approaching asphyxiation to gain erection. They of course have to cut this a little short in order to avoid suicide.

À cous trop tirés 'with necks too stretched' equates incest with asphyxiation and with Duchamp's plan, derived from the expression *couper le gaz* 'to cut off the gas' to: 'Establish a society in which the individual has to pay for the air he breathes (air meters; imprisonment and rarefied air), in case of non-payment simple asphyxiation, if necessary (cut off the air).'

All of these serious overtones however are already comic, since *tirer un coup* is simple slang for having intercourse. **À COUPS TROP TIRÉS** is an odd twist to that phrase (**TROP** 'too much') implying intercourse too much had, or too much intercourse.

ESQUIVONS LES ECCHYMOSES DES ESQUIMAUX AUX MOTS EXQUIS.

Let us flee from (cleverly and with some disdain) the bruises of the Eskimoes who have exquisite words.'

This sentence was first written in 1924 as *Rose Sélavy et moi estimons les ecchymoses des esquimaux aux mots exquis*. 'Rose Sélavy and I esteem the bruises of the Eskimoes of exquisite

words'. It appeared on the front cover *The Little Review*, N.Y. XL No. 1, spring 1925. In 1925, Duchamp had the sentence, *Rose Sélavy et moi esquivons les ecchymoses des esquimaux aux mots exquis*, engraved around the edge of his sculpture entitled *Rotative demi-sphere*.

The sentence follows correct syntax and alliteration is tightly built upon all three syllables of each of the four word groups, creating again a spiral of sound. Yet the sentence, like the postcards of 1916, makes no apparent sense.

ESQUIVONS 'let us cleverly escape implies disdain.

LES ECCHYMOSES are very bad, ugly bruises, since lighter ones are called *les bules*. They are disgusting and revolting to look at. Mention of it here carries a certain sexual connotation which shadows physical sexuality as something 'perverse'.

Logically, the Eskimoes are a people that to a Frenchman seem cold and exotic. Here, they are the possessor of **MOTS EXQUIS**, where **EXQUIS** 'exquisite' suggests in French something that is sublimely and ravishingly sensual. The Eskimoes, while responsible for the gross pain, are nonetheless extremely attractive. Perhaps they are beautiful yet cold and unattainable sex objects: or, still on an aesthetic or intellectual level, **AUX MOTS EXQUIS** could refer to a seductive sophistication. But since both the sublime 'aesthetic' beauty (**EXQUIS**) and the disgusting physicality (**ECCHYMOSES**) simultaneously qualify the same noun, they are inseparable, so that concepts of aesthetic and physical taken from this context must be defined accordingly.

MOTS EXQUIS 'exquisite words' is the substance of the film, and the words used are certainly refined and based in the sensual. They are as words intellectual, so the **ESQUIMAUX AU MOTS EXQUIS** is perhaps artistic activity as in this film. Modified by **ECCHYMOSES**, art becomes a form of battering cerebral eroticism born from insatiable desires which are attractive yet enslaving, painful and 'perverse'.

Still the indication **ESQUIVONS** 'let us cleverly and disdainfully escape' is to outsmart this 'perverse' attraction, be it physical or aesthetic. With characteristic irony, Duchamp presented us both the pun and the film, and at the same time he described his own art activity as nil - 'I am a breather' - and claimed he abandoned his projects (painting for example, and the *Large Glass*) because he became bored. He was in these descriptions of himself consistently lying of course, and in so doing recreating himself, hermetically sealed in his direct statements, as his own idealization, enacting as much as possible his own wishful thinking.

Incidentally, *objet dard* (cf. p. 2) is a dildo, which makes the piece a pun of many dimensions and a very funny statement on/ or object for/ the function of art.

(... That it now rests untouchable in a museum collection makes it unnecessary for a future artist to deface it with a moustache... R.I.P!)

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AVEZ VOUS DÉJÀ MIS LA MOËLLE DE L'ÉPÉE DANS LE POËLE DE L'AIMÉE ?

Have you ever put the marrow of the sword into the stove of the loved one ?

LA MOËLLE is usually part of the idiom, *moëlle d'épine* 'spinal cord' which sounds similar to *MOËLLE DE L'ÉPÉE*. LA MOËLLE 'the marrow' is the centre and thus the essential, the main preoccupation. It is also slang for penis, and L'ÉPÉE 'the sword' is also a phallic reference.

The pun was later written in 1939 in *Morceaux moisis* (Written Rotten, a pun on Morceaux choisis, Selected Works) as, '... dans le poil de l'aimée.' In this pun, the homonym of *POËLE* 'stove', *poil* 'fur; body hair' is common slang for naked and for cunt. L'AIMÉE 'the loved one' is in the feminine gender. It is a seldom used, very lyrical word for lover, so that here again is the mocking juxtaposition of vulgar slang and classical language.

'Have you ever put the penis of the sword into the stove/cunt of the loved one ?'

LE POËLE is also a sheet that covers the dead or the drapery on a coffin. L'AIMÉE sounds like *lamé* 'embroidered in gold' (... dans le poêle lamé 'in the embroidered death-sheet'). Sexual themes are interwoven with hints of death. L'ÉPÉE 'sword' as a weapon reinforces this, and the word also suggests the pun, *la paix* 'peace' (at last ... *Requiescat in Pacem*). The pun *lamé* relates also to L'ÉPÉE since *lamé* means blade. *Le poil de lamée*, although not exactly grammatical, may mean the bladed or stabbed, referring to the loved one, while *lamé* is slang for hussy.

LA MOËLLE DE L'ÉPÉE suggests *la moëlle de l'épie*, or the penis of the spy or of the *voyeur*. That must also refer to the perceiver himself and to the process of watching this film, ANÉMIC-CINÉMA. Too I must call attention to myself and to the reader, since by now we would qualify as well.

From DÉJÀ MIS comes the pun *déjà amis* 'already friends' and also the forbidding pun, *jamais* 'never', both of which recall incest.

In alchemy, L'ÉPÉE is the alchemist's fire, which burns then in the perpetual revolution of the sexual spiral.

PARMI NOS ARTICLES DE QUINCAILLERIE PARESSEUSE, NOUS RECOMMANDONS LE ROBINET QUI S'ARRÊTE DE COULER QUAND ON NE L'ÉCOUTE PAS.

This too is worded like a want ad: Among our articles of lazy hardware, we recommend the faucet that stops running when no one is listening to it.

The allusion is obvious enough. LE ROBINET 'the faucet' refers to the penis, and the sentence expresses Duchamp's view of the sexual drive as a tiresome function and an organic fatality, as an intellectual and physical preoccupation which, free will or no, you can neither escape nor negate.

L'ASPIRANT HABITE JAVEL ET MOI J'AVAIS L'HABITE EN

SPIRALE.

The sentence is an anagram of syllables centring around *ET MOI*. The first syllable corresponds to the last, and so on: L'AS:ALE, SPIR:SPIR, ANT:EN, HABITE:HABITE, JAVEL:J'AVAIS L'. It is appropriate that this mirror pun should be the last one of the series in the film ANÉMIC-CINÉMA.

In the book compiled by Robert Lebel, this sentence is copied incorrectly as, 'L'aspirant habite Javel et moi j'avais la bite en spirale.' Neither Lebel's *la bite* nor Duchamp's *l'habite* is part of the established French language. Still, the sentence may be simply translated as: The aspiring one lives in Javel and me I (was living) in the spiral.

J'AVAIS L'HABITE is based on the French verb *habiter* 'to inhabit' and probably too on the English expression, to have a habit. It also suggests the English word *beat*, sexual rhythm (gyration) and the motion of the optic spirals; but the most obvious allusion is to *la bite*, which is French slang for penis: '... and me I had my penis in the spiral.'

Aspiration (L'ASPIRANT) has to do with ambition, and with respiration, blowing and sucking; hence, it relates to *souffler* and to the in-out motion of the spiral. Inspiration, which is suggested by consonance from L'ASPIRANT and EN SPIRALE, means the same in French as in English, and it is common slang for a sexual inspiration.

JAVEL is the place where *eau de Javel* 'Javel water', a very common product in France, comes from. JAVEL can be that liquid itself, which is yellowish and caustic and used as we use Clorox. In vulgar slang, *blanc d'oeuf et Javel* 'egg white and Javel' refers to cum in a scandalously caustic sense. 'The aspiring one lives in Javel' can refer derogatorily to sexual activity (or to what Lebel describes as the 'malic function'). '... and me I had my domicile (my penis) in the spiral' seems then onanistic in a drier, intellectual fashion.

If living in Javel refers to the ceaseless physical sexual drives or the constantly running faucet, then the inference is that this entails a dreadful suffocation, since the breather, or the aspiring one, lives in Javel. Here again is the theme of asphyxiation.

'... and me I had my penis in the spiral,' seems therefore an escape (cf. *ESQUIVONS*, p. 20). In this sentence, *ET MOI* is parallel with and therefore in contrast to L'ASPIRANT 'the aspiring one, the breather'. If Javel represents suffocating physicality, the spiral could represent specifically the artistic and cerebral as an attempt at disdain to the physical. The dichotomy between physical and spiritual would be as old and traditional as for instance the Catholic Church in France, yet Duchamp, while indicating such a dichotomy, destroys it by the complex relationship of the contrasting elements. The relationship to the spiral is sexual: 'I had my penis in the spiral' contrasts with the aspirer's drowning in Javel, yet it is not really an escape nor even a separate alternative, but rather a mirror image.

Throughout ANÉMIC-CINÉMA is this ambivalent perspective present at once in the anagram, the mirror, the pun, and the revolving spiral. In the tightly wound phrases, horizontal consonance and vertical dissonance create a unique set of linguistic chords which move upon each other in time like the motion of the spiral. Each component part of the work is so thoroughly exploited that its linearity explodes and it is freed to operate dynamically to create a multi-dimensionality within which reverberates an elusive infinity.

That Duchamp chooses eroticism as the theme abstract to his work naturally heightens its impact, for if there is anything that does not inspire indifference, but rather arouses and stirs deeply even into myth, it is human sexuality together with incest and death. It seems that Duchamp is researching within this ambivalent optical/linguistic motion the representation of a double sexual identity or even the realization of androgyny which would be absolute union and perfection. It is as if he seeks to master and control fleeting orgasm, and through his innovative mechanics to project this split second of ecstasy into eternity. This capture the French, both in poetry and in idiom, have traditionally considered as death (e.g. *la petite mort* 'the little death' is idiom for orgasm).

Such idealism then must remain frustrated, and Duchamp offers us no solution. He freely admits his own sexual frustration as a major theme for his work, as in for example his pun on *littérature: lits et ratures*, 'beds and failures' (*rater* 'to fail'). He does not however express his cynicism as despair, but rather, by deliberately creating the amazing illusion of ANÉMIC-CINÉMA, he remains in brilliant control as a master of art.

This film was made in the '20s, when abstinence was the most reliable means of contraception and when the double standard, both in France and in America, was even more excessive than it is today. It was also a time when Freud was very influential on the arts, so that while Duchamp radically allowed for the mechanics of varying perception, he was equally aware of repression and the externalization processes of psychoanalysis. ANÉMIC-CINÉMA prescribes a certain set of reactions and at the same time proscribes the traditional defences of categorization and control. By blatantly mocking what is usually called perverse, both in terms of sexual mores and of 'perspective', he has ingeniously attacked and destroyed these static conventions.

The film discovers the overwhelming illusions of gyratory movement and idealist desire, aroused and unresolved from within the perceiver, and yet these are denied as it touches and multiplies the perceiver's frustration. The artist himself neatly side-steps (cf. *ESQUIVER*) these illusions he creates with his direct and apparently exclusive concern for the 'optics' and 'consonance' of discs on a turntable.

In making such claims, Marcel Duchamp is simultaneously presenting us images and reflections which reject and re-create an elusive art of mighty wit. ●