"Faire Un Cinéma": Marcel Duchamp And The Moving Image

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Abstract
Marcel Duchamp was among the first artists in the transatlantic avant-garde to acquire his own movie camera in 1920. Yet he would produce only a single complete film, Anemic Cinema (1926), over the course of his decades-long career. As the lone film made by an artist better known for his work in other media, Anemic Cinema occupies a contested place in histories of avant-garde art and cinema. For some, it is a Dada-inspired effort to parody the conventions of silent film, and is determinedly “anti-cinema.” For others, it is a perceptual experiment entirely divorced from filmmaking, relating instead to the artist’s kinetic sculpture-like “optical machines.” This dissertation reassesses Duchamp’s engagement with the moving image, arguing that the artist interrogated period conceptions of the cinematic medium and spectatorship in both filmic and non-filmic works made between 1911 and 1968. Through extended analyses of visual art and films by Duchamp and his contemporaries, scrutiny of archival materials, and readings in media and film theory, “Faire un Cinéma” constructs an alternative history of avant-garde moving image production in France and the United States during the emergence and maturation of popular cinema across the first half of the twentieth century.

Four chapters, arranged roughly chronologically with a comprehensive introduction and conclusion, trace the artist’s moving image works and their significance within period film and media discourses. The project examines the shifting notions of the cinematic articulated in the artist’s “chronophotographic” cubist paintings of 1911 and 1912 and mixed-media-on-glass The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass) (1915-23); the optical machines, cinematographic experiments, and film notes leading up to Anemic Cinema in the 1920s; a three-minute dream sequence within the feature film Dreams That Money Can Buy (1947) and accompanying cover design Please Touch; and the assemblage Œtant données: 1 ça la chute d’eau, 2 ça le gaz d’éclairage (1946-66) and its Manual of Instructions (1966). Together, the chapters offer a new perspective on the role of moving images within avant-garde culture, one that also addresses current concerns regarding cinema and medium-specificity in the post-celluloid digital age.

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“FAIRE UN CINÉMA”: MARCEL DUCHAMP AND THE MOVING IMAGE

Alexander Benjamin Kauffman

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“FAIRE UN CINÉMA”: MARCEIL DUCHAMP AND THE MOVING IMAGE

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Alexander Benjamin Kauffman
For my parents, Barbara and Neil
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ABSTRACT

“FAIRE UN CINÉMA”: MARCEL DUCHAMP AND THE MOVING IMAGE
Alexander Benjamin Kauffman
Christine Poggi

Marcel Duchamp was among the first artists in the transatlantic avant-garde to acquire his own movie camera in 1920. Yet he would produce only a single complete film, *Anemic Cinema* (1926), over the course of his decades-long career. As the lone film made by an artist better known for his work in other media, *Anemic Cinema* occupies a contested place in histories of avant-garde art and cinema. For some, it is a Dada-inspired effort to parody the conventions of silent film, and is determinedly “anti-cinema.” For others, it is a perceptual experiment entirely divorced from filmmaking, relating instead to the artist’s kinetic sculpture-like “optical machines.” This dissertation reassesses Duchamp’s engagement with the moving image, arguing that the artist interrogated period conceptions of the cinematic medium and spectatorship in both filmic and non-filmic works made between 1911 and 1968. Through extended analyses of visual art and films by Duchamp and his contemporaries, scrutiny of archival materials, and readings in media and film theory, *Faire un Cinéma* constructs an alternative history of avant-garde moving image production in France and the United States during the emergence and maturation of popular cinema across the first half of the twentieth century.

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INTRODUCTION

“I’ve had a ‘Moving Picture Camera’ for six months now,” Marcel Duchamp announced in October 1920. The French artist was writing to his sister and brother-in-law in Paris from New York, where he had been living since January. The acquisition of a camera from his patron Katherine Dreier coincided with a burst of new productivity amid the stalled construction of his mixed media on glass work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23, Fig. 0.1). Duchamp reported building a motor-driven “monocle,” the optical machine today known as *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)* (1920, Fig. 0.2). During the same New York sojourn he invented a female artistic persona, whom he named Rose Sélavy (later Rrose Sélavy), posing as her in photographic portraits taken by his friend the artist Man Ray, and with Man Ray and Dreier, he founded the Société Anonyme, Inc., an “experimental museum” publicizing European modernism.  

Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. Quoted translations of Duchamp’s writings largely preserve the orthography present in the originals. Minor changes to punctuation and spelling are made for the sake of readability. Any additional changes are noted.


2 Katherine Dreier characterizes the *Société Anonyme, Inc.* as a “small experimental museum” in period correspondence. See Katherine Dreier to William Henry Fox, July 19, 1926, Katherine S. Dreier Papers, series I, box 6, folder 152, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Yale University, New Haven; quoted in Lars Blunck, *Duchamps Prázisionsoptik* (Munich: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 2008), 159.
Little of this activity commanded use of his new camera. Duchamp’s filmography is famously meager. He evidently experimented with the device but would wait another six years before shooting his first film, *Anemic Cinema* (1926). That seven-minute-long short, made following his return to Paris with the assistance of Man Ray and a young filmmaker, Marc Allégret, comprises fixed camera shots of spinning disks, alternating between disks featuring optical illusions and others inscribed with French puns and spoonerisms (the title itself an anagram), bookended by handmade title and credits cards attributing the film to Rrose Sélavy (Figs. 0.3–0.6).\(^3\) It is, by all accounts, the only complete film of Duchamp’s career.\(^4\) By the later 1920s, he would publicly retreat from all recognizable forms of artistic production, filmmaking included.

Duchamp had been among the first artists to acquire a camera and employ it in his studio practice. Yet one would hesitate to call him a filmmaker. Can we even speak of “Duchamp’s cinema”? To answer this question, *Faire un Cinéma* looks outside standard film formats and media configurations, that is to say, beyond the isolated film print of *Anemic Cinema*. The apparatus theory of the 1970s and Early Cinema studies of the

\(^3\) The credits card uses an alternative spelling of Rose and reads, “Copyrighted by Rrose Sélavy 1926.”

\(^4\) Man Ray and Marc Allégret are frequently cited as assistants or collaborators in the film’s creation, but their specific roles remain undocumented. Man Ray was living next door to Duchamp at the time and collaborated with him frequently while also working on a film of his own, *Emak Bakia*. Allégret’s connection to the project is less clear. He would go on to become a prominent film director in France but in the summer of 1926 had not yet released his first film, the documentary *Voyage au Congo* (1927). Evidence in his period correspondence suggests that Allégret became involved in the production through Man Ray and may have operated the camera and/or edited the footage. See Allégret to André Gide, June 11, 1926, and July 2, [1926], in *André Gide, Marc Allégret: Correspondance*, ed. Jean Claude and Pierre Masson (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005), 615, 629.
1980s exposed the complexity and variety of media architectures shaping cinematic experience beyond the film object itself. Building on this work, recent scholarship on a “cinematic imaginary” pervasive in the historical avant-gardes has cast new attention on the ways that visual artists and writers engaged period discourses of film production, distribution, and display in media and cultural domains traditionally excluded from study in the context of film studies.\(^5\) This interest in non-filmic cinema illuminates Duchamp’s work in film, which had already in 1920 met severe obstacles. As he wrote in the same letter home to Paris, “It’s so expensive (the film) that I have to space out my cinematographic outpourings.”\(^6\)

In the absence of additional cinematographic production, Duchamp’s “outpourings” populated his paintings, writings, and mixed-media works, both in the years before and after he acquired his camera. Though not constituting material film prints, these works invoked and participated in period discourses around the moving image. The prohibitive cost of working directly in film undoubtedly contributed to this circumvention of the camera, as Duchamp claimed, but so did other constraints of the apparatus, such as the photographic character of film media and the dominant dispositif, or media architecture, of theatrical projection. By working outside cinematography,  


\(^6\) Duchamp, *Affectionately, Marcel*, 94.
Duchamp effectively engaged aspects of the cinematic experience absent or latent in standard commercial formats. Furthermore, he did so repeatedly, returning to cinema in nonfilmic works at multiple points over his long career. Duchamp also at times crossed over from the so-called imaginary and into cinema as it is more conventionally conceived. The expanded medial purview granted by the “cinematic imaginary” reveals a significant engagement with commercial film by Duchamp in the 1940s, some two decades after the production of Anemic Cinema.

Such an expansion prompts reassessment. Duchamp’s cinema was far more diverse and dynamic than the example of Anemic Cinema suggests, encompassing distinct encounters with the changing medium and its institutions over the span of several decades. Considering the enduring legacy of Anemic Cinema in the reception of avant-garde film, these lesser-known aspects of Duchamp’s filmmaking and film-related activity grants greater specificity to the contemporary conversations in which he participated. Although a “cinematic imaginary” may have pervaded the historical avant-gardes, its articulations were hardly consistent or univocal. The media technology invoked was itself a mass of competing models and formats changing over time. Beyond geographic and historical determinants, the “cinematic” was also a highly contested and evolving concept among artists and filmmakers as much as among those critics and intellectuals traditionally associated with classical film theory. This project is thus less a hagiographic effort to fill in missing chapters of Duchamp’s catalog than an attempt to grapple with the ways in which the facture of “cinematic” works of art intersected with and contributed to theoretical discourses at specific moments in the twentieth century.
Faire un Cinéma employs a range of newly available and previously unpublished archival materials to elucidate Duchamp’s engagement with the moving image, documenting, for example, his little-known contribution of a dream sequence to the feature-length narrative film Dreams That Money Can Buy, directed by the artist and filmmaker Hans Richter and released to theaters in the United States in 1948. The reconstruction of nearly daily agendas by two scholars in 1993, revision of the primary catalogue raisonné in 1997, and publication of a large selection of the artist’s correspondence in 2000 create the impression that a nearly complete archival record of his activities is now available. However, owing to Duchamp’s itineracy, frequent collaborations, and aversion to authorial and artistic conventions, additional materials were deposited in a number of public and private collections. In fact, the journal Étant donné Marcel Duchamp has continuously published primary source documentation since its debut in 1999. Using the archives of Hans Richter, Siegfried Kracauer, and other collaborators on Dreams, I argue that Duchamp’s sequence, titled Discs (ca. 1945-47), elaborates a critique of midcentury cinematic spectatorship informed by contemporary theories of film and distinct from those associated with Anemic Cinema and the 1920s avant-garde. Discs accomplishes this not only by cultivating a critical space within the

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8 The end credits of Dreams That Money Can Buy identify the title of Duchamp’s sequence as “Discs.” The pamphlet published by Richter to accompany the film lists a
narrative feature film but also through a dialogue with works made by Duchamp in other mediums: his Please Touch catalog cover design for a Surrealist exhibition in 1947 and large-scale assemblage, Étant donnés: 1° la chute d’eau, 2° le gaz d’éclairage... (1946–66).

Although Please Touch and Étant donnés have been the subject of extensive study, they have not been previously associated with Duchamp’s filmmaking. In attempting to do so here, I seek not to unseat perceptive interpretations of the past but rather to elaborate how ideas emerged within one cultural domain and were shaped by the media and discourses specific to that domain before effectively landing in another with minimal material evidence of the migration. In addition, then, to demonstrating that Duchamp’s engagement with the moving image extends beyond Anemic Cinema, study of the 1940s works makes possible a return to and reframing of that earlier film, whose historical reception has been largely dictated by its material character as a celluloid print.

Anemic Cinema in Histories of Avant-Garde Art and Film

Within an expanded view of Duchamp’s film and film-related activities, Anemic Cinema is the exception rather than the rule. It is the only complete film print to emerge

from Duchamp’s investigations of moving images and optical effects in the 1910s and 1920s and the artist’s only representation in the group of prints that came to constitute the canon of interwar avant-garde film. These distinctions had significant ramifications for Duchamp’s reception in the contexts of avant-garde film and visual art. *Anemic Cinema* began to circulate widely in the 1940s, appearing in programs of avant-garde or abstract shorts alongside other films by painters turned filmmakers like *Ballet mécanique* (Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy, 1924) and *Emak Bakia* (Man Ray, 1927). For Duchamp himself, following the completion of the film in August 1926, had explicitly avoided showing it in this context. Instead, he held small private demonstrations of the 35mm print for friends, first in Paris and later that fall in New York.

As *Anemic Cinema* began screening widely at midcentury, its material constitution consigned it to spaces, both physical and discursive, apart from Duchamp’s work in other media. Though obviated in recent years by the emergence of digital file formats and projection technologies, the lighting demands of avant-garde film prints historically relegated them to darkened theaters, excluding them from the galleries where paintings, sculptures, and other works by the same artists were displayed. For many

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9 For a description of one such program in the early 1940s, see Herman G. Weinberg, “A Forward Glance at the Abstract Film,” *Design* 42, no. 6 (February 1941): 24.
10 As discussed in chapter two, the first demonstrations of *Anemic Cinema* took place in a private Paris screening room at 63, Avenue des Champs-Élysées, on August 30, 1926; and in private screenings in New York at the Fifth Avenue Playhouse, 66 Fifth Avenue, on December 22, 1926, and at Miles Studio, 130 West 46th Street, on an unknown date between January 26 and February 23, 1927.
11 There are notable exceptions, such as Julien Levy’s short-lived presentation of artist’s films in his New York gallery in the 1930s. On the exhibition of avant-garde filmstrips in the interwar period, see Noam M. Elcott, “Darkened Rooms: A Genealogy of Avant-
artists’ shorts, including *Anemic Cinema*, theatrical projection and programming had the effect of exaggerating continuities with other film experiments of the interwar avant-gardes and their responsiveness to the commercial films of the period. Included in theatrical surveys of avant-garde film as early as 1929, and with increasing frequency in the years following World War II, *Anemic Cinema* became an emblem of vanguard opposition to commercial filmmaking, an opposition that scholars often associated specifically with the anti-art attitude of the Paris Dada group. In 1963, film historian George Amberg wrote, for example, that *Anemic Cinema* represented “the usual Dada effrontery,” albeit “rather a tepid version,” ignoring the disbanding of the Paris group

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The alternative version of *Anemic Cinema* includes short sequences from other films, including Sergei Eisenstein’s *October* (1928), and now resides in the collection of the Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen. When brought to Duchamp’s attention in 1961, he definitively disavowed this version of the film, indicating, “The interpolations… [were] certainly done without my consent.” See Duchamp to Serge Stauffer, May 28, 1961, quoted in *Film as Film: Formal Experiments in Film, 1910–1975*, ed. David Curtis and Richard Francis (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), 75. Thanks to Matěj Strnad for providing footage from the variant print.
three years prior to the film’s creation. Amberg highlighted the “nonsense phrases” on the textual disks as “Dada absurdities,” but primarily focused on what he perceived to be a basic disregard for filmic conventions on the part of Duchamp. “The major part of the film,” he reported, “consists merely of an exhibition of [optical disks]….simply recorded on film as they were, without gaining a new dimension in the cinematic presentation.”

First chiding Duchamp for an “amateurish manipulation of the medium” and for “approach[ing] the motion picture with a singular blindness to its possibilities,” Amberg ultimately concluded that his “blindness” in fact represented Duchamp’s signal contribution to Dada filmmaking, declaring the film “characteristic of the spirit of the movement in its effort to be anti-cinema.”

The avant-garde film historian P. Adams Sitney later extended this “anti-cinema” reading of *Anemic Cinema* beyond the specific context of Dada. In his 1979 essay “Image and Title in Avant-Garde Cinema,” Sitney characterized the faux-depth of the optical disks and intertitlelike textual disks as positing a basic “anemia” in the cinematic medium itself. Referring specifically to the text-and-image-based films of the silent era, Sitney argued, “[Anemic Cinema] implies that cinema is anemic because it all takes place in the

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14 Ibid.
mind of the viewer through automatic responses, as that viewer is duped into believing that the successive still images move, that their flatness is really depth, that they bear a relationship to their titles.\textsuperscript{16} This contravention of filmic space, movement, and narrative amounted to Duchamp’s “one statement in film and about film,” Sitney declared, suggesting that the artist’s repudiation of the medium precluded any further filmmaking.\textsuperscript{17} For Sitney then, much as for Amberg, \textit{Anemic Cinema} read as an assault on the medium itself, constituting a brief but intense pursuit of its negation on the part of its creator.

The emergence of kinetic art and op art in the 1950s and 1960s offered an entirely different lineage in which to situate \textit{Anemic Cinema}, challenging the idea that its statement was “about film,” if not the basic fact of its material constitution “in film.” Exhibitions and publications on the moving sculpture and optical illusions of Jean Tinguely, Victor Vasarely, and others cast fresh critical scrutiny on Duchamp’s previously little-known media experiments with perception in the 1920s, his so-called Precision Optics works. Curators seeking to represent the movements’s predecessors

\textsuperscript{16} P. Adams Sitney, “Image and Title in Avant-Garde Cinema,” \textit{October}, no. 11 (Winter 1979): 102. Sitney echoes film scholar Annette Michelson who compared the interruptions of the textual disks to the intertitles in silent films in Michelson, “‘Anemic Cinema’: Reflections on an Emblematic Work,” \textit{Artnet}, vol. 12, no. 2 (October 1973): 65. Michelson’s essay is an important exception to the bifurcated reception history outlined here, simultaneously identifying \textit{Anemic Cinema} as “that most singular of filmic objects” and as “emblematic of the entire range of painting, sculpture, games, and language games, of speculative and poetic ventures which compose that elaborate semiotic system we know as Duchamp’s lifework” (ibid., 64-65).

\textsuperscript{17} Though he positions \textit{Anemic Cinema} as Duchamp’s “one statement in film and about film,” Sitney (“Image and Title in Avant-Garde Cinema”, 103) acknowledges that Duchamp “experimented with a stereooptical project.” For more on Duchamp’s stereooptical, or anaglyphic, film, see chap. 2.
installed Duchamp’s kinetic sculpture-like *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)* and another motor-driven instrument, *Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)* (1925, Fig. 0.7), in their exhibitions. Duchamp’s use of disks in both his “optical machines” and *Anemic Cinema* created the impression of continuity across the varied media, prompting *Anemic Cinema*’s integration into histories of modern art. This reading effectively divorced *Anemic Cinema* from the history of avant-garde film, disputing the intense opposition to period filmmaking perceived by many film scholars. Art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss’s brief but nevertheless influential treatment of the film in her 1977 book *Passages in Modern Sculpture* exemplifies this approach. Writing a history of modern sculpture, Krauss seamlessly integrated the disks

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18 Swedish-born curator and critic Pontus Hultén was a primary agent in this shift. He and Jean Tinguely advocated for the inclusion of Duchamp’s *Rotary Demisphere* and *Rotoreliefs* in the influential exhibition *Le mouvement* at the Galerie Denise René in Paris against the wishes of co-organizers René and Victor Vasarely. Hultén then featured Duchamp’s *Rotary Demisphere*, *Rotoreliefs*, *Anemic Cinema*, *Discs Inscribed with Puns* (1926, used in the filming of *Anemic Cinema*), and authorized replicas of *Rotary Glass Plates* and *Bicycle Wheel*, among other works by the artist, in the major kinetic survey *Movement in Art* (or *Art in Motion*), at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (as *Bewogen Beweging*), March 10 to April 17, 1961; Stockholm’s Moderna Museet (as *Rörelse i Konsten*), May 16 to September 10, 1961; and the Louisiana Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Humlebaek, Denmark (as *Beweegelse i kunsten*), September 22 to October 22, 1961. On Hultén’s inclusion of works by Duchamp in these exhibitions, see the introduction and commentary by Paul B. Franklin, in Pontus Hultén and Marcel Duchamp, “‘L’art moderne cherche son Gutenberg, dit Marcel Duchamp’: La correspondance entre Pontus Hultén et Marcel Duchamp,” *Étant Donné Marcel Duchamp* 11 (2016): 48–49, 75–82.

of the film with the physical disks of his optical machines, entirely disregarding the contravention of the camera in *Anemic Cinema*. The inscribed disks in *Anemic Cinema* share the same sexual subtext as *Rotary Demisphere* and the “sculptural presence of many of [Duchamp’s] readymades,” she argued. This subtext presents a profound challenge to traditional conceptions of meaning in sculptural works, as it “does not seem to have been wrought or fabricated by Duchamp but rather by the observer.” “If that content is generated by ourselves—by our own need to find a meaning,” it poses the question, “are we justified at all in believing that content to be causally connected to the producer of the object?”

In subsequent writings, Krauss continued to position *Anemic Cinema* outside the context of film through an emphasis on the optical disks. In a 1988 essay, “The Im/Pulse to See,” which she revised and published in her book *The Optical Unconscious* (1993), Krauss again grouped all of Duchamp’s disks-based works together, referring not to *Anemic Cinema* but to “the turning discs of the devices he collectively called Precision Optics.” Ignoring their appearance in a film, she nevertheless asserted a basic filmic character across these works. Their formal structure is that of “the beat, or pulse, or

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22 Ibid., 79–80.
throb,” she wrote.24 Their pulse “tap[s] into forms of mass culture—in this case both the revolving turntable of the phonograph player and the flickering silence of early film… [as well as] the nineteenth-century optics that underwrote these forms”25

According to Krauss, the exploitation of this form in the disks, and in certain other works of visual art by Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, and Pablo Picasso, disputes the “formal premises of modernist opticality,” referring here to the modernist theory of Clement Greenberg that “connect[s] the dematerialization of the visual field to the dilated instantaneity or peculiar timelessness of the moment of its perception.”26 The disks use the “pulse” of the phonograph and film reel to assert the existence of temporality within the supposedly atemporal paintings and sculptures of modernism. Crucially, Krauss noted a secondary effect of this intervention in modernist opticality: “[The pulse] ends up challenging the notion that low art, or mass-cultural practice can be made to serve the ambitions of high art as a kind of denatured accessory, the allegory of a playfulness that high-art practice will have no trouble recuperating and reformulating on its own terms.”27 The injection of film into modernist art does not negate film’s temporal character; instead, filmic temporality, Krauss’s “pulse,” permeates modernist art.

This assertion by Krauss anticipates recent “cinematic imaginary” scholarship, discussed below, which affirms the cinematic character of a broad range of works of modern art. Krauss’s reading differs, however, in associating Duchamp’s use of film with his critique of modernist painting and not with cinema itself. He is not interested in a

24 Krauss, “The Im/pulse to See,” 53.
25 Ibid., 60.
26 Ibid., 53.
27 Ibid., 53-54.
reflexive commentary on the film medium at all, she argued in a monograph published in conjunction with *Formless: A User’s Guide*, the exhibition she co-curated in 1996 at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. There she discussed *Anemic Cinema* at length in what remains the most sophisticated art historical interpretation of the work. “*Anémic Cinéma* is a kind of hybrid object, somewhere between film and painting, the initiator…of a whole development that would come to be known as kinetic art. But to see this work…as making up a new genre is to miss its significance for the field of painting from which it was spawned.”\(^{28}\) Where Krauss had previously written of the optical disks collectively critiquing sculpture’s autonomy or modernist opticality and atemporality, here she identified modernist painting as a specific referent for the film. “For the throb of his revolving discs, pulsing as they do with erotic suggestiveness, opens the very concept of visual autonomy—of a form of experience that is wholly and purely optical, owing nothing to time—to the invasion of a sense of dense, corporeal pressure.”\(^{29}\) “So if *Anémic Cinéma* is a film,” Krauss concluded, expressing skepticism, “the target it seems to have in mind is nonetheless painting—or rather modernist, abstract painting.”\(^{30}\) Indeed, the use of imagery associated with protocinematic chronophotography already in Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* (Fig. 0.8) and other oil paintings of 1911 and 1912 magnifies this impression that Duchamp primarily pursued filmmaking as a means to put


\(^{29}\) Ibid., 135.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 134.
pressure on painting. Anemic Cinema is not about the illusionistic depth of the film medium, as Sitney and Amberg had claimed; it is about modernist painting.

Duchamp himself seemed to authorize such readings of Anemic Cinema when he discussed the film publicly in a series of late-in-life interviews, all dating to the heyday of kinetic art. “Cinema never interested me as an artist,” he told Francis Roberts in 1963, confirming, “That little film called Anemic Cinema is the only one I ever made.”

Speaking with Pierre Cabanne in 1966, in what would become his most widely read and quoted interview, Duchamp again sought to minimize Anemic Cinema’s relation to filmmaking. He referred to the film as a “little cinema [petit cinéma]” made during his experimentation with “that optical turning thing [cette chose optique qui tourne],” Rotary Demisphere. The belt-driven machine had been expensive to build and frequently broke. He explained, “I wasn’t interested in making movies as such; it was simply a more practical way of achieving my optical results,” before concluding more firmly, “When people say that I’ve made movies, I answer that, no, I haven’t, that it was a convenient method—I’m particularly sure of that now.”

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33 Marcel Duchamp, interview with Pierre Cabanne (1966), in Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 67. Originally published as Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp (Paris: Belfond, 1967). Speaking with Cabanne, Duchamp appears to confuse the dates and locations of these productions with those of his other film and optical experiments, situating the creation of both Anemic Cinema and Rotary Demisphere in New York between the years 1924 and 1925.
34 Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, 68.
If in the 1960s Duchamp could confidently state his lack of interest in “making movies,” it is less clear that he would have done so at the time he made *Anemic Cinema.* Evidence for a more direct and prolonged engagement with filmmaking in the 1920s has been available since at least 1953. In that year, the Greek-born French filmmaker and critic Ado Kyrou described a previously little known film made by Duchamp prior to *Anemic Cinema,* purportedly in 1920, and later destroyed. Kyrou reported its subject as a “turning sphere” with a punning inscription, filmed using an improvised “anaglyphic” method that produced an impression of relief when viewed through red and green eyeglasses (Fig. 0.9). Man Ray’s memoirs, published in 1963, offered firsthand accounts of the creation of this and even another film, said to feature the artist and poet Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, lost as well (Fig. 0.10).

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36 The date of the anaglyphic film project was likely 1925, not 1920. Kyrou’s account evidently relied on the recollections of Man Ray, who had retained two short fragments believed to belong to the destroyed film. The fragments, later acquired from Man Ray by collector and scholar Arturo Schwarz, show *Rotary Demisphere,* constructed in 1924, leading Schwarz to propose the later date for the project. See Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp,* vol. 2, 707. As Lars Blunck has documented, Duchamp’s references to the filming in correspondence with Katherine Dreier confirm the later date. Nevertheless, the appearance of an anaglyphic camera set-up in a photograph of Man Ray’s New York studio suggests some anaglyphic experimentation began around 1920. See Blunck, *Duchamps Präzisionsoptik,* 233-36.

37 See Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (New York: Little, Brown, 1963), 99-100, 263. Man Ray describes the latter film as “a sequence of myself as a barber shaving the pubic hairs of a nude model.” Extant frames believed to belong to that film show the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven posing nude, but not Man Ray or any shaving activity. See Patrick de Haas, “J’ai résolu de ne jamais m’occuper de cinéma,” in *Man Ray: Directeur de mauvais movies,* ed. Jean-Michel Bouhours and Haas (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997), 8–10. On the Baroness’s collaborations with Man Ray and Duchamp, see Irene
Duchamp evidently made several experimental shorts in the years preceding *Anemic Cinema*, even going so far as to privately screen them for a group of friends. After attending a dinner party in January 1922, the author Henri-Pierre Roché noted in his diary, “Marcel projects his film experiments, fragments, and geometric dances on a screen of silvered bathroom glass [*un écran de verre de salle de bains garni de tain*]—impressive and quite fantastic result, surely exploitable.” Though these shorts never screened publicly and are presumed lost, the posthumous publication of a collection of Duchamp’s personal notes in 1980 demonstrated definitively that Duchamp’s filmmaking extended beyond the disks of *Anemic Cinema*, on paper if not on film itself. The notes detail eight imaginative projects, among them: “Take a film of a real boxing fight—done with white gloves and blacken all the rest of the pictures so that one only sees the white gloves boxing”; “Electric wires seen from a moving train—Make a cinema”; “Make a movie of the [piano] tuner tuning and synchronize the tunings on a piano.”

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38 Henri-Pierre Roché, transcription of diary entry, January 21, 1922, box 243, folder 2, Henri Pierre Roché Papers, Carlton Lake Collection, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

39 Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, ed. and trans. Paul Matisse (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983), pls. 197, 192, 199. Translation modified for pl. 192. For Duchamp’s other notes for films, see pls. 189–201. The notes for films were collected and published, without commentary, as Marcel Duchamp, “Notes,” in *Jeune, dure et pure!: Une histoire du cinema d’avant-garde et expérimental en France*, ed. Nicole Brenez and Christian Lebrat (Paris: Cinémathèque Française, 2001), 90. They are undated and likely originate in the period between Duchamp’s acquisition of a camera in 1920 and his temporary cessation of filmmaking activity after *Anemic Cinema*. As I discuss in chap. 2, several (pls. 190, 196, and 197) appear to relate to René Clair and Francis Picabia’s 1924 short film *Entr’acte*, in which Duchamp performed a small role. They describe sequences in the film and the set design for the Picabia-designed ballet *Relâche* where it debuted.
a collection of nearly three hundred personal notes on wide-ranging subjects, the film plans have made little impact on Duchamp scholarship.⁴⁰

References to moviegoing and filmmaking also abound in Duchamp’s early correspondence and itineraries, calling new attention to the frequency of filmmaking language and metaphors in his work of the 1910s extending well beyond the chronophotographic imagery in *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2).* One note from the planning of the *Large Glass,* likely dating to 1912 or 1913 and first published by Duchamp in 1966, explores the idea of adapting the sequential imagery of cinematographic filmmaking to a static medium. “Make a painting or sculpture as one winds up a reel of moving picture film [*une bobine de film-cinéma.* With each turn, on a large reel…, a new ‘shot’ continuing the preceding turn and tying it into the next one.” “This kind of continuity,” it concludes, “may have nothing in common with moving picture film [*film cinématographique*] or even resemble it.”⁴¹ Another note, first published by Duchamp in 1934 but also likely written in 1912 or 1913, imagines different means of imbuing a work of “painting or sculpture” with motion, not through the sequential turning of a film reel but through chemical reactions on plate glass. Headed “Painting or Sculpture,” it reads, “Flat container in glass—[holding] all sorts of liquids.

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⁴⁰ The most extensive discussions of these notes to date are Craig E. Adcock, *Marcel Duchamp’s Notes from the “Large Glass”*: An N-Dimensional Analysis (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 184–88; and Blunck, *Duchamps Präzionsoptik,* 240-41.

⁴¹ Duchamp published this note in the bilingual limited edition *À l’Infinitif (The White Box),* trans. Cleve Gray (New York: Cordier & Ekstrom, 1966). English translation reprinted in Marcel Duchamp, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp,* ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 75. This and the following note appear to date to the same period in late 1912 and 1913, before Duchamp had determined paint and mixed media on glass with an accompanying textual catalog as the means to realize the work and convey the motion of its various elements.
Colored, pieces of wood, of iron, chemical reactions. Shake the container and look through it [regarder par transparence, against a light source].”

The notes evince a search for ways to transport the moving image out of the cinematographic apparatus and into the discursive spaces of period painting and sculpture. As film scholar Annette Michelson astutely observes, the mixed-media on glass format Duchamp ultimately selected for the Large Glass, though static by comparison to these earlier proposals, adopts cinema’s “surface—the screen,” “medium—light,” and “perceptual and compositional mode—temporality.”

There is also evidence of more direct encounters with commercial and pseudo-commercial filmmaking than previously believed. Duchamp performed a small role in the 1918 Léonce Perret film Lafayette, We Come. Then, in November 1921, writing from Paris to friends and patrons Louise and Walter Arensberg in New York, he reported that he had “made a bit of film, a short,” evidently referring to an early experiment with his new camera, and was “planning on getting a ‘job’ in the cinema—not as an actor, rather as an assistant cameraman.” Duchamp presumably sought the job as a means to research camera operation for his own work in the 1920s; there is no indication that he

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44 Duchamp plays the part of a wounded soldier in the film. See the entry for July 8, 1918, in Gough-Cooper and Caumont, “Ephemerides on or about Marcel Duchamp.”

45 Marcel Duchamp to Walter and Louise Arensberg, November 15, 1921, in Duchamp, Affectionately, Marcel, 102–03.
ever obtained such a position. Duchamp also returned to filmmaking nearly two decades after the production of *Anemic Cinema*, contributing the three-minute long dream sequence *Discs* to *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. Though directed by the former Dada painter and avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter, *Dreams That Money Can Buy* deliberately mimicked conventions of contemporary commercial films of the time to attract as wide an audience as possible; as such, it was central to Richter’s effort since the mid-1930s to mount a popular anti-fascist film movement he called “progressive cinema.” Duchamp’s dream echoes and subtly critiques Richter’s project, proposing an alternative extrafilmic means of audience activation that Duchamp continued to explore in his subsequent assemblage works *Please Touch* and *Étant donnés*.

**The Cinematic Imaginary**

Clearly, Duchamp’s engagement with the moving image was extensive, spreading over much of his six-decade career, and promiscuous, moving with ease between painting, sculpture, photography, assemblage, and film media. Is all of this activity directed at modernist painting? In the last fifteen years, the idea of a “cinematic imaginary” in media outside of film has attracted significant attention. Prompted by the rapid replacement of analog film media with digital cinema formats, this scholarship proposes that many works of modern art seek an intervention in cinema specifically through the use of non-filmic media.

Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel’s 2003 exhibition *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film* signaled this new interest in reassessing the material character of
cinema and its cultural impact. As Shaw and Weibel stated in the exhibition catalog, they were motivated by the substitution of digital, algorithmic technologies for the analog, photographic media that had dominated film and film theory for much of the twentieth century. As Shaw further explained in his introduction to one section of the catalog:

A…function of these essays is to create an appreciation of the radical impact that the increasing shift to digital techniques of production and presentation is having on the nature of the cinematic experience. Such an appreciation is often best achieved by a closer examination of the nature of the traditional, and even obsolete, means of production and presentation that have constituted cinema up to now. In this way we may see more clearly the ‘differences’ that the digital is offering.\textsuperscript{46}

Peter Weibel, in his catalog preface, attributes the exhibition’s attention to the means of production and presentation and the ways they actively “constitute cinema” to the “apparatus” or \textit{dispositif} theory of Jean-Louis Baudry, Chrisitan Metz, and others in the 1970s. In a series of widely-circulated essays, Baudry and Metz adopted the French term \textit{dispositif} to denote the media architecture structuring the viewing experience in standard cinema halls of the period, relying upon Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser’s respective theorizations of spectator identification and “ideological state apparatuses” to

\textsuperscript{46} Jeffrey Shaw, “Introduction,” in Weibel and Shaw, \textit{Future Cinema}, 21-22. Film scholar Catherine Russell has designated this return to early cinema prompted by digital technologies “parallax historiography,” explaining, “New media technologies have created new theoretical ‘passages’ back to the first decades of film history….The term parallax is useful to describe this historiography, because it is a term that invokes a shift in perspective as well as a sense of parallelism.” Russell, “Parallax Historiography: The Flâneuse as Cyberfeminist,” in \textit{A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema}, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 552.
examine the ways this media architecture advanced an ideological agenda. According to Weibel, Lacan’s psychoanalytic approach exposed the ways in which a subject internalizes an external self-image, “demonstrat[ing] that the subject mistakes its true self (je) and constructs instead an imaginary self (moi) that is offered from exterior to subject.” Althusser drew on Lacan and Marxist theory to provide further insight into the way ideology “interpellates” its subjects, analyzing how “the function of ideology is not so much to reproduce social structure or classes [but] to reproduce subjects who mistake themselves and are therefore willing to reproduce the values and social order necessary for the survival of capitalism.” Applied to film, Lacan and Althusser’s theories, Weibel concludes, “show[ed] that the cinema is an ensemble of discursive, material, formal elements that construct not only a reality, but also a subject.”

Weibel and Shaw derived the exhibition’s subtitle, “the cinematic imaginary after film,” directly from Christian Metz’s application of Lacan’s psychoanalytic “imaginary”

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49 Ibid.
(imaginaire) for film. Metz, in his now famous essay, “The Imaginary Signifier,” published in *Screen* in 1975, had written, “Cinema is a technique of the imaginary… a veritable psychical substitute, a prosthesis for our primally dislocated limbs.” In his preface, Weibel similarly associates the cinema with the imaginary in an effort to displace material-based ontologies and re-center cinematic experience as a vehicle for psycho-social liberation. By linking cinema and the imaginary, Weibel dramatically proposes that changes to the structure of cinema would affect the imaginary and its interpellation of the subject: “The aim [of *Future Cinema*] is to deconstruct the total apparatus of cinema, to transform the cinematic apparatus, and create new technologies that allow different psychic mechanisms, that subjugate subjects in the cinema, that allow different relations between spectator and screen, different representations/constructions of reality and subjects, a critical relation to representation. The cinematic imaginary is the imaginary signifier in the digital field.”

As the title *Future Cinema* and catalog texts suggest, Weibel and Shaw’s primary interest was the contemporary transformation and future expansion of cinema to accommodate new media technologies. In the immediate aftermath of the exhibition, however, several emerging film scholars and art historians embraced similar terms and methods to reassess the migration of cinema and cinematic discourses outside of film media in the first decades of the twentieth century, at times including discussion of

individual works by Duchamp. Jennifer Wild, for example, completed a dissertation at the University of Iowa in 2006, titled “L’Imagination Cinémentale: The Cinematic Impression on Avant-Garde Art in France, 1913-1929.” Wild’s subject was the “rise and stabilization of the cinema in France as a significant contemporary contributor to the historical and aesthetic nexus of avant-garde art and art practice,” and in reference to this “contribution” she modified the “cinematic imaginary” as the “cine-mental imagination.” As she explained, the variant derives from the period under study; the artist and critic Jean-Francis Laglenne introduced “l’imagination cinémentale” in a short essay published in a special “cinema” issue of the French journal Cahiers du Mois in 1925. His essay, “Peinture et Cinéma,” appearing in a section devoted to “the influence of cinema on the arts,” posits a “cine-mental imagination” whereby “the rhythm of the screen little by little educates and transforms the eye of the artist.”

Noam M. Elcott’s 2009 dissertation “Into the Dark Chamber: Avant-Garde Photograms and the Cinematic Imaginary” directly adopts Weibel and Shaw’s term to characterize the relationship between cinema and the cameraless photography of Man Ray and Lásló Moholy-Nagy. The “cameraless photographic abstraction” of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy represent, Elcott argues, non-traditional cinematic objects: “Man Ray created his rayographs [and later Moholy-Nagy, his photograms] by projecting electric light onto a rectangular surface in an artificially dark space. The…conditions of

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production, in other words, closely paralleled the conditions of reception in the cinema as they were consolidated in the immediate post-WWI period.”

Where Wild employs the “cine-mental imagination” to justify film scholarship’s expansion beyond the traditional objects of film culture, Elcott uses the “cinematic imaginary” to recognize the impact of cinema on works of modern art. Like Wild, Elcott implies the recognition of this “cinematic imaginary” by artists and critics in the period itself. At the beginning of his discussion of the topic, he includes as an epigraph a long quote from French poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire’s lecture “The New Spirit and the Poets” delivered at Paris’s Vieux Colombier Theater in 1917. Eight years before Laglenne, Apollinaire attested to a permeation of cinema and other new technologies into the forms of poetry: “It would have been strange if in an epoch when the popular art par excellence, the cinema, is a book of pictures, the poets had not tried to compose pictures for meditative and refined minds which are not content with the crude imaginings of the makers of film. These last will become more perceptive, and one can predict the day when, the phonograph and the cinema having become the only form of publication in use, the poet will have a freedom heretofore unknown.” Though Apollinaire spoke of poetry and not the other arts, Elcott extends the “cinematic imaginary” to the avant-garde more broadly. He answers Apollinaire, “It would have been very strange, indeed, if interwar artists did not respond to cinema, the popular art par excellence. Of course they did.

Although surprisingly marginal in most art historical scholarship on the interbellum, cinema and its imagined potential beyond the production of films—what might be called the cinematic imaginary—were everywhere in the art and writing of the avant-garde.”\textsuperscript{56}

Curiously, the terms “cinematic imaginary” and “cine-mental imagination” are largely absent from the books that followed Wild and Elcott’s dissertations, published in 2015 and 2016, respectively. The concept that cinema’s reach extended beyond film into other visual art media remains present, but rather than rely on a singular conception of the “cinematic,” the authors devote significant energy to defining the various cinematic forms and structures they see reemerging in works of visual art. In Artificial Darkness: An Obscure History of Modern Art and Media, Elcott shifts his focus from the broadly conceived “conditions of reception in the cinema as they were consolidated in the immediate post-WWI period” to a careful genealogy of the uses of “artificial darkness” in the production and reception of film media throughout its history.\textsuperscript{57} It is the experimentation with and exploitation of artificial illumination and its absence that yokes cinema and avant-garde art in the first decades of the twentieth century, Elcott concludes. Wild’s The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema, 1900-1923 develops its central arguments through a media archaeology of early cinematic experience in Paris, associating it in an opening chapter, for example, with the development of Picasso and Braque’s cubism. Drawing upon Leo Steinberg’s analysis of the confrontational address of Picasso’s Demoiselles d’Avignon and Tom Gunning’s writings on the exhibitionary character of early cinema, Wild proposes that “Cubist reflexivity,” the self-referential


\textsuperscript{57} Elcott, Artificial Darkness.
flatness of the cubist picture, corresponds to the self-aware viewing conditions and scenarios of the early “cinema of attractions” in Paris’s café-concert venues.\(^{58}\) The avenues by which this “correspondence” travels remain somewhat vague. Wild at times implies a flow of influence from cinematic precedents to cubism, but ultimately proposes a mutual participation in broader shifts in public life and spectatorship in Paris at that time: “While it could be said that the perceptual environment of early cinema venues in fact precedes the invention of Cubism by a short decade, the more important point lies in understanding how early cinema and Les Demoiselles shared a system of relations that transformed a scenario of beholding into a confrontational interspatial scene of mutual and self-conscious exhibition.”\(^{59}\)

Through careful attention to the history and geography of early film culture and exhibition practices, Wild expands her study of the “cinematic imaginary” to other areas of avant-garde production in the visual arts as well, looking beyond cubism to certain “diagrammatic” and text-based works by Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia in New York and Paris and the “spectator-oriented” works of the Zurich and Paris Dada groups. Duchamp ultimately emerges as one of the main test-cases through a selection of his early work. Wild focuses on two series, his “Bride” paintings of 1912-1913 and the text-based works The (1915), Fania (1915, Fig. 0.11), and Rendez-vous du Dimanche, 6 February 1916 (1916), which she relates to his development of the Rrose Sélavy persona in the early 1920s. With regard to the “cinematic” in the “Bride” paintings, she highlights


\(^{59}\) Ibid., 30.
Duchamp’s use of the phrase “cinematic blossoming” in a related note to develop an interpretation of “the diagrammatic interstices structuring the bride’s passage from woman into a formless abstraction,” which “like the perception of filmic movement,” “were not located on the representational plane, but rather in the eyes and creative imagination of both the spectator and her bachelors.”60 In this way, Wild positions filmic movement at the origin of painterly abstraction. Alongside Duchamp, “both Léopold Survage and František Kupka conceptualized the experience of moving images as a perceptual ‘blossoming,’ whereupon they adapted the filmstrip’s parallel structure in a procedure for generating abstract form.”61 Wild’s reading relies heavily upon an English translation of the original French phrase “épanouissement cinématique” as “cinematic blossoming” which, as I argue in chapter one, may exaggerate the relationship to period cinematography and mischaracterize Duchamp’s debt to Étienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotographic studies.

According to Wild, the text-based works of 1915 and 1916 engage a different aspect of early cinema, nevertheless related to a common “diagrammatic” paradigm in early film culture. *The, Fania, and Rendez-vous*, all created shortly after Duchamp sailed to New York and met the early film star Fania Marinoff, “combine language and stardom into an intertwined and amplified dispositif,” Wild argues. “In turn, they offer a view of Duchamp’s identification and dissection of the language of stardom—as it was diagrammatically structured across media by way of literature and poetry, image and

60 Ibid., 105.
61 Ibid.
symbol, poster and postcard.” From this “identification and dissection of the language of [film] stardom,” Duchamp invented Rrose Sélavy, a female persona whose image and name appeared on a range of his activities during the early 1920s. “Duchamp…was equally attentive to film’s inherent diagrammicity, out of which the blossoming of ammased movement arose as a condition of both (self) perception and the perception of the world after technology,” Wild concludes. Again, while generally reluctant to assert causality, Wild points here to effects of this technology, cinema, on its contemporaries’s perception, and thereby on their artistic production.

Wild’s renovation of “cinematic imaginary” discourse through the expansion of the “cinematic” from film media to the dispositif and culture of early cinema coincides with other historical accounts explicitly motivated by the “digital turn” cited by Weibel and Shaw. Pavle Levi’s 2012 book *Cinema by Other Means* addresses “radical experiments not only with but also ‘around’ and even without film,” explaining, “We live in an age in which it is easy to overlook the fact that this severance of cinema from its traditional, historical base—the film apparatus—did not emerge as a possibility only with the advent of digital technologies.” “The separation of film and cinema,” Levi argues, “had, in fact, already been practiced throughout the era of cinematographic normativity; during those (scarcely past) ‘pre-digital’ days when film was still widely accepted as the material-technological foundation of the phenomenon that is the cinema.”

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62 Ibid., 117.
63 Ibid., 134.
64 Levi, *Cinema by Other Means*, xiii.
65 Ibid., xiii.
Levi draws his examples primarily from the pre- and post-World War II Yugoslav avant-garde, including works by Llubomir Micić, Dragan Aleksić, Aleksandar Vučo, Dušan Matić, Llubiša Jocić, and Slobodan Šijan. Among them is The Frenzied Marble, an assemblage made in 1930 by Vučo and Matić, Yugoslav surrealists (Fig. 0.12).

Comprising wood, metal, clay, hay, and paper on a painted wooden background, The Frenzied Marble represents for Levi a prototypical instance of the “cinematic imaginary” in the visual arts, though he favors an alternative designation for cinematic works in non-film media: “cinema by other means.” As he argues, The Frenzied Marble constitutes “cinema by other means” because its “component-parts” appear in three successive rectangular, screen-like frames that “create[e] the overall impression of a filmstrip.” The Frenzied Marble is thus a work “directly inspired by the workings of the film apparatus, but evoked through the material and technological properties of the originally nonfilmic media.” Unlike Wild and Elcott’s “cinematic imaginary,” which permeates the other arts, Levi casts “cinema by other means” as a deliberate attempt by artists to engage cinema. To what ends? According to Levi, Vučo and Matić’s reimagination of the film apparatus in nonfilmic media and other “cinema by other means” works of the 1920s and 1930s “oppose normativization and technological reification of the apparatus.” They force one to recognize that “this Idea [cinema] acquired sufficient conceptual precision—that it gained its own, albeit immaterial, specificity—only after the cinematographic apparatus

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66 Ibid., 27.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 31.
had already been invented.”⁶⁹ At the same time, Levi argues, they begin “to reveal the whole of reality as having, in fact, all along been proto-cinematic (a form of ‘cinema degree zero,’ so to speak).”⁷⁰ Levi’s attention to the film theoretical implications of works of visual art, their opposition to the cinematic apparatus on the level of the “Idea,” seems crucial in pinpointing the avant-garde’s contribution. Levi, however, grants them primarily antagonistic power, overlooking the artists’s attempts not only to challenge but to redefine or reinvent their contemporary cinema and the reasons they might have done so.

Though unremarked upon by Levi, the assertion of a “cinema by other means” outside of film, like Wild’s “cine-mental imagination,” originates in the interwar period. A short article titled “The Cinema by Other Means,” published in the Rome-based journal Interciné appears to coin the phrase in 1935. There Czech-German journalist and novelist Hans Natonek used “cinema by other means” specifically to refer to the attempts by writer-illustrators to create cinematographic effects in printed stories. Natonek explained, “When we speak of the ‘creators of the cinema,’ we think of the technical part only of this invention and generally forget that, even before it was invented, draughtsmen, who may also be considered the precursors of the cinema, succeeded in narrating short tales by means of a series of images to which their pencils gave a really cinematographic movement.”⁷¹ The cartoons of Swedish illustrator Oscar Jacobsen are, he claimed,

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⁶⁹ Ibid., 32.
⁷⁰ Ibid.
“veritable little silent films.” Though this language implies an expanded conception of cinema and film similar to that of Levi, Natonek ultimately reasserted the medial distinction and hierarchy. “Despite their affinities, these different means of expressions differ essentially one from the other. In spite of that fact, however, many novelists try to ‘make the cinema by other means’; their novels are at bottom merely well developed scenarios.”

Natonek’s “Cinema by other means” would require the new millennium’s “digital turn” to reemerge in scholarly discourse. Raymond Bellour used the phrase after attending the 1999 Venice Biennial where he saw several digital moving image works by contemporary artists. “It seems time for a new inventory,” he wrote. “To fix the terms of it is a delicate task. In effect, one would have to describe the explosion and dispersal by which that which one thought to be or have been cinema (if one accepts to see things through its eyes) now finds itself redistributed, transformed and reinstalled.” Recalling the synchronized slide projections and accompanying audio narration in the work Photograph (Fig. 0.13) by James Coleman, Bellour proposes one class of objects for his new typology: “Cinema can…be reinvented, an other cinema, by other means.” With Pavle Levi’s subsequent theorization of the phrase in a 2010 essay in the journal October and in his 2012 book, the phrase has now become synonymous with the idea of cinematic works that eschew film media.

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
In addition to the Yugoslav avant-garde, Levi’s study also includes several “cinema by other means” works by American, German, and French artists, most prominently the airbrush painting *Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematograph* (1919, Fig. 0.14) by the American-born Man Ray. Man Ray’s painting “presents an audiovisual machine of dubious operability, a strange relative, one might say, of Sound Film,” Levi writes. As such, it portrays cinema as a medium that is in a “permanent state of ‘becoming’…simultaneously objectively executed and subjectively motivated, universal in [its] abstractness and particular in [its] concrete existence.” Duchamp, despite his proximity to Man Ray in this period and the apparent correspondence of works such as *Rotary Demisphere* to the “cinema by other means” model, is mostly absent from Levi’s account. The *Large Glass* appears in passing as one of several examples of “a European avant-gardist intent on explicitly linking eruptions of human psychosexual energy with the creative impulses of technological modernity.” Like Wild, Levi relies here on Duchamp’s use of the phrase “cinematic blossoming” in an early note for the *Glass* to isolate the “technological modernity” referenced in the *Glass* as specifically cinematic in nature. “Particularly significant for our purposes is the fact that, according to Duchamp, his *desiring machine* was intended to give rise to a distinctly cinematic effect: a certain ‘cinematic blossoming’ realized in the domain of the Bride.”

Levi similarly takes Duchamp’s neologism, rendered in English translation, at face value as relating to cinematography, leaving unexplored the actual material character of this

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77 Ibid., 40.
78 Ibid., 8.
79 Ibid., 9.
nominally “cinematic” effect. He also ignores those works by Duchamp that would appear most germane to the “cinema by other means” rubric, such as *Rotary Glass Plates* and *Rotary Demisphere*.

Another scholar delivers the analysis of Duchamp’s *Rotary Demisphere* as “cinema by other means” absent from Levi’s account. Andrew Uroskie’s 2014 *Between The Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* characterizes Duchamp’s optical machines of the 1920s as important precedents for “cinema’s ‘expansion’ into the institutions and discourses of late modern art” in works by Jean Tinguely, Robert Breer, and others in the 1950s and 1960s. Without using Levi’s terminology, Uroskie presents Duchamp’s optical machines as “cinema by other means” works that uncouple the medium of cinema from the apparatus of the cinematograph. “Like the works of so many of his time, Duchamp’s ‘precision optics’ were propelled by his fascination not with ‘the machine’ in general, but with a particular machine—the most revolutionary and disruptive motor of twentieth-century aesthetics—the cinematographic apparatus.”

He adds, “All of Duchamp’s optical toys might be considered thinly veiled explorations, critiques, and transformations of this singular, insidious machine. *Rotary Demisphere* allowed Duchamp to approach the cinematic apparatus obliquely, to dissect its studied coherence into the strangeness of its otherwise invisible component parts.”

With his focus on post-World War II works, Uroskie curtails this discussion of *Rotary Demisphere*. If Duchamp’s optical works are indeed “explorations, critiques, and

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81 Ibid.
transformations” of the cinematographic apparatus, what is the critique that they offer? Uroskie implies, like Levi, that the result is to “make strange” the apparatus, “dissect its studied coherence.” For Levi, this serves to reveal the distance between the “Idea” of cinema and the apparatus of the cinematograph. In the context of Uroskie’s study, it would appear to serve the expansion of cinema into the “institutions and discourses” of modern art, but how does it do so? And to what end?

Uroskie’s primary interest is not *Rotary Demisphere* but its reception in the 1950s. “It becomes significant that the historical recovery of Duchamp’s precision optics in the 1950s came at the very moment when the cinema, as a cultural institution, was itself undergoing a massive internal transformation,” he concludes. The optical machines are significant only for “the model they presented for an investigation of cinema by means of a space historically and epistemologically prior to cinema.”82 What was the significance of the optical machines before they served as models for moving image and kinetic works in the 1950s? Why did Duchamp create them in the 1920s? Can they seek the “transformation” of the cinematographic apparatus, as Uroskie claims, and the temporalization of modernist painting, as Krauss has argued? Furthermore, what was their relationship to *Anemic Cinema*? Uroskie, Levi, Elcott, and Wild productively expand the study of cinema to the “cinematic imaginary” beyond film, but, like Krauss, largely leave unexamined the implications of this expansion on *Anemic Cinema* and the broader canon of 1920s avant-garde film.83 If *Rotary Demisphere* critiques cinematographic

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82 Ibid., 101.
83 For an important exception in recent “cinematic imaginary” scholarship, see George Baker’s discussion of the formal relation between René Clair and Francis Picabia’s short
filmmaking, what does that mean for the artist’s completion of an avant-garde cinematographic film two years later? Or, for that matter, for his contribution of a dream sequence in a narrative feature film twenty years later?

_Faire un Cinéma_ seeks to both expand and refine the study of the “cinematic imaginary,” building on the work of Krauss, Wild, Elcott, Levi, and Uroskie. Where the past scholarship has approached the subject thematically through individual examples created by a range of artists, poets, and filmmakers, _Faire un Cinéma_ explores moving images and moving image discourses in the work of a single artist-filmmaker, Marcel Duchamp, over the span of six decades. Further developing Levi and Uroskie’s models, I see the avant-garde’s “cinema by other means” as a corollary to the work of writers and critics more conventionally associated with “classical film theory.” That is to say, Duchamp’s paintings, sculptures, assemblages, works on paper, film, and writings, created between 1911 and 1968, reveal a searching examination of the “cinematic” as moving image technology and institutions themselves transformed over time. Duchamp’s use of nonfilmic media, while demonstrating the distance between the medium of cinema and the media apparatus of the cinematograph, also exploits this distance; Duchamp employs medial disjunction to a variety of ends from the chronophotographic paintings of 1911 and 1912 to the room-sized assemblage _Étant donnés_ in the 1960s. At a time when digital tools and media have replaced the analog cinematographic apparatus and celluloid film _Entr’acte_ (1924) and the Picabia-designed ballet _Relâche_ (1924) in _The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris_ (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 289–337. For a recent reassessment of _Anemic Cinema_, focusing on its “modulation of embodied perception,” see Scott C. Richmond, _Cinema’s Bodily Illusions: Flying, Floating, and Hallucinating_ (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 25-50.
film stock that once grounded the study of cinema, such experimentation offers an alternative lineage in which to situate contemporary image and screen practices. If, as Andre Gaudreault and Philippe Marion have recently argued, the proper objects of film studies in the digital era are “kinematic” images across media, earlier instances of non-filmic cinemas, such as Duchamp’s own “kinematic blossoming” discussed in chapter one, demonstrate the historical character of this expanded field.  

As a study of painting, photography, writing, and assemblage and their relationship to “the cinematic,” *Faire un Cinéma* also examines the role of media in the artistic avant-garde more broadly. Duchamp famously “quit” oil painting after executing *Tu m’anime* in 1918, and his career as an artist with the (non-) completion of the *Large Glass* in 1923, but he irrefutably went on to produce cinematographic film and several publication and exhibition projects in the 1930s. In my analysis of *Anemic Cinema, Dreams That Money Can Buy*, and *Étant donnés*, I join Elena Filipovic in focusing attention on the artist’s nominally “marginal” productions after 1923. By following Duchamp’s move out of painting and into film, exhibition, and publication, I explore how Duchamp and others in the pre- and interwar avant-gardes conceived artistic media “in the age of technological reproducibility.” Significant attention has been paid to the role of

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86 Filipovic (Ibid., 55-65) provides extended analysis of the status of the photograph in Duchamp’s *Boîte verte* (1934) and Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of
photography in Duchamp’s work, not often as a direct means of production but rather as a conceptual framework. As Jean Clair noted in his pioneering 1977 monograph Duchamp et la photographie: Essai d’analyse d’un primat technique sur le développement d’une œuvre, “One could say that if it is rarely by the photograph/photography that Duchamp found a new mode of expressing himself, it is in fact always in relation to it that he defined the new means of his expression.” Krauss has similarly observed photographic affinities in the indexical means of signification Duchamp employed in the Large Glass and other works. One recognizes such accounts as detailing a photographic corollary to the “cinematic imaginary” in Duchamp’s art, a “photographic imaginary.” George Baker, building on Krauss’s observations on its indexicality, even characterizes the Large Glass as “photography by other means.”

Faire un Cinéma extends these discussions to cinema and considers their implications for Duchamp’s articulation of media-specificity more generally. Does Duchamp give us a “theory” of media? An answer would look beyond Duchamp’s cinema and photography “by other means” and even the potential painting and sculpture “by other means” that are also evident in his work to consider the broader significance of “other means” approaches to the figuration of various media. Like many of his contemporaries, Duchamp repeatedly referred to and instrumentalized period media discourses, representing medium-

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Technological Reproducibility” (1935-39). As in previous studies, however, Anemic Cinema and other film works are largely absent.

87 Filipovic (Ibid., 35-43) notes this discrepancy and seeks to correct it in her attention to the photography present in Duchamp’s Boîtes.


specificity not as a given but as a discursive frame, a “theoretical object,” to borrow Krauss’s phrase, to test and exploit to a variety ends. At the same time, in works like *Étant donnés*, he registered the psycho-social effects of these frames on the viewing subject.

The title *Faire un Cinéma* derives from one of the eight undated notes for films that Duchamp drafted in the 1920s. The original note (Fig. 0.15), scrawled by the artist on a small sliver of paper, reads, “*fils électriques vus / d’un train en / marche – Faire / un cinéma*” or, in the standard English translation, “Electric wires seen / from a moving / train—Make / a film.” Duchamp elsewhere employs the phrase “*prendre un film*” to refer to making, or literally “taking,” a film. Here he employs *faire* and *cinéma* instead, synonyms which emphasize the “making” of a film as one makes a painting or sculpture and the multivalent meanings of “cinema” as film print, film hall, the film institution, and, in the French “cinéma,” also kinema, movement.

Duchamp’s formulation of the phrase informs three broad arguments of the dissertation regarding the artist’s moving image works: they they not only oppose or critique dominant cinematic formats and media but also create and re-imagine the cinema; that they articulate the cinematic medium, and medium-specificity more generally, as something made and defined through material facture and conditions of beholding, not as something taken as a given; and that they exploit the polysemy of the French word “*cinéma*” to signify both cinema(tography) and kinema. To foreground

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91 See, for example, Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, 197.
these issues, the dissertation continually presents Duchamp’s “moving image” works in both visual art and film media as intersectional with film and media theory. *Nude Descending a Staircase*, No. 2, *The Large Glass*, *Rotary Demisphere*, *Anemic Cinema*, *Discs, Please Touch, Étant donnés*—these works offer visions of cinema contrasting both with one another and with the commercial and avant-garde cinemas dominant in the period. *Faire un Cinéma* identifies and defines these cinemas and their contexts across the twentieth century.

Centered on the “moving image” and not on any one specific media-based conception of cinema, *Faire un Cinéma* locates Duchamp’s “cinematic” works between painting and film. As Krauss argues, Duchamp’s embrace of film in the pulsating structure of the optical disks developed with his movement out of painting in the *Large Glass* and remains in important ways shaped by the character of that project. In the *Large Glass*, Duchamp had set himself the task of representing the psycho-sexual “blossoming” of the bride, an event that he felt exceeded the means of traditional easel painting and prompted his search for alternative, kinematic means. *Étant donnés* arises out of Duchamp’s making of the film short *Discs* in the 1940s, and more directly refers to recognizable forms of mid-century film production and spectatorship. Nevertheless, by situating itself in the gallery space of the modern art museum, *Étant donnés* again displaces cinema to the domain of painting.

Across these works, Duchamp’s cinema remains oriented toward the body, the female body as the object of its representation and a desiring (presumed to be heterosexual male) body as its voyeuristic viewer. As David Joselit has argued, the
female body, and its signification, underlies much, if not all, of Duchamp’s art and modernist art generally. Modernist painting, from Courbet onward, had, in addition to paralyzing the image, objectified the “biological body” into a “semiotic marketplace.” A work such as the Large Glass, according to Joselit, stages the instability of this act, “perform[ing]…the perpetual generation and degeneration of semiotic meaning from the medium of the body.” Krauss, in The Optical Unconscious, points to a similar disruption of the universalizing rhetoric of modernist visuality with regard to the viewer of this body. “In Duchamp’s work at all the levels of his practice [it] is revealed….that there is no way to concentrate on the threshold of vision, to capture something en tournant la tête, without siting vision in the body and position[ing] that body, in turn, within the grip of desire.”

The visual objectification of the female body is not the exclusive domain of modernist painting, however. As Joselit notes, Annette Michelson similarly characterizes film culture as being “rooted in fetishistically analyzing the feminine body and then reconstituting it synthetically.” “The female body,” Michelson writes, is “the fantasmatic ground of cinema itself.” In this sense, Duchamp’s moving image works address a “semiotic marketplace” common to both modernist art and film. Krauss has observed how the rotating optical disks of Anemic Cinema create the “illusion of

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92 Joselit, Infinite Regress, 45.
93 Ibid., 34.
94 Krauss, The Optical Unconscious, 140.
95 Joselit, Infinite Regress, 220n41.
trembling breast giving way to that of uterine concavity, itself then swelling into the projecting orb of a blinking eye.\(^97\) The reclining nude of Étant donnés has obvious art historical models but, as I argue in chapter four, specifically refers to the representation of the woman seen “through the keyhole” in early film through its subject and formal structure, its inner brick wall mimicking, for example, the lens masking employed to created the keyhole effect. By doing so, Duchamp’s cinema undoubtedly participates in the representation of the female body for the pleasure of a desiring viewer. Nevertheless, like Krauss and Joselit, I see these works as frequently troubling the expected dynamic of this encounter, displacing, interrupting, and at times contravening its operation.

The study unfolds over four chronological chapters. The first develops a conception of the “cinematic imaginary” operative in Duchamp’s work through a survey of cinematographic analogies and alternatives in the artist’s paintings, assemblages, works on paper, and writings prior to 1920. Nearly a decade before he acquired his movie camera, Duchamp created a series of cubistic oil paintings mimicking the diachronic imagery of Étienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotography. This does not, however, align him with Marey’s scientific method. I argue that Duchamp’s integration of chronophotographic imagery drew an implicit relationship between moving image or “kinematic” discourses within Parisian cubism and the emergent “cinematic” film culture in the city. The Large Glass, his major post-cubist work of the later 1910s, continues this examination of “cubist kinema” by replacing chronophotographic painting with a free-standing screen-object and textual catalog. Severed from the wall and paired with a

\(^97\) Krauss, “The Im/pulse to See,” 60.
textual accompaniment, the screen-as-object radically transforms the easel painting, shifting its relationship to the viewer and the lighting and spatial architecture of its display environment to create a kinematic art medium parallel to the contemporary cinematographic film.

The next chapter focuses on Duchamp’s turn to cinematographic filmmaking and eventual production of *Anemic Cinema*. After moving to New York in 1915, Duchamp’s plans for the *Glass* shifted from kinematic to optical forms of motion, ultimately prompting a series of film experiments with little relation to period narrative conventions or theatrical projection formats. *Anemic Cinema*, filmed after his return to Paris, integrated an architectural glass screen with the projected film to effect, I argue, the “four-dimensional vision” Duchamp had previously pursued in the *Glass*. It also introduced into his filmmaking Duchamp’s female artistic alter ego, Rrose Sélavy, and her language-based practice. Existing studies of *Anemic Cinema* overlook the significance of Rrose Sélavy’s fictive authorship and the unique screen-object, now lost but described by the artist as translucent glass with silver-mirror backing. By recovering these elements of Duchamp’s early filmmaking, this chapter seeks to decenter the standardized theatrical film from its position as the dominant theoretical object of avant-garde film culture, exposing the medial diversity of Duchamp’s cinema and that of other filmmakers associated with Paris Dada.

A third chapter jumps to the 1940s when the collaborative production of Richter’s *Dreams That Money Can Buy* prompted Duchamp to return to *Anemic Cinema* and comment upon its emergent popular reception in American cinemas in his three-minute
dream sequence titled *Discs*. Duchamp’s sequence in *Dreams* is often confused for a facile copy of his earlier film and erroneously attributed to Richter. Newly uncovered archival documents and comparative analysis of the films confirm Duchamp’s authorship and his deliberate adaptation of *Anemic Cinema* to the modern dispositif of the commercial cinema. Duchamp’s renovation of the original film acknowledges the changed context and its effect on the viewing experience of the audience.

During *Dreams*’s production, Duchamp also began work on his own alternative “cinema,” one sited not in the theater but in the museum. The fourth chapter traces *Etant donnés*’s development from 1946 to 1968, situating the inception of the two-decade long work in the film’s production, and argues that the altered final version of *Etant donnés*, unveiled at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1969, remains in important ways a “black box,” mobilizing the cinematic experience to allegorize the spectatorial regime of the modern museum. By creating a cinema uniquely suited to the museum gallery, this version of *Etant donnés* is an important but little known precedent for contemporary practices that displace the cinematic object from “black box” screening rooms to “white cube” museum galleries. A short concluding chapter addresses the theoretical and practical implications of this new history of Duchamp’s cinema for art and film practices within the contemporary museum and the ongoing reception of Duchamp’s art.
CHAPTER 1: Épanouissement cinématique and the “Cinematic Imaginary”

Early in the conception of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915-1923, see Fig. 0.1), a nine-foot tall mixed media on glass work, Marcel Duchamp laid out his plans in a long manuscript. The original draft, written in black ink over ten hand-numbered pages (Fig. 1.1), remained in Duchamp’s possession until his death in 1968 but facsimiles published in the boxed edition known as *The Green Box* (1934, Fig. 1.2) found a broader audience. Circulating there and later in popular anthologies of Duchamp’s writings, the text became one of the best known of the two hundred or so notes written in relation to the *Large Glass* between the years 1912 and 1923.1

In the manuscript, Duchamp elaborates upon various ideas for the “graphical arrangement” of the work then titled *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* and envisioned as a large-scale oil painting on canvas, not glass. The artist devotes the majority of the text, some six and a half of its ten pages, to a single form in the work’s upper register that he refers to as the “épanouissement cinématique.”2 This

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1 André Breton included a long excerpt in a review of the *Green Box* he published in the December 1934 of *Minotaure* that offered the first critical analysis of the *Large Glass* and the note has served as fodder for every subsequent study of the work. See Breton, “Phare de la mariée,” *Minotaure* 6 (1935): 45-49.

“épanouissement cinématique” emerges as an element crucial to the imagined work: “The whole graphic significance [of the painting] is for this épanouissement cinématique;” “This épanouissement cinématique is the most important part of the painting.”

Although the Large Glass has since become an iconic work in the history of modern art and the subject of extensive art historical study, the “épanouissement cinématique” of this early manuscript remains enigmatic. English-language translations of the text conventionally render the phrase as “cinematic blossoming,” a neologism with no obvious meaning or significance, particularly in the context of plans for an oil painting. The phrase does not re-appear in the many preparatory notes and studies that followed the ten-page manuscript, and, though Duchamp would subsequently acquire a movie camera and create the avant-garde short Anemic Cinema (1926), the version of The Bride Stripped Bare constructed between 1915 and 1923 features no film or moving image media of any kind. What was this “cinematic blossoming” that Duchamp considered the “most important part” of The Bride Stripped Bare in 1912? How did it factor in the final version of the work?

Past scholarship on the Large Glass equates the “cinematic blossoming” of the early manuscript with a graphic element that appears in the upper register of the constructed version, identified in a later note by another name: “Draft Pistons” (Fig. 1.3). The Draft Pistons are three irregular rectangles horizontally arranged within an opaque cloud-like form. Duchamp derived the shapes from photographs he had taken of a piece of gauze fluttering in front of a window. As early as 1959, commentators associated the method with the “cinematic” sequential image-taking of motion picture film, a conclusion
evidently supported by the Draft Pistons’s appearance in the *Glass* in the same upper region said to be the domain of the “cinematic blossoming” in the ten-page manuscript. As Robert Lebel wrote in that year, “The position of the blossoming in the tympanum of the *Glass* must…be thought of as a screen on which several images are seen in succession.”³ Likely prompted by Lebel’s influential monograph on the artist, subsequent interpretations have repeated and even extended the equivalence of the manuscript’s “cinematic blossoming” and the *Glass*’s Draft Pistons with moving picture film. Dalia Judovitz, for example, argues in her 1995 book *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit*, “Cinematic blossoming is not symbolic but literal to the extent that the surface…is punctuated by the three exposures of the draft pistons.”⁴ Most recently, in 2015, film scholar Jennifer Wild proposes, “the ‘cinematic blossoming’…in *The Large Glass*” is “the infrathin space between separate, static film cells [which] disappears in projection to elicit the perception of continuous movement.”⁵

These identifications of the manuscript’s “cinematic blossoming” and the Draft Pistons of the *Large Glass* with cinematic frames and cinematic motion participate in a growing discourse within art history and literary and film studies around cinema’s impact on the formal structure and subjects of works made in other media. Since 1975, when film scholar Standish Lawder coined the name “Cubist cinema” for early avant-garde films, historians have repeatedly sought to relate the formal experimentation of twentieth-

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century visual art and literature with the uniquely modern experience of cinema. In recent years, a significant body of literature has emerged asserting a pervasive impact of cinema across the twentieth-century avant-gardes, in some cases referring to this extension of cinema beyond film media as the “cinematic imaginary.”

Writing in the early 1970s when questions of “medium-specificity” dominated the critical discourse around modern art, Lawder was exceptional in recognizing a certain cross- or trans-mediality between cinema and modern painting, what he called a “close correspondence” between cinema’s “multiplicity of viewpoints” and the “restlessly moving image formed quite literally from the patterning of light” and the “flickering surfaces of Cubist and Futurist paintings of the immediate pre-war years.” Lawder himself stopped short of proposing a causal relationship, cautioning, “The influence of film here [on Cubism and Futurism], to whatever degree it existed, was certainly not a simple matter of direct transposition of ideas from one medium to the other. The presence of film was pervasive, and its influence felt through many indirect channels.”

Scholarship in Lawder’s wake largely shed these reservations. Natasha Staller, for example, in a 1989 article on the cubist painting of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, argued, “Picasso and Braque took the tricks and effects also found in three-minute films shown in street fairs or the basements of billiard parlours and transformed them into the instruments of high art.” Art historian Bernice Rose extended Staller’s argument, emphasizing the historical specificity of filmic conventions supposedly evident in Picasso.

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6 For an overview of recent “cinematic imaginary” literature, see introduction above.
8 Ibid., 20.
and Braque’s paintings: “From 1909 to 1912, Cubist paintings do try to look like film, but especially film as it was projected at the time, including the *trucs* of cutting—it is only gradually the specific comical motifs come to the fore….At any rate, the perceptual interruption fostered by the cutting of various viewpoints into film, and by montage and dissolve, is recorded in the flickering lights of Analytic Cubism, and in the structuring of Cubism as a series of impressions that build and then fade and rebuild as disparate views and conflicting multiple perspectives…. [a] characteristic of classic Cubism in general—and of early film.”\(^9\) Jennifer Wild, too, has proposed that “Cubist reflexivity,” the self-referential flatness of the cubist picture, responds to the viewing conditions in early cinemas: “The event of projection and the horizontal aesthetics of film exhibition supplied a sufficient perturbation or change to the classical system of representation and beholding. As a significant form of new knowledge derived from experience of the modern world… early cinematic scenarios share in, as well as engage with, the reflexive logic subtending Picasso’s formal inquiry.”\(^10\)

Study of the “cinematic imaginary” specifically as it contributed to the development of Parisian cubism laudably introduces film media into long-standing debates around Picasso and Braque’s engagement with mass visual culture.\(^11\) As in


previous cases, however, accounts of cubism’s “borrowing” from other media, whether it be newspaper, wallpaper, Grebo masks, or film, risk reducing a heterogeneous cultural domain such as early film to a static repository of “tricks and effects,” to borrow Staller’s phrase, thereby limiting painting to passive reflection, or more cynically, to plagiarism and theft.  

A relationship between cinema and visual art in the years around 1910 undeniably exists but what did painting gain by transposing a “cinematic imaginary” out of the medium of film? What did the siting of its “imaginary” in painting contribute to early cinema? Duchamp’s “cinematic blossoming” illuminates the complex encounter of modern painting and early cinema in the first decades of the twentieth century, arising, I argue in this chapter, from Duchamp’s participation in the so-called Puteaux group of cubists in late 1911 and early 1912. Though a marginal, even minor, player in the development of Parisian cubism, Duchamp holds a much better claim to the invention of “cubist cinema” or “cinematic cubism” than Picasso or Braque. More than a decade before Duchamp’s acquisition of a moving picture camera and creation of his first films, his épanouissement cinématique envisions a kinematic alternative to both traditional oil on canvas and cinematographic film.

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Part One: Épanouissement cinématique

The “épanouissement cinématique” that Duchamp sought to create in The Bride Stripped Bare and repeatedly referred to as the most important part of the embryonic project in late 1912 arises directly out of his brief, yet intense, engagement with Parisian cubism over the preceding eighteen months. To understand the lineage of Duchamp’s “épanouissement cinématique” in Parisian cubism, however, a brief excursus on the French phrase is necessary. The conventional English translation, “cinematic blossoming,” is something of a misnomer that exaggerates the connection between Duchamp’s cinématique and the modern cinema institution and medium. Duchamp’s step-son Paul Matisse, who translated a large number of the notes, has discussed the absence of a direct English corollary for the first term, épanouissement. “Blossoming,” he explains, is a poor approximation of the French, which similarly “begins with the idea of opening out, of expansion or development… [but can] equally well describe the development of a soccer club or an explosion’s shock wave…. [as well as] the arousal of sensual feelings, and then their gradual intensification and expansion.”¹³ Matisse nevertheless concludes that blossoming remains “our only available English equivalent.” He takes no issue with the adjective, following previous English editions of Duchamp’s notes in rendering cinématique as “cinematic.” Cinématique also has multiple meanings, however. It can denote “cinematic,” as in, of, or relating to the cinematograph, but also “kinematic,” of or relating to the physics of motion. In 1981, art historian Craig E. Adcock proposed the latter as a better translation, pointing out that Duchamp specifically

uses the term *cinématographique* when he means cinematic in the cinematographic sense. Translators of Duchamp’s notes have roundly ignored the suggestion, perhaps owing to its appearance deep within Adcock’s book-length study on the role of n-dimensional geometry in Duchamp’s conception of the *Glass*, but Adcock appears to have been correct. “Kinematic blossoming” is indeed the better translation. Not only does Duchamp use the term *cinématographique* elsewhere in the notes, as Adcock claims, but the association of *cinématique* with cinematographic filmmaking evidently post-dates Duchamp’s manuscript.

The French word *cinématique* originated in the 1830s with the mathematician and physicist André-Marie Ampère, who drew on the Greek word κίνημα (kinema, movement) to designate the branch of physics devoted to the study of movements “in themselves” (en eux-mêmes). More specifically, Ampère’s *cinématique* addressed those movements “we observe in the bodies that surround us, and particularly in the apparatuses [appareils] known as machines.” Then, in the 1890s, the French inventor Leon Bouly also adapted the Greek *kinema* (in French, *cinéma*) to name his new moving picture device, the cinematograph (*cinématographe*), which combined camera, printer, and projector. Popularized by the Lumière brothers’s version of the device, from 1895 on, the *cinématographe* quickly generated the abbreviation *cinéma*. By the 1910s, *cinéma* had expanded beyond the device itself to encompass the films it produced, the companies

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that distributed them, the projection halls in which they appeared, etc. Only after the popularization of the abbreviation *cinéma* in France would *cinématique* become an adjective substituting for *cinématographique*, denoting nearly anything of or relating to the cinema. According to *La Lexique français du cinéma des origines à 1930*, its first usage in this way dates to the late 1910s, that is after Duchamp penned his manuscript and conceived *The Bride Stripped Bare*. Thus, at the time Duchamp wrote his ten-page manuscript, in late 1912, his use of *cinématique* would almost certainly have conformed to the then dominant Ampèreian usage.

The substitution of “kinematic blossoming” for “cinematic blossoming” goes beyond a mere translation correction, offering a new perspective on cultural discourses of the “kinematic” during the early years of cinematographic filmmaking. After all, Anglo-American scholars and critics are not the only ones to confuse Duchamp’s use of *cinématique* for the cinematographic “cinematic.” French commentators missed the distinction, too. The mistranslation arises from the temporal disjunction between the drafting of the manuscript and its first publication more than two decades later. During that time, the dominant definition of the word *cinématique* had changed for French artists and critics. This evolution is evident in the first analysis of the note, published in 1959 by

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the French art critic Robert Lebel. As previously noted, Lebel, like subsequent
commentators, identified the épanouissement cinématique as the “cinematic” Draft
Pistons in the upper register of the Large Glass.¹⁷

The existence of a false cognate in English—cinematic—undoubtedly contributed
to Anglo-American critics’s obliviousness to its alternative translation—kinematic.
However, like the French, they too responded to the transformation of the
cinematographic arts between the time of the manuscript’s creation and its first
translation. Ampère’s science of motion entered English in the nineteenth century via
German translation as “kinematics” owing to the Germanic rendering of the Greek word
κίνημα as “kinema.”¹⁸ “Cinema” as an abbreviation of “cinematograph” or
“cinematographic” entered English around the turn of the century directly from French
and thus retained the French spelling. Early motion picture halls in England adopted
“cinema” in their names as early as 1899. Yet, the imported abbreviation was still rare
enough in 1910 for a London newspaper to remark, “‘Cinematograph’…has just been cut
down in a glaring advertisement to ‘cinema.’”¹⁹ By the later 1910s, “cinema” had
acquired much of its modern English meaning, denoting the cinematographic halls
themselves but also the films and other related components. With the popularization of
the term in English, “cinematic” soon became a substitute for “cinematographic,” in
Britain and the United States, its emergence dating to a few years later than similar

¹⁷ Lebel, Marcel Duchamp, 66.
¹⁹ The Daily Chronicle (London) (March 7, 1910), 6/7; quoted in “cinema, n.,” OED
Online (December 2016), Oxford University Press,
http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/33081?redirectedFrom=cinema, accessed January 03,
2017.
usage in France but soon becoming much more popular than its French counterpart.\textsuperscript{20} Two and a half decades later, when tasked with the first English rendering in \textit{View} magazine, an anonymous translator would unhesitatingly render \textit{épanouissement cinématique} as “cinematic blossoming,” establishing a convention followed in every subsequent translation.\textsuperscript{21}

For Adcock, the replacement of “cinematic” with “kinematic” severs the perceived relationship between the upper register of the \textit{Glass} and the sequential motion of the cinematograph, redirecting a “phrase…generally taken to be a reference to [Duchamp’s] interests in the early development of motion pictures” to the “branch of mechanics that deals with motion.”\textsuperscript{22} In the context of Adcock’s study, this substitution contributes to his interpretation of \textit{The Bride Stripped Bare} as a graphical representation of the advanced geometries circulating in the period—the so-called n-dimensional, non-Euclidean, and topological geometries. “It is possible,” he concludes, “that the Bride’s ‘kinematic blossoming’ implies her status as a four-dimensional being.”\textsuperscript{23} Undoubtedly Duchamp, like many of his peers in the Parisian avant-garde, was interested in emergent scientific and mathematic theories. In fact, this interest would help prompt him to embrace cinematographic filmmaking in the early 1920s, discussed at length in chapter two. Here, however, I would like to argue that the “kinematic blossoming” of \textit{The Bride

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\textsuperscript{20} Giraud, \textit{Le lexique français du cinéma des origines à 1930}, 85; “cinema, n., OED Online.

\textsuperscript{21} André Breton, “The Lighthouse of the Bride,” \textit{View} V, no. 1 (March 1945), 13. The uncredited translator was likely Charles Henri Ford, Robert Motherwell, or Edouard Roditi.

\textsuperscript{22} Adcock, \textit{Marcel Duchamp’s Notes from the “Large Glass,”} 147.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 41.
*Stripped Bare* also constitutes an early experiment in kinematic, or kinetic, art, made in conversation with, but ultimately divergent from, cinematographic filmmaking.

Scholarship on the history of so-called pre- and early cinema has demonstrated that the “early development of motion pictures” cannot be divorced from the “branch of mechanics that deals with motion.” The invention of the cinematograph drew upon decades of kinematic research on the graphing of bodily motion by Étienne-Jules Marey and others, and though the cinematograph rapidly developed a discrete commercial and cultural domain in the early twentieth century, this relationship to kinematics persisted in its first decades. At the same time, the *cinématique* emerged as a major focus within modern painting and sculpture, with both the Puteaux cubists and the Italian futurists seeking to introduce temporality and motion into their static media.

**Duchamp and Cubism**

Duchamp encountered *cinématique* discourse in the context of the group of artists who met regularly at the studio of his two older brothers, Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon, located in the Paris suburb of Puteaux. At the time Duchamp joined the group in mid-1911, it would have included his elder brothers, Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes, Fernand Léger, Le Fauconnier, and Robert Delaunay, all of whom had exhibited together in a shared room at the Salon des Indépendants in May 1911. Duchamp participated in the second communal showing of the so-called Puteaux group that October, in “room 8” at the Salon d’Automne. He continued his association with them until the following spring, when their objections to his submission of *Nude Descending a
Staircase (No. 2) to the shared room at the 1912 Salon des Indépendants prompted his withdrawal and conception of The Bride Stripped Bare that summer. Despite this retreat, Duchamp would return to Paris and participate in a major exhibition organized by members of the group, the Salon de la Section d’Or, in October 1912.

The Puteaux group is generally credited with popularizing cubist painting and theory at a time when Picasso and Braque were absent from the salons, but there was significant divergence in the cubism they practiced. As Leo Steinberg has argued, Picasso and Braque, during the so-called “analytic” phase of cubism, employed faceting, passage, and other formal conventions in order to signify the flatness of the pictorial ground and deconstruct the language of representation.24 The Puteaux painters, on the other hand, developed a pictorial language of “mobile perspective” and “multiple views,” in which the juxtaposition of contrasting perspectival views delivered a surfeit of visual information of a static object to the viewer, ostensibly providing a privileged view of reality, rather than, as in the case of Picasso and Braque’s cubism, dismantling and disrupting the graphic object.

This is a significant and sometimes overlooked distinction between the two groups. Historically, commentaries on cubism have favored the pioneering work of Picasso and Braque, and subordinated the cubism of the Puteaux group as a vulgarized or simplified variation. The Puteaux painters doubtlessly borrowed formal ideas from what they saw in Picasso and Braque’s studios and Braque’s important 1908 exhibition at the

Kahnweiler Gallery, but they applied them, in many cases, to a starkly different end: the animation, or mobilization, of the image. As Jacques Villon later recalled, “The Cubism of Braque and Picasso interested us very much, but it seemed too static to us…We thought, on our own account, that it was rhythm, and the breaking down of surfaces into coloured planes that made the picture live.” Ironically, as Steinberg suggests, this deviation may have resulted from something of a misreading of analytic cubism by early critics, among them Jean Metzinger. Though Picasso had experimented with simultaneous views of contrasting perspectives in earlier works, such as Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (1907), Steinberg observes that “never is a[n Analytical] Cubist object apprehendable from several sides at once, never is the reverse aspects of it conceivable, and no object in a work of ‘Analytical’ Cubism by Picasso or Braque appears as a summation of disparate views.” Yet, Metzinger articulated the animating principles of “mobile perspective” and “multiple views” as cubist formal devices in a September 1910 review of Picasso and Braque’s most recent painting. Braque, Metzinger wrote, “skillfully confound[s] simultaneity and succession….Whether he paints a face or a fruit, the total image radiates in time [la durée]: the painting is no longer a dead portion of space.” Picasso “gives us a material report of [forms’s] real life in the mind…[by]
establish[ing] a free, mobile perspective, in such a way that the shrewd mathematician Maurice Princet has deduced an entire geometry from it.”

Metzinger’s citations of Maurice Princet and *la durée* illuminate the intellectual underpinnings for the Puteaux group’s deviations from the cubism of Picasso and Braque. Though little is known about Maurice Princet himself, he was evidently responsible for the dissemination of theoretical physics, particularly Henri Poincaré’s writings on four or more spatial dimensions, amongst the group. Their concept of *La durée*, or duration, derives from the writings of Henri Bergson, then chair of Philosophy at the *Collège de France*, who privileged subjective experience over empirical knowledge in popular books such as *Matter and Memory* (1896) and *Creative Evolution* (1907). Knowledge of reality cannot arise from analysis of one’s perceptions, a socialized sense-making process that distorts the continuous, temporal character of the real, Bergson argued. Instead, he lodged the acquisition of knowledge in an amorphous “pure intuition,“ a kind of pre-conscious acuity. “That which is commonly called a *fact* is not reality as it appears to immediate intuition, but an adaption of the real to the interests of practice and to the exigencies of social life. Pure intuition, external or internal, is that of an undivided continuity. We break up this continuity into elements laid side by side, which correspond in the one case to distinct *words*, in the other to independent *objects*.

30 Metzinger, “Note sur la peinture,” 76.
31 Cottington, *Cubism and Its Histories*, 64.
...For the living unity, which was one with internal continuity, we substitute the factitious unity of an empty diagram as lifeless as the parts which it holds together." Bergson employed *la durée* to refer to this “living continuity” throughout his writings.

Despite their participation in distinct discourses in turn-of-the-century France, Poincaré and Bergson provided Metzinger with an understanding of a subjective reality that exceeded everyday human sensorial faculties and demanded a new representational regime. Poincaré argued that a fourth spatial dimension, though imperceptible, could theoretically exist. Bergson similarly posited that the perception of temporal stasis or persistence is an illusion created by intellection: “The apparent discontinuity of the psychical life is...due to our attention being fixed on it by a series of separate acts: actually there is only a gentle slope; but in following the broken line of our acts of attention, we think we perceive separate steps.”

In addition to Princet and Bergson, Metzinger’s focus on the temporality of Picasso and Braque’s painting may have been prompted by his reading of the Italian futurists’s “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting,” published in French translation in May 1910. Though Paris had not yet seen examples of futurist painting, Metzinger

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could have read there the assertions of signatories Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini: “The gesture that we want to reproduce will no longer be a moment in universal dynamism which has stopped, but the dynamic sensation itself, perpetuated as such”; “The construction of pictures has hitherto been foolishly traditional. Painters have shown us the objects and the people placed before us. We shall put the spectator in the center of the picture.”

After emphasizing what he interpreted as temporal experimentation in Picasso and Braque’s painting, Metzinger would extend the claims to the new paintings he, Gleizes, Delaunay, Léger, and Le Fauconnier exhibited in room 41 at the 1911 Salon des Indépendants. In August of that year, he proclaimed mobile perspective had been the common denominator in the room’s paintings: “They have allowed themselves to move around the object to give a concrete representation of several aspects of it in succession, under the control of intelligence. The picture used to occupy space, now it reigns in time [la durée] as well.” Metzinger would also include mobile perspective as a central tenet in Du Cubisme, the programmatic text he wrote with Albert Gleizes and published to coincide with the Section d'Or in October 1912. There he and Gleizes describe “the act of moving around an object to grasp in succession several of its appearances, which, blended into a single image, reconstitute it in time.”

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These texts, particularly *Du Cubisme*, represent articulations of cubist theory but do not necessarily characterize all paintings by the Puteaux group over the course of 1911 and 1912. As David Cottington notes, the paintings appearing in the cubists’ rooms at the salons offer contrasting evidence of mobile perspective and multiple views. Though Metzinger had claimed the paintings in room 41 “allowed themselves to move around the object to give…several aspects of it in succession,” a survey of those on view reveals no such thing.\(^{39}\) Metzinger’s *Two Nudes* (1910-11), Gleizes’s *Woman with Phlox* (1910), Delaunay’s *Tower with Curtains* (1910-11), Le Fauconnier’s *Abundance* (1910-11), and Léger’s *Nudes in the Forest* (1909-11) share certain formal characteristics but do not provide “several aspects…in succession” or even more limited examples of mobile perspective. Instead they are united, Cottington observes, by other attributes: “an appearance of physical density achieved by the firm modelling, in sober even-hued colours, of fragmented, geometric forms distributed evenly across the visual field, and imbricated with their ambient space to present (with varying degrees of emphasis) an illusion of low relief.”\(^{40}\)

Later, in the summer and fall of 1911, several painters in the group would begin to experiment with mobile perspective, perhaps prompted by Metzinger’s exaggerated claim of the devices’s centrality that August.\(^{41}\) Metzinger’s own *Tea-Time* (Fig. 1.4), exhibited at the Salon d’Automne in October, integrated multiple aspects of certain objects. The frontal view of the face of the tea-drinker inscribes a second profile view;

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40 Ibid., 61, 65.
her left side advances forward in a way that contradicts the position of her neck and head; and one side of the teacup appears in section and the other side from above. The rest of the picture appears relatively fixed to a single frontal perspective. Though hardly the “several aspects…in succession” he ascribed to the group in August, these passages constitute a striking change from his Two Nudes of the previous spring. Robert Delaunay similarly introduced the device in late 1911, juxtaposing aerial and ground views of the Eiffel Tower in a continuing series of paintings devoted to the monument (Eiffel Tower, 1911; The Red Tower, 1911, Fig. 1.5).  

Duchamp was among those in the group to experiment with multiple views. His first cubist paintings, completed in the fall of 1911, conform to the style of the room 41 paintings. Sonata (Fig. 1.6) and Apropos of Little Sister (Fig. 1.7) adopt the formal conventions of faceting and passage to depict family subjects, his sisters and mother, but, as in the room 41 paintings, apply them to stable, frontal or profile views. A third canvas Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters (Fig. 1.8), painted in September 1911, is the closest Duchamp comes to using multiple views in the way imagined by Metzinger. The work presents four views of the faces of his two sisters, Yvonne and Magdeleine, possibly combined with features of Duchamp’s own face. However, the limited number, two profiles of one and a profile and three-quarter view of the other, and different scales and spatial orientations void the analytical rigor sought by Metzinger. As Duchamp later

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42 Cottington, Cubism and Its Histories, 84.
acknowledged in reference to the painting, “There…we have a very loose interpretation of the Cubist theories—two profiles of each sister of a different scale and scattered about the canvas.”

Duchamp also included multiple views of human figures in a second painting that he created alongside Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters, one that deviates even further from Metzinger’s pronouncements. Instead of providing a mobile perspective, Duchamp immobilizes the observer before an image that itself appears to move. Portrait (Dulcinea) (Fig. 1.9) presents sequential images of a young woman walking within a non-descript environment, seen from a single viewpoint. According to Duchamp, the subject of the painting was a woman who walked her dog in the neighborhood around his Neuilly studio. Portrait (Dulcinea) otherwise effects the group’s characteristic tension between illusionistic depth and the flatness of the picture plane, signifying recession through cues of scale and superimposition while compressing space with semi-transparent facets and passage. But Duchamp’s portrayal of a fantasy narrative seems to parody Metzinger’s vocabulary of visual disclosure through multiple views. The five profile and three-quarter views track the woman’s meandering movement towards the viewer as she divests herself of articles of clothing until she arrives in the foreground, nearly nude.

45 Marcel Duchamp, interview by Calvin Tomkins, 1964, in Tomkins, Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2013), 68.
Duchamp’s variance would have been on display for visitors to the cubists’ room at the Salon d’Automne, where *Portrait (Dulcinea)* shared the walls with Metzinger’s *Tea Time*. If Metzinger painted *Tea Time* as a didactic “demonstration exercise” for his theory of cubism as some have suggested, Duchamp’s canvas would appear a similarly self-conscious divergence from it.\(^{47}\) The two canvases address a common subject—the female nude; the center of each features a three-quarter view of a woman’s head, turned toward the right side of the frame. Similarities continue, but the deviations quickly accrue. Metzinger integrates a contrasting profile view within the same three-quarter face; Duchamp also presents a profile view of his subject, but displaces it to a different area of the painting, asserting a common identity through shared facial features and a “bouquet” structure that gathers the lower bodies together at a pointed base.\(^{48}\) Furthermore, in Duchamp’s portrayal, differences of height and visibility imply the woman’s spatial transit across the frame. Metzinger’s figure, though animated by mobile perspective, is herself resoundingly static; the frozen arc of the spoon, from coffee cup to mouth, confirms her snapshot-like fixity. The junction of these conflicting perspectives in *Tea Time* implies instantaneous transit around a static figure, a blunt studio fiction that serves to highlight the artist’s ability to create images beyond everyday perception.

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Duchamp would continue to diverge from Metzinger’s interpretation of cubism in a series of canvases that fall and winter. In November and December, he painted *Sad Young Man on the Train* (Fig. 1.10), a self-portrait of the artist on a train ride from Paris to Rouen on his way to visit his family home. As in *Portrait (Dulcinea)*, he repeated the image of a human body multiple times to represent its movement over time. A mass of lines and volumes in the center of the picture delineates a man standing and smoking his pipe, a personal emblem identifying him as the artist, as Duchamp later recalled. Parallel vertical lines run from the left to the right graphing the lateral movement of the body as it travels with the speeding train across the field of vision. The lines also move vertically on the canvas, descending from left to the right. Duchamp explained these as the secondary movements of the man “who is in a corridor and who is moving about.” “The[re] are two parallel movements corresponding to each other.”

Around the same time, Duchamp began work on a larger composition on the subject of a nude woman descending a staircase. The idea evidently originated in a small drawing on paper he made that fall to illustrate the poem “*Encore à cet astre*” (“Once More to this Star,” or “Another for the Sun”) by French symbolist Jules Laforgue (Fig. 1.11). The illustration was a loose extrapolation based primarily on the title. The poem’s verses express the melancholic reflections of an aging sun (“It is all in vain that I caress / their spines with my flames; they keep their pallor….The Earth is nothing but a vast kermesse, / Our hurrahs of gaiety rake the grain.”); the pencil sketch depicts two

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49 Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 33.
50 Ibid., 29.
spindly legs and the faint arched back of a nude figure arduously climbing a set of three stairs. Duchamp apparently planned to illustrate in this manner several poems by Laforgue, completing drawings for “Mediocrité” and “Sieste éternelle,” but ultimately abandoned the project. Nevertheless, Duchamp’s later recollection of “looking at [his illustration of Encore à cet Astre]” and getting the idea for a painting of a nude descending a staircase is confirmed upon close inspection. In the sketch, Duchamp drew over the original torso in a darker pencil line to test the appearance of a profile descending in the opposite direction and superimposed a magnified portrait to the left, on top of the staircase. Then, free from the staircase, he drew a sample for the legs of this new configuration. Descending would offer a better angle for conveying the trajectory of the figure. “The majesty of descending would…help my static expression,” he remembered thinking.

Duchamp enlarged and reoriented the staircase in the first (Fig. 1.12) of two painted versions. Instead of the three short steps in the sketch, an extensive staircase begins far in the distance at the upper right-hand corner of the canvas and snakes toward the foreground. Duchamp compared it in a late interview to the “enormous stairs in the center” of the stage in musical comedies. As in Sad Young Man on a Train, the nude

53 Duchamp later claimed to have completed drawings for “about ten” of Laforgue’s poems. Only three are known today. See Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, 30.
54 Tomkins, Marcel Duchamp, 69; Steefel, “Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Encore à cet Astre,’” 27.
55 Tomkins, Marcel Duchamp, 70.
56 Ibid.
figure consists of lines and volumes that radiate down the stairs roughly corresponding to its limbs and torso. The movement here is clearly defined, descending the length of the staircase to the landing, though the left side of the composition remains incomplete. In the second and more finished version that Duchamp executed in January 1912, the graphic trace of the body’s movement is less legible in the mass of intersecting dots and lines, but the vector of the volume moving along the staircase is evident (see Fig. 0.8). The staircase itself is also less defined, appearing in multiple contrasting viewpoints at the margins of the image.

In later interviews, Duchamp asserted that these paintings integrated cubist formal conventions (limited color palette, faceting) with those of chronophotography. In 1946, he told interviewer James Johnson Sweeney, “Chrono-photography was at the time in vogue. Studies of horses in movement and of fencers in different positions as in Muybridge’s albums were well known to me.” In 1961, he repeated the claim to Katherine Kuh: “The fact that I had seen chrono photographs [sic] of fencers in action and horses galloping…gave me the idea for the Nude.” As several art historians have noted, these statements erroneously conflate the motion photography of Eadweard Muybridge with the chronophotographs of the Frenchman Étienne-Jules Marey.

Eadweard Muybridge had developed his so-called “motion photography” over the course of the 1870s and early 1880s, using multiple cameras with rapid exposure film to capture an image sequence of “suspended” motion. On a commission from Leland

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Stanford, he developed the technology to document the gallop of a horse, creating twelve successive photographs, each capturing a single static “frame” in the range of motion (Fig. 1.13). Marey, after seeing Muybridge’s photographs in a French journal in 1878, invented chronophotography, a closely related but distinct technique, whereby multiple, successive images of movement appear on a single photographic plate, creating a direct record of a durational trajectory through space (Fig. 1.14). The goal of these images was, Marey professed in a 1900 text, “to analyze movements by the means of a series of instantaneous photographic images taken at very short and equidistant intervals. In thus representing the successive attitudes and positions of an animal for example, chronophotography allows one to follow all the phases of its gaits and even translate these into true geometrical diagrams.”

Marey referred to the diagrams that resulted as “analyses cinématiques,” or “kinematic analyses.”

Duchamp himself corrected his confusion of Muybridge and Marey in a late interview, recalling, “In one of Marey’s books, I saw an illustration of how he indicated people who fence, or horses galloping, with a system of dots delineating the different movements….That’s what gave me the idea for the execution of the ‘Nude Descending a Staircase.’” Subsequent study of Duchamp’s “motion” paintings has affirmed his reliance upon Marey. According to David Joselit, Margit Rowell, Marta Braun, and others, Duchamp’s work over the course of late 1911 and early 1912 increasingly and

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59 Étienne-Jules Marey, “Exposition d’instruments, de photographes, de cartes et plans relatifs à l’Histoire de la chronophotographie,” in Musée Centennal de la classe 12 (Photographie) à l’Exposition universelle international de 1900 à Paris (Saint-Cloud: Imprimerie Belin Frères, 1900), 2; trans. in Rowell, “Kupka, Duchamp and Marey,” 49.

60 Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, 34.
more or less transparently adopts the graphic language of Marey’s geometric chronophotographs. Portrait (Dulcinea) employs multiple images of a single body to represent successive temporal states; Sad Young Man mimics the superimpositions created by the speed of Marey’s camera. The Nude Descending paintings go further, including the abstracted geometry of stripes and dots from Marey’s graphical extrapolations from the photographs and motion studies. Marey had sought to maximize legibility by attaching “motion tracers,” reflective striping and dots, to subjects otherwise clad completely in black fabric. When photographed repeatedly along a horizontal or vertical axis against a similarly blackened background, the stripes and dots generated an indexical, clear graph of motion. For Joselit, this shared vocabulary offers evidence of commonality between the projects of Duchamp and Marey and further isolates Duchamp’s cubism as a personal idiom distinct from that of Picasso and Braque, and by implication, that of the Puteaux painters as well. Both Duchamp and Marey “attempted to create a static representation—a kind of graph—of the body’s internal and external motion,” Joselit writes, adding, “[they] were interested in developing a ‘language of phenomena themselves’…a way of representing the body through a graphic system immanent to it.”

I believe there is a risk, however, in overstating the consonance of Duchamp and Marey’s projects and the dissimilarity of Duchamp’s cubism and that of the other

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Puteaux painters. Duchamp, after all, transfers Marey’s graphic vocabulary out of photography and into the medium of oil painting, effectively voiding the indexicality that undergirds Marey’s claims to analytical rigor.²⁴ Though Marey had himself originally employed non-photographic means for his “kinematic analyses,” these means were always indexical, with self-registering physical graphing mechanisms responding directly to the motions of the body. As Mary Anne Doane has argued, this indexicality assured the accuracy of these mechanisms as an extra-human means to record the contingency of natural events.²⁵ “Indexicality has acted historically not solely as the assurance of realism but as the guarantee that anything and everything—any moment whatever—is representable. …Contingency is brought under the rein of semiosis.”²⁶ This desire to record and thereby manage contingency is, according to Doane, a correlate of the “industrialized modernity” of Taylorism, the “scientific management” of workers developed by Frederick W. Taylor in the late nineteenth century that promoted “efficiency, strict management of time, and the elimination of waste.”²⁷ Media historian Greg Siegel has observed a “symmetrical reflectionism” in the human graphing pursuits of Marey and others in the nineteenth century. “The notion that a manmade machine, once affixed to an organic body, behaves exactly like living tissue” renders the “vital organism [as] merely an ‘animate machine.’”²⁸ As machine, the human body can be

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²⁵ Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time, 31.
²⁶ Ibid.
²⁷ Ibid., 32, 5.
streamlined and controlled, all contingencies forecasted and modelled to maximize performance.

Joselit acknowledges the importance of indexicality to Marey, even quoting scholar François Dagognet’s claims that Marey’s project was “structurally related to photography,” but still continues to align it with Duchamp’s painting. His argument that both Marey and Duchamp were primarily interested in a graphic language of bodily motion “extracted from deep within its biological architecture” is significant, correcting scholarship attributing Duchamp’s interest in Marey to a desire to depict movement or speed alone. In making it, Joselit relies upon a theory of signification articulated in Jean-François Lyotard’s Libidinal Economy, which posits that “the ground for [all] signification and also for economic exchange is the body. …It is the material ground from which psychoanalytic, semiotic, or economic meaning is produced.” In this way, Joselit is able to overlook the different media employed by Duchamp and Marey. Both seek to expose the “residue of…carnality” in the sign.”

The human body is central to Duchamp’s interest in motion, uniting all of his “chrono” paintings in 1911 and 1912 and his various plans for the The Bride Stripped Bare between 1912 and 1915. There remain, however, important differences, between Duchamp’s imaginatively painted bodies and Marey’s rigorously graphed bodies. By forsaking mechano-photographic indexicality, Duchamp can depict scenarios unavailable

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69 Joselit, Infinite Regress, 54.
70 Ibid., 56, 53.
72 Joselit, Infinite Regress, 18.
to or disregarded by Marey’s scientific apparatus: an imagined woman disrobing on a city street, a “sad” artist pacing in a train car. *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* may seem the one exception, but its association with Laforgue’s poem vacates any pretense to the scientific analysis of human locomotion. Furthermore, Duchamp’s mode of depiction specifically defeats the possibility of the measurement and rationalization so eagerly pursued by Marey. *Portrait (Dulcinea)*, for example, eschews the regular imaging and rigid horizontality that permits durational measurement in Marey’s kinematic analyses. The five bodies are staggered haphazardly across the pictorial field, nominally representing five distinct moments in the passage of the woman across the frame of vision but which moments those are, and how they relate to one another, is impossible to determine with any assurance of accuracy. Unlike Marey, Duchamp gives no units of measurement for the ambiguous spatial and temporal continuum depicted.

The horizontal orientation and continuity of graphic lines across the canvas in *Sad Young Man on a Train* appears to promise greater legibility and accuracy but this too is quickly undermined. Rather than isolating a single movement for analysis, Duchamp presents two contrasting physical motions, that of the man inside the train and that of the train itself, with an additional linguistic transference between image and title. As Duchamp later explained to Pierre Cabanne, “The ‘Sad Young Man on a Train’ [*Jeune homme triste dans un train*] already showed my intention of introducing humor into painting, or, in any case, the humor of word play: *triste, train*. . . . The young man is sad because there is a train that comes afterward. ‘Tr’ is very important.”

73 Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 29.
depicts a subjective emotional state, sadness, entirely inaccessible to the indexical means of chronophotography.

_Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)_ more than any other painting by Duchamp, mimics the formal vocabulary of Marey’s geometric chronophotography. The quasi-parallel dotted arcs and intersecting lines repeating from the upper-left to the lower-right sides of the canvas suggest the depiction of the descent referenced in the painting’s title. Yet, period viewers, who were by that time well versed in the graphic notations of Mareyian dots and stripes, famously struggled to decipher the image, expressing anger at the disconnect between the image and its nominally descriptive title.74 There, Marey’s dots and stripes appear devoid of indexicality and of clarity. The space traversed, “the staircase,” is disjointed. It appears to originate in the top right, where the scale suggests significant distance, and descends in a spiral, first to the left and then to the right in the immediate foreground. Sharply angled stacks of stairs, in the middle far left and far right, and even at the base, contradict the cues of scale. In the “nude” itself, the familiar Mareyian stripes suggest a head, torso, shoulder and upper arm, waist, thigh and knee. However, in many places there is an excess of figuration, particularly in the dotted arcs appearing near the figure’s waist, that have no apparent significance, voiding the efficiency of Marey’s system. Elsewhere there is not enough. Where, for example, are the nude’s feet or its lower arms and hands?

These paintings simultaneously suggest that Marey’s recording mechanisms are insufficient to record and manage the human “machine” and that this Taylorist desire to rationalize and control the body is itself fantastical and absurd. In this way, Duchamp’s “chrono” paintings appear consonant with the discourses of the “cinématique” circulating amid Puteaux cubism. Essential to Metzinger’s devices for depicting “multiple views” and “mobile perspective” were their conscription by a sensate subject in the painter, not a mechanical camera. Metzinger highlighted of the role of the artist’s “intelligence” in directing their movement “around the object to give a concrete representation of several aspects of it in succession,” for example. He also critiqued the mechanization of the artist. “[The cubists] have uprooted the prejudice that directed the painter to stand motionless, at a determined distance from the object, and to capture on the canvas only the retina’s photograph of it, more or less modified by ‘personal feeling.’” “Ironically,” as Marta Braun notes, “[Marey’s] imagery, so grounded in positivism and so rigorously analytical, served those very artists who vociferously rejected positivism and its claims to a higher form of knowledge.”

75 Joselit (Infinite Regress, 195) observes a staging of Taylorism’s contradictions in Duchamp’s The Bride Stripped Bare, writing, “In The Bride Stripped Bare... the trope of the machine functioned as a switching station between a body submitted to the rationalizations of Taylorism and a mind subjected to a psychic techniques of mechanization. Duchamp’s modernity—in fact, modernity tout court—must be conceived not as an epic of disciplined bodies or of colonized minds but rather as the chiasmatic intersection of these two epistemological imperatives.” I am proposing that Duchamp, following the Puteaux painters and Bergson, goes further, articulating a critique of Taylorist mechanization already in the 1911-12 paintings.

76 Metzinger, “Cubisme et tradition,” 123.

77 Braun, Picturing Time, 277.
In addition to his citations of chronophotography, Duchamp’s retreat from the Puteaux group in spring 1912 has contributed to the impression that he owes more to Marey than to Puteaux cubism. However, this deviation is overstated. *Portrait (Dulcinea)*, the painting many associate with Duchamp’s first break with the Puteaux group, had prominently appeared in his debut showing with the group at the Salon d’Automne in October 1911. Though Gleizes and Metzinger discouraged Duchamp’s submission of *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* to another group exhibition the following March, this may have been a temporary dispute rather than an enduring difference of opinion. As David Cottington notes, the futurists had launched their first show in Paris in February 1912 and Gleizes and Metzinger may have felt a need to consolidate their group in opposition.™ Later in 1912, Duchamp would resume exhibiting with the Puteaux group and participate in their Section d’Or exhibition. Although he would stop showing with them in 1913, this corresponded with the dissolution of the group following the departures of Robert Delaunay and Fernand Léger as well.

Duchamp’s motion paintings and interest in Marey’s chronophotography, then, developed out of, not against, the cubist theory circulating in the Puteaux group.™ If other members of the group did not themselves pursue the quasi-diachronic chronophotographic temporality of Duchamp’s paintings, they were united in a common pursuit of mobile or moving images representing the subjective, embodied experience of duration. The Puteaux painters, like Bergson, were responding to the nineteenth-century

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™ Cottington, *Cubism and Its Histories*, 92.
™ David Joselit and David Cottington read Duchamp’s cubism primarily as a response to the so-called gallery cubism of Picasso and Braque, not to the salon cubists. See Joselit, *Infinite Regress*, 16-70; Cottington, *Cubism and Its Histories*, 157-61.
revolution in pictorial representation to which Marey contributed. As Friedrich Kittler has argued, Marey’s invention of chronophotography participated in a then decades-old pursuit among physiologists for an empirical means of representing bodily motion in graphical terms.\textsuperscript{80} Kittler notes that analyses of the simple motions of an entity, such as those of a “swinging pendulum or flying grenades” or astronomical bodies, pre-date the 1830s but in 1836, coincident with Ampère’s designation of kinematics, the brothers Wilhelm and Eduard Weber published a monographic study, \textit{Mechanics of the Human Walking Apparatus. An Anatomical-Physiological Investigation (Mechanik der menschlichen Gehwerkzeuge. Eine anatomischphysiologische Untersuchung)}, that would become the direct predecessor to Marey’s photographic documentation of human locomotion, analyzing the body as a machine composed of parts with discrete and definable ranges of motion.\textsuperscript{81} As the Webers state, “Man binds his movements to certain rules even if he cannot express these rules in words. These rules are based totally on the structure of his body and on the given external conditions.”\textsuperscript{82} Working directly from dissected cadavers, they sought to define all of the parameters of the knees, hips, leg muscles, and joints that govern walking and running.\textsuperscript{83} They also translated their anatomical findings into drawn figures (Fig. 1.15) included in the appendix of the book.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 641.
\textsuperscript{83} Kittler, “Man as a Drunken Town-Musician,” 642.
which, as Kittler writes, “portray two lonely legs or knees in all individual phases of walking, running, and jumping in order truly to resynthesize the unity of a pair of steps.” More than just legs or knees, however, these drawings feature diagrams of human skeletons in a succession of static postures laid out across a lateral axis to represent the arc of a human step, leap, or jump, thereby establishing the graphic conventions employed by Marey in his chronophotographs and targeted by Duchamp in his illegible “chrono” paintings.

The Webers’s and Marey’s pursuit of greater graphic fidelity prepared the way for the invention of both the Lumière brothers’ cinematographic camera and the Puteaux group’s mobile perspective. As Marta Braun has written of Marey’s photographs, and equally applicable to the Webers’ drawings: “[They] shattered [the] unity [of a single instant in time and space]; viewers now had to unravel the successive parts of the work in order to understand that they were looking not at several men moving in single file, but at a single figure successively occupying a series of positions in space. Viewers had to allow themselves to be led from one figure to another, reading the several images of the

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84 Ibid., 646.
85 Much like the Webers, Marey had also initially employed non-photographic means to graphically record human and animal locomotion. He sought, however, to improve upon the Webers’ study through the use of elaborate mechanical instruments that attached wires and tubes to the wings of birds and insects or the legs of horses. Though not yet photographic, Marey’s “kinematic analyses” already sought at that time a means to indexically, or directly, record movement, calling for a “graphic record” that was “automatically registered,” as opposed to the Webers’ theoretical drawings based on dissections. “The movement,” he explained, “should give on paper its own record of duration, and of the moment of production.” Marey, Movement, trans. Eric Pritchard (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 3.
86 Kittler (“Man as a Drunken Town-Musician,” 651) argues that the Webers prepared the way for both Marey and for Lumière’s cinematograph.
single figure as it moved through time and space. The result, a vision that goes beyond sight, was a new reality.” Similarly, the mobile perspective of Metzinger and Gleizes provided multiple synchronic views of a subject within a unified pictorial field. This approach also rejects the unity of time and space proposed by Renaissance single-point perspective, though its synchrony conflicts with the unfolding of diachronic motion presented by cinematographic filmmaking. Nevertheless, the motion implied by the paintings responded to the kinematic graphics of Marey and the Webers and was recognized as doing so in the period. In an April 1911 review, the poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire characterized Metzinger’s painting as a “sort of kinematic [cinématique] art.”

The Puteaux group, in applying Marey’s innovations to the synchronic representation of sequential views, was effectively reinventing this tradition and creating images unavailable to Marey’s camera and to the cinematographic cameras it begat. The Lumières’s cinematograph had developed directly out of Marey’s pioneering chronophotographic technologies, essentially attaching a projector to Marey’s own film-based variant on his fixed-plate chronophotographic camera. Indeed, the first patent for the cinematograph by the Lumière brothers refers to the device by an alternate name, the “projecting chronophotograph.” Duchamp’s images seek to represent the diachronic

motion rendered through cinematographic film but, like the chronophotograph, they integrate their several successive states into a single static image.

If Duchamp’s aim was the depiction of diachronic motion, why did he not simply embrace the cinematograph technology that had emerged in the years after Marey’s chronophotographs? In 1911, film had no place at the Salons, which would bar his moving images’s participation in the cubists’ shared pursuit of the cinématique. Furthermore, Duchamp evidently considered the photographic basis and sequential imagery common to chronophotography and cinematography to be a constraint, limiting filmmaking to the portrayal of visible, normative motion. This would echo Marey’s own critique of cinematographic motion: “What such pictures show, after all, our eye could have seen directly. They add nothing to our ocular powers, they remove none of our illusions. Now the true character of scientific method is to remedy the inadequacies of our senses or correct their errors. In order to achieve this, chronophotography must renounce showing things as they really are.” Duchamp would extend this critique to Marey’s own indexically-created chronophotographs.

Duchamp, like Marey, sought to render forms of diachronic motion not readily available to human vision, whether aided by a moving picture camera or not, but the subjects of his painting exceeded the human and animal locomotion studied by Marey. As previously noted, Duchamp’s paintings depict the motion of other processes that, if present in Marey’s chronophotographs or period cinematographic filmmaking, remained

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latent. The motion in Portrait (Dulcinée), for example, is that of an imagined striptease by a woman Duchamp encountered walking around his neighborhood in Neuilly. Duchamp’s choice of oil on canvas over film here is even more significant considering the fact that Duchamp shared this same Neuilly neighborhood with the studio of a prominent film production company, Film d’Art, located less than one half mile from his painting studio. Focused on civilizing popular film through adaptations of theatrical dramas, Film d’Art would not have lent itself to this voyeuristic fantasy, but the record of early stag films suggests there were other producers who would have been more receptive. Nevertheless, Duchamp chose painting.

Despite this avoidance of filmmaking in 1911 and 1912, Duchamp’s diachronic motion paintings represent a significant turn towards the cinematograph, especially when compared with the alternative synchronic assemblages of disparate views preferred by others in the Puteaux Group or with the cubism of Picasso and Braque. Though Natasha Staller, Bernice Rose, and Jennifer Wild argue for the pervasive influence of film on Picasso and Braque, I believe that Duchamp’s motion paintings of 1911 and 1912 constitute a much more cogent example of a “cinematic” cubism, particularly in consideration of the filmic conventions of a period when editing remained in its infancy. Instead of multiplying contrasting perspectives, much more common in the years of cubism’s emergence, were films that employed a static fixed camera informed by theatrical framing conventions. Like Duchamp’s paintings, these films immobilized the audience’s point-of-view, unfurling a short sequence of action before it.
Although distinct from the synchronic imagery of the Puteaux painters, Duchamp’s pursuit of a diachronic kinematic art in his paintings of late 1911 and early 1912 in many ways mirrors concurrent proposals for moving image art by others in the Parisian avant-garde. In October 1911, Ricciotto Canudo’s essay “The Birth of a Sixth Art,” appearing in the Paris-based publication Les Entretiens idéalistes, proclaimed the “dawn” of a new art reconciling the existing “rhythms of space” (the plastic arts of painting, sculpture, architecture) with the “rhythms of time” (music and poetry). Canudo characterized this new art in terms remarkably similar to Duchamp’s painting in the fall of 1911. “The new manifestation of Art should really be…a Painting and a Sculpture developing in Time,” he proclaimed, describing it later as “the Plastic Art in Motion.” The present-day use of the cinematograph, Canudo argued, “points the way” for the development of this art but does not coincide with it. Like Duchamp, Canudo evidently conceived cinematographic filmmaking as merely reproductive. “It is not yet an art, because it lacks the freedom of choice peculiar to plastic interpretation, conditioned as it is to being the copy of its subject, the condition that prevents photography from becoming an art.” Cinema must shed its cinematographic constraints and realize its

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93 Ibid., 61.
destiny, he insisted. Cinema could only become an art as “painting in motion…the new dance of manifestations.”

Historians have studied Canudo’s tract in the context of classical film theory, where it reads as an early attempt to delineate the formal qualities proper to cinematographic film, anticipating the theorization of film’s medium specificity and media ontology developed later by Sergei Eisenstein and Andre Bazin. The emphasis on the cinématique in cubist painting of 1911, however, particularly in the painting of Marcel Duchamp, encourages a reassessment of Canudo’s essay. Though it calls for a kinematic art, this is not the same as the cinematographic cinema that Eisenstein or Bazin would address decades later. Canudo defined his goal as the creation of a kinematic “plastic art.” He acknowledged that at that time cinematographic film was the closest approximation to his vision, but rejected reliance upon the cinematographic apparatus itself. “Arts are the greater the less they imitate and the more they evoke by means of a synthesis….The cinematograph, therefore, cannot today be an art. But for several reasons, the cinematographic theater is the first abode of the new art—an art which we can barely conceive.”

The essay clearly responds to cinematographic filmmaking, but also participates in the motion discourses emerging from visual art in 1910 and 1911, such as the

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96 Canudo, “The Birth of a Sixth Art,” 62.
futurists’s call for a painting of “dynamic sensation”97 and the cubists’s pursuit of an image that itself “reigns in time.”98 Duchamp’s motion paintings are concurrent contributions to the conception of a non-cinematographic, non-filmic, moving image art. When the American painter Daniel MacMorris asked Duchamp in a 1938 interview, “Is the Nude [Descending a Staircase (No. 2)] a painting?” Duchamp replied in the negative and characterized the Nude instead in terms reminiscent of Canudo’s “plastic art in motion.” “No [the Nude is not a painting],” he explained, “it is an organization of kinetic elements, an expression of time and space through the abstract expression of motion.”99

Duchamp’s discussion of the Nude Descending and his other motion paintings in his later interviews affirm his pursuit of a distinct “kinematic” medium. Speaking about the Nude Descending with James Johnson Sweeney in 1946, he explained, “My aim was a static representation of movement—a static composition of indications of various positions taken by a form in movement—with no attempt to give cinema effects through painting,”100 In 1961, he told interviewer Guy Viau: “I realized very well that I couldn’t produce the illusion of movement in a static painting. I was therefore content to make a state of thing, a state of movement, if you will, like the cinema does, but without the development of the cinema like a film. To superimpose one upon the other….Each of these phases…indicated in a completely graphic way and not the intention of giving the

98 Metzinger, “Cubisme et tradition,” 123.
100 Sweeney, “Eleven Europeans in America,” 20.
illusion of movement.” As Duchamp repeatedly asserts in these later interviews, he had sought a “state of movement” like the cinema, but without the “development of the cinema like a film.”

The distinction Duchamp draws here, between a “state” of movement and the “illusion of movement,” suggests an attitude toward vision and moving images popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and present still today, though largely discounted by contemporary perceptual psychologists. As Tom Gunning explains, nineteenth century scientists attributed the perception of motion to a physiological illusion, known as the afterimage or persistence of vision. Conceived as a defect of the eye, the “afterimage” was believed to be a prolonged perception of an image after the stimulation that produced it, often attributed to the continued firing of the optic nerve. The brain received motion, then, as successive static images and inferred continuity and transit that would be accurate in the case of “real” motion but illusory in the case of “fake” cinematographic motion. Subsequent research has demonstrated that “persistence of vision” is an insufficient explanation for the perception of motion, overly reliant, as Gunning notes, on a “mechanical view of the human sensorium.” Instead, the perception of motion results from a combination of multiple cerebral-physiological

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103 Ibid.
phenomena and cannot be reduced to any one mechanism. More important, for Gunning, is the definition of these effects as “illusions” in the case of moving image apparatuses like the cinematograph. There is nothing more or less “real” about the experience of motion inside or outside the movie theater. “These devices do not represent motion; they produce it,” he concludes, “They do not give us a picture of motion (such as a comic strip panel…); they make pictures move. For perceptual reasons, which we still understand only in part, we actually see movement.”

Duchamp specifically avoided making his pictures move in this way, opting for a picture, or representation, of motion. His equivalence in interviews of the “illusion of movement” with the “development of cinema like a film,” suggests he shared the widespread suspicion of cinematographic experience as a trick on the senses. He also expressed, however, dissatisfaction with the static regime of oil painting. Cinematographic cinema evidently spurred him to conceive a kinematic medium between and beyond painting and film, one that did not involve a camera. While “avoiding cinema effects” he would produce “a state of thing, a state of movement…like the cinema does,” “an organization of kinetic elements.”

Alongside Duchamp and Canudo, the painter Léopold Survage also pursued a kinematic art in 1911 that embraced aspects of cinematographic filmmaking. Survage, born in Moscow, had moved to Paris in 1908 and exhibited his cubistic painting at the 1911 Salon d’Automne. Shortly thereafter, he began planning a moving image work, Colored Rhythm, which he described as “a mode of succession in time…. the fulfillment

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104 Ibid., 38.
of which I advocate by cinematographic means.”¹⁰⁵ Without the instruments or expertise to make the film himself, Survage created two hundred watercolors showing “the crucial stages” of Colored Rhythm between 1911 and 1913 (Fig. 1.16).¹⁰⁶ He then called for “animators, [who] with a little common sense, would know how to deduce the intermediate images from indicated numbers or figures,” and filmmakers, explaining, “Once the sheets of images were finished, they would be placed in succession in front of a three-colored camera lens.”¹⁰⁷ His ultimate aim was to “represent a state of mind or to channel an emotion.” Like Duchamp and Canudo, he found traditional static imagery inadequate for the task. “Immobile, an abstract form still does not express very much. Round or pointed, oblong or square, simple or complex, it only produces an extremely confused sensation; it is no more than a simple graphic notation. Only by putting it in motion, transforming it and combining it with other forms, does it become capable of evoking a feeling.”¹⁰⁸

Film scholar Donald Crafton has recently discussed similar “instrumental” uses of cartoon animation, in particular the attempts by film studios of the 1930s to provoke laughter amid the economic hardships of the Great Depression.¹⁰⁹ Animation is capable of eliciting emotional responses in the viewer, he argues, owing to narratological metalepsis, the “entertain[ing] of opposites” where “we accept that what we are seeing is

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 91.
¹⁰⁹ Donald Crafton, Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), particularly chap. 5.
happening spontaneously and ‘live’ on-screen…, all the while knowing that we are
witnessing the unfolding process of a scarcely concealed construction.”

Echoing Gunning, Crafton continues, “These cinematic, kinesthetic bodies are not material, but
they are real. They are beings we believe in, although the beliefs may not be enduring or
strongly held. They are like imaginary playmates that we pretend are real while knowing
in our heart of hearts that they are not.”

Though Crafton’s study specifically addresses “embodied animation,” those films featuring the “believed-in bodies performing in the Tooniverse[s]” of Betty Boop, Mickey Mouse, and Bugs Bunny,” not the abstract forms of “Colored Rhythm,” Survage evidently sought to exploit the same effect: the human
investment of emotion and empathy in two-dimensional forms once they are set into
motion, made to “live.”

Though Survage employed cinematographic means to realize Colored Rhythm
and employed musical metaphors to describe his abstract forms, he still maintained a
distinction between his own kinematic medium and existing cinematographic film and
music. As he explained, “Colored Rhythm is in no way an illustration or an interpretation
of a musical work. It is an art unto itself, even if it is based on the same psychological
phenomena as music.”

Guillaume Apollinaire, an early advocate for the project, corroborated Survage’s claims: “One can compare Colored Rhythm to music, but the
analogies are superficial, and it really is an independent art having infinitely varied

110 Ibid., 51-52, 50.
111 Ibid., 52
112 Ibid.
113 Survage, “Colored Rhythm,” 90.
resources of its own.” Similarly placing Survage’s work beyond established traditions of “static painting” and “cinematographic representation,” Apollinaire situated it in an alternative lineage of “fireworks, fountains, electric signs, and those fairy-tale palaces which at every amusement park accustom the eyes to enjoy kaleidoscopic changes in hue.” Apollinaire concluded, “We thus will have…an art to which one will quickly accustom oneself and which will render its followers infinitely sensitive to the movement of colors, to their interpenetration, to their fast or slow changes, to their convergence and to their flight, etc.”

In 1912 and 1913, concurrent with Survage’s project, Duchamp would begin his own kinematic work, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, of similar scale and ambition. Seeking to move beyond the static representation of motion, he quickly determined, just as Survage had, the inadequacy of oil on canvas. Instead of passing directly to the cinematograph, however, Duchamp devised a number of alternative kinematic possibilities that share Apollinaire’s lineage of “fireworks, fountains, electric signs, and…fairy-tale palaces,” before settling on the provisional solution of painting on glass with textual accompaniment.

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115 Ibid.
Part Two: *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*

Duchamp’s first studies for a large-scale oil painting, titled *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors*, date to a trip to Munich, Germany, in the summer of 1912. Construction of a mixed-media painting on glass, titled, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, would begin three years later, after Duchamp relocated from Paris to New York. Despite its initial conception as a painting, Duchamp and subsequent historians consistently identified the inception of the *Bride Stripped Bare* as a rejection of contemporary Parisian painting. In late-in-life interviews, Duchamp repeatedly associated his work in Munich with his “liberation” from oil painting. Talking with Pierre Cabanne in 1966, for example, Duchamp spoke of a repudiation of his former artistic career. “Art was finished for me….It was a renunciation of all aesthetics, in the ordinary sense of the work…not just another manifesto of new painting.”¹¹⁶ He told another interviewer, “The intention behind the Large Glass…[was] getting away from even the idea of painting a picture. Instead I purposely introduced elements considered anathema to art, at least at that time, nearly fifty years ago.”¹¹⁷

If the *Large Glass* represents a break from existing artistic paradigms, and I think it does, this break was nevertheless prepared by pre-existing debates on the cinématique within Parisian cubism and coincident with other attempts to animate the plastic arts. For, primary among those “elements” that Duchamp purposely introduced was motion, “anathema” to a western painting tradition shaped by single-point perspective and static

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¹¹⁶ Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 41-42.
composition. However, as I have demonstrated in the first part of this chapter, the representation of motion emerged out of Parisian salon cubism rather than against it.\footnote{Michael R. Taylor has argued that Duchamp’s “anti-retinalism” similarly developed out of the cubist theory of the Puteaux group, specifically Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger’s 
\textit{Du “Cubisme.”} See Taylor, “Resisting Courbet’s Retinal Revolution: Marcel Duchamp’s 
\textit{Étant donnés} and the Erotic Legacy of Cubist Painting,” in \textit{Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall}, ed. Stefan Banz (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2010), 116-17.}

And though the hanging committee opposed the exhibition of \textit{Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)} at the 1912 Salon des Indépendants, other members of the Puteaux group would subsequently adopt chronophotographic imagery to portray diachronic motion.

Duchamp’s elder brother, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, also a member of the Puteaux group, had likely been the first of the three Duchamp brothers to encounter chronophotography, having been a medical student at the Salpêtrière hospital around 1898 when the photographer Albert Londe was applying Marey’s techniques to medical uses there.\footnote{Braun, \textit{Picturing Time}, 287.} Furthermore, Raymond and Jacques’s friend and longtime neighbor, František Kupka, had been the first Parisian painter to represent motion using chronophotographic-like graphic vocabularies, doing so as early as 1901 or 1902, though the source for his imagery appears to have been the Reynaud praxinoscope, a different nineteenth-century moving image technology.\footnote{Ibid., 282.} Marcel was the first to introduce Marey’s imagery into cubist painting in 1911 and within just a few months, his brother Jacques would also adopt the device. In his \textit{Little Girl at the Piano} (1912, Fig. 1.17), a
girl sits on a piano bench, the movement of her hands and legs playing the instrument represented through a sequential repetition of forms.

Indeed, Duchamp’s plans for *The Bride Stripped Bare* in the summer and fall of 1912 imagined a work much closer to his “Puteaux” paintings of 1911 and early 1912 than to the *Large Glass* as it was constructed between 1915 and 1923. Duchamp’s growing dissatisfaction with painting is evident in these early studies but not yet the source of a major transformation that would mark the *Large Glass*. Instead, the plans would proceed gradually over the course of the latter half of 1912 and into 1913 and 1914, eventually becoming recognizable with, yet still not identical to, the realized version. As Duchamp himself later acknowledged, “I made [the *Large Glass*] without an idea.” He appears to be referring here to the absence of a single, consistent plan from the inception of the project. “There were things that came along as I worked,” he added, ultimately characterizing the *Glass* as “a sum of experiments.”\(^{121}\) The *Glass*’s departure from contemporary painting is thus not punctual with the inception of the work or even identifiable with a single element of the work. It is the product of a gradual accretion, a series of decisions made over the course of several years.

In the past, scholars have been reluctant to assert a specific chronology for the conception and creation of the *Large Glass*, perhaps in deference to Duchamp who dated only a few of the preparatory notes and studies and published them later without order or classification. In some instances, historians have proposed tentative dates for certain subgroups of the notes, drawing from contextual evidence and in one case speculative

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\(^{121}\) Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 42.
handwriting analysis, but more often they have ascribed a basic disorder to its
development.¹²² Today, the availability of additional writings by the artist makes it
possible to isolate certain stages in the creation of the work. In 1980, Pontus Hultén, then
director of the Centre Georges Pompidou, and Duchamp’s step-son Paul Matisse oversaw
the publication of some three hundred notes, many of them relating to the conception and
construction of the Glass. Excluded from the releases made during the artist’s lifetime,
these notes were more practical and self-directed, in several cases referring specifically to
matters of fabrication and planning, exposing Duchamp’s decision making in the early
development of the work. A chronology drawing from these and other notes suggests that
much of Duchamp’s process revolved around problems of representing motion and
increasingly complex narrative action.¹²³ In this way, I would like to propose, the Large
Glass extends his pursuit of kinematic painting from 1911 and early 1912.

Duchamp first conceived the work during his so-called sojourn to Munich in the
summer of 1912.¹²⁴ There, on a sheet of paper measuring nine by thirteen inches,
Duchamp made a pencil sketch that he inscribed with the caption: “Première recherche

¹²² Arturo Schwarz, “Introduction,” in Marcel Duchamp, Notes and Projects for the
¹²³ For an early “hypothetical chronology” based on the posthumous release, see Juan
Antonio Ramírez, Duchamp, Love and Death, Even, trans. Alexander R. Tulloch
la muerte, incluso (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1993).
¹²⁴ Scholars have devoted significant attention to Duchamp’s “sojourn to Munich” and its
impact on his career, particularly its relationship to the conception of The Large Glass
and the readymades. See, for example, Lebel, Marcel Duchamp, 13-15; Thierry de Duve,
Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp’s Passage from Painting to the Readymade,
trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Helmut Friedel,
Thomas Girst, Matthias Mühling, and Felicia Rappe, eds., Marcel Duchamp in Munich
1912 (Munich: Lenbachhaus/Schirmer/Mosel, 2012).
pour: La mariée mise à nu par les célibataires” (First study for: The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors, Fig. 1.18). Unlike in the realized Large Glass, here both the Bride and the Bachelors inhabit a single, horizontal plane, the Bride in the center, flanked by a Bachelor on either side. Thus, while clearly an early study for The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, the sketch envisions a significantly different representation.

Like much of Duchamp’s work over the previous year, this was to be an oil painting depicting a range of bodily motion. The sketch’s title, as in the slightly amended final version, describes an action in the past tense: “La mariée mise à nu” (The Bride stripped bare). The sketch itself, however, presents a range of actions. The Bride may indeed be “stripped bare,” but the painting also shows the “strippings” that led there. Duchamp identifies the Bride as the central figure in a caption reading, “mécanisme de la pudeur/ Pudeur mécanique” (mechanism of modesty/mechanical modesty). The Bachelors’s violent solicitations take the form of horizontal and angled lines thrusting out toward her like sharp appendages. The immediate model for these lines appears to have been Marey’s chronophotographic studies of fencers, making the work’s proximity to the “chronophotographic” paintings clear (Fig. 1.19). The lines’s departure from anatomical logic, however, confirms Duchamp’s continued deviation from Marey. In two cases, the Bachelors’s advances appear to make direct contact with the dotted outline that defines the torso of the Bride. Hardly a passive object for the Bachelors’s attacks, the Bride extends sharp appendages of her own, though they are fewer in number. The non-contact between hers and many of the Bachelors’s lines evidently speaks to the

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125 Duchamp explicitly refers to Marey’s chronophotographic studies of fencers in Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, 34.
“mechanical modesty” referred to in the caption, introducing a criticism of turn-of-the-century bourgeois gender roles that, though itself misogynistic, persists throughout The Bride Stripped Bare.

The work also shows another kind of motion, internal to the figures. Duchamp renders all three in a skeletal, geometric style he had developed earlier that spring in a series of studies for the painting The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes (Le Roi et la reine entourés de nus vites) (1912, Fig. 1.20). Though frequently characterized in the literature on Duchamp as “mechanomorphic,” these stylized figures resemble geometric diagrams of dynamic mechanical systems more than machines in themselves. Duchamp departs from the sequential imagery of chronophotography here, adopting aspects of the related graphic language of the motion diagram, also originating from the domain of nineteenth-century kinematics.

Already in Sad Young Man on a Train, Duchamp had represented a dynamic system not available to chronophotography by registering two related but distinct ranges of motion: the man’s serpentine movement inside the train car and the barreling trajectory of the train car itself. Yet, that painting retains the chronophotographic vocabulary of repeated parallel figures, or “elementary parallelism” as Duchamp sometimes called the method.126 With the complexity of the motion in his subsequent canvases, Duchamp increasingly embraced the graphic language of the motion diagram. Coffee Mill (1911, Fig. 1.21), an oil painting with graphite on board, made around the same time as Sad Young Man on a Train, represents the circular motion of the handle above the mill. The

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126 Ibid., 29.
rotating handle lacks the lateral progression that characterizes the subjects of Marey’s chronophotographic studies so Duchamp instead presents it in a bird’s-eye view of multiple positions, associating them with one another through a common base and dotted line. The dotted line also appears in Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* (No. 2), and originates in Marey’s own geometric chronophotographs, where it was the product of graphic motion tracers worn by the test subjects. In *Coffee Mill*, the line deviates from Marey’s examples by ending in an arrow. The drawn arrow, signifying the directionality of the handle’s motion, is alien to Marey’s indexical vocabulary. It derives instead from industrial drafting, which Duchamp studied as a schoolchild in France. The formal language of industrial drafting opens up a scale and complexity eluding both the chronophotographic camera and the formal vocabulary of geometric chronophotography.

Duchamp later identified the *Coffee Mill* as the key work informing his design of the *Large Glass*. “It was [in *Coffee Mill*] I began to think I could avoid all contact with traditional pictorial painting, which is found even in Cubism and in my own ‘Nude Descending a Staircase.’ I was able to get rid of tradition by this linear method, or this technical method, which finally detached me from elementary parallelism. That was finished.” In the months after making *Coffee Mill*, Duchamp did not “get rid” of his elementary parallelism, but rather mixed the two graphic vocabularies. This mixture is evident in the Munich sketch and the other studies he made later that same summer: *Virgin* (No. 1), *Virgin* (No. 2), *The Bride*, and *The Passage from Virgin to Bride*. The

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127 On the role of industrial drafting in French primary education and its relationship to the work of Marcel Duchamp, see Molly Nesbit, “The Language of Industry,” *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 53-64.

128 Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 37.
sketches *Virgin* (No. 1) and (No. 2) and *The Bride*, oil on canvas, develop individual figures as kinematic machines (Figs. 1.22-1.24). *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* integrates these mechanical figures of Virgin and Bride into a lateral series reminiscent of chronophotography (Fig. 1.25). Even in those works that represent forms of motion invisible to the chronophotographic camera, Duchamp adopts a modified version of Marey’s sequential “elementary parallelism” to show the transition.

Duchamp would move increasingly toward the diagrammatic and away from the “chronophotographic” as he continued to develop his plans for the *Large Glass* later that fall and into 1913, but his original plan for *The Bride Stripped Bare* in the summer of 1912 envisioned a large-scale horizontal painting combining multiple formal idioms in ways consonant with contemporary work by another former Puteaux colleague. In early 1912, Robert Delaunay painted a monumental horizontal canvas measuring nine by thirteen feet on the subject of the history of the city of Paris (Fig. 1.26). Taking as his subject the development and urbanization of the metropolis, Delaunay sought to portray a temporal sequence while insisting on its simultaneity. This subject clearly exceeded the means of chronophotographic imagery. Instead, Delaunay montaged diachronic images into a single spatial field, evoking the coexistence of multiple temporalities in the urban fabric. On the left side he painted pre-industrial Paris based on Henri Rousseau’s *Self-Portrait* (1890) and, on the right, the Eiffel Tower, the emblem of modern Paris. Between them, he placed three nude female figures copied from a picture postcard of a Pompeiian

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fresco.\textsuperscript{130} This conceptual intermixture of divergent styles, naively realist and cubist landscapes with allegorical figures, finds echoes in Duchamp’s painting that same spring, *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, and sketch for *The Bride Stripped Bare* that summer.\textsuperscript{131}

In March 1912, Delaunay exhibited *The City of Paris* in the cubists’ shared room at the Salon des Indépendants, where Duchamp had encountered opposition to showing *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* and withdrawn his work. The exhibition evidently convinced Delaunay that he too had moved beyond the cubism of the Puteaux group.\textsuperscript{132} Soon after, he began a new series of paintings, known as the *Window* series, that pursued an alternative means of kinematic image-making. Studying neo-impressionist color theory, he developed dynamic compositions oriented around color relations. The first several paintings in the series apply this approach to Delaunay’s emblematic image of the Eiffel Tower but the *Window* paintings eventually abandoned nearly all suggestions of pictorial representation. In a programmatic text written in the summer of 1912, Delaunay would characterize the new style as “rhythmic simultaneity” and reject any association

\textsuperscript{130} On the sources of the imagery in the painting, see Michel Hoog, “La Ville de Paris de Robert Delaunay: Sources et Développement,” *La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* 15, no. 1 (1965): 29-38.


with conventional easel painting. He refused to participate in the cubists’s showings at the Salon d’Automne and Section d’Or the following fall, announcing his dissension in an open letter published in the Paris newspaper Gil Blas: “I beg to inform you that I do not subscribe to the erroneously held opinions…which proclaim me as a founder of Cubism…. It is without my knowledge that certain young painters have made use of my latest researches. They have recently exhibited paintings which they call Cubist paintings. I am not exhibiting.”

**Ten-Page Manuscript**

Plans for the *Bride Stripped Bare* would increasingly move away from cubist painting as Duchamp sought to portray other kinds of motion—libidinal, emotional, linguistic. The ten-page “cinématique” manuscript dating to that fall or winter is the first, or among the first, notes Duchamp drafted for *The Bride Stripped Bare*. Though art historians subsequently identified its evocation of an “épanouissement cinématique” with the “draft pistons” in the constructed version of the work, the manuscript predates the conception of the draft pistons and many other aspects of the work. Like the first Munich sketch, the heading on the first of the ten pages of the manuscript bears the initial title of the work, “The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors” (La Mariée mise à nu par les

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célibataires) before later amendments changed it to *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*). The first three pages outline a “graphic arrangement” familiar from the Munich sketch: “two principal elements” comprising the “Bride” and the “Bachelors.” The orientation of the canvas has shifted, however. Instead of a horizontal format, Duchamp describes a long, vertical canvas. Bride and Bachelors no longer inhabit a single spatial continuum. Now, the “Bride [is] above—the bachelors below.”

The manuscript characterizes the Bachelors of the lower register in only vague terms. They are said to be the “architectonic base” for the Bride, including a “solid foundation,” “masonry substructure,” and finally, a “bachelor-machine fat lubricious” with a “desire motor.” The description stops short of providing other graphic details. In a parenthetical note reading, “To develop,” Duchamp identified a need for substantial elaboration. Shortly thereafter, in early 1913, he would determine the central element of the Bachelors machine to be a “chocolate grinder,” an example of which he saw during a trip to Rouen in January. Later on, the Bachelors themselves would take on the form of nine “malic moulds,” uniforms belonging at the time to male occupations—priest, busboy, delivery boy, undertaker, etc.

The manuscript’s primary subject is the Bride and her “blossoming.” Duchamp had spent much of the summer of 1912 devising a graphical representation for the “Bride” figure, which he refers to in the manuscript as the “arbor-type,” and in other

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135 Duchamp, *WMD*, 39. For the original French, see Duchamp, *DDS*, 63.
137 Ibid.
notes as the “Hanged female” (Pendu femelle). As realized in the Large Glass, this figure inhabits the left side of the upper pane, known as the “Bride’s Domain.” With the figure established, the manuscript addresses its integration into the drama of The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors. Again, despite Duchamp’s use of the passive tense in the title, the subject of the work was to be an event, the action of the Bride’s “stripping bare” serving as a metaphor for the initiation of her sexual life.

Though the Bride seems a passive object of the stripping by “the,” later “her,” Bachelors in the title, the manuscript makes clear that she is, at least in part, its agent. Specifically, it distinguishes between two separate but related “strippings”: the “stripping by the bach[elors]” and the Bride’s own “voluntary-imaginary” stripping of herself. The “collision” or “conciliation” of these two “strippings” produces “the whole blossoming,” comprising the “upper part and crown of the picture.” The manuscript even suggests in certain passages that the entire sequence of events, including the stripping by the bachelors, is the Bride’s own dream or fantasy, noting, for example, “The painting will be an inventory of the…elements of the sexual life imagined by her the bride desiring [mariée-désirante].” The two elements, the stripping by the bachelors and her own voluntary-imaginative stripping, create “the blossoming,” an apparent

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138 This evidently was part of the reasoning for the new title. See Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 104: “Definitive title: The bride stripped bare by her bachelors even to give the picture the aspect of continuity and to not lay oneself open to the objection of having only described a fight between social dolls. = The bride possesses her partner and the bachelors strip bare their bride. As subtitle: (agricultural machine) or ‘extramural agricultural apparatus.’”
139 Duchamp, WMD, 42.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid. For the original French, see Duchamp, DDS, 68.
corollary to orgasm. As translator Paul Matisse notes, Duchamp may have chosen to use “blossoming” here owing to the proximity of the French épanouissement to évanouissement, fainting.\textsuperscript{142} Adding to the confusion regarding his use of this erotic metaphor for readers and perhaps for Duchamp himself, the manuscript sometimes appears to employ these terms, “stripping” and “blossoming,” interchangeably.

In selecting the bride’s sexual initiation, or fantasy thereof, as the subject of his new large-scale work, Duchamp identified a temporal event that he considered to be outside conventional means of representation, Marey’s chronophotography, and Puteaux cubism. The need to invent a new visual language for the portrayal of this transformational event is evident throughout the manuscript as Duchamp repeatedly notes to himself the need to further “develop graphically” various ideas for which present means were inadequate. “Kinematic” (cinématique) is the term he uses here. It is a placeholder for a motion graphic not yet determined. That is to say, the “kinematic blossoming” of the ten-page manuscript is a promise of further experimentation and not a specific arrangement for the Draft Pistons, or any other element that would appear in the finished Glass years later. Duchamp employs the phrase aspirationally, referring to an effect related to the “kinema” of his Puteaux motion paintings but more extraordinary. “This kinematic blossoming is controlled by the electrical stripping [of the bachelors],” he writes on the manuscript’s fifth page.\textsuperscript{143} “This kinematic blossoming which expresses the moment of the stripping should be grafted on to an arbor-type of the bride…. but the kinematic effects of the electrical stripping…leave (plastic necessity) the arbor-type at

\textsuperscript{142} Matisse, n.p.
\textsuperscript{143} Duchamp, WMD, 42. Translation modified. See original French, Duchamp, DDS, 67.
rest”; “This kinematic blossoming is the most important part of the painting. (graphically as a surface).”

What does it mean for the “kinematic blossoming” to be “controlled by the electrical stripping?” What does a “kinematic blossoming” look like “graphically as a surface”? Again, Duchamp himself was not sure at the time of the ten-page manuscript. He notes to himself a “need to express [it] in a completely different way from the rest of the painting” and catalogs a number of inventive but still nascent ideas. Though he repeatedly refers to the work as a “painting,” these ideas entail the integration of actual moving elements. In many cases, their imaginative nature makes it difficult to determine whether the proposals were meant to be actualized, and Duchamp himself at times seems indifferent to such a distinction. Though not relating directly to motion, this confusion of the real and the symbolic is perhaps most evident in his characterization of the “air (or water) cooler” on the manuscript’s second page. There, in the midst of describing the “desire motor,” “the last part of the bachelor machine,” he asserts that “far from being in direct contact with the Bride, the desire motor is separated by an air (or water) cooler.”144

In the following paragraph, he abruptly shifts registers, addressing the graphical significance of this “cooler” and his plans to represent it. “This cooler (graphically) to express the fact that the bride, instead of being merely an asensual icicle, warmly rejects (not chastely) the bachelors’s brusque offer.” Rather than creating a physical air or water mechanism, however, he would represent it with panes of glass, explaining, “This cooler

144 Duchamp, WMD, 39. Translation modified. See Duchamp, DDS, 64.
will be in transparent glass. Several plates of glass one above the other."¹⁴⁵ To clarify the idea, he includes a small diagram in the margins of the note (Fig. 1.27). Three ink lines run horizontally across the mid-point of the vertical canvas, suggesting three stacked plates of glass. This digression makes clear that even though Duchamp repeatedly refers to the work as a painting throughout the ten-page manuscript, he planned to integrate other media as well. In the diagram, the plates of glass do not appear to bisect the image, as three horizontal plates do in the eventual constructed glass-based version of the work. Duchamp’s intention may have been to conjoin two square-shaped canvases to form the “long canvas, upright” described on the first page. Alternatively, he may have sought to affix or adhere the panes to the surface of the canvas.

Duchamp’s evocations of motion similarly vacillate between moving parts and static, graphical representations of movement. For example, he writes, “The Bride basically is a motor,” but then makes clear that he does not intend to literally integrate a working motor on the surface of the work. The “arbor-type,” which he explicitly identifies with the two graphic studies, The Bride and The Passage from Virgin to Bride, remains at “rest,” he notes, citing “plastic necessity.” As he acknowledges elsewhere in the manuscript, such representation of mechanical, motor-based movement would not be possible in the static medium of painting: “Graphically, there is no question of symbolizing by a grandiose painting this happy goal—the bride’s desire.” Yet, at other points, he appears to pursue the animation of various components. For the third blossoming, which is where he explicitly notes a “need to express [it] in a completely

different way from the rest of the painting,” he suggests as a possible solution in a “mixture, physical compound of the [first and second blossomings] unanalyzable by logic.” Though the “mixture, physical compound” could conceivably be static, his stated aim to find a “completely different way” to express it suggests he did indeed mean to create motion from two physical elements mixing, compounding. Duchamp’s goal here, to confound logic, recalls the contradictions of his “chrono” paintings, adopting the synchronic imagery of Marey’s chronophotographs while negating their indexicality and legibility that promised accurate measurement.

Duchamp continues to develop the idea of integrating actual moving parts in later pages of the manuscript, though these imaginative plans are perhaps even more speculative. He describes the “kinematic blossoming” of the Bride (the “stripping voluntarily imagined by the bride-desiring”) as “the image of a motor car, climbing a slope in low gear. (The car wants more and more to reach the top, and while slowly accelerating, as if exhausted by hope, the motor of the car turns over faster and faster until it roars triumphantly.)”146 The other blossoming, or stripping, by the bachelors should terminate, he writes, “in the clockwork movement (electrical clocks in railway stations) Gearwheels, cogs, etc.”147 How would the Bachelors’s stripping of the Bride “graphically…end in the clockwork movement (electrical clocks in railway stations)”?

That question is unresolved by the manuscript’s conclusion. In a parenthetical note, Duchamp instructs himself to “develop expressing” this idea further. He clarifies only that by “clockwork movement” he meant “the throbbing jerk of the minute hand.” Would

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146 Duchamp, *WMD*, 43.
147 Ibid.
the canvas conceal cogwheels animating the Bachelors’s stripping-blossoming? The motion of the Bride’s voluntary blossoming is even more fantastic. Would the same cogwheels manage the simulation of “a motor car, climbing a slop in low gear”?

Delay in Glass

As anyone who has seen the Large Glass at the Philadelphia Museum of Art knows, Duchamp eventually abandoned the idea of integrating moving parts in favor of alternative static means, which included the sequential imagery of the “Draft Pistons,” but also the replacement of the canvas with a glass substrate and a textual catalog. However, for a brief time after penning the cinématique manuscript in late 1912 and early 1913, Duchamp indeed appears to have explored additional possibilities for the integration of actual moving parts that would have imbued the work with real, rather than purely graphic, motion. Furthermore, this pursuit of the cinématique, beginning in late 1912 and concluding around a year later, was not ancillary but essential to the realization of the Large Glass, contributing central aspects to the final design.

Two notes dating to the early conception of The Bride Stripped Bare, but released later in Duchamp’s career, appear to document these theoretical approaches to imbuing the work with real motion. Both refer to the creation of a “painting or sculpture” evidently separate from The Bride Stripped Bare, but likely intended as studies, much like the Chocolate Grinder paintings or Munich works. Duchamp included the first note, headed “painting or sculpture,” in the Green Box in 1934 and the second in another collection of notes relating to the Bride Stripped Bare published in 1966. The first reads,
“Flat container in glass—[holding] all sorts of liquids. Colored, pieces of wood, of iron, chemical reactions. Shake the container and look through it [regarder par transparence, against a light source].”148 This text, though undated, directly relates to the Bride’s blossoming from the ten-page manuscript, especially the kinematic “surface” Duchamp sought to integrate in the “upper part and crown” of The Bride Stripped Bare. There Duchamp had described the kinematic blossoming as a “mixture, physical compound of the 2 [other] causes,” the stripping bare of the Bride by the Bachelors and the self-stripping bare by herself, which it refers to elsewhere as a “collision.” The mixture should be, he asserted, “unanalyzable by logic.” In the later “painting or sculpture” note, Duchamp describes the suspension of reactive matter (pieces of wood and iron) in “all sorts of liquids” in a glass container. Shaking the glass and holding it up to the light, the chemical reactions would create a kinematic surface, matter mixing, colliding, and compounding to create random and unanticipated moving images. The unpredictability of this movement, and its eventual termination at the exhaustion of the “reactive matter,” reads as a deliberate challenge to a fine art market that values constancy and permanence in its objects, anticipating Duchamp’s later observations on the aging of artworks. In one of several similar statements in the 1950s and 1960s, he declared, “I believe in the original fragrance [of a work of art], but, like any fragrance, it evaporates very quickly (a

148 Duchamp, WMD, 35. For the original French, see Duchamp, DDS, 58.
few weeks, a few years at most). What remains is a dried up nut, classified by the historians in the chapter ‘History of Art.’”

The second “painting or sculpture” note shows that Duchamp also considered a means to integrate real motion in *The Bride Stripped Bare* that would have been more regular and pre-determined. It reads: “Make a painting or sculpture as one winds up a reel of moving picture film [*une bobine de film-cinéma*]. With each turn, on a large reel (several meters in diameter if necessary), a new ‘shot’ continuing the preceding turn and tying it into the next one.” “This kind of continuity,” it concludes, “may have nothing in common with moving picture film [*film cinématographique*] or even resemble it.”

Though it fails to mention the visual content of the “shots,” this approach seems much closer to the cinematographic “Colored Rhythm” imagined by Leopold Survage during the same period.

Duchamp briefly pursued the first proposal for the “kinematic blossoming” but the cinematographic idea was stillborn. He may have concluded that the “animation” of the machine by the turning of a large reel imposed too strict a sequential logic on the operation of an apparatus intended to upend linear narrative and temporal conventions. In any case, in a series of notes made in July 1913 during a vacation in the seaside town of Herne Bay, England, Duchamp developed the idea of animating the Bride’s blossoming by staging reactions with material inside an “insulated” case, the operation of which he

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compared to a barometer.\(^{151}\) A note, headed “In the Pendu; Femelle—and the barometric blossoming,” reads:

Barometer. The filament material could extend or contract itself in response to an atmospheric pressure organized by the wasp. (filament material extremely sensitive to artificial differences of atmospheric pressure controlled by the wasp. insulated case—containing the filament mat. Where the storms and fair weathers of the wasp will take place—the filament mat. In its meteorological extension (part connection the ‘hanged’ to the handler) resembles a solid flame i.e. having the force of a solid. It licks the ball of the handler displacing it as it pleases.\(^{152}\)

According to this note, the “wasp,” identified elsewhere as the lower cylindrical portion of Bride figure, would somehow affect the atmospheric pressure within the “insulated case,” likely a double-paned glass bulb, containing a filament material “extremely sensitive” to such changes. The material would “extend or contract” within the case and at full extension reach the opposite side of the work where it would meet the “Handler.” The “Handler,” or “Juggler of Gravity,” is characterized elsewhere by Duchamp as a three or four-legged table resting on a spring and supporting a ball, located at the far-right hand side of the upper register of the work.\(^{153}\) The “barometric blossoming” appears to supersede the “kinematic blossoming” from the ten-page manuscript, offering an alternative means for the representation of the Bride’s “voluntary-imaginary stripping.”

\(^{151}\) Henderson (The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art, 122) argues that the effect is closer to a hygrometer than to a barometer.

\(^{152}\) Duchamp, WMD, 48. Translation modified. For the original French, see Duchamp, DDS, 74.

\(^{153}\) Duchamp, WMD, 65. For other notes on the “Juggler,” see Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 149-50, 152.
Taking the place of “the image of a motor car, climbing a slope in low gear,” the filament material would slowly extend across the width of the work until it reached the “ball of the handler.” Where Duchamp had previously characterized the blossoming as a car “[wanting] more and more to reach the top, and while slowly accelerating, as if exhausted by hope,…turn[ing] over faster and faster until it roars triumphantly,” here he compares the extending filament to a growing flame, leaping out to lick at the ball of the handler. Duchamp makes the substitution explicit in a second note, “Transparent paper filaments alternatively blossoming out from the arbor to the juggler’s ball and coming back….The movement of these filaments…constitutes the stripped bare self-blossoming of the bride.”\footnote{Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp, Notes}, 149.}

This was not the only moving part Duchamp imagined for \textit{The Bride Stripped Bare} over the course of 1913. As already indicated, the element referred to as the “Juggler of Gravity” was to bounce a ball. One note Duchamp drafted in 1913, likely prior to the “barometric blossoming” note, indicates that the movements of the Juggler responded to the Bachelors’s blossoming via a mechanism located just below in the Bachelors’s side of the work. Titled “Boxing Match” (Fig. 1.28), it describes an elaborate apparatus in which the trajectory of a “combat marble” activates “battering rams” and “clockwork” cogwheels that manipulate the base on which the Juggler’s feet rest. Duchamp’s description recalls a marble-based Rube Goldberg machine, or as Francis Naumann has noted, a game of pinball.\footnote{Francis M. Naumann, \textit{Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction} (Ghent: Ludion Press, 1999), 49.} The mechanism was to sit below the mid-line
dividing the Bachelors from the Bride and shoot the marble upwards. The note includes a motion diagram outlining a three-part trajectory and its effects. Beginning at Point A, the marble would launch vertically, reaching its first summit, where it would “unfasten…the clockwork.” Hitting its mark, the marble would then descend vertically to a Point B and shoot back up to the second summit where it would “release the 1st battering ram [Bélier].” At that time, it would fall back down to a Point C and shoot up to a third summit, releasing the second battering ram. Standing upright, the rams support the base of the Juggler of Gravity, which Duchamp identifies as the “garment of the bride.” Struck by the marble, the rams are “released,” falling down and “carr[y]ing with [them] the garment of the bride.” The clockwork cogwheels, also activated by contact with the marble, “push the fallen rams up again,” effectively resetting the mechanism so that the entire mechanism can start again. The marble, after reaching the third summit, returns to Point A. The sequence would repeat continuously, providing a constant source of motion to the Juggler of Gravity.

In the past, commentators have treated these and other notes describing moving parts in The Bride Stripped Bare as pure fantasy, imaginatively outlined by Duchamp but never intended for actual integration into the constructed work. Duchamp, they claim, created the descriptions for a catalog that would accompany the static work, narrating movements between its diagrammatically rendered elements, thereby “animating” the work. Indeed, that is more or less what the notes would become by late 1913, when

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156 Duchamp, *WMD*, 66. Translation modified. For the original French, see Duchamp, *DDS*, 100.
Duchamp developed his idea of accompanying the work with a text. However, during the brief period from late 1912 to mid 1913 when Duchamp evidently wrote the notes on chemical reactions, reel-based painting, “barometric blossoming,” and “Boxing Match,” it seems likely that he considered integrating actual moving parts into *The Bride Stripped Bare*. The plans outlined in the quoted passages are conceivably viable, not just imaginary. As in the earlier ten-page manuscript, the intermixture of symbolic and real elements generates confusion; the “Boxing Match,” “Juggler of Gravity” and “Garment of the Bride” are imaginative names for iconographic elements that feature no boxers, jugglers, or garments. The trajectory of the “combat marble” and clockwork cogwheels are also metaphorical, symbolizing, as Duchamp indicates in the ten-page manuscript, the end of the “electrical blossoming” of the Bachelors.\(^{158}\) This does not mean, however, that they could not also be real, mobile elements. Duchamp expends enormous energy in the “Boxing Match” and other notes outlining their function in real time. Furthermore, if, as the “chemical reactions” note suggests, Duchamp had at that point begun to shift his conception of the work from a painting on canvas to a thin glass “container,” this format could have accommodated the marble game and barometric blossoming’s presumably moving elements.

The co-presence of real and graphic renderings of motion is also evident in another element in the Bachelor machine, referred to by Duchamp as the “Hook.” A component of the Glider, the Hook was a “sleigh” located on the left side of the Chocolate Grinder. The Glider would “slide” horizontally across the picture in an oiled

\(^{158}\) Ibid., 43.
groove, propelled forward by the fall of the Hook. As outlined in a series of notes, the
Hook would be located between the Glider and the Chocolate Grinder and consist of a
chain. As the chain descended, it would rotate an axle at the base of the Glider, activating
its horizontal motion. The chain would then pass through a trapdoor in the floor, running
into the basement. As it passed back up through the floor and made its way to the summit
again, the chain would activate another element of the Bachelor machine, the “scissors”
located above the Chocolate Grinder. Duchamp played with ideas for powering the
descending and ascending motion of the Hook itself. In a few notes, he proposed a
“weight” made out of a “substance of oscillating density.”¹⁵⁹ A substance that would be
denser “going down than going up” could, he theorized, largely propel itself. If the ascent
required additional assistance, Duchamp proposed a drivetrain turned by a water mill.
Though undoubtedly highly imaginative, these plans address a number of practical issues
of construction, particularly in reference to the transit of the chain. Over several other
notes, Duchamp developed ideas for the trapdoors located at the base of the work
permitting the chain to move through the basement. If these plans were always intended
to remain conceptual or textual only, it seems unlikely that Duchamp would have devoted
so much attention to the specific functionality of this element. Indeed, Duchamp appears
to obliquely refer to the real motion of his machine in one of the notes discussing the
weight. Speculating that the substance of oscillating density could take the form of a
bottle of liquid, specifically a bottle of Benedictine liqueur or a “magnum,” he explains
its visual aspect as a “Little dig [Petite méchanceté]: An Ironic concession to still

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 61.
Duchamp appears to be alluding to the depiction of the distinctive shape of Benedictine and of magnum size wine bottles in still life paintings, perhaps specifically those of the Puteaux cubists, whose stasis would contrast with the real motion of his machine. A magnum-size wine bottle appears, for instance, at the center of Jean Metzinger’s *Dancer in a Café* (1912), exhibited at the 1912 Salon d’Automne beside Duchamp’s Munich drawing *Virgin No. 1*.161

The “Boxing Match,” “Juggler of Gravity,” “barometric blossoming,” and “Hook” remain unrealized in the constructed version of the work. Commentators generally ascribe their absence to the “unfinished” nature of the *Large Glass*. However, it is likely that these elements were more or less rejected when Duchamp definitively decided to displace all “motion” in the work to a textual catalog and render *The Bride Stripped Bare* a static painting on glass. The visual significance of the lost elements, after all, hinged largely upon their kinematic operation. This shift may have occurred relatively rapidly. At some point over the course of 1913 Duchamp began work on a study for the Glider that tested the idea of painting on glass (Fig. 1.29). Duchamp inscribed the date “1913-14-15” on the back upon its completion in 1915. It is also possible that 1913 marks the date of conception and not the beginning of construction itself, extending the potential period when Duchamp planned to include mobile elements in the work.

In any case, Duchamp’s pursuit of real motion in *The Bride Stripped Bare* appears to have had lasting effects on the design of the work. If Duchamp first experimented with

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161 Duchamp was in Munich during the planning and opening of the 1912 Salon d’Automne but returned to Paris by October 10 in time to see the exhibition, which was on view from October 1 to November 8.
glass in the context of his plans for chemical reactions viewed \textit{par transparence}, his pursuit of motion may have motivated the shift from a canvas to a glass substrate. At some point between the drafting of the ten-page manuscript and beginning his work on the \textit{Glider} study, Duchamp decided to definitively abandon canvas in favor of glass, as documented in a series of undated notes. One reads, for example, “Make a painting on glass so that it has neither front, nor back; neither top, nor bottom.”\textsuperscript{162} The reference to \textit{painting} on glass suggests Duchamp had already rejected the idea of chemical reactions or other actual motion inside, but the absence of a front, back, top, or bottom also appears to develop out of that earlier proposal for a glass container that one would pick up, “shake…and look through.”\textsuperscript{163} As in the earlier note, this effectively transforms \textit{The Bride Stripped Bare} from a painting to a projection, although a projection of a static rather than moving image. Essential to “look[ing] through” the glass was the presence of a light source on the other side, illuminating the scene. Duchamp penned several additional notes on the subject of a lighting array installed behind the Glass.\textsuperscript{164} He also considered inverting the projection so that the work would not be seen by looking through glass onto a source of light but conversely by casting light through the glass onto a second surface: “When executing it on glass, make a white background. not very far away and giving cast shadows which permit sculptural reconstitution (or rather put a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{162} Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp}, \textit{Notes}, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{163} Duchamp, \textit{WMD}, 35.
\item \textsuperscript{164} See Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp}, \textit{Notes}, 74: “As background, perhaps: An electric fete recalling the decorative lighting of Magic city or Luna Park. Or the Pier Pavilion at Herne Bay.—garlands of lights against a black background (or a background of the sea. Prussian blue and sepi) Arc lights.—Figuratively a fireworks—In short, a magical (distant) back drop in front of which is presented….the agricultural machine.”
\end{itemize}
white object, fairly close to the glass, and receiving the shadows cast from certain parts of
the glass."\(^{165}\)

As late as 1915, Duchamp was still planning to incorporate lighting directly into
the work. A note drafted shortly after he arrived in New York documents a shift in the
plans. Instead of casting light through the glass or looking through the glass at a light
source, Duchamp sought to “illuminate [it] from within”:

Framing the 2 glasses [in] making a window / cooper wood handle opening on a
landscape of some kind (at will) garden sea town etc. or [at will] illuminated with
weak light (red blue green etc –the color having no importance) The picture
illuminated from within by a very strong artificial light preventing the picture
from ‘standing out’ against the background of natural light.\(^{166}\)

Another note, titled “Interior lighting,” develops the idea further: “Instead of an extra
solar light falling an angle of 45º. determine the luminous effects (lights and shadows) of
an interior source, i.e. that each substance in its chemical composition is endowed with a
‘phosphorescence’ and lights up like luminous advertisements not quite.”\(^{167}\) Though
Duchamp would not formally pursue this or his earlier plans for integrating lighting into
the glass structure of The Bride Stripped Bare by 1923, he would do so informally by
overseeing the lighting design for nearly all subsequent installations of the work during

\(^{165}\) Ibid., 158. See also Ibid., 68: “Put the entire bride under glass, or in a transparent
case….Perhaps put a lighted vertical surface as a background for the picture; the shadows
cast by the div. parts on this surface would allow the viewing eye to locate precisely the
perspective depth of each part in the whole.”

\(^{166}\) Ibid., 171.

\(^{167}\) Duchamp, *WMD*, 71.
his lifetime. These installations suggest continued experimentation with the idea of light projection in the Glass. Duchamp designed two installations in which the Glass appeared before a large window, where it was viewed against a light source: in Katherine Dreier’s Connecticut home for several years in the late 1940s and early 1950s and at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, from the early 1950s through the present day (Figs. 1.30-1.31). An earlier installation, at the Museum of Modern Art, from 1943 to 1946, cast a spotlight on the front surface of the Glass at a forty-five-degree angle, generating defined shadows on the floor (Fig. 1.32). As film scholar Annette Michelson has observed, the deliberate integration of light is fundamental, not ancillary, to the work, magnifying, for her, its association with the cinematic “surface—the screen,” “medium—light,” and “perceptual and compositional mode—temporality.”

The experimentation with motion in The Bride Stripped Bare may have also directly contributed to the creation of another work in 1913, Bicycle Wheel, and thus indirectly to the initiation of Duchamp’s “readymades” the following year. In Bicycle Wheel, Duchamp affixed an inverted bicycle wheel and fork to the seat of a wooden stool (Fig. 1.33). Over the following decade, Duchamp would create a number of works incorporating found objects, often paired with inscriptions and signatures, evidently as a means to elude the period’s conventional conceptions of the work of art as a product of technical mastery and singular effort. In 1916, he would designate these “readymade,” borrowing an American sales term. Historians have generally studied Bicycle Wheel in

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the context of the readymades. However, as Duchamp later explained, *Bicycle Wheel*’s origins preceded the later series. “The *Bicycle Wheel* is my first Readymade, so much so that at first it wasn’t even called a Readymade. It still had little to do with the idea of the Readymade.” On another occasion, he told an interviewer, “When I put a bicycle wheel on a stool, the fork down, there was no idea of a ‘readymade.’” Duchamp then added, “Or anything else. [*Bicycle Wheel*] was just a distraction. I didn’t have any special reason to do it, or any intention of showing it, or describing anything.”

Though the absence of any intention to “show it” is obvious, Duchamp’s claim that there was no idea of anything in making the *Bicycle Wheel* seems overstated. He may not have had a specific plan in mind, but he created *Bicycle Wheel* in the same weeks and months he was experimenting with moving elements in *The Bride Stripped Bare*, many of them involving spinning wheels of one kind or another. The Glider was to incorporate a water wheel; the Boxing Match would have clockwork cogwheels. *Bicycle Wheel* may have been a related study. Even so, Duchamp himself never drew an explicit connection between the two works. In a later interview, he acknowledged a motivation for the creation of the work, but one different from *The Bride Stripped Bare*: “I liked the idea of having a bicycle wheel in my studio. I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoy looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace. It was like having a fireplace in my studio, the movement of the wheel reminded me of the movement of the flames.” Though Duchamp does not make the connection, his identification of the spinning wheel with flames recalls the

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171 Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 47.
language employed in the “barometric blossoming” note, where he compares the extension of the barometric filament to a “solid flame” licking the ball of the Juggler of Gravity. On another occasion, Duchamp explicitly related the form of a rotating wheel, which would reoccur throughout his later work, to the expression of sexual desire as masturbation: “Always there has been a necessity for circles in my life, for how do you say, rotation. It is a kind of narcissism, this self-sufficiency, a kind of onanism. The machine goes around and by some miraculous process I have always found fascinating, produces chocolate.” The reference to chocolate production refers directly to the Chocolate Grinder in *The Bride Stripped Bare* but could equally apply to the other elements of blossoming in both the Bachelors and Bride’s domains.

Unlike *Bicycle Wheel*, the post-1914 readymades eschew moving parts. Yet many incorporate motion in other ways that suggest a relationship to Duchamp’s experimentation in *The Bride Stripped Bare*. Period photographs of Duchamp’s studio show a number of the readymades (*Sculpture for Traveling*, 1915, Fig. 1.34; *Hat Rack*, 1916, Fig. 1.35) suspended or otherwise hung in mid-air, casting moving shadows on the walls and floor. Others would be set into motion by the viewer or set the viewer into motion. *With Hidden Noise* (1916, Fig. 1.36) demanded manual handling and shaking for effect; *Trebuchet* (1917, Fig. 1.37), a clothes rack nailed to the studio floor, instigated stumbles. Another readymade, *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy* (1921, Fig. 1.38),

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incorporated a mercury thermometer, whose internal mercury “filament” responded to the ambient temperature of the cold marble cubes that make up another part of the work. The parallel between the thermometer and the “Barometric blossoming” endorses the impression that Duchamp’s experiments with motion for The Bride Stripped Bare were transferred to the readymades when he decided to immobilize the work on glass itself.175

The timeline of Duchamp’s return to a static vision of The Bride Stripped Bare is not entirely clear or uni-directional. The “Boxing Match” and “Juggler of Gravity” were definitively replaced by 1918. At that time, Duchamp conceived a two-dimensional graphic element, known as the “Oculist Witnesses,” to fulfill the same function as the combat marble and juggler, conveying the Bachelors’s blossoming into the Bride’s domain in the upper register. Duchamp had replaced the “barometric blossoming” with a static element earlier, in late 1913 or 1914. An undated note, titled “[Blossoming] ABC:,” marks the transition from an actual moving element for the so-called “Kinematic blossoming” to a graphical representation of motion. It begins by describing a “moving inscription,” in which “a group of alphabetic units” representing the Bride’s blossoming would reach across the picture from the Pendu Femelle to the Juggler of Gravity, evidently still present at this stage of the planning. Duchamp sought to use these “alphabetic units” to escape a rigidly linear progression of the Blossoming. “[They] should no longer have a strict order from left to right,” he wrote, referring to a direction

175 David Joselit identifies another transferal between The Bride Stripped Bare and Why Not Sneeze, reading Why Not Sneeze’s caged thermometer as a “spatialization” of the “Barometric blossoming” and the “erotic economy of the Large Glass.” Joselit, Infinite Regress, 166-69. Joselit’s identification of the delayed “sneeze” of the title with the sexual dysfunction of the Glass registers the bodily motion encoded in the mercury thermometer’s responsiveness to temperature changes in the marble cubes.
originating at the Pendu Femelle and ending at the Juggler of Gravity. The “barometric blossoming” would have been limited to this order. The term “alphabetic units” was, like “cinématique,” something of a placeholder; Duchamp notes to himself, “Determine the alphabetic units (their number, form, significance...).” However, here he is at least explicit that their inscription would be represented by a “photographic method.” He outlines a series of steps to take after determining the number, form, and significance of the units: “Represent sculpturally this inscription in movement. and take a snapshot. have it enlarged to the final dimensions.—With the negative of the enlargement: have prepared with silver bromide—the large plate glass and make a print directly on the back.”\textsuperscript{176}

The idea to represent the inscription “sculpturally...in movement,” may again refer to one of Étienne-Jules Marey’s methods. In addition to producing two-dimensional graphic analyses, Marey sometimes represented his kinematic data sculpturally, famously, for example, using multiple bronze and plaster figurines to show the successive movements of a bird’s body in flight (Fig. 1.39). The photographic snapshots of this sculptural movement would then approximate the form of Marey’s chronophotographs. Duchamp’s note continues: “Perhaps look for a way to obtain superimposed prints.—i.e. a first print—of the first alphabetic unit....make a second print of the second alphabetic unit superimposing itself on the first but printing only the essential without a background 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, 5\textsuperscript{th}, etc. units.”\textsuperscript{177}

How exactly this method would have avoided a “strict order from left to right” is unclear. The successive photographs Duchamp describes would seem as reliant on uni-

\textsuperscript{176} Duchamp, \textit{WMD}, 38.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
directionality as the prior barometric design had been. Perhaps for this reason, Duchamp ultimately amended the idea, replacing the superimposed prints with three non-sequential “snapshots” of an object in motion. These were the “Draft pistons,” the three irregular rectangles traced onto the surface of the glass whose shape was determined by photographs of a piece of gauze affected by gusts of air currents (Fig. 1.40). Though these shapes do, as commentators have argued, resemble the “frames” of a moving picture, Duchamp negates any cinematographic resemblance in them by presenting only three “frames,” not enough to represent any motion, and providing no clear order “left to right.”

As in the specific case of the kinematic blossoming and Draft Pistons, Duchamp’s general decision to retreat from moving parts in favor of the graphic representation of motion appears motivated by a dissatisfaction with the physical constraints. Though experimenting with his various proposals to imbue motion in the work, Duchamp evidently decided that this event, the blossoming of the bride, evaded the means of visual representation, moving or static. Even the most imaginative solutions he conceived, such as the “chemical reactions” or “Boxing Match,” were bounded by physical logic. As previously noted, Duchamp’s manuscripts devote significant energy to working out specific mechanisms that would operate physically and do so in a predictable manner, or at least in a predictably erratic manner. This was apparently not adequate for The Bride Stripped Bare. In a series of undated notes Duchamp characterizes the “reality” of the work as being an alternative to that which governs everyday existence: “The whole

178 For notes on this idea, see Duchamp, *WMD*, 35, 36. Also Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, 117.
picture seems to be in papier mâché because the whole of this representation is the sketch (like a mould) for a reality which would be possible by slightly distending the laws of physics and chemistry.”¹⁷⁹ “The picture in general is only a series of variations on ‘the law of gravity’ a sort of enlargement, or relaxation of this law, submitting to it [glimpses of the effects of the law on] extraphysical situations or bodies less or not chemically conditioned.”¹⁸⁰

Since the “reality” of the picture distends the laws of physics (namely, gravity) and chemistry, Duchamp ultimately abandoned the pursuit of moving parts in the work and replaced it with a textual account meant to accompany the graphic The Bride Stripped Bare and elucidate the “extraphysical” motion of its various elements. A note, dated 1913, explains the decision: “In that the picture is incapable (despite all the well-intentioned Idealism of man’s visual works, all the overwhelming yearning toward he knows not what; consequences of anthropomorphism) of producing a kinematic state (real or ideal), language can explain several stages of this rest not descriptively.”¹⁸¹

The Bride Stripped Bare thus became, in Duchamp’s words, a “rest” or “delay” in glass. Many scholars have identified the hundreds of notes relating to The Bride Stripped Bare published by Duchamp in boxed editions beginning with the 1934 Green Box as being identical to the “textual account” Duchamp drafted to “explain several stages of this rest not descriptively.” Though some of the notes may record earlier drafts for aspects of the text, the notes themselves are not the textual account created for The Bride

¹⁷⁹ Duchamp, WMD, 71.
¹⁸⁰ Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 104.
¹⁸¹ Ibid., 82. Translation modified.
Stripped Bare. Many notes that found their way into the Green Box and other collections pre-date the conception of the textual account. He evidently abandoned that plan in deciding to release the working notes themselves in 1934. As Duchamp later explained, “Originally I had planned to finish the glass with a catalog like the Green Box, except of course, the Green Box is a very incomplete realization of what I intended. It only presents preliminary notes for the Large Glass and not in the final form which I had conceived as somewhat like a Sears, Roebuck catalog to accompany the glass and to be quite as important as the visual material.”

Duchamp repeatedly compared this unrealized text to a commercial mail-order catalog in later interviews, vacillating between Sears and a French corollary “Arms of Saint-Étienne” (Manufacture d’armes de Saint-Étienne) depending on the audience. In both cases, it remains unclear what this catalog would have looked like as a graphic work of art. The notes offer some clues as well as a view of a number of alternative plans for the text that preceded the conception of the catalog. When he turned toward “language” to explain The Bride Stripped Bare, Duchamp initially referred to the accompanying text as a “poem.” Though historians take Duchamp’s idea of pairing The Bride Stripped Bare with a textual accompaniment to represent a singular break from period artistic conventions, the activation of motion in a static graphic image with a paired poem has counterparts in Duchamp’s immediate circle of the Parisian avant-garde. In June 1913, likely before Duchamp settled on creating his own “poem,” Blaise Cendrars’s Paris publishing house released a limited edition image-and-text poem by Cendrars and Sonia

182 Kuh, The Artist’s Voice, 81, 83.
183 Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 139.
Delaunay-Terk titled *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (*Prose of the Trans-Siberian Railway and of Little Jehanne of France*) (Fig. 1.41). The text of the poem, by Cendrars, recounts his experience traveling on the railway during the Russian Revolution of 1905 with his companion, Jehanne, and runs vertically down one half of a two-meter long sheet of paper folded accordion-style. Delaunay-Terk’s watercolor images, reproduced through the pochoir process, fill the the other half of the paper, appearing beside the text, as well as in the blank spaces between stanzas and words. The watercolors are not illustrations of the text, at least not in any conventional sense. Cendrars and Delaunay-Terk conceived the work as a “simultaneous text painting,” pairing image and text to create a sensorial experience not available to either graphic or literary works in isolation.¹⁸⁴

Christophe Wall-Romana includes Cendrars and Delaunay-Terk’s project in his recent study of French “cine-poetry,” a corpus of twentieth-century poetic works that, he argues, “expands poetics and poetry” by integrating “cinematic elements.”¹⁸⁵ For Wall-Romana, *Prose* represents an “outer liminal example” of the cinepoetic form. As he notes, the text itself “bears only tangential marks of cinema.” Instead, it is other formal elements of the work that make it “flicker at the edge of the cinepoetic,” namely the

“paratext (unfolding page), subtext (Cendrars’s 1912 profession of faith toward cinema), and intermedial aspect (resemblance to a strip of dyed film stock from the period).” The unfolding of the long sheet of paper, according to Wall-Romana, mimics the sequential motion of the cinematographic format. Similarly, the watercolor washes of the pochoir process resemble the wash-like dyes hand applied to film stocks. Indeed, this parallel goes beyond the physical resemblance cited by Wall-Romana; the Pathéchrome technique for dying film stock adopted its stencil-based method from the pochoir technique.

If Prose is, as Wall-Romana argues, a cine-poem, the imagined *Bride Stripped Bare* is too. Duchamp similarly sought to integrate word and image into a single experience of narrative motion and proposed a variety of means to avoid the impression of the image as an illustration of the text or the text as the description of the image. In the process of developing the concept of his catalog, however, Duchamp stopped using the word “poem” for the textual form he sought. Following Duchamp’s example, I would argue that the “cine-poetic form” that Wall-Romana detects in a broad range of text-based twentieth-century French poetry is not particularly suitable for either *Prose* or *The Bride Stripped Bare*. First, both Cendrars/Delaunay-Terk and Duchamp sought to engineer a new kinematic medium by conjoining existing media—painting, poetry, sculpture, chronophotography—not to expand the limits of a single medium, poetry, by integrating elements from another, cinema. Second, it overemphasizes the reliance on cinematographic forms of motion. Their *kinema*, though informed by the cinematograph, is clearly an alternative to it, existing to provide experiences not available to the
cinematograph. Though films like D. W. Griffith’s *The Lonedale Operator* had introduced experimental crosscut editing to convey simultaneous action by 1911, the structure of the apparatus, with one frame after another passing through the projector gate, demanded a basic linear order that works like *The Bride Stripped Bare* expressly reject.

Duchamp’s determination that the poetic format was inadequate is evident in a series of notes. In one long meditation on the subject, he proposed to substitute for the poem a “juxtalinear translation” of the graphic work:

Text (external form--) Of the different motions recorded on the picture draw up a kind of reference table (from the picture to the text and vice versa), reference sketch. The purpose of this text is to explain (and not to express in the manner of a poem) i.e. it is a juxtalinear translation of the figure (picture). This juxtalinear translation, which must no longer have any hieroglyphic intention (the picture, itself, is hieroglyphic data of the Bride stripped bare--), this translation should not be based on words and letters, or at least the alphabet used will be entirely new i.e. without any similarity to latin greek—german letters—it will no longer be [phonetic], but only visual one will be able to understand it with the eyes but one will not be able to read it with the eyes or out loud—The principle of such an alphabet will be an ideal stenography—The symbols as numerous as possible and will be the elements (as in every alphabet) of the groups (analogous to words) destined to translate the progressive distortion of the convention hieroglyphic
phenomenon (Chocolate grinder, etc.) into its nominalization which then only express a single [dead] idea.\textsuperscript{186}

The note indicates that Duchamp sought to avoid the “expression” associated with poetry: “The purpose of this text is to explain.” The “Juxtalinear translation” (\textit{traduction juxtalinéaire}) he proposed in its place is an approach to literary translation in which the original text appears beside its translation allowing for direct comparison. First promoted by the eighteenth-century French translator César Chesneau Dumarsais, juxtalinear translation remained a popular method for the study of classical literature in France at the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{187} Essentially, it seeks to render the two texts as close to semantic equivalents as possible such that the value distinction between original and translation is lost or, in cases where that is not possible, clearly registered. Duchamp sought to exploit this equivalence, conceiving his text as a “juxtalinear translation,” or “reference table,” of the “different motions recorded on the picture,” that could be read “from the picture to the text and vice versa.” Each explains the other, together providing greater information than either could alone.

As such, the initial model for the text accompaniment to the graphic image in \textit{The Bride Stripped Bare} would appear to be the key, or caption, of a kinematic diagram, though a fairly unconventional one. In the note, Duchamp expresses a desire to make the key itself “visual”: “One will be able to understand it with the eyes but one will not be able to read it[,] with the eyes or out loud.” He initially characterizes this visual language

\textsuperscript{186} Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp, Notes}, 164. Brackets in the original.
\textsuperscript{187} Glyn Thompson notes that Duchamp would have learned the method as part of his school curriculum in Thompson, “Unwinding Duchamp: Mots et Paroles à Tous les Étages” (PhD diss. University of Leeds, 2008), 57.
as an “ideal stenography,” and later a dictionary, of symbols to translate the “hieroglyphic data” of The Bride Stripped Bare. Left vague in this first note, Duchamp evidently experimented with various methods to realize the idea, writing for example:

Take a Larousse dict. And copy all the so-called ‘abstract’ words. i.e., those which have no concrete reference. Compose a schematic sign designating each of these words….These signs must be thought of as the letters of the new alphabet. A grouping of several signs….will be connected with the other groupings by a…sort of grammar, no longer requiring a pedagogical sentence construction.  

For this purpose, Duchamp may have even briefly pursued the idea of using photographs or short films. One note reads: “Dictionary—with films, taken close up, of parts of very large objects, obtain photographic records which no longer look like photographs of something. With these semi-microscopics constitute a dictionary of which each film would be the representation of a group of words in a sentence.” Duchamp’s explanation of this film-based language suggests that he saw his “ideal stenography” as a sort of universal language that could enable a more precise “juxtapositional translation” of The Bride Stripped Bare than linguistic languages could. “This relation between film and meaning translated into words would be ‘striking’ and would serve as a basis for a kind of writing which no longer has an alphabet or words but signs (films) already freed from the ‘baby talk’ of all ordinary languages.” Finally, the note concludes with a self-

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188 Duchamp, WMD, 31. 
189 Ibid., 78.
directive for proceeding with the idea in The Bride Stripped Bare: “Find a means of filing all these films in such order that one could refer to them as in a dictionary.”

Duchamp’s envisioned “ideal stenography” comprising films and micro-scopic photographs echoes the contemporary documentary project of French banker and philanthropist Albert Kahn’s Les Archives de la planète. Between 1908 and 1930, Kahn and his project director, Jean Brunhes, a professor of Human Geography at the Collège de France, employed cameramen to travel the globe and create a comprehensive visual archive of “practices and modes of human activity whose disappearance is just a question of time.”

Traveling to forty-eight countries, his staff would ultimately contribute around 72,000 photographs, 4,000 stereographs, and 183,000 meters of 35mm film to the archive. As film historian Paula Amad has written, the inspirations for Kahn likely included Étienne-Jules Marey, who had worked to create a “chronophotographic archiv[e] of the human body” during his own professorship at the Collège de France several decades prior. Amad notes, however, that Kahn’s Archive de la planète also participated in the contemporary “‘archival’ fever sweeping French culture in the 1910s” that birthed a variety of film-based archives and collections. The Gaumont film company, for example, began to distribute a new catalog of films in 1913 claiming to

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190 Ibid.
191 Paula Amad, “Cinema’s ‘Sanctuary’: From Pre-Documentary to Documentary Film in Albert Kahn’s ‘Archives de la Planète’ (1908-1931),” Film History 13, no. 2 (2001): 144.
192 Ibid., 146.
193 Ibid., 149.
represent a visual “encyclopedia.” "

Duchamp’s film-based “dictionary” of close-ups similarly echoes Marey’s photographic collection, which included microscopic images, and emerges out of the same “archival fever.” There are further correlates in the United States, though likely post-dating the writing of Duchamp’s notes for the dictionary. The American poet Vachel Lindsay publicized a theory of film “hieroglyphics” and the creation of a film museum in 1915 and 1916 when Duchamp was living in New York.

Duchamp eventually abandoned his pursuit of a “visual” language. Another series of notes records the shift in the conception of the text towards a catalog format, though not quite like the Sears Roebuck-style catalog he would later describe. In a long manuscript titled “Text (general notes for the),” Duchamp described a fully realized vision of the text, going so far as to develop style guidelines and address the adaptation of existing notes for inclusion:

Heading the text, like an introductory quote (analogous to those signed Pascal, Plato, or Ecclesiastes)…. Simplify the spelling: eliminate double letters (as long as it doesn’t upset the pronunciation. Arrive at a sort of short hand, avoiding long

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196 There is evidence of intermediary stages here. See, for example, Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 66: “For the text of The Bride stripped bare….make a round book i.e. without beginning or end (either with the pages unbound and ordered by having the last word of the page repeated on the following page (no numbered pages) – or with the back made of rings around which the pages turn.”
developments, explanation of a word when necessary, more its stenographic equation than a tirade = Avoid all formal lyricism; let the text be a catalog—clarity i.e. choice of words whose meanings don’t lend themselves to ambiguity…. Repeat as in logical proofs, entire phrases to keep from falling into hermeticism; that every idea, even the most obscure, can be clearly understood. Give the text style of a proof by connecting the decisions taken by conventional formulae of inductive reasoning in some cases, deductive in others. Each decision or event in the picture becomes either an axiom or else a necessary conclusion, according to a logic of appearance…. Use the conditional form in the style: Also introduce some presents, some imperfects to reinforce the proofs.  

Adopting the style of a “logical proof” would, according to Duchamp, permit him to avoid “hermeticism.” At the same time, it would effectively narrate the motion in the diagrammatic graphic image of *The Bride Stripped Bare*, “connecting…decisions.”

Duchamp did not ultimately create any such catalog for *The Bride Stripped Bare*, instead releasing a selection of eighty-nine of his original manuscripts in 1934. This and later selections made by the artist included working notes for the graphic *Bride Stripped Bare* and the textual catalog, rather than the rewritten, re-formatted manuscripts he intended for publication in the catalog itself. Many thus retain his errant ideas and proposals, contributing to critical confusion surrounding the conceptual and material genesis of the work. Just as Duchamp predicted, the absence of a textual counterpart for the graphic *Bride Stripped Bare* has left its viewers without an “explanation” of the

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197 Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, 77.
motion in its various elements, effectively voiding the “kinema” he had sought in the picture.

The non-completion of Duchamp’s catalog effectively “stalled” the motion in *The Bride Stripped Bare*. Commentators on the work regularly refer to it as “esoteric,” “obscure,” and difficult to understand. Following the release of the Green Box in 1934 and other notes in later volumes, however, a number of scholars sought to reconstruct the motion that Duchamp intended for *The Bride Stripped Bare*, and thereby “animate” it themselves. Beginning with André Breton’s influential “Lighthouse of the Bride” essay in 1934, these attempts have been primarily narrative, that is to say, literary. While impressive feats of close reading and imagination, these interpretations draw from a fragmented and unfinished set of texts and are necessarily speculative. Moreover, by seeking to establish a linear, coherent narrative in the motion of the Bride-Bachelors “machine,” they impose a logic that Duchamp had explicitly rejected by opting to pair image and text.\(^{198}\)

Without the finished catalog, it is impossible to know precisely how the various elements’s fictive movements were to operate. Duchamp himself appears to have remained uncertain or ambivalent about certain questions, perhaps contributing to his eventual suspension of the catalog. Nevertheless, the working notes provide a clear picture of the artist speculating about possible ways to create motion and the subject of that motion. Crucially, it was a psychological, libidinal, and chemical motion unavailable to representation via traditional visual art and cinematographic film, the dominant

\(^{198}\) To be fair, many authors of literary reconstructions freely admitted their artifice. See, for example, Breton, “Lighthouse of the Bride,” 9.
moving picture media of his day. For this purpose, Duchamp, like Ricciotto Canudo and Leopold Survage, sought the creation of a distinct kinematic art medium. Though the realized version of the Glass features no internally moving parts, this original goal would contribute key elements to the final design, including the substitution of glass for canvas, the planned textual catalog, and multiple graphical forms. The delay of several years between the initial conception and construction of these elements, during which Duchamp traveled to Munich, Paris, New York, Buenos Aires, and back to Paris and New York, likely contributed to the obscuration of any vestiges of the origins and to false equivalencies between ideas from early and later stages, as in the case of the “kinematic blossoming” and Draft Pistons.

Recovery of the cinématique discourses within which Duchamp’s plans for The Bride Stripped Bare first emerged demonstrates that the exchange between early cinema and cubism exceeds the unidirectional mimicry sometimes ascribed to Picasso and Braque’s cubism. As I have argued, the painters and theorists of the Puteaux group conceived various cinématique devices to animate their canvases, employing both the synchronic juxtaposition of multiple views and, in Duchamp’s paintings of 1911 and 1912, the display of sequential, if illogical, imagery. The development of The Bride Stripped Bare in this context demonstrates the deceptive causality of much “cinematic imaginary” scholarship. The motion in The Bride Stripped Bare and early cinematographic filmmaking have a common precursor in the kinematic studies of the nineteenth century and have points of convergence with one another but it would be no more accurate to say that The Bride Stripped Bare shows the influence of cinema than to
say that cinema shows the influence of *The Bride Stripped Bare*. Instead, Duchamp’s work of the early 1910s illuminates the mutual participation of Parisian painting and early cinema in what might be called a “kinematic imaginary,” the progenitor of both the institutional cinematographic cinema that would emerge in the later 1910s and 1920s and the kinetic art that would gain visibility in the 1920s and reemerge more forcefully after the Second World War.  

The concept of “kinematic blossoming” then, far from disassociating *The Bride Stripped Bare* from cinema, refines our understanding of “Duchamp’s cinema,” its emergence during Duchamp’s encounter with Parisian cubism between 1911 and 1913, and its relation to early cinema. In the creation of *The Bride Stripped Bare*, Duchamp sought to engineer a new form of kinematic art in dialogue with cinematographic film, a medium that was itself undergoing rapid transformation in the same period. In doing so, Duchamp was one of several artists and poets in the Parisian avant-garde investigating the character and potentialities of the moving image outside the commercial domain of the cinematographic cinema. When he eventually acquired his own moving picture camera in 1920, elements of this alternative approach to “kinema” in *The Bride Stripped Bare* persisted in his cinematographic filmmaking, the subject of chapter two.

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CHAPTER 2: Duchamp’s Optics and the Avant-Garde Film

When Marcel Duchamp sailed for New York in June 1915, he had determined the constitutive media of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, drafted dozens of notes, and completed studies for many of its graphic elements, including the Pendu Femelle, the Chocolate Grinder, and the Malic Molds. He began construction shortly after his arrival, facilitated through a financial arrangement granting ownership to his new American patrons Louise and Walter Arensberg. Three years later, the work was nearing completion when Duchamp left New York, sailing first to Buenos Aires and then on to Paris. Photographs taken before he left show the Glass’s two panes leaning against his studio wall, the Chocolate Grinder, Sieves, Malic Molds, and Milky Way all clearly visible (Fig. 2.1). Other elements outlined in earlier notes, including the Boxing Match, Toboggan, and Juggler of Gravity, are missing. If they were still intended for the Glass, Duchamp would have needed only to fill them in and set the panes into a wood frame to finish the project begun in 1912.

The Arensbergs presumably expected Duchamp to complete this work the next time he returned to New York. He did not. During a second and third visit to the city, spanning sixteen months in 1920 and 1921 and another twelve in 1922 and 1923,

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1 Construction began in the fall of 1915 in Duchamp’s studio at 1947 Broadway. By fall 1916, Duchamp had reached an agreement with the Arensbergs whereby they would pay for the rent of a new studio in their apartment building (33 West 67th Street) and acquire the work in progress. These and other “travels” of the Glass are documented in Paul B. Franklin, “The Travels of the Large Glass,” *Étant donné Marcel Duchamp* 9 (2009): 214-49.
Duchamp filled in the right side of the Glass with entirely new graphic elements, including the Oculist Witnesses, leaving those from earlier notes unaddressed. In the meantime, the Arensbergs had moved to Los Angeles and sold their stake to another of Duchamp’s New York patrons, Katherine Dreier. When Duchamp next visited the city, in 1926, he and Dreier displayed the Glass, now mounted vertically in a heavy wood frame, in a major exhibition of modern art at the Brooklyn Museum, effecting the work’s public debut (Fig. 2.2). Subsequent damage ensured that additional work on the Glass would never take place. Duchamp painstakingly repaired the shattered fragments in 1936, but only approximated the work’s pre-accident state, generating the so-called “definitively unfinished” version temporarily exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1943 and permanently installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 1954.

Duchamp’s biographers have often identified the slow down and cessation of work on the Glass with a retreat by the artist in favor of immaterial, non-artistic activities such as semi-professional chess playing. While Duchamp would indeed increasingly pursue chess throughout the 1920s, his activities in the expanded artistic mode he had previously cultivated, continued and if anything grew. During the 1920-21 visit alone, Duchamp amended the right side of the Glass, made several found-object “readymades,” built the motor-driven “optical machine” Rotary Glass Plates, invented the female artistic persona Rrose Sélavy, and co-founded the Société Anonyme, Inc., an “experimental museum.” He also acquired a movie camera and began testing the device.

2 The Arensbergs moved to Los Angeles in May 1921. The fragile and unfinished Large Glass remained in New York, where Katherine Dreier bought it from the Arensbergs in late 1922 or early 1923. See Franklin, “The Travels of the Large Glass,” 214.
Few of these actions manifested in recognizable “art” objects, but little of Duchamp’s productivity since 1913 had.⁴ With the readymades, optical experiments, and Rrose Sélavy, Duchamp deliberately evaded or confused would-be exhibitors and publics. This was also true of his flirtation with cinematography. Despite film’s prevalence in mass media contexts, Duchamp employed his camera for primarily private purposes, in many cases with little concern for the viability of the resulting print or for any material production at all. As Duchamp predicted in a letter to his sister and brother-in-law shortly after procuring his camera, its direct use would be limited. He immediately cited money as the constraining factor: “It’s so expensive (the film) that I have to space out my cinematographic outpourings.”⁴ Yet, Duchamp’s camera spawned an array of notes, objects, and even films over the following six years, culminating in a complete film print, *Anemic Cinema* (1926). Afterward, Duchamp would indeed go quiet for several years, returning to public view with the release of *The Green Box* in 1934, and *The Box in a Valise* in 1941. Then, in the mid-1940s, he would initiate several new film and assemblage projects that extended his engagement with the cinematic medium, which I discuss in chapters three and four.

In this chapter, I explore the question of why Duchamp began making films in 1920 after situating his kinematic art in other media for nearly a decade, and the relationship between these films, his continued work in other media, and other

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filmmaking by former and continuing painters in the European avant-gardes. Duchamp was one of several painters-turned-filmmakers who contributed to the emergence of an avant-garde film culture in the later 1920s and 1930s. Man Ray completed his first film, *Retour à la Raison*, in 1923, followed by three more by the end of the decade. Another of Duchamp’s longtime friends, Francis Picabia, joined with a young French director René Clair to produce the short film *Entr‘acte*, also in 1923, and Fernand Léger, Duchamp’s former colleague in the Puteaux cubist group, collaborated with an American director, Dudley Murphy, on *Ballet mécanique* in 1924. In Germany, the Dadaist Hans Richter created his three *Rhythmus* films in fast succession between 1921 and 1925. In that same span, the painter Walter Ruttmann made his three *Lichtspiel* films (1921-25) and Viking Eggeling completed *Diagonale-Symphonie* (1923).

Long screened together in theaters, museums, and classrooms as related avant-garde attempts to disrupt or contravene conventions of commercial cinema, a growing body of literature explores these visual artists’s interest in the medium even prior to their filmmaking and the specific cultural discourses in which their individual films participated. Jennifer Wild, for example, argues in her 2015 study *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema, 1900-1923* that cinema pervaded turn-of-the-century Paris and shaped the visual art of the Parisian avant-garde, specifically Cubism and Dada; and that cinema’s permeation of the visual arts in these years prepared the subsequent embrace of filmmaking by these same artists and their followers. “1900-1923 may be considered a kind of ‘prehistorical’ era,” she writes, “preceding the ‘age of the avant-garde film’ in which filmmaking is recognized as a more available and visible means of
avant-garde exploration.” Noam Elcott, too, has proposed the greater integration of avant-garde visual art and cinema histories, arguing that experimentation with “artificial darkness,” the modulation and exploitation of artificial light technology, marries the two domains. “The spaceless darkness…promulgated in cinemas was redirected most adroitly by Dadaists and Surrealists” in both filmic and non-filmic works.

Both Wild and Elcott rely upon models of cinema that look beyond individual films or filmic conventions to a broader dispositif to demonstrate its relationship to avant-garde visual art. Wild speaks of “cinema’s horizontal reach,” or “axis,” as providing the formal structures for “Cubist paintings, proto-Dada machine forms, and Dada acts of shock, media hybridity, and appropriation.” Similarly, Elcott situates his argument not in film media but in the dispositif of “artificial darkness” that structures cinematic experience. His is a “genealogy of cinema in terms of artificial darkness, one in which film, light, projected moving images, editing, and even cameras play ancillary roles.” “Such a genealogy,” he argues, “allows us to see…the fundamental agon with cinema that undergirded much avant-garde art, theater, and dance, even as the artistic and theatrical avant-gardes produced but a handful of films.”

Such approaches exploring what Wild, Elcott, and others have designated the extra-filmic “cinematic imaginary” radically reorient the study of the relationship between visual art and cinema, and as I discuss in the introduction, inform my approach.

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to Duchamp’s trans-medial engagement with cinema. For the most part, however, “cinematic imaginary” scholarship has overlooked the moment in the early 1920s when Duchamp and other visual artists who had been experimenting with “cinema’s horizontality” or “artificial darkness” turned to cinematographic filmmaking itself. Deprivileging this move from painting into film exposes the “already cinematic” character of works of avant-garde visual art. Wild, for example, concludes her study in 1923 when “films canonically associated with Dada and Surrealism emerge adjacent to the narrative experiments of French Impressionist filmmakers,” asserting a sharp distinction between avant-garde artist’s pre-1923 cinema-informed visual art and their filmmaking in and beyond 1923. Of this transition, centered around Tristan Tzara’s inclusion of Man Ray’s *Retour à la Raison* in the final Dada soirée in July 1923, and the factors motivating it, Wild writes that filmmaking represented a “last-ditch effort to save [Tzara’s] Dada enterprise,” one that must have failed since the enterprise subsequently dissolved. “By including avant-garde films at the 1923 event…, the cinema became a literal, rather than a conceptual, temporal, or structural, component of the avant-garde project.” This “becoming literal” would thus signal the end for a certain strain of avant-garde experimentation and mark avant-garde film, at its moment of emergence, as still-born. Yet, Duchamp and many others had begun making films prior to 1923, did not participate in Tzara’s Dada soirée, and resumed their activity after it. What is the relationship between their films and their preceding and continuing work in other media? Reliance upon the “cinematic imaginary” can also risk underestimation of the variety and

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media experimentation within the avant-garde’s cinematographic filmmaking. The distinction between cinema and its imaginary often affirms reductive medium-based conceptions; cinema only encompassing film prints and its imaginary everything else “beyond film.”

In this chapter, I argue that the standard historical account of Duchamp abandoning the Large Glass in the early 1920s and beginning production of Anemic Cinema several years later elides a continuum between the two projects, attested to by the artist’s various film experiments spanning from 1920 to 1926. Duchamp’s pursuit of a non-filmic kinematic eroticism in the Large Glass ultimately led him to experiment with filmmaking and circumscribes his contributions to early avant-garde film culture in France and the United States. The association of Anemic Cinema with the Large Glass clarifies what Duchamp’s encounter with cinema in the 1920s entailed and what it did not. Although Duchamp cited the cost of film stock as the limiting factor in his “cinematographic outpourings,” he later claimed an abiding disinterest in the medium. Scrutiny of his film and film-related works in the 1920s suggests that he exploited cinematographic technologies to extend his earlier experimentation with kinematic effects in the erotic allegory of The Bride Stripped Bare. While Duchamp’s moving image works of the 1920s occasionally employed cinematographic film media, and in the case of Anemic Cinema later appeared in theaters, they do not adopt standard film formats. Instead, these works imagine alternative objects, using film to animate painting and sculpture and to modulate the sensorial and cerebral experiences of viewers. That is not to say that Duchamp did not participate in the cosmopolitan avant-garde film culture
of the 1920s. He did, and the non-standard formats of his works speak to a medial variety in interwar avant-garde film that is sometimes overlooked. The chapter concludes with a discussion of points of contact between Duchamp’s early cinema and interwar avant-garde film culture more broadly.

**Part One: From Kinema to Cinema in the *Large Glass***

Duchamp’s acquisition of a camera and creation of films may seem contrary to the pursuit of a non-filmic kinematic art chronicled in chapter one. As I describe there, Duchamp studiously avoided the use of film or similar optical “illusions” to convey movement during the early conceptual development of *The Bride Stripped Bare*. The notes and studies made between mid-1912 and mid-1915 outline a series of kinematic mechanisms and their interactions across the domains of the Bride and her Bachelors. Duchamp’s plans began with an idea for a graphical arrangement of two separate “blossomings” or “strippings” of the Bride that “collide,” creating a third blossoming, the “blossoming-crown,” to stage a scene of sexual solicitation and arousal. The initial ten-page manuscript indicates the electrical stripping would “graphically end in the clockwork movement” and the imaginative stripping would take “the image of a motor car, climbing a slope in low gear.”\(^\text{10}\) Somehow the clockwork movement would come to interact with the image of the motor car. Duchamp specifies only that the interaction

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would not result from “direct contact” but rather “electrical [connections].” Subsequent manuscripts and studies elaborate this encounter, tracing a series of “operations” originating on the left side of the Bachelor’s Apparatus and moving towards the right and up into the Bride’s Domain. The “illuminating gas” (gaz d’éclairage) would accumulate inside the “malic molds” (malique moules), nine dies in the shape of uniforms of male-associated professions (Priest, Policeman, Busboy, etc.). The gas would then travel through nine “capillary tubes” and emerge as a condensed liquid through the “slopes” or “corkscrew” in the lower right corner. Duchamp writes that this spiral-shaped chute would “direct these splashes which should be used for the maneuvering of the handler of gravity (Boxing match),” to be located just above. Elsewhere he obliquely acknowledges his euphemistic use of the term “splash” (éclaboussure) as a kind of ejaculatory liquid, noting that it “[has] nothing to do with champagne.” (A separate series of operations, activated by a waterfall, would also participate in this process via the two horizontal blades connected to the Chocolate Grinder below. Duchamp’s notes suggest that the blades, or “scissors,” contribute to the transformation of the gas in the adjacent tubes and drop some kind of heavy weight.)

11 Ibid., 39.
12 Duchamp, WMD, 51. For the original French, see Duchamp, Duchamp du signe (hereafter cited as DDS), eds. Michel Sanouillet, Paul Matisse, Anne Sanouillet, and Paul B. Franklin (Paris: Flammarion, 2013), 81.
13 Duchamp, WMD, 48-51.
14 Ibid., 66. For the original French, see Duchamp, DDS, 100.
The Boxing Match referenced in the above note was a cogwheel mechanism transferring the Bachelors’s long-traveling energy into the Bride’s domain, “transmitting” what Duchamp described as the “childhood memories [or] last wish[es]…of the illuminating gas.”\textsuperscript{16} The arrival of the liquid at its base, and possibly the weight dropped by the scissors, initiates a sequence that projects a marble vertically toward the “garment of the bride,” the horizontal support located at the intermediary line between Bride and Bachelors’s panes. The “liquid gas” ignites at the base of the mechanism and, Duchamp explains, “this explosion ‘sets off’ the cannons of the boxing match.”\textsuperscript{17} The ascent and descent of the marble manipulates the garment, on which the legs of the Juggler of Gravity rest. The Juggler of Gravity would attract the “threads or branches” of the Bride, which would extend from the “arbor-type” in the left side across the width of the pane.\textsuperscript{18} Duchamp compares this response to the stimulation to a filament within a barometer.\textsuperscript{19} The arrival of the branches at the Juggler would close the “circuit” between Bride and her bachelors, effecting the “meeting” of their operations.

As I discuss in chapter one, Duchamp’s manuscripts equivocate on the material nature of the Boxing Match, Garment of the Bride, and Juggler of Gravity components. His considerable attention to their mechanical operation and speculations about the use of lights, chemicals, and reels suggest he briefly pursued the integration of mobile elements. Whether or not he sought moving parts or purely graphic forms of motion during the

\textsuperscript{16} Marcel Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp, Notes} (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983), pl. and trans., 153.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 152.
\textsuperscript{19} Duchamp, \textit{WMD}, 48.
early conceptual development of *The Bride Stripped Bare*, he remained committed to an underlying chemico-mechanical logic throughout the many notes and studies he created between 1912 and 1915. As art historian Juan Antonio Ramírez writes, “It is obvious that all this was, for him, always an articulated mechanism and that the relationship between the components could not be considered arbitrarily.”

The mechanical elements in the right side of the Glass were gradually replaced after construction began despite Duchamp’s claims to the contrary. In later interviews, Duchamp asserted plans were complete prior to physical construction. “From 1915 on I was just copying.” He even cited this alleged “copying” as the reason for the work’s ultimate non-completion. “It became so monotonous, it was just a transcription, and toward the end there was no invention.”

However, around 1918 Duchamp began elaborating new ideas for what he called in one note “the opticeries,” which would serve to transmit the illuminating gas up the right side of the work. In the same area previously inhabited by the Boxing Match and Juggler of Gravity, a series of optical instruments would convey the Bachelors’ “stripping” upwards into the Bride’s domain, a transversal that Duchamp had come to imagine in the pseudo-scientific vocabulary that had circulated amongst the Puteaux cubists. As Linda Dalrymple Henderson explains, Duchamp, possibly as early as 1913, conceived the Bachelors as inhabiting a three-dimensional space, which he would represent using a familiar Albertian one-point

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20 Ramírez, *Duchamp*, 87.
23 Duchamp, *WMD*, 76.
perspective; the Bride existed within an entirely different spatio-temporal domain of four dimensions that evaded conventional graphic representation, spurring Duchamp to imagine various alternative means for the depiction of the Bride and her “stripping bare.”\(^{24}\) His reasoning for the Bride’s inhabiting four-dimensional space is somewhat opaque. Duchamp apparently felt that the eroticism of the Bride lay outside not only Albertian one-point perspective but also the everyday reality with which that representational system was associated. The theory of a four-dimensional space coextensive with but imperceptible to the familiar three-dimensional world offered a pre-existing pseudo-scientific means by which to verbally articulate this idea, if not a coherent graphic vocabulary to go along with it.

One undated note, likely written early in 1918, introduces the shift to an “optical” solution for this problem of representation. Duchamp imagined the creation of a “thing to be looked at with one eye,” which he interpolated into the existing mechanisms of the Glass, adding, “to put in the Crash-splash.” “One could base a whole series on things to be looked at with a single eye (left or right),” he continued, extending the idea aurally as well: “One could find a series of things to be heard (or listened to) with a single ear.”\(^{25}\) Though the attention to monaurality was a one-off, Duchamp would go on to elaborate the idea for a “series of things to be looked at with a single eye” in the Glass. It is this “series of things to be looked at” in the Glass that he designated “the opticeries,” writing, “Use ground glass behind which one lays mat black paper (silvered effect) (in the


\(^{25}\) Duchamp, *WMD*, 49.
The opticeries would coincide, at least in part, with the “Crash-splash.” “Ground glass and rust of different metals as colors to use in the ‘splasher,’” Duchamp indicated in a series of notations on the color palette of the Glass. Then, in another manuscript, Duchamp instructed himself to “silver (like a mirror) a part of the crash-splash. Make inquiries from technical point of view. With the ground glass part and the Rust—Rust appearing through the ground glass—and also Rust alone. Glue a magnifying glass on. Kodak lens.”

Duchamp proceeded to enact a study for this plan by constructing the so-called Small Glass, formally titled To Be Looked At (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close To, For Almost an Hour (Fig. 2.3). The artist assembled the work on a single pane of clear glass measuring twenty by sixteen inches during a nine-month visit to Buenos Aires. It features two angled rectilinear forms balancing circles on the tips of their far-right sides. A magnifying lens, surrounded by radiating flattened circular forms, rests on the vertex of an elongated pyramidal pylon at the center. Above the pylon and lens hovers a flattened pyramid, and below is a radiating circle, rendered in a light-reflecting silver leaf.

The two rectilinear forms correlate to the right ends of the “scissors” element in the Large Glass. Duchamp made the intended relationship explicit in two letters dating to the fall of 1918. The artist had left New York for Argentina in August, expecting to stay there for “several years probably,” as he wrote to his friend and future brother-in-law.

26 Ibid., 76.
27 Ibid., 82.
28 Ibid., 83.
Jean Crotti. “My plan…is to…make a clean break with this part of the world.” By October, he had resumed work on his plans for the Glass, perhaps foreseeing a shorter duration for his trip. He again wrote to Crotti: “I started a small glass to experiment with an effect that I will carry over to the large glass—when I return to N.Y.” He also wrote to the Glass’s owners, Louise and Walter Arensberg: “I have started the right side of the Glass and hope that a few months will suffice to conclude my work on the drawing that I want to bring back one day to N.Y. to finish the Glass.”

The only element from To Be Looked At ultimately manifest in the Glass is the triangular mirror-silver design, which the notes designate as “Oculist’s Charts” (Tableaux d’oculiste) and Duchamp would later re-title as “Oculist Witnesses” (Témoins oculiste). In the absence of the other components it is not entirely clear what “effect” he intended to “carry over” to the Glass. Ramírez notes the presence of two small holes in the top right and left corners of To Be Looked At, and speculates that they were to permit hanging in front of or behind the planned elements on the right of the Large Glass. Designating this juxtaposition a “conjunctive apparatus,” Ramírez imagines it would have “offered, after the splash, two simultaneous modes of establishing relationships with the bride: the chemico-mechanical one described above, to be represented on the Large Glass and the

29 Marcel Duchamp to Jean Crotti, July 8, 1918, in Duchamp, Affectionately, Marcel, 56.
31 Marcel Duchamp to Walter and Louise Arensberg, November 8, 1918, in Duchamp, Affectionately, Marcel, 66.
32 Duchamp, WMD, 65. For the original French, see Duchamp, DDS, 98. The name Témoins oculiste appears for the first time in the Boîte-en-Valise (1935-1941). See Ramírez, Duchamp, 115.
optical one which would be produced with the small glass suspended in front of (or behind) it.”33 This is a possibility. A small black-and-white snapshot documents Duchamp’s suspension of To Be Looked At from strings on the balcony of a Buenos Aires apartment, showing the point of view “from the other side.” (Fig. 2.4). His references seem to contradict the “conjunctive” conjecture, however. In the letters quoted above, Duchamp writes that he “started a small glass to experiment with an effect that I will carry over to the large glass” and that he “started the right side of the Glass.” Neither suggests a conjunction or supplementation of already existing plans for the right side of the Glass. The first indicates the small glass was a test for an effect to be replicated in the Glass and the second that it would serve as the right side itself.

In either case, the idea appears to have been to attach magnifying lenses and reflective silvering to the surface of the Glass that would participate in the transmission of the Bachelors’s liquid splash to the Bride’s domain above. As the manuscript notes make clear, the radiating silver circles around the lens were part of the crash-splash operation. Duchamp expanded on the idea in the note referring to the silvered forms as “Oculist’s Charts,” an apparent reference to the charts used by opticians for testing astigmatism.34 The Oculist’s Charts, he wrote, effect a “dazzling [éblouissement] of the splash.” As a result of the “dazzling,” the splash forms a “sculpture of drops [points]…each drop acting as a point and returned miroiriquement [mirrored] to the high part of the glass to meet the 9 shots [9 tirés].”35 The shots become visible as nine

33 Ramírez, Duchamp, 113.
34 Duchamp, WMD, 65. On the astigmatism charts, see Henderson, 114; Ramírez, 116.
35 Duchamp, WMD, 65. For the original French, see Duchamp, DDS, 98-99.
dots in the right side of the upper pane of the glass, their arrangement randomly determined by firing projectiles with painted tips from a toy cannon.36

The magnifying lens in To Be Looked At seems to be the element that “mirrorically returns” the drops to the high part of the Glass. In the long note, Duchamp proposed to use “prisms stuck behind the glass…to obtain the desired effect,” this effect being the transfer of “the mirrorical drops” into the upper region of the Glass.37 The “mirrorical drops” were “not the drops themselves but their image,” Duchamp explained. In this transmission from the Bachelors below to the Bride above the drops would effectively transgress dimensions, manifesting the earlier idea that the Bride and her bachelors inhabit divergent spatial domains.

These planned elements, the lens and the oculist’s charts, evidently operated analogically to represent transit into an un-representable four-dimensional space. While Duchamp confuses denotative and analogical language in many of the other manuscripts, likely deliberately, here he was insistent and clear. The proposals were merely “convenient” ways of conditioning the mind.38 “The plane of the mirror,” he explained in an undated note, “is a convenient way of giving the idea of 3-dim[ensional] infinite space. It is at this plane that the 3-dim[ensional] infinity stops. (There is no contradiction in putting it this way since it is only to familiarize the mind with the ideal representation of the 4-dim[ensional] continuum).”39 The mirror provides a two-dimensional reflection of a three-dimensional reality. Duchamp sought to use the two-dimensional reflection in

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36 Duchamp, WMD, 35.
37 Ibid., 65.
38 Duchamp, WMD, 91.
39 Ibid. Translation modified. For the original French, see Duchamp, DDS, 140
the silvered surface of the Glass to acquaint the viewer with the idea of a four-dimensional continuum beyond his or her standard cognition and perception.\textsuperscript{40}

Another undated note shows the magnifying glass to operate in a similar way. It would hover atop the scissors, the blades of which were to imaginatively “open,” butterflying the two-dimensional plane of the glass into three dimensions. In doing so, viewers standing on either side of the lens would no longer see one another across the threshold of the Glass. Instead the lens would provide an unexpected (“ad libitum”) view of another part of the room, providing an analogy with which to conceptualize another spatial plane coextensive with the known three dimensions but not perceivable to the observer.\textsuperscript{41}

Duchamp’s emphasis on mirrors, lenses, and other optical means for the viewer to conceptualize a fourth-dimensional space responds to ideas he had worked out in earlier notes. For Duchamp, the traversal from three-dimensional to four-dimensional space was fundamentally “optical.” On the backs of two gas bills dating to the fall of 1914, Duchamp developed ideas for the “construction of a 4-d[imensiona]l eye” from within three-dimensional space, that is, the creation of circumstances whereby the viewer could see four dimensionally.\textsuperscript{42} Again operating analogically, Duchamp compared a two-dimensional circle seen from the perspective of three dimensions to a three-dimensional

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\textsuperscript{40} Craig E. Adcock, \textit{Marcel Duchamp’s Notes for the Large Glass: An N-Dimensional Analysis} (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 116.  
\textsuperscript{41} Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp, Notes}, 129.  
\textsuperscript{42} Duchamp, \textit{WMD}, 88-89. For elaboration on Duchamp’s conception of a “four-dimensional eye” and its relationship to theoretical physics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Adcock, \textit{Marcel Duchamp’s Notes for the Large Glass}, particularly chap. 4.  
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sphere seen from the perspective of four dimensions. “A circle (when seen by a 3-
dimensional eye…) undergoes many changes in shape conventionally determined by
the laws of perspective…But a sphere (for the 4-dimensional perception…) undergoes
many changes in shape, from 3-dimensional sphere gradually decreasing in volume
without decreasing in radius to simple plane circle.”43 As early as September 14, 1914, he
proposed a possible solution in motion parallax, or as he wrote, “a wandering around
[promenade]” of the eye.44 There is a “difference,” he explained, “between…the
wandering in a plane by a 2-dimensional eye around a circle, and the vision of this very
circle by the same 2-dimensional eye fixing itself at a point.” In the same way, there is a
“difference between…3-dimensional wandering by an ordinary eye around a sphere and
the vision of that sphere by the same eye fixing itself at a point (linear perspective).”
Fixing itself at a point transforms vision into a different dimension: three dimensions
become two through linear perspective. Extending this thought, Duchamp concluded,
“The same difference exists in the 4-dimensional domain.” In a four-dimensional
domain, the eye can wander around or it can be fixed, offering a “3-dimensional visual
perspective perception of the 4-dimensional body. This 3-dimensional visual
perspective perception is only distinguishable to the 4-dimensional eye. The 3-
dimensional eye will not distinguish it clearly (just as a 2-dimensional eye only sees
the projected segment of a circle).” Thus, one must create a 3-dimensional “wandering
around” for the eye. “[This] will perhaps permit an imaginative reconstruction of the

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 88. For the original French, see Duchamp, DDS, 135.
numerous 4-dimensiona]l bodies, allowing this perspective to be understood in a 3-
dimensiona]l medium.”

Duchamp proposed another optical element in the Glass to enact this dimensional transit: three planes at the borderline between the panes of glass. He would draw a single figure seen from two different dimensions on the planes, which would be designed in such a way that the figure’s appearance would be altered by the viewing position of the observer. Duchamp explained the technique by referencing and illustrating an optical amusement evidently sold at the time by proponents of the United States President Woodrow Wilson. It was a lenticular print that showed a portrait of Wilson if seen from one direction and a portrait of his predecessor Abraham Lincoln if seen from the other. “The perspective and the geometrical drawing…will be indicated on these 3 planes by the Wilson-Lincoln system,” Duchamp wrote, clarifying, “(i.e. like the portraits which seen from the left show Wilson seen from the right show Lincoln--).” Duchamp’s planes would use the same method to show a figure in two different dimensional representations. “Seen from the right the figure may give a square for example from the front and seen from the right it could give the same square seen in perspective--.”

It is unclear whether Duchamp intended to construct this so-called “Wilson-Lincoln system” in the Glass or if it was simply another literary device to conceptualize the inter-dimensional transit of the drops. The Wilson-Lincoln effect is not present in To

45 Duchamp, WMD, 88.
46 Ibid., 65. For more on Wilson-Lincoln system, see Anne Collins Goodyear, “‘Constructing a ‘Made-up History’: Self-Portrayal and the Legacy of Marcel Duchamp,” in Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture, ed. Anne Collins Goodyear and James W. McManus (Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution, 2009), 85-87, fig. 5.2.
Be Looked At, but perhaps it was meant to be located above the area to which To Be Looked At corresponds. The system does not appear in the constructed Glass. The Glass features three planes at the horizon line, but these are simply transparent pane glass with no dimensional renderings on them. This could mean that Duchamp abandoned plans to include the element, but it seems more likely that he simply displaced it to the textual catalog he intended to create. The “prisms stuck behind the glass” had a similar fate. He would integrate a real lens in To Be Looked At, but by the time he eventually returned to New York and resumed work on the Glass, Duchamp chose instead to graphically represent the lens using a silvered ring shape and identify its function in the text.47 This “lens” appears as a drawn circle directly above three perspectively rendered Oculist’s Charts. Duchamp clearly intended these elements to be involved in the cross-dimensional transit of the drops as the Oculist’s Charts appear to float horizontally in the proper three-dimensional perspective of the Bachelor Apparatus. The “lens” just above them flips vertically, appearing flat in two dimensions. The chute and splash are not figured but would presumably have conformed to the three-dimensionality of the rest of the Bachelor Apparatus. When the drops appear in the Bride’s Domain, represented by the “shots,” they have become two-dimensional round circles, much like the “lens.”

47 Duchamp confirms that “in the Large Glass, the circle…[is] the equivalent of the magnifying glass in “To Be Looked at with One Eye”” in correspondence with Robert Lebel. See Robert Lebel and Marcel Duchamp, “[“Typed questionnaire by Robert Lebel with Marcel Duchamp’s handwritten responses”], June 20, 1953, in Marcel Duchamp and Robert Lebel, The Artist and His Critic Stripped Bare: The Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp and Robert Lebel, ed. and trans. Paul B. Franklin (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2016), 124.
The reasons for the delay between Duchamp’s 1914 notes on the fourth dimension, which already point to the use of mirror, and the 1918 opticerie are unknown. It may have resulted from the difficulty of these analogies or other interruptions to the working process. Duchamp evidently postponed construction of this right side of the Glass until this late date. Still, one may speculate as to other contributing factors. Shortly after moving to New York in mid-1915, Duchamp had met the American artist Man Ray. When Man Ray began to experiment with still photography in 1916, Duchamp sat for portraits and invited him to collaborate on photographic works involving the Glass, such as Élevage de Poussière (Dust Breeding) (1920, Fig. 2.5). Although his attention had turned to the viewer’s perception already in 1914, it may have been Man Ray’s technical knowledge of photography and photographic equipment that prompted Duchamp to explore lenses and optical analogies in To Be Looked At. As Juan Antonio Ramírez has observed, the radiating forms around the lens resemble mechanisms used to focus the image in a camera.48 Around the time he met Man Ray, Duchamp also became close friends with the French author Henri-Pierre Roché, and the two became frequent cinemagoers, documented in Roché’s diary.49 Then, in late 1917, Duchamp became a French tutor for the silent film actress Jean Acker and in the summer of 1918, acted as an extra in a silent narrative film, Lafayette! We Come!, directed by the French

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48 Ramírez, Duchamp, 115-16.
49 Roché’s diaries and agendas (now in the Henri Pierre Roché Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin) are the uncredited source for accounts of cinema-going in Gough-Cooper and Caumont, “Ephemerides on or about Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélyavy 1887–1968,” in Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life, ed. Pontus Hultén (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), n.p. See entries for June 17, October 23, and December 4, 1917.
film director Léonce Perret. Whether these experiences contributed directly to the “shift
to optics” in the Glass in unknown but would corroborate the strain of “cinematic
imaginary” scholarship asserting modern art’s reliance upon film and film experience for
its formal innovations, discussed in chapter one. The screen, much like the mirror, would
have provided the two-dimensional image of three-dimensional space by which to
conceptualize a three-dimensional image of four-dimensional space.50

Duchamp’s turn to “optics” confounds reductive conceptions of the “cinematic”
and its impact on visual art, however. The complex analogical-optical language of the
right side of the Glass developed alongside Duchamp’s evolving plans for the creation of
a textual catalog that would animate the action of The Bride Stripped Bare. The
“explanation” that could be offered by the text obviated the need for graphic notation of
every motion, permitting operations increasingly complex in nature, many of which went
beyond anything available to period cinematography. At the same time, the conception of
the catalog directed attention outside the enclosed system of the Glass to a media
architecture that echoes early film’s conjunction of projection, text/speaker, and active
viewer. As Jean-François Lyotard has argued, “What the viewer sees on the Glass is the
eye and even the brain in the process of composing its objects, the images of these
objects impressing the retina and the cortex according to the laws of (de-) formation,
which are their own and that organize the glass partition.”51

50 The “opticeries” note (Duchamp, WMD, 76) calling for “ground glass behind which
one lays mat black paper” suggests a potential modeling of this reflective surface on early
cinema screen technologies.
51 Jean-François Lyotard, Duchamp’s TRANS/formers, trans. Ian McLeod (Venice, CA:
Duchamp’s alertness to the viewer of the *Large Glass* coincided with the inception and ramping up of his cinematographic filmmaking.\(^\text{52}\) After constructing *To Be Looked At* in Buenos Aires, Duchamp sailed for Paris, returning to New York in January 1920. During this sixteen-month visit, he began the process of “carrying over” the ideas of *To Be Looked At* to the right side of the *Glass* that he had anticipated in his letters home from Argentina. On the back of a large sheet of carbon paper, Duchamp expanded the Oculist’s Charts of *To Be Looked At* to the sizes and shapes that would appear on the *Glass* (Fig. 2.6). This drawing would serve as the guide to transfer the designs to the *Glass* through the removal of silvering over the coming months. During the same stay in New York, Duchamp made his first film experiments and constructed the large belt-driven glass instrument later designated as the first of two optical machines, *Rotary Glass Plates* (the other being *Rotary Demisphere* of 1924, see Fig. 0.7). In *Rotary Glass Plates*, a belt turns an axel fitted with five rectangular glass panes. Each pane bears a series of arcing lines. When spun they create the impression of continuous concentric circles.

\(^\text{52}\) Decades later, Duchamp would elaborate a theory of the work of art from this attentiveness to the viewer’s role, writing, “The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.” Marcel Duchamp, “The Creative Act,” American Federation of the Arts, Houston, TX, April 5, 1957, in Duchamp, *WMD*, 140. During his work on the *Glass*, this theory would remain largely unarticulated. Nevertheless, recognition of and desire to register the viewer’s role in the creation and activation of a work of art is evident in the form of the opticeries. In an undated note for a work, possibly a study for an element in the opticeries, Duchamp wrote, “Make something which should be seen from a certain position (lying on one’s back for ex[ample]—give a photo of the position required to view this thing—going further—simply give a photo of the position to take at such a place, such a time, such a day. (for how long) what type of costume.” Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, 198.
Much like the opticeries, *Rotary Glass Plates* was an optical instrument for the “construction of the four-dimensional eye.” Duchamp explained the idea in an undated four-page folio manuscript (Fig. 2.7). Under the heading, “Primary experiment of 2 circles,” Duchamp drew a small diagram of two overlapping circles. Their centers, labeled A and B, are connected by a single line, demonstrating a relationship in three dimensions. The circles would turn “on a center located between A and B on the line connecting them,” Duchamp explained. “The spiral at rest doesn’t give any impression of relief (or at least only imagined psychologically). Turning around the center of one of these circles, the spiral gives the impression of corkscrewing up toward the eye.” The rotating images create the illusion of three dimensions. By extension, the viewer is to imagine three dimensional images creating the impression of four dimensions.

The lineage of the idea can be found in Duchamp’s notes on analogical models for four-dimensional space in relation to *The Bride Stripped Bare*. In one long undated text, Duchamp proposed an analogy for conceptualizing four-dimensional space. With accompanying diagrams, he described an infinite one-dimensional line abutted by a two-dimensional planar surface. If the one-dimensional line becomes a hinge, rotating into a third dimension, it would create a three-dimensional spherical volume. Assigning alphabetical identifiers to points in his diagram, Duchamp added, “Let us rotate the plane

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54 Ibid. Though Duchamp employs the term “spiral,” few of the optical disk designs conform to true spiral shapes. As Francis M. Naumann has noted in reference to *Rotary Demisphere*, that optical disk instead features “a series of eccentric circles, that is to say, independent circles aligned tangentially along a spiral format.” Naumann, *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Essays on the Art, Life and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Readymade Press, 2012), 128.
surface ABCD about AB as hinge. It will generate a volume. Thus a finite 3-
dimensiona]l continuum is generated by a finite 2-dimen[isonal] continuum rotating (in
a general sense) about a finite 1-dimen[isonal] hinge.”55 From this Duchamp drew a
conclusion that directly anticipates the analogical structure of Rotary Glass Plates: “Thus
a 4-d[imensiona]l finite continuum is generated by a finite 3-d[imensiona]l continuum
rotating (here the word loses its physical meaning…) about a 2-d[imensiona]l hinge.”56
The axel of the machine is the one-dimensional hinge. The glass plates are the finite 2-
dimensional planes that rotate and create a 3-dimensional continuum.

In assembling a physical manifestation of this analogy as Rotary Glass Plates,
Duchamp slightly changed the diagrammatic “thought experiment.” Instead of the 2-
dimensional planes running parallel to the one-dimensional axel, they are perpendicular
to it, and thus already inhabit a discontinuous three-dimensional space. By rotating within
that space, they create a virtual image of a three-dimensional corkscrew moving forward
and backward. Although Duchamp referred to it soon after production as a “monocle,” a
tool for vision, the changes to the design suggest an exploratory bid for four-dimensional
vision based not on optical perception but on a conceptual, virtual optics.57 On one of the
final pages of the manuscript, Duchamp acknowledged a potential challenge to his
original idea. “Objection: What is the meaning of this word 4th dimension since it does
not have either tactile or sensorial correspondence as do the 1st, the 2nd, the 3rd

55 Duchamp, WMD, 96.
56 Ibid.
57 Marcel Duchamp to Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp, October 20, 1920, in
Duchamp, Affectionately, Marcel, 94.
dimension." His enigmatic answer concedes a basic ineffability to the 4th dimension. It must be cerebrally imagined, because it is not perceivable to the human sensory apparatus. “Virtuality as 4th dimension. Not the Reality in its sensory appearance, but the virtual representation of a volume (analogous to the reflection in a mirror).”

Shortly before taking up cinematographic film then, Duchamp was creating “cinema” as a moving object without film or screen coupled with a sensate viewer. By siting it outside the cinematographic apparatus, the moment of transformation, from two to three dimensions, so essential to Duchamp’s thought experiment, remains intact. Like the Phenakistoscope, Zootrope, and other optical motion devices of the nineteenth century, Duchamp’s cinema of four dimensions demands the astonishment arising from the oscillation from still to moving image to enact its dimensional analogy. Rosalind Krauss has lyrically noted the use of this effect in Duchamp’s optics works as a means to disrupt the stasis of modernist painting. “The beating of the zootrope, cranking up to speed, …the beating of all those mechanical devices through which the real appears to burst into life from the shards of the inorganic and deathly still, and the particular form of the pleasure connected to that rhythm, all this became a resource for an artistic practice disinclined to obey the modernist law of the immobility of painting.”

58 Duchamp, WMD, 98.
59 Ibid., 99.
this effect, which she designates the “beat” or “pulse,” in works by a number of twentieth-century artists, including Duchamp, but also Max Ernst, Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, and Jackson Pollock. Duchamp’s “beat” diverges, however, insofar as it exploits not only the libidinal pleasure of identification with the “living” image but also the attendant disorientation as it cycles between stasis and motion. His pulsating optical devices contradict modernist painting’s immobility, as Krauss argues, extending Puteaux cubism’s cinématique experimentation, but also, like the Large Glass, targeting its two-dimensional spatiality.

Considering the date of its creation and elaboration in Duchamp’s notes, it seems possible that Rotary Glass Plates was a study for an unrealized or speculative element for the Glass; more likely it was a related but stand-alone work generated by Duchamp’s work on the Glass. In either case, it realized the Glass’s flirtation with moving parts. Duchamp’s reference to the optical machine as “the ‘Revolving Glass’” in a letter written shortly before its first public exhibition in 1936 draws an implicit comparison between the two works.

Duchamp would acquire his “moving picture camera” around the same point in the Large Glass’s construction and, like Rotary Glass Plates, put it to use animating spinning spiral designs. In New York, he and Man Ray evidently created a few short test sequences, later lost or damaged, the best known of which featured a nude performance.

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62 Krauss (Ibid., 216) describes the “beat of desire” in the Precision Optics works as the “alternating pulse of stimulation and enervation.”
63 Marcel Duchamp to Katherine Dreier, May 3, 1935, in Duchamp, Affectionately, Marcel, 199.
by the artist and model Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (see Fig. 0.10).\textsuperscript{64} Duchamp then traveled with the camera back to Paris the following June and filmed sequences outdoor at his brothers’ Puteaux studio that July. The experimental shorts, now presumed lost, captured “drawings of spirals” that Duchamp mounted on a bicycle wheel and spun.\textsuperscript{65} It is possible that these drawings of spirals were the same as those that Duchamp later mounted and dated “1923,” today known collectively as \textit{Discs Bearing Spirals} (Fig. 2.8). The two-dimensional discs conform to the idea outlined in Duchamp’s “Primary Experiment with Two Circles” cited earlier: “The spiral at rest doesn’t give any impression of relief (or at least only imagined psychologically). Turning around the center of one of these circles, the spiral gives the impression of corkscrewing up toward the eye.”\textsuperscript{66}

Duchamp appears to refer to these tests when he informs his New York friends Carrie, Ettie, and Florine Stettheimer in September 1921: “I’m trying to get some cinema [cinéma] effects with my camera. I hope to bring back a few feet to N. Y.”\textsuperscript{67} Though the French “cinéma” had become an abbreviation for “cinématographique” by 1921, as noted in chapter one, Duchamp may exploit here its double meaning. The spiral designs would replicate those of his kinematic “optical” machine completed the previous year. In November 1921, Duchamp also alerted the Arenbergs, who at that time had not yet sold

\textsuperscript{64} Man Ray described the creation of these sequences in his memoirs. See Man Ray, \textit{Self Portrait} (New York: Little, Brown, 1963), 99-100, 263.
\textsuperscript{65} Gough-Cooper and Caumont, “Ephemerides on or about Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy 1887–1968,” entry for July 28, 1921, n.p.
\textsuperscript{66} Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp, Notes}, 170.
\textsuperscript{67} Marcel Duchamp to Carrie, Ettie, and Florine Stettheimer, September 1, 1921, in Duchamp, \textit{Affectionately, Marcel}, 101.
their stake in the Glass to Katherine Dreier, that he was looking for low-cost transit back to New York. “I have already had enough of Paris and of France in general.” His primary motivator was to find employment in the silent film industry, evidently to gain technical expertise for his own work. “In New York I’m planning on getting a ‘job’ in the cinema—not as an actor, rather as an assistant cameraman.” He assured the Arenbers that he would remain attentive to the Glass: “I’m hoping to make a little more headway with my glass and possibly finish it, if things turn out as I would like. I just have some work to do with lead wire, nothing out of the ordinary.” “Perhaps I won’t die before it’s finished, then,” he concluded unenthusiastically.

Duchamp’s references to the incomplete state of the Glass here and in other period correspondence contradict his later accounts of growing bored “copying” his own design and gradually ceasing work on the “unfinished” Glass. There is no evidence that Duchamp punctually declared the Glass “definitively unfinished” in 1923, as Robert Lebel and subsequent scholars have claimed. If the Glass is missing graphical elements described in the working notes, Duchamp must have decided to exclude them at some point prior to November 1921 when he told the Arenbers that he could “finish [the Glass]” after “some work…with lead wire, nothing out of the ordinary.” They may have been phased out with the introduction of the catalog, as I suggest in chapter one.

Duchamp would have had ample time to complete this work when he returned to New York.

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68 Marcel Duchamp to Louise and Walter Arensberg, November 15, 1921, in Duchamp, Affectionately, Marcel, 102.
69 Ibid., 103.
70 Ibid., 103.
York again in January 1922, staying there for a little over a calendar year, and yet he did not. The one graphical element he may have still pursued after this date but never realized is the “chute,” or “ramp,” the spiraling, corkscrew shape that was to transport the liquid gas from the tubes to the splash at the base of the Boxing Match, since it is named in the first notes for “opticeries.” But if the Glass can be considered incomplete in any major way, it is in Duchamp’s unrealized plans for the textual catalog, approximated in the Green Box of 1934 in a significantly altered form. It is the absence of the catalog that created the impression that the Glass was lacking some essential elements as it would have provided a “key” to the kinematic relationship between its various parts.

Instead of climactically and decisively concluding in 1923 then, Duchamp’s plans for the Glass appear to have diminished between 1918 and 1921 as he devoted more and more energy to his films and optical machines, where he explored some of the same ideas regarding fourth-dimensional vision. In January 21, 1922, he staged a private screening of his films in Paris. It was documented in the diary of an attendee, Henri-Pierre Roché: “Marcel projected his film experiments, fragments, and geometric dances on a screen of silvered bathroom glass [un écran de verre de salle de bains garni de tain]—the result, expressive and quite fantastic, surely exploitable.”

Though Roché did not identify the subjects of the films, other evidence points to the “geometric dances” consisting, at least in part, of the spirals.

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72 Henri-Pierre Roché, transcription of diary entry, January 21, 1922, box 243, folder 2, Henri Pierre Roché Papers, Carlton Lake Collection, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin (hereafter cited as Roché Papers).
The non-standard projection surface, described by Roché as “a screen of silvered bathroom glass,” amplifies the relationship between Duchamp’s filmmaking in the early 1920s and the “opticeries” of the Large Glass. “Bathroom glass” evidently refers to the same ground glass (verre dépoli) that Duchamp repeatedly calls for in his plans for the optical elements in the right side of the Glass. There is no documentation of the screen outside Roché’s journal entry but Duchamp would acknowledge its existence in a late-in-life interview. Duchamp evidently spoke of a “projection screen” he had “constructed specially for the first showing of [Anemic Cinema]” during a 1965 interview with the film critic Toby Mussman. Mussman, drawing from the unpublished interview in a subsequent article, described the screen’s construction as having been “translucent glass, like that used in bathroom windows, with a reflective mirror-silver backing.” Mussman presents the Anemic Cinema referred to here as the seven-minute film print that Duchamp completed over the summer of 1926. However, the presence of the mirror-glass screen already in Roché’s account of the 1922 film viewing suggests Duchamp may have been referring to a predecessor to the final 1926 version of Anemic Cinema.

When Duchamp projected his spiral films onto silvered “bathroom glass” in January 1922, he would just have completed the silver leaf Oculist’s Charts in the Large

73 Mussman, “Marcel Duchamp’s Anemic Cinema,” 153. For the first published account of the glass screen, see Toby Mussman, “Anémic Cinéma,” Art and Artists (July 1966): 50-51. Mussman evidently learned of the screen directly from Duchamp, citing an hour-long interview with the artist on the subject of filmmaking in 1965. The interview transcript was never published and is now believed lost. Nevertheless, Mussman’s accounts, in Art and Artists and in an expanded anthologized version cited in n. 15 above, offer the most extensive analysis of Duchamp’s filmmaking activity, and its relationship to other works by the artist, to date.
74 Mussman, “Marcel Duchamp’s Anemic Cinema,” 153.
Glass. Given the proximity of the two silvered “screens,” Duchamp may have considered an alternative plan to integrate four-dimensional motion into this side of the Glass by projecting film onto it, in which case his concurrent filmmaking projects would appear to be related studies. In any event, Duchamp’s mirror-glass film screen extended an idea from his work on the Glass, namely the use of a two-dimensional mirror image of three-dimensional space as an analogy for a three-dimensional image of four-dimensional space. Depending on the lighting conditions and placement of the projector, the mirror-screen would partially reflect the image of the viewer and his or her three-dimensional surroundings along with the projected image. In such a dual-image, the projected semi-spherical spiral shape would virtually inhabit the same spatial continuum as the viewer, creating the impression of a four-dimensional interruption in his or her three-dimensional space.

Evidently still dissatisfied with the results, Duchamp continued his spiral-based experiments in four-dimensional vision over the next several years. In 1924, Duchamp would construct his second belt-driven “optical machine,” Rotary Demisphere. Financing from a wealthy patron facilitated the employment of an engineer and other technical specialists. In this iteration, the optical machine rotated a papier-maché demisphere bearing a spiral design fitted on a black velvet-covered disk. The velvet disk differentiated between the spatial continuum of the demisphere and that of the surrounding environment, departing from the mirror-glass screen model. The demisphere was a three-dimensional shape, and its rotation presumably sought another means to create the impression of four-dimensional motion.
Around 1925, Duchamp attempted to film this creation using an improvised mount that would convey three dimensions to the viewer.75 As recollected by Man Ray, his collaborator on the project, “[Duchamp] had conceived an idea for making three-dimensional movies.” They filmed the motion with two separate cameras. “The idea was to join them with gears and a common axis so that a double stereoscopic film could be made.”76 The prints were damaged during processing and only a few short strips survived (see Fig. 0.11). These reveal the technique involved dying the two strips in different colors, red and green. One would then arrange the strips in two side-by-side projectors that superimposed the images. By wearing correspondingly paired, colored lenses, red over one eye and green over the other, the viewer would perceive the two projections as a single image of a greyish three-dimensional relief.77 This technique adopts the so-called anaglyphic methods of stereoscopy first developed in the mid-nineteenth century for three-dimensional magic lantern projections.78 Duchamp had previously experimented with stereoscopic photography in a readymade known as Hand Stereoscopy (Stéréoscopie à la main) (1918-19, Fig. 2.9), which he had created during his sojourn to Buenos Aires

75 This anaglyphic film likely dates to 1925, but Duchamp and Man Ray may have started experimenting with anaglyphic camera mounts as early as 1920. See n. 36 in my introduction.
76 Man Ray, Self Portrait, 99.
78 Jean Clair (Ibid., 104) associates Duchamp’s use of anaglyphy with Louis Ducos du Hauron, who patented an anaglyphic printing method in 1891. As Clair notes, mathematician Henri Vuibert published a monograph on Hauron’s technique in 1912, “the very year in which Duchamp began thinking about the Large Glass.” Lars Blunck documents, however, a prior history of color-based “stereoscopic cinematography,” or projection in relief, dating to the mid-nineteenth century. See Blunck, Duchamps Präzionsoptik, 218-225.
alongside *To Be Looked At*. In that work, Duchamp appropriated a pre-existing stereoscopic card of a placid seascape and drew in pencil a geometric design featuring an octahedron. Man Ray had also created two sets of stereoscopic photographs of *Rotary Glass Plates* in 1920.

The appeal to Duchamp of such a “three-dimensional movie” of the *Rotary Demisphere* is not immediately evident. Though the footage has been lost, his improvised method of anaglyphy presumably would have conveyed an impression of three-dimensional depth and motion already present in the optical machine. As Duchamp later commented about *Anemic Cinema*, his use of film here may have responded to the fragility of the optical machines, which frequently broke and were expensive to maintain. It would have also provided Duchamp with a means to document and more widely circulate the work. Beyond these practical considerations, however, the anaglyptic film of *Rotary Demisphere* may have further demonstrated Duchamp’s four-dimensional gambit. Whereas *Rotary Demisphere* employed a rotating three-dimensional spiral, the projection of the film would, like *Rotary Glass Plates*, stage the passage from two to three dimensions, and imaginatively beyond to four. Duchamp was satisfied with the experiment despite the absence of a working print, according to Man Ray.

In the summer of 1926, Duchamp finalized the spiral films he had been testing since 1921 and assembled a finished print, *Anemic Cinema*, that combines his optical disks with others inscribed with puns, all bookended with handmade title and credits.

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79 Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 68.
cards. The punning inscriptions interrupt the spinning disks, each sequence lasting no more than twenty or thirty seconds, bringing the duration of the entire film to approximately seven minutes in total. The title card introducing the film returns to the mirror analogy, suggesting that the projection of the final version of Anemic Cinema may have also been intended for the mirror-glass screen. The two words “Anemic” and “Cinéma” appear in slanted white lettering against a black velvet background, meeting at the center of the card. This creates the impression of their extending into three-dimensional space in a two-sided mirror. The near palindrome of the two words also contributes to the impression of a mirror reflection.

Anemic Cinema’s textual disks and credits relate to a component first introduced in Rotary Demisphere two years prior. For his second optical machine, the artist had built, with the assistance of a metal engraver, a copper “collar” with a glass dome that fit over the hemisphere and covered its velvet base (Fig. 2.10). Duchamp directed the engraver to inscribe a punning sentence along the inner edge of the copper disk that read, “Rrose Selavy et moi esquivons les ecchymoses des esquimaux aux mots exquis” (Rrose Selavy and I dodge the Eskimos’s bruises with exquisite words). Duchamp had invented the female pseudonym and alter-ego Rrose Sélavy in 1920, during the same trip to New York when he acquired his movie camera. He posed as Rrose Sélavy for a series of photographic portraits by Man Ray and signed her name to a number of works, beginning in early 1920 with the carbon paper studies of the Oculist’s Charts. Though the optical

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80 The finished Anemic Cinema print may incorporate some footage from Duchamp’s earlier spiral films. See Blunck, Duchamps Präzionsoptik, 250.
81 On the four-dimensional analogy of the title card, see Adcock, Marcel Duchamp’s Notes for the Large Glass, 75-78, 184.
machines do not bear her name, Duchamp would later appear to attribute them to her by listing “Precision Optics” among Rrose Sélaivy’s specialties on a faux-calling card.\textsuperscript{82} The delay of several years between the creation of these works, their first public exhibitions as works of art, and their first association with Rrose Sélaivy’s name make it difficult to conclusively determine the role Duchamp ascribed to her. By the time of \textit{Rotary Glass Plates}’s public debut, at MoMA in 1936, Duchamp had largely shed the Rrose Sélaivy persona; the museum ascribed the work to him alone. In the \textit{Rotary Demisphere} inscription, her name does not read as synonymous with that of the creator, who is ostensibly the “moi” in “Rrose Sélaivy et moi.” However, in his various letters to Jacques Doucet, the women’s apparel magnate who financed the project, Duchamp would alternatively sign as himself and as Rrose Sélaivy. In \textit{Anemic Cinema}, also likely financed by Doucet, Duchamp would employ an altered version of the “Rrose Selavy et moi” inscription and add eight more punning, alliterative phrases continuing the schizophrenic authorship.\textsuperscript{83} The end credits card affirmatively ascribes the film to Rrose Sélaivy in hand-lettering reading, “Copyrighted by Rrose Sélaivy 1926,” but also bears Duchamp’s own “signature” in the form of his thumbprint.

The significance of the doubled authorship and double entendres of the punning texts in \textit{Rotary Demisphere} and \textit{Anemic Cinema} to Duchamp’s pursuit of four-

\textsuperscript{82} The “calling card” appears in Marcel Duchamp, \textit{Rrose Sélaivy} (Paris: GLM, 1939).
\textsuperscript{83} Doucet’s financial support of Duchamp between 1924 and 1926 is documented in their correspondence, now located in the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris. Doucet’s involvement in \textit{Anemic Cinema} is suggested by a letter, Duchamp to Doucet, postmarked August 6, 1926, reporting on the production, cited in Arturo Schwarz, \textit{The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp}, vol. 2 (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997), 716.
dimensional vision is not immediately clear. *Anemic Cinema’s* other inscriptions include:

“Bain de gros thé pour grains de beauté sans trop de bengué,” “L’enfant que tête est un souffleur de chair chaude et n’aime pas le choufleur de serre chaude,” “Si je te donne un sou, me donnera-tu paire de ciseaux?” “On demande des moustique domestiques (demi-stock) pour la cure d’azote sur la côte d’azur,” “Inceste ou passion de famille, à coups trop tirés,” “Avez vous déjà mis la moëlle de l’épée dans le poêle de l’aimée?” and “Parmi nos articles de quincaillerie paresseuse, nous recommandons le robinet qui s’arrête de couler quand on ne l’écoute pas.”

“To a French-speaking person,” Katrina Martin observes in the most extensive study of *Anemic Cinema’s* texts to date, “these phrases appear as nonsense.”84

“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 viewer is unable to compile this smattering of material into visualized images representing cinematic representation, or to inflect these works with the linear transition of the normal sentence structure.”85 According to Martin, the primary purpose of the phrases in the film is to defeat unified or linear meaning: “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 a spiral.”86 Martin implies a potential relationship between this confusion of optical and linguistic disks with the film’s attribution to Rrose


85 Ibid., 54.

86 Ibid., 60.
Sélavy: “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.”\(^87\) She also speculates that the alternation between graphic and verbal spirals may “itself [be] a pun on the alternating images and titles of silent film.”\(^88\) Subsequent historians have extended this reading, taking the illogic of the alternating images to mock period film. They conclude that *Anemic Cinema* is a critique of the cinematic medium, that it constitutes a form of “anti-cinema.”\(^89\)

The relationship between the four-dimensional opticeries of the *Large Glass* and the spiral works including *Anemic Cinema*, suggests, however, that even when he was using a cinematographic camera, Duchamp was not directly engaging standard cinematographic filmmaking of the period either affirmatively or negatively. One might recall here his arrangement of private demonstrations, rather than public theatrical screenings, of his films. Rather than critiquing silent film, the alternation of the optical and linguistic in works like *Rotary Demisphere* and *Anemic Cinema* more likely referred to Duchamp’s plans for a textual accompaniment to the *Glass*. The textual elements of *Rotary Demisphere* and *Anemic Cinema* read as subtly cynical of that explanatory endeavor, perhaps reflecting its ultimate non-completion. While Duchamp clearly believed that conceptualization of the fourth dimension demanded some kind of textual component, these works cast doubt on its pursuit through a scientific, or even

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 60.  
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 54.  
pseudoscientific, rationalism. Instead, they imply, fourth-dimensional vision must originate in bodily activation through disorientation and confusion. One of Duchamp’s earlier notes anticipates this approach, attributing one’s orientation in three-dimensional space to “gravity and center and gravity.” “Gravity is not controlled physically in us by one of the 5 ordinary senses. We always reduce a gravity experience to an auto-cognizance, real or imagined, registered inside us in the region of the stomach.”

To Be Looked At exploited this effect to activate four-dimensional vision. Staring at the blurry image in the magnifying lens for an extended period, one would inevitably become unsteady, as noted by the work’s longtime owner Katherine Dreier, who coined her own title: Disturbed Balance. Historian Jerrold Siegel has read the effect as an attempt to “induce [in the viewer] the sense of disorientation, even dizziness, that seeking to enter the fourth dimension from our own more limited world is bound to bring.” This would appear to confuse cause and effect. The optics works seek disorientation as a means to induce four-dimensional perception, or at least the nearest approximation of it, not the other way around.

Anemic Cinema similarly works to engage this “auto-cognizance…registered in the region of the stomach” to disrupt or redirect spatial orientation and perception. As

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90 Duchamp, WMD, 87. Blunck (Duchamps Präzionsoptik, 132) dates this note to Duchamp’s trip to Buenos Aires in August 1918, associating it with the queasiness of seaborne travel.

91 On Dreier’s use of the title Disturbed Balance, see Ann Temkin, “To Be Looked At (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour,” in Dada in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, ed. Anne Umland and Adrian Sudhalter (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 124.

Annette Michelson observes, the rotations of the circular texts prompt bodily contortion and counter-intuitive action. “One must strain a bit to read them as they proceed in a clockwise motion whose staccato quality contrasts with the serene undulation of the spirals. One’s deciphering effort is compounded by one’s impulse to commence the reading at a spot not quite coincident with the first word of each phrase, as it is placed in superb disregard of generalized typographical conventions.” Importantly, however, Anemic Cinema’s disruption of “auto-cognizance” also extends to areas of body beyond the stomach. In a discerning analysis echoed later by Rosalind Krauss, Michelson reads the “[optical] disk’s circular motion” as an “aggressively sexual intimation of thrust and recession.” The libidinal solicitation “is confirmed” in the “obscene humor and partial obscurity of [the] punning intertitles,” she continues, “a succession of phrases both loaded and cryptic, models of double entendre.”

Duchamp’s late-in-life statements about his filmmaking also promote the idea that his films were largely disengaged from period cinema. “Cinema never interested me as an artist,” he told Francis Roberts in 1963, adding, “That little film called Anemic Cinema is the only one I ever made.” Speaking with Pierre Cabanne in 1966, in what would become his most widely-read and quoted interview, Duchamp continued to minimize Anemic Cinema’s relation to filmmaking. He referred to the film as a “little cinema (petit

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94 Ibid., 65. Robert Lebel (*Marcel Duchamp*, 52) had also noted, in 1959, “These [spiral] forms are laden with sexual allusion through the calculated succession of contractions and dilations.”
95 Michelson, “‘Anemic Cinema’: Reflections on an Emblematic Work,” 65.
96 Marcel Duchamp, “I Propose to Strain the Laws of Physics,” interview with Francis Roberts [1963], *Art News* 67, no. 8 (December 1968), 46.
cinéma) he made during his experimentation with “that optical turning thing (cette chose optique qui tourne),” Rotary Demisphere. The belt-driven machine had been expensive to build and frequently broke; film provided a cheaper alternative. He claimed, “I wasn’t interested in making movies as such; it was simply a more practical way of achieving my optical results” before concluding more firmly, “When people say that I’ve made movies, I answer that, no, I haven’t, that it was a convenient method—I’m particularly sure of that now…”

The distinct lineage and character of Duchamp’s first films is undeniable but it would be a mistake to overstate the distance between Duchamp’s filmmaking and the entirety of period cinema. Duchamp’s public accounts of his filmmaking were all retrospective, dating to the 1960s. As his assertion, “I am particularly sure of that now,” suggests, the sharp delineation between his own film practices and those of “moviemaking” are something of an anachronism, antithetical to the artist’s own approach to film and to the avant-garde film culture of the early 1920s. At the time of their creation, filmmaking by visual artists was still emergent and heterogeneous. Duchamp’s later rejection speaks more to the postwar canonization of avant-garde film in France and the United States and to the development of “kinetic art” as a distinct domain of moving image production than to any demarcation in the period.

The mirror-glass screen, for example, intersects with the history of cinematographic cinema. The media archaeology of cinematic dispositifs by Wild, Elcott, and others demonstrates that free-standing screens, including those made from ground

97 Ibid., 68.
glass (verre dépoli), were relatively common in cinema’s first decades. Exhibitors added mirror-silver backing to glass screens in order to increase the amount of light reflected back at the viewer, enabling screenings in the daylight or partial light conditions common in the fairground and café-concert venues of early film. Duchamp may have been drawn to the mirror-like reflective character of these screens because of his interest in trans-dimensional analogies, but he effectively re-created a projection technique of early film exhibitors. His glass screens extricated his films from the newer purpose-built projection houses, permitting their display side by side with his other “precision optics” works of the period.

Formal choices, such as the black velvet covering of the disk in Rotary Demisphere, also point to Duchamp’s awareness of, and sensitivity to, filmmaking

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99 See, for example, the following description from 1911: “The mirror screen….consists of a sheet of plate glass, the size of the projected picture; this glass is silvered upon the back and ground to a smooth ground-glass finish upon the front surface. The ground-glass surface gives a good screen surface for projection, even if not backed, being equivalent to a surface, [sic] of finely-powdered glass, but all light which passes through the ground-glass surface is reflected by the mirror back to the surface again and through it to the spectators in the theater. The result is a large increase in the brilliancy in the picture projected with the same conditions of lamp and lenses.” In David S. Hulfish, “Motion Picture Theater,” in Early Cinema: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, vol. 4, ed. Richard Abel (New York: Routledge, 2014), 203. Originally published as Hulfish, Cyclopedia of Motion Picture-Work (Chicago: American Technical Society, 1911), 187.

100 Duchamp was at the same moment seeking to disassociate his optical machines from period painting and sculpture: “All painting and sculpture exhibitions make me sick. And I would like to avoid being associated with them. I would also be sorry if people saw in this globe [Rotary Demisphere] anything other than ‘the optical.’” Marcel Duchamp to Jacques Doucet, October 19, 1925, in Duchamp, Affectionately, Marcel, 152.
techniques. During the construction of *Rotary Demisphere*, Duchamp wrote frequently to Jacques Doucet, whom he considered a kind of collaborator. On September 14, 1924, several months into planning and construction, Duchamp wrote to Doucet asking for help selecting and locating a covering for the disk: “I wanted to stick a velvet background on the metal plate holding up the spiral. English velvet or silk velvet?? The kind of velvet reminiscent of the totally matt [sic] backgrounds in cinema studios….Perhaps you could help me find this?” Duchamp’s casual reference to shooting backgrounds suggests a personal familiarity, though the source of his familiarity is unknown. His short performance for Léonce Perret in 1918 occurred outdoors. As noted in chapter one, Duchamp’s home in Puteaux had been a short distance from the Film d’Art studios and he may have observed film production there.

Even Duchamp’s short-lived anaglyphic film project of 1925 corresponds to experimentation within the domain of early commercial filmmaking. Duchamp and Man Ray’s method, “join[ing two cameras] with gears and a common axis so that a double stereoscopic film could be made,” replicates a method described as “The Twin Lens Stereo-Cinematograph Camera” in a photography manual of 1907. The technique outlined there involves yoking two existing single lens cinematograph cameras. “Many of the cameras now on the market are of such a design that to make stereoscopic pictures it

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101 See letters from Marcel Duchamp to Jacques Doucet in Duchamp, *WMD*, 181-85.
102 Marcel Duchamp to Jacques Doucet, September 14, 1924, in Duchamp, *Affectionately, Marcel*, 145.
is only necessary to use two such cameras simultaneously, by having them geared
together.”¹⁰⁴ Either the film strips are tinted or the projectors use tinted glass to color the
two images in red and green. “The projections are viewed with discriminating glasses of
tints corresponding to the projections on the screen,” replicating an anaglyphic
photographic system developed in the mid-nineteenth century, the guide explains, “but,
of course, with the additional element of animation.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, stereoscopy persists
throughout the history of cinema despite the dominance of monoscopic formats,
resurfacing in the 3D color films of the 1950s and in RealD 3D films today.¹⁰⁶ It appears
that Duchamp exploited certain existing cinematic technologies in order to realize his
cinema of “four dimensions” while generating formats other than those that would come
to dominate both commercial and avant-garde filmmaking by the later 1920s and 1930s.

Finally, Duchamp’s filmmaking, though originating from his desire to
temporalize and spatialize painting through the four-dimensional optical disks, did not
end with them. Although never publicly acknowledged by Duchamp during his lifetime,
the artist drafted plans for at least eight additional films featuring outdoor settings, live
actors, and camera- and screen-based optical effects. Published after his death in a
collection of nearly three hundred undated personal notes on wide-ranging subjects, the
film plans have made little impact on Duchamp scholarship but illuminate the artist’s

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
¹⁰⁶ On June 10, 1915, five days before Duchamp first arrived in New York, the filmmaker
Edwin S. Porter hosted a screening at the city’s Astor Theater of an anaglyphic process
for use in narrative commercial films. See Lynde Denig, “Stereoscopic Pictures
Screened,” The Moving Picture World 24, no. 13, June 26, 1915, 2072; “Stereoscopic
Pictures Give Sense of Depth to Images,” Motion Picture News 11, no. 26, July 3, 1915,
62.
participation in the emergent avant-garde film culture in Paris. In part two of this chapter, I argue that the little-known notes for films elucidate Duchamp’s trajectory from the private cinema of the optical discs toward early avant-garde filmmaking in 1920s Paris.

**Part Two: Duchamp and Avant-Garde Film in 1920s Paris**

The posthumous publication of a collection of Duchamp’s personal notes demonstrated definitively that Duchamp’s filmmaking extended beyond the disks of *Anemic Cinema*, on paper, if not on film itself. Duchamp’s stepson Paul Matisse selected the 289 previously-unpublished notes after the artist’s death in 1968 and first published them in 1980 as a limited French-language edition of facsimiles and transcriptions. Matisse’s bilingual French-English edition appeared two years later. Of the 289 notes, 120 detail ideas for *The Bride Stripped Bare*, in some cases even duplicating or nearly duplicating notes that Duchamp had previously published in *The Green Box* and *The White Box*.

As discussed in chapter one, many of these notes are of a more practical nature than those published by Duchamp himself and help to illuminate the conceptual and physical progression of the work between 1912 and 1923. Forty-six notes discuss various

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107 Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, pl. and trans., 198-201. The notes for films were collected and published, without commentary, as Marcel Duchamp, “Notes,” in *Jeune, dure et pure!: Une histoire du cinema d’avant-garde et expérimental en France*, ed. Nicole Brenez and Christian Lebrat (Paris: Cinémathèque Française, 2001), 90. They are undated and likely originate in the period between Duchamp’s acquisition of a camera in 1920 and his temporary cessation of filmmaking activity after *Anemic Cinema*. The most extensive discussions of these notes to date are Adcock, *Marcel Duchamp’s Notes for the Large Glass*, 184-88; Blunck, *Duchamps Präzionsoptik*, 240-41.
ideas relating to “inframince” (infrathin), a neologism invented by the artist in the 1930s
to express obscure physical phenomena; they had been collected together in an envelope
by the artist himself.\(^{108}\) Eighty-two of the 289 are what Matisse calls “Word Plays,” short
puns, spoonerisms, or other short statements in both French and English, many of them
attributed to Rrose Sélavy, there or elsewhere. Among the eighty-two are clear word
plays such as, “\textit{Fermentation / Ferme intention}” (Fermentation / Firm intention) and
“scrambled legs,” as well as seemingly unrelated jottings—a street address of a colleague
or an epigram, “\textit{la vie à credit}” (Life on credit).\(^{109}\)

The eight notes for films belong to the remainder, a group of forty-one notes that
Matisse vaguely classifies as “projects.”\(^{110}\) Many in this group, including the eight I am
calling “notes for films,” are indeed plans for potential works stated “in the infinitive.”
Two projects read, for example, “Without glue—\textit{Make (faire)} an assembly of ‘ready
mades’ balanced one on top of the other and photograph them” and “\textit{Make (faire)} an
instrument which, placed under the floor, lets appear, when one spits on the ground in
illuminated letters: ‘Spitting prohibited,’ or ‘I love you.’”\(^{111}\) The imaginative nature of
these plans, their formulation in the infinitive tense, and their distance from any works
actually produced by the artist encourages the impression that these plans were
theoretical and not intended to be acted upon. Indeed, Duchamp would explain to an
interviewer inquiring about the reality of some of his more fantastical notes in \textit{The White
Box}, “All these notes had almost a common character—they were always written in the

\(^{109}\) Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp, Notes}, 213, 244, 235, 289
\(^{110}\) Ibid., 190-92, 195-97, 199-200.
\(^{111}\) Ibid., 167, 179.
infinitive tense; à l’infinitif in French means to do things, eventually to do this, which, of course I never did.”\textsuperscript{112}

It would be wrong, however, to discount these, and the other notes written “in the infinitive.” Of those classified as “projects,” several have a clear and self-evident relationship to works that Duchamp eventually completed. For example, “Projects” includes the previously cited four-page folio outlining a “primary experiment of 2 circles…turning on a center,” which directly anticipates Duchamp’s design of the \textit{Rotary Glass Plates}.\textsuperscript{113} Others evidently test ideas arising during the construction of the \textit{Large Glass}, yet were excluded by Matisse from the \textit{Large Glass} section of the volume. One of the few notes with an inscribed date and location, “1915 NY,” reads, “Framing the 2 glasses [in] making a window…opening on a landscape of some kind (at will) garden sea town etc. or [at will] illuminated with weak light.”\textsuperscript{114} This came at a point in the early construction of the Glass in New York when Duchamp was working on the mounting of the two glass panes. Another, dated “1912/1913” on the verso, originates in a much earlier point in the conceptual genesis of \textit{The Bride Stripped Bare}, in late 1912 or early 1913 when Duchamp was determining an analogical graphical idiom. “Comparison: find [\textit{trouver}] what corresponds to comparison in literature (like…).” Although several of these notes include verbs in the infinitive tense, they read more as specific instructions or reminders Duchamp wrote to himself than as vague or undirected speculation. If, as in the

\textsuperscript{112} Marcel Duchamp, interview by Jeanne Siegel, in Siegel, “Some Late Thoughts of Marcel Duchamp,” in Siegel, \textit{Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s} (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 18.
\textsuperscript{113} Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp, Notes}, 170.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 171.
case of the window mounting, they propose variants of ideas that Duchamp ultimately employed that does not diminish their documentary value.

It is equally wrong to discount any of the notes simply for being theoretical. As I discuss at greater length in the first chapter, the artist’s notes make little distinction between ideas that could be materially realized and those that could not be. The two intermingle and often become confused. Even those ideas that never generate a material work, such as the “spitting” apparatus or balanced readymades, are conceivable in the context of Duchamp’s oeuvre. Moreover, Duchamp invested great interest and energy in the theoretical development of both practical and more purely imaginative ideas throughout his career, creating his notes from the early 1910s through to the time of his death in 1968.

The eight notes for films are at once highly imaginative and potentially realizable. Although written “in the infinitive,” and in many cases running for only a few sentences, they propose specific and actionable plans for film or film display projects. If they were not ultimately realized by Duchamp, they nevertheless anticipate ideas that found expression elsewhere or offer evidence of briefly considered and subsequently rejected ideas for films. If nothing else, they demonstrate that Duchamp’s interest in filmmaking originated in fourth-dimensional vision and ultimately extended beyond it.

Among the plans (Figs. 2.11-2.17, see also Fig. 0.15) are proposals to: “‘attach the camera to the stomach, and walk in the street turning the handle’”\(^\text{115}\), “‘make a cinema’"

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 191.
from “electric wires seen from a moving train”\textsuperscript{116}, “make parts of lines black (1\textsuperscript{st} 1/3 of the film’s width long) which advance (toward the right) alternating with white lines advancing toward the left …to make the lines undulate, use the spiral, undulate the spiral, etc., [the] object [being] to obtain an effect similar to the emotions of the fair, dizziness, to make something that the eyes can’t stand”\textsuperscript{117}; “take a film of a real boxing fight—done with white gloves and blacken all the rest of the pictures so that one only sees the white gloves boxing”\textsuperscript{118}; “have a piano tuned on the stage…or make a movie of the tuner tuning and synchronize the tunings on a piano or rather synchronize the tuning of a hidden piano”\textsuperscript{119}; “have the same image in different sizes intermixed against a black background, the same size reappearing every 2 or 3 frames”\textsuperscript{120}; make “screens in rubber, canvas and other materials, rubber so that it can be deformed by blowing it up, pressing at certain places from behind…. [and] take films, like from an airplane, or in an oblique projection seen from above and oblique [projection] vanishing off to a particular side”\textsuperscript{121}; “use 2 projections, 1 behind, 1 in front of the screen…seasick, feeling of an elevator starting…continuous mixture of 2 or several films (by mixing the photos of one with those of the other). Effect from the side, make the screen turn on a pivot – (El Greco characters).\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 192. Translation modified.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 195. Translation modified. This note was made after 1919 as it appears on the verso of a sheet of chess paper made by Duchamp in 1919.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 197.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 199. Translation modified.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 200.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 196. Translation modified.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 190.
All eight involve the production of some kind of film footage. Otherwise they diverge in their approach to filmmaking. Some stipulate shooting outdoors in natural light or otherwise “on location,” by “walk[ing] in the street” or by filming a “real boxing fight” or “electric wires seen from a moving train.” Others, such as the “undulating lines,” would be shot entirely in studio. Some specify camera movement—“attach the camera to the stomach and walk”—and others demand a fixed camera—“have the same image in different sizes intermixed against a black background.” Five address only the filmmaking itself while three stipulate specific actions for display or the use of experimental screen technologies: “Make a movie of the tuner tuning and synchronize the tunings of a piano;” “Screens in rubber, canvas and other materials, rubber so that it can be deformed by blowing it up, pressing at certain places from behind;” “use 2 projections, 1 behind, 1 in front of the screen. Many car headlights (real) turned toward the audience…, make the screen turn on a pivot.”

Despite their differences, what unites many, if not all, of the ideas is a pursuit of audience disorientation. Duchamp characterizes the “object” of his “undulating line” film as being “to obtain an effect similar to the emotions of the fair, dizziness[,] mak[ing] something that the eyes can’t stand.”\(^{123}\) The inclusion of “seasick…feeling of an elevator starting” in his plans for a film using “two projections” on either side of a screen also suggests a desire for optico-bodily disorientation.\(^{124}\) The piano tuning film too would presumably prompt aural discomfort, the synchronization of visible and hidden pianos creating dissonance emanating from multiple sources in the room. In the note featuring

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 195. Translation modified.
\(^{124}\) Ibid., 190.
“rubber screens” a vertical list down the page appears to describe individual shots in a fast, chaotic montage: “Balloon blown up slowly which bursts / water spout / wind / vapors / headlights—Sparks / Backgrounds of soles of feet (from time to time / moving their toes)….little mechanical toys (beetles, trams) / lead ball in a [sketch of a cylindrical cannon barrel] of paper.” Other planned films, such as the “electric wires seen from a moving train” film or the abstracted “boxing match” film, would also presumably create “dizziness” and even “something the eyes can’t stand.”

The character of these plans is consistent with the so-called “Dada cinema” of film and film screenings by visual artists in Paris in the early 1920s, in which Duchamp participated. In July 1923, Man Ray created Retour à la Raison for the Dada Soirée du Coeur à barbe organized and hosted by Tristan Tzara at the Théâtre Michel. That two-minute silent black and white short rapidly cuts between sequences of flat black objects set against a white background created using Man Ray’s rayograph technique and footage of rotating fairground rides, a suspended cardboard egg carton, his airbrush painting Danger/Dancer (1920), and the nude torso of actress and model Kiki de Montparnasse (Figs. 2.18-2.22). Man Ray shot the fairground rides at night so that only the artificial light of its globular bulbs are visible, spinning in dizzying arrays (Fig. 2.23). In one shot, the camera position is fixed beside a carousel, watching its lights approach and then retreat as the ride rotates. With a jump cut, the camera position moves onto a spinning ride and itself rotates (Fig. 2.24). There is correspondence here with Duchamp’s

125 Ibid., 196. Translation modified.
proposals for a darkened boxing match and for a camera attached to the stomach. Duchamp’s alterations to the boxing match film would have created an image of disembodied white gloves dancing around the screen, much as the illuminated bulbs of the fairground rides appear in Retour à la Raison. The stomach-mounted camera would have approximated the “point-of-view” shot of the ride itself. In Man Ray’s film, both techniques are employed to create, as Duchamp’s plans envisage, a sense of dizziness and disorientation on the part of the viewer.

Duchamp’s notes for films may indeed have a direct relation to Retour à la Raison. Man Ray famously created the film in less than two days at the instigation of Tristan Tzara. As Man Ray later recounted in his memoirs, Tzara had listed a film by Man Ray, titled Le Retour de la Raison, in the announcement for the Soirée printed and delivered the day before, compelling him to rapidly produce a print to match the description between July 5 and 6, 1923. Duchamp had returned from New York in February of that year, but did not immediately go to Paris, settling instead in Brussels. He moved back to Paris by July 15 and may have made short trips in the preceding weeks but was not present for the production or debut of Retour à la Raison. In a letter to his friends Ettie and Carrie Stettheimer dated July 23, Duchamp wrote, “There was a Dada session (which I did not attend) where fisticuffs were exchanged, very amusing

126 Another note by Duchamp (Ibid., 201: “a group of lines which move around alternately black and white and moving in a sense like worms”), though not directly referencing filmmaking and thus not discussed here, also recalls footage appearing in Retour à la Raison.
127 Man Ray, Self Portrait, 259-60.
apparently.” Duchamp nevertheless would have been aware of the “Dada session” and plans to screen films there as he had helped Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand send their short film, *Manhatta* (screened as *Fumées de New York*, 1921), to Tzara from New York.129

In order to rapidly produce a film by the deadline the following day, Man Ray had integrated newly made footage using the rayograph technique with several pre-existing strips of 35mm films, possibly including those made with Duchamp or in consultation with Duchamp.130 As previously recounted, Duchamp had acquired his camera in New York in early 1920 and worked with Man Ray in his first experiments. Duchamp then brought the camera with him back to Paris in June 1921. Man Ray joined him there in July at Duchamp’s encouragement. It appears that the camera saw significant use during the following six months. Duchamp’s private screening of “film experiments, fragments, and geometric dances,” documented by Roché, took place in January 1922. The fairground footage likely dates to this period. Duchamp’s notes, for a boxing match and stomach-mounted camera, may record other ideas circulating between the two artists around the same time. Alternatively, Duchamp could have written the notes in response to seeing Man Ray’s film. Although he did not attend the premiere, he would have had ample opportunities to consult the filmstrip after July 15, when he moved back to Paris and rented a studio at 37 rue Froidevaux in Montparnasse, less than a half a mile away.

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from Man Ray’s studio at 31 bis rue Campagne-Première. In January 1924, he would move next door to Man Ray on rue Campagne-Première, renting a room at the famed Hotel Istria. It was there that Duchamp and Man Ray together filmed *Anemic Cinema* in the summer of 1926.

Shortly after moving next door to Man Ray, the two artists would perform in another short film, *Entr’acte*, conceived by Francis Picabia and directed by René Clair, and certain of Duchamp’s notes appear to refer or respond to that film. On May 28, 1924, Clair filmed Duchamp and Man Ray playing a game of chess on the roof of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées for an early scene in *Entr’acte*, which Picabia and Clair planned to project onto the closed curtain during the intermission of the ballet *Relâche* (Cancelled) written by Erik Satie and staged by Picabia inside the theater that December. Picabia famously designed a backdrop for the set with 370 lightbulbs surrounded by light-amplifying metal disks directed toward the audience. According to period accounts, the lights brightened and dimmed according to the dynamics of Satie’s score, sometimes temporarily blinding audience members.131

The film, which an early announcement for *Relâche* referred to as “un Entr’acte cinématographique” (cinematographic intermission), is today known simply as *Entr’acte*. Running approximately eighteen minutes with over 320 separate shots, it opens with rapid cuts between shots of Paris roofs; dolls with balloon heads that expand with air and then deflate; a ballet dancer leaping directly above the camera; and double-exposures of

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animated matchsticks catching fire set against a head of hair; and disembodied white boxing gloves in front of a busy Paris intersection (Figs. 2.25-2.29). Then comes Duchamp and Man Ray’s chess game; a double-exposure of a paper boat appearing to float over the rooftops of Paris; and a hunter, played by Jean Borlin, the choreographer and star of Relâche, climbing on the theater’s roof and trying to shoot an egg suspended in a jet of water (Figs. 2.30-2.32). Borlin’s hunter eventually cracks open the egg and a pigeon escapes. Another hunter arrives and tries to shoot the pigeon but misses and kills Borlin’s character instead. An extended funeral procession sequence concludes the film.

A sullen crowd exits a funeral home and then forms a procession behind the hearse. As it begins to move, the crowd leaps and dances behind it in slow motion. The hearse later speeds up and the procession runs to catch it. Eventually, the coffin falls out of the hearse and lands in a field, where the procession crowds around it. Borlin’s sportsman emerges unscathed, now dressed as a magician. He points his wand at the coffin and procession members, who disappear one by one, and then turns it upon himself. He disappears. The film ends with a title card inscribed with the word, “Fin” (End), actually a large white sheet that Borlin tears by jumping through it towards the viewer. As he lands, someone else’s foot appears and kicks him in the head, sending him backwards into the title card, which repairs itself via reverse editing. In the original presentation during Rêlache, a shorter film by Clair, featuring Erik Satie and Francis Picabia aiming and shooting a cannon towards the screen, opened the ballet. For subsequent theatrical showings, programmers integrated this scene into Entr’acte, adding approximately two minutes to the film’s duration.
Duchamp’s role was nominally limited to that of a performer. He played chess with Man Ray in *Entr’acte* and impersonated Adam from the Lucas Cranach the Elder painting *Adam and Eve* in *Cine-Sketch*, a live stage play that Picabia and Clair added for the final night of *Rêlache*’s run at the Théâtre Champs-Elysées. The art historian George Baker has proposed that Duchamp’s work, specifically his *Large Glass*, provided an inspiration for Picabia’s design of both *Entr’acte* and *Rêlache*. “The entirety of Picabia’s scenario was ‘stolen,’ in quite the direct sense,” he writes. “This is a work steeped through in appropriation.”

Employing art historian William Camfield’s historical reconstruction of the ballet, Baker narrates the Bride-and-her-Bachelors-like plot, in which a female dancer, Edith Bonsdorff, is pursued by a group of male dancers and strips off her clothes to a layer of tights underneath. Baker also points to images in the film, such as the “repeated image of a ballerina recorded as if positioned above the spectator, dancing on a pane of glass that we view, in the film, from below,” as rehearsing “the very mise-en-scène of [Duchamp’s] *Large Glass*.”

Baker’s argument overlooks the fact that Duchamp’s *Glass* had not yet been exhibited or reproduced in 1923. Picabia presumably could have consulted certain of Duchamp’s *Large Glass* studies and notes or heard about the work second-hand. However, Duchamp’s notes for films suggest that no such “stealing” would have had to take place and that Duchamp was a willing uncredited collaborator. The disembodied boxing gloves in the film, for example, directly correspond to Duchamp’s proposal in his

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133 Ibid., 299.
134 Ibid., 302.
notes to “take a film of a real boxing fight [combat de boxe] – done with white gloves” and manipulate the image so that “one only sees the white gloves boxing.”

Although it appears only briefly in the finished film, the boxing sequence played a larger role in the film scenario that Picabia initially provided Clair, which stipulates an opening scene of a “Boxing bout [Assaut de boxe] with white gloves against a black screen.”

Written on stationary from a Paris restaurant, evidently at some point before shooting began in May, the scenario details the one-minute long “curtain raiser,” consisting of the “slow-motion loading of a cannon by Satie and Picabia,” and a twelve-minute film for the “interval” consisting of eight scenes. Much but not all of Picabia’s scenario would find its way into Clair’s finished film. Clair significantly lengthened the scenes and added entirely new ideas to bring the duration to around eighteen minutes. He also excised Picabia’s plans for explanatory intertitle cards.

The seven scenes following the “boxing attack” in Picabia’s notated scenario also contain echoes of Duchamp’s notes:

2. Game of chess between Duchamp and Man Ray. Stream of water maneuvered by Picabia sweeps away the game: duration, 30 seconds.


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135 Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 197.
4. Hunter firing at an ostrich egg on a stream of water maneuvered by Picabia, who sweeps away the egg which lands on the head of the hunter; a second hunter fires at it and kills the first hunter; he falls, the bird flies away: duration, 1 minute. Written titles: 20 seconds.

5. 21 people lying on their backs display the soles of their feet: 10 seconds. Handwritten titles: 15 seconds.

6. Female dancer on a transparent sheet of glass, filmed from below: duration, one minute. Written titles: 5 seconds.

7. Inflation of balloons and rubber screens, on which faces will be drawn, accompanied by inscriptions: duration, 35 seconds.

8. A funeral procession: hearse pulled by a camel, etc.: duration: 6 minutes. Written titles: 1 minute.  

Scenes four, five, and seven relate to multiple elements in the vertical list of shots in Duchamp’s note describing the use of “rubber screens” includes a “balloon blown up slowly which bursts,” a “water spout,” and “backgrounds of soles of feet…5 or 6 pair.”

Discrepancies, such as the number of pairs of feet in scene five, suggest that Duchamp’s note predates Picabia’s written scenario, perhaps originating from earlier conversations between the two artists.

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138 Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 196. Another shot described in the same note (“The garden globe, the distorting mirrors. 2 mirrors one opposite the other, multiplying the movements to infinity”) resembles a scene in another film created by Man Ray, Emak Bakia (1926).
Another of Duchamp’s notes points to Duchamp’s involvement possibly extending to Picabia’s set design for the ballet. The long note that begins “use 2 projections 1 behind 1 in front of the screen” includes the proposal of “Many – car headlights (real) turned toward the audience – in colors and very strong.” This would point to another expansion of Duchamp’s role in the project and support Baker’s claim elsewhere in his study, of a close coordination between the design of the film and the design of the ballet. “This site-specificity [within the ballet] was crucial to the film,” Baker argues, pointing to the use of the roof of the ballet theater as the setting for the early scene in the film, where Man Ray and Duchamp play chess, the presence of the lead male dancer, Jean Borlin, as an actor in the film, and other deliberate continuities between ballet and film.

Another idea included in Duchamp’s note, reading “seasick….Double exposure,” may refer to the doubly exposed scenes of a paper boat appearing to float over the Paris rooftops. If this note similarly documents an early iteration of Picabia’s design before filming of *Entr’acte* began, the role of projected images in the ballet would appear to have been reduced and simplified for the final version. Duchamp’s note goes on to describe the use of two projectors, one in front of and one behind the screen providing an alternative means to create visual effects. Rather than double-exposing the film itself, the back and front projections would overlay on the screen. As Duchamp specifies later in the same note, “continuous mixture of 2 or several films (by mixing the photos of one with those of the other).” He also imagines having the screen set up “on a pivot” so that it

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could turn and manipulate the film that way. Duchamp describes the effect as “El Greco characters,” likely referring to the elongation of the projected image as it landed on the angled surface of the screen.\footnote{Duchamp, \textit{Marcel Duchamp, Notes}, pl. and trans., 190.} In light of these proposals for a screen that would be a significant element of the set design, the references in the other note to “Screens in rubber, canvas and other materials[,] rubber so that it can be deformed – by blowing it up, pressing at certain places from behind” also read as alternate proposals for a projection screen in the set design for \textit{Rêlache}.

In the context of Dada cinema, these proposals are not surprising. That is to say, the proposals conform to Man Ray and Picabia’s own approaches to filmmaking in the period, which emphasize the performative context over specific formal characteristics of the film itself. As Thomas Elsaesser has written, “What was Dada in regard to cinema was not a specific film, but the performance, not a specific set of techniques or textual organization, but the spectacle.”\footnote{Thomas Elsaesser, “Dada/Cinema?,” in \textit{Dada and Surrealist Film}, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 19.} Both \textit{Retour à la Raison} and \textit{Entr’acte} were commissioned for specific viewing contexts, that of the Dada soirée and that of the modernist ballet, respectively, taking film out of the increasingly-standard setting of the darkened theater. “At a time when the cinema had become itself a thoroughly respectable (and ‘institutionalized’) form of entertainment, both film text and viewing context had to combine in order to defamiliarize the occasion, in order to recapture the cinema’s ‘excremental’ age of scandalously guilty innocence.”\footnote{Ibid., 20.}
Elsaesser’s assertion that Dada cinema engaged the viewing context in order to “recapture” a previous, vanishing experience of the cinema is echoed by other accounts of the films of the European avant-garde. Tom Gunning and Noël Burch, for example, associate *Retour à la Raison, Entr’acte*, and other films of the early 1920s with the spectatorial mode of early cinema, which Gunning designates the “cinema of attractions” and Burch, “primitive cinema.” The Lumière brothers’ actuality films, Méliès’s fantastical scenarios, and the Edison Company’s travelogues, though diverging in subject matter, share a common approach to the spectator, emphasizing the visual astonishment of optical effects over narrative continuity and cinematic “realism.” For Burch, the latter characteristics comprise the “Institutional Mode of Representation” that would come to dominate Hollywood film.

For Elsaesser and others discussing Dada cinema, the films of Dada-affiliated artists, including *Retour à la Raison, Entr’acte*, and even *Anemic Cinema*, pursue this strategy of “defamiliarization” and seek to “recapture” an earlier experience of cinema to “deconstruct” and even “mock” the dominant commercial cinema of their day. “Entr’acte works hard at ‘deconstructing’ what had already become set as the conventions of the feature film and the cinema experience. It mocks the solemnity of state-occasions as they might have been presented in contemporary newsreel.” *Anemic Cinema* takes aim at the cinematographic apparatus, according to Elsaesser, parodying

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146 Ibid.
and contravening its visual effect. “The synchronization of two machines: the recording camera and the revolving motor that spins the disks…produce endlessly closed circuits. Useless energy has been transformed into semiotic energy, via punning and mirroring effects, and the film—referring the spectator to the apparatus that makes its effect possible—reveals itself as peculiarly auto-erotic.” “The cinematic machine has become a bachelor-machine,” Elsaesser concludes, referencing the faulty, non-reproductive character of the Bachelor Machine in the lower pane of Duchamp’s *Large Glass*.147 Recently, Andrew Uroskie has extended this reading to include all of Duchamp’s Precision Optics works, characterizing the revolving disks in *Rotary Glass Plates* and *Rotary Demisphere* too as “thinly veiled explorations, critiques, and transformations of [the cinematographic apparatus].”148

Duchamp’s opticeries and notes for film offer a different perspective on his filmmaking in the 1920s and “Dada Cinema.” For Duchamp, if perhaps not Man Ray or Picabia, making films that disorient the viewer did not initially offer a critique of period filmmaking, emerging instead out of his pursuit of four-dimensional vision.149 As previously noted, Duchamp identified gravity and bodily orientation in three dimensions as a hindrance to the construction of four-dimensional vision: “Gravity is not controlled physically in us by one of the 5 ordinary senses. We always reduce a gravity experience

147 Ibid., 24.
149 Craig E. Adcock (*Marcel Duchamp’s Notes for the Large Glass*, 187) has previously drawn a connection between Duchamp’s notes for films and his pursuit of four-dimensional vision, based not on their disorientation but on the visual effects of “double exposures’ and ‘dissolving views’” as “references to the inevitable interpenetrations and superimpositions involved in the projection of four-dimensional configurations.”
to an auto-cognizance, real or imagined, registered inside us in the region of the stomach.”\(^{150}\) The creation of conceptual analogies, in other words, is not enough to disrupt a deep-seated anchor in three-dimensional space. This is why Duchamp constructed *Rotary Glass Plates* in 1920 and why he began making, or planning, his first cinematographic films.

Significantly, Duchamp’s use of film to instigate four-dimensional vision did not isolate or sideline him from more “mainstream” avant-garde filmmaking of the 1920s, far from it. The relationship between the notes for films and films like *Retour à la Raison* and *Entr’acte* suggest that Duchamp’s pursuit of disruption as a means of to construct a new kind of vision corresponded with, and may have directly correlated with, Man Ray and Picabia’s own approaches to film that similarly sought to exploit the moving image to provide new sensations and experiences to the viewer.

Awareness of and interest in Duchamp’s experimentation with film and “optical machines” reached beyond Parisian avant-garde circles. The first published photograph of *Rotary Demisphere* appears in a special issue of the German avant-garde journal *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung* (*G: Materials for Elemental Form-Creation*) devoted to film. Founded in Berlin in July 1923, *G* was among the most significant of the interwar avant-garde journals with an editorial staff that included Hans Richter, Raoul Hausmann, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Werner Graff. The film issue, the journal’s last in April 1926, was edited solely by Richter, an artist who had participated in the Dada groups in Zurich and Berlin before devoting himself to filmmaking in the early

\(^{150}\) Duchamp, *WMD*, 87.
1920s. Beginning around 1919, Richter and the Swedish-born artist Viking Eggeling had sought the development of a “universal language” of abstract forms. As Richter later recalled, “The basis for such a language would lie in the identical form of perception in all human beings and would offer the promise of a universal art as it had never existed before.”¹⁵¹ Employing musical analogies to conceptualize the dynamics and durational character of this language, Richter and Eggeling first created abstract progressions on long scrolls and eventually turned to cinematographic film to animate their designs, in partnership with the German film company Universum-Film, A. G. (UFA).

The G film issue promoted cinema as a kinematic art medium divorced from the standard narrative features resulting from commercial exploitation. “Film does not yet exist—just a perverse anomaly of photograph literature!” an editorial on the opening page announces. Designating the realization of this kinematic art the “Absolute film,” it continues, “The absolute film opens your eyes for the first time to what the camera is, can be, and wants! Object, meaning, and plot are comfortable concessions to the after-dinner nap in the orchestra seats. Wake up, finally!”¹⁵² This programmatic text, probably written by Richter, establishes an oppositional relationship between the absolute film and


standard commercial film but for reasons exceeding simple “Dada” antagonism. “Only a new generation, the most recent,” the editorial argues, “has begun to work methodically with film as an independent art. The general and characteristic features of these works is a new optical attitude. Film has added a new dimension to the optical consciousness of today’s humans, a dimension that reveals the uniform shape of things through the constant change in their form.”

Richter evidently perceived a relation between his own views and Duchamp’s approach to cinematographic film. Richter’s conclusion makes this clear: “A young generation….is beginning to discover…film as the realm of a space-time consciousness, as an unknown and rich force.” Overlooking significant deviations in the filmmaking practiced by this “young generation,” texts included in the issue mention Duchamp alongside Man Ray, Fernand Léger, René Clair and Picabia, Sergei Eisenstein, Walter Ruttmann, Alberto Cavalcanti, Viking Eggeling, and Richter himself. The cropped black-and-white photograph of *Rotary Demisphere* appears at the end of an article by Georges Antheil, who wrote the score for Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy’s 1924 film *Ballet Mécanique* (Fig. 2.33). In the experimental graphic design of *G*, this proximity

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155 [Richter], untitled editorial, 206.
156 On the contrast between Richter’s editorial and the texts included in the issue, see chap. 3, n. 22.
suggests no explicit relationship between the article and image. To its right, another article reprints an excerpt from a Berlin newspaper about a French researcher who claims that all life comprises “waves of various lengths,” without stipulating the nature of these waves. “The shorter the wave, the higher the order of creature,” it concludes.\textsuperscript{157}

Only a short caption accounts for \textit{Rotary Demisphere}’s appearance in this context, reading, “Marcel Duchamp, le plus parisian, used this device—a moving disk of concentric circles that produces spirals as it rotates—to record a short film.”\textsuperscript{158} The short film referenced appears to be the experimental anaglyphic short of \textit{Rotary Demisphere} that Duchamp attempted with Man Ray in 1925, but confusingly implies that \textit{Rotary Demisphere} is a recording device, not the subject of the film. It seems likely that Richter, or whoever wrote the caption, had not seen \textit{Rotary Demisphere} in operation or viewed the film. Instead, Man Ray may have acted as the intermediary. The issue includes two rayographs likely provided by Man Ray himself. One appears on the page opposite the \textit{Rotary Demisphere} image.

Although the reference is somewhat muddled, the inclusion of Duchamp’s “optical machine” in \textit{G}’s film issue demonstrates the heterogeneity of media in the early years of avant-garde cinema. As I explore at greater length in the following chapter, social, political, and economic developments in the later 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s transformed how we see these films. The circulation of film prints in standardized theatrical settings inscribed the films into the context of filmmaking, magnifying their

\textsuperscript{157} [Richter], untitled editorial, 206.
\textsuperscript{158} [Richter], image caption, in Mertins and Jennings, \textit{G}, 218. The English translation leaves “le plus” untranslated.
perceived relationship to one another and their antagonism toward the commercial films shown in those same settings. Thomas Elsaesser points to film’s potential for promiscuity as a central reason that “film [was] a less than perfect medium at Dada events.” “The conditions of a reception in the cinema—the dark room, the stable rectangle of the screen, the fixed voyeuristic position of the spectator—all counteract not only the sense of provocation, but they also compensate for the absence of a coherent diagesis and for the non-narrative organization in the filmed material. Under normal viewing conditions, that is, in a movie theatre and not as part of a performance aspiring to the conditions of a happening, Dada films such as *Entr’acte*, *Ballet mécanique*, or Hans Richter’s works are almost inescapably contained, unified and finally recuperated.”\(^{159}\)

*Anemic Cinema* shared this fate. Duchamp debuted the film in a private Paris screening room on August 22, 1926, possibly projecting it onto the mirrored glass he had designed several years prior.\(^ {160}\) Duchamp then brought the print with him when he sailed to New York in October, a trip made in order to transport and install a gallery exhibition of work by his friend, the sculptor Constantin Brancusi. Once he arrived, Jane Heap, co-editor of *The Little Review*, sought to arrange a public premiere for *Anemic Cinema* in a theatrical film setting.\(^ {161}\) The artist explicitly rejected the idea, citing as an excuse the


\(^{160}\) See Henri-Pierre Roché, diary entry, August 30, 1926, folder 12, Roché Papers. The notation “Synchronisme–en haut [upstairs]” suggests the screening facility may have belonged to Charles Delacommune’s film company Synchronisme Cinématique, distributor of *Ballet mécanique*, known to have shared that address by 1928. Thanks to Jennifer Wild for this address reference.

\(^{161}\) Jane Heap had previously commented upon Duchamp’s *Monte Carlo Bond* in *The Little Review* ([Jane H[earp], “Comment,” *The Little Review* 10, no. 2 (Autumn 1924/Winter 1925), 18-19], and reproduced a Man Ray photograph of Duchamp’s
film’s French “captions,” meaning the inscriptions on the textual discs. They are half of
the film, he explained, “cannot be translated,” and are in some cases “obscene.”

“Privately I’ll do all you want (!!!),” he assured her.162 Indeed, Duchamp would organize
two private showings of the film in New York, the second primarily for Heap’s benefit.163

The presentation of the film on standard screens there, though still private,
prepared the film’s subsequent theatrical circulation in the context of avant-garde cinema.
As it began screening widely around mid-century, *Anemic Cinema’s* material constitution
as a film print consigned it to spaces, both physical and discursive, apart from Duchamp’s
*Large Glass* and Precision Optics works. Although obviated in recent years by the
emergence of digital file formats and projection technologies, the lighting demands of
avant-garde film prints historically relegated them to darkened theatres, excluding them
from the galleries where paintings, sculptures, and other works by the same artists

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162 Marcel Duchamp to Jane Heap, [ca. October 1926-March 1927], box 6, folder 25,
Little Review Records, 1914–64, Milwaukee MSS EX, University of Wisconsin-
Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department (hereafter cited as Little Review Records).
163 The first screening took place on December 22, 1926, at the Fifth Avenue Playhouse,
66 Fifth Avenue. See entries for August 30, 1926, and December 22, 1926, in Gough-
Cooper and Caumont, “Ephemerides on or about Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy
1887–1968,” n.p. Gough-Cooper and Caumont misidentify the venue as the “Fifth
Avenue Theater,” a theater located at 31 West 28th Street. The Fifth Avenue Playhouse
was a “little cinema” that opened in November 1926 directly below the offices of the
modernist magazine the *Little Review*. Duchamp showed the film at least one more time
in New York between January 27 and February 24, 1927. That screening occurred in a
rented room at Miles Studio, 130 West 46th Street. See Duchamp to Jane Heap, undated
appeared. For many artists’ shorts, including Anemic Cinema, theatrical projection and programming had the effect of exaggerating continuities with other film experiments of the interwar avant-garde and their critical response to the commercial films of the period.

For Elsaesser, this transit from Dada event to darkened theater represents something of a failure for Dada Cinema. Duchamp’s consistent attempts to site kinematic motion outside the darkened theater throughout the 1920s provide an alternative view of Dada Cinema. Duchamp’s interest in the creation of a four-dimensional, eroticized vision merges with a Dada cinema of provocation, while remaining resolutely private and situational. Throughout both the Precision Optics and his notes for cinematographic films, Duchamp sustains his interest in non-standard projection screens. As we have seen, in one of the posthumously published notes, Duchamp imagines a projection surface that would “turn on a pivot.”¹⁶⁴ In another, he describes “screens in rubber, canvas and other materials[, the] rubber so that it can be deformed—by blowing it up, pressing at certain places from behind.”¹⁶⁵ Duchamp’s desire to project Anemic Cinema and other films onto free-standing or pliable screens eludes the existing interpretative paradigms for Dada cinema. Anemic Cinema is neither “anti-cinema” nor evidence of Duchamp’s disinterest in contemporary developments in the medium. This gives new significance to the credits that appear at the end of Anemic Cinema. The inscription “Copyrighted by Rrose Sélavy 1926” might seem a straightforward parody of the credits appearing in period silent films, but in the context of Duchamp’s experimentation with the cinematic dispositif, it would also appear to credit Rrose Sélavy as the inventor of her own four-

¹⁶⁴ Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 190.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 196.
dimensional erotic “cinema” or vision machine. Duchamp even inscribed Rrose Sélavy’s name into the wood surface of the German-made camera used to shoot the film (Fig. 2.34). More than a claim to ownership, it reads there as a substitute trademark or brand—a Rrose Sélavy movie camera to rival those of Lumière or Edison.166

In this sense, Rrose Sélavy’s cinema may best correspond to the desire among some in the Parisian avant-garde for a production and display format other than the increasingly popular film “palaces” and their alternatives, the new independent cinema houses that had taken the place of the “soirée” and ballet settings of earlier Dada cinema. Richard Abel has documented the emergence of this “alternate system of exchange more or less independent of the dominant film industry” in the mid-1920s comprising an “interrelated network of ciné-clubs, specialized cinemas, exhibitions, and conférences.”167 In the face of these developments, Duchamp’s friend Robert Desnos, a poet affiliated with the Paris Dada group and later surrealism, called for an entirely


different kind of cinema. Writing in the daily newspaper Paris-Journal in April 1923, Desnos castigated a recent feature film celebrated by many in the independent and avant-garde network, Abel Gance’s La Roue. “It is discouraging to see foolish sums of money swallowed up for imbecilic popularizations like La Roue and not have any money at all available to tempt the desire of those whose freedom of mind is great enough to allow full license to the filmmaker.”168 He continued:

I have already said how I deplore the fact that eroticism is prohibited [in existing cinemas]…. Couldn’t we therefore establish a private cinema where films that were too bold for the ordinary public would be screened? In every age, innovators have been hounded by their contemporaries. The painter and the writer are able to consecrate themselves in obscurity to superior tasks. Can the cinegraphist ever escape the prison of antiquated ideas? Will the cinema perish for lack of these eccentricities in which I continue to see only genius? One of my friends once imagined the existence of someone who would dedicate his fortune to the maintenance of an experimental laboratory of this kind. Will we one day encounter this millionaire, in the showy title of bacon or steel king, who would favor such a laboratory?”169

It is unknown if Desnos was referring specifically to Duchamp/Rrose Sélavy’s film experiments, funded by the millionaire Jacques Doucet, but Desnos was closely following Duchamp’s work at the time. Beginning in October 1922, Desnos himself had

adopted the Rrose Sélavy persona for a series of proto-surrealist séances, emitting his own puns and spoonerisms in a trance-like state. In 1925, he would seek to display *Rotary Demisphere* in a surrealist exhibition he was co-organizing with André Breton, a request Duchamp denied through the work’s then owner Jacques Doucet. It is tempting to see the eroticism of *Anemic Cinema* as coincident with the “private cinema” Desnos advocated. For a time, with Doucet’s funding, Duchamp had successfully maintained the “experimental laboratory” Desnos sought, dedicating himself to the “eccentricity” of a four-dimensional cinema.

Duchamp would create a film specifically for standard theatrical distribution and projection, but that film was not *Anemic Cinema*. Some two decades later, in late 1945 and early 1946, Duchamp designed and co-directed the three-minute long dream sequence *Discs* for inclusion in the narrative feature film *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. Despite theatrical screenings in the United States and abroad in the later 1940s and early 1950s, and occasional revivals in the decades since, *Discs* is virtually non-existent in the critical literature on Duchamp. In the following chapter, I present *Discs* as a significant later invention in the artist’s cinema. Unlike his earlier production, the dream sequence, I argue, engages directly the format of the theatrically projected film print, developing a critique specific to mid-century cinema yet prepared by the 1920s avant-garde.

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170 Marcel Duchamp to Jacques Doucet, October 19, 1925, in Duchamp, *Affectionately, Marcel*, 142. See n. 100 above.
CHAPTER 3: Anemic Cinema Twenty Years Later

During the winter of 1946 Marcel Duchamp created a short film sequence, returning to the medium for the first time since Anemic Cinema twenty years prior.\(^1\) The

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\(^1\) The dream sequence is not granted an entry in the most recent update of the Duchamp catalogue raisonné. See Schwarz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, vol. 2 (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997). The artist’s first formal catalogue raisonné, published in 1959, lists under the reproductions section of the Rotoreliefs entry: “The Rotoreliefs were also used by Hans Richter in his film Dreams That Money Can Buy (1946–7) [sic] where they were reproduced in color.” Robert Lebel, Marcel Duchamp (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 173. This is no doubt a result, in part, of an erroneous attribution in the film itself. The end credits list the seven artists’ episodes jointly as “dreams based on suggestions, drawings, and objects by,” followed by individual credits cards for each sequence and its associated artist. This implies that the dreams were inspired or informed by the artists but created independently by Richter and his crew. Though perhaps accurate for some dream sequences in the film, the credit is incorrect for Discs. Both Duchamp and Richter later attested to Duchamp’s role in the design and direction of the original sequence. Duchamp also made other uncredited contributions to the film as well, addressed in this chapter.

Duchamp wrote a statement confirming his design of the sequence in 1947, following accusations of plagiarism directed at Richter: “The collaboration with Richter took place under the sign of friendship and this collaboration mainly consisted of a ‘carte blanche’ to each of the artists in his episode. As to me, I was delighted to have worked with Richter, with the ‘gangster’ who dreamed my sequence and with John Cage who put it to music.” Quoted in Herman G. Weinberg, “The Cult of Glibness in Film Criticism,” 6a, Hans Richter Archive, C.XV.1, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (hereafter cited as MoMA Archives, NY). This manuscript was revised, translated into French where necessary, and published as “Le culte de la platitude dans la critique cinématographique,” La Revue du Cinema 3, no. 171 (September 1948): 54-58. In later interviews, Richter explicitly credited Duchamp with the conception of the “Rotoreliefs,” “nude descending,” and “falling coal over nude” sequences and described the artist “directing” the nude descending and coal scenes. See Richter, “Hans Richter,” in Peggy Guggenheim and Her Friends, ed. Virginia M. Dortch (Milan: Berenice Art Books, 1994), 90; and Gideon Bachmann and Jonas Mekas, “From Interviews with Hans Richter during the Last Ten Years,” Film Culture 31 (Winter 1963–64): 31. Duchamp, when asked in a 1954 interview if he had, as rumored, ceased all artistic and literary activity after 1923, replied in the negative, referring the interviewer to his “cinematographic
three-minute sequence, titled *Discs*, opens with color footage of a single optical disk isolated against a black velvet background, centered and unmoving (Fig. 3.1). After five seconds, it cuts to a black-and-white shot of a nearly nude woman descending a staircase, filmed with trick lenses (Fig. 3.2). The disruption is brief, and the film resolves back to shots of disks, now spinning. These are interrupted by three more staircase scenes. In each, the same woman begins an identical descent of the stairs; in the final two, her image mingles with footage of coal blocks cascading vertically down a wide chute (Fig. 3.3).

The sequence clearly reprises elements of *Anemic Cinema*: it repeats *Anemic Cinema*’s central motif of spinning optical disks; in many shots it mimics the precise framing of the earlier film; it also parrots the structure of *Anemic Cinema*, repeatedly interrupting the optical disks with contrasting scenes over a total duration that roughly corresponded to that of *Anemic Cinema* (before a late reshoot and edit that cut the sequence to its current length). The two films are far from identical, however. *Discs* employs Duchamp’s color optical disks of 1935, the *Rotoreliefs*, which were based on, experiences, among others *Anemic Cinema* and the sequence of the film by Richter *Dreams That Money Can Buy* based on my roto-reliefs of 1936.” Marcel Duchamp, “Dans l’atelier de Marcel Duchamp,” interview by Michel Sanouillet, *Les Nouvelles Artistiques*, December 16, 1954, 5. During a public lecture in 1961, Duchamp stated: “Richter asked Max Ernst, Fernand Léger, Man Ray, [Alexander] Calder and myself, to give him a personal motif to be adapted to a collective theme about the dreams of seven different types of human beings.” Duchamp, “Dreams That Money Can Buy,” manuscript of a lecture accompanying a screening of the film at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, December 4, 1961, box 2, folder 18, Alexina and Marcel Duchamp Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives, 1. He added, “Richter and I worked together on the composition of this short sequence [*Discs*].” Ibid., 3.

As I discuss at greater length below, Duchamp left New York in May 1946 for an extended visit to Paris, and Richter evidently reshoot part or all of the nude descending footage in his absence.
but different from, those he made in the 1920s and featured in *Anemic Cinema. Discs* also makes use of new color and sound technology unavailable at the time of *Anemic Cinema*, including an original score by the young American composer John Cage. Its camera work is more varied, mixing the fixed framing of *Anemic Cinema* with close-ups and jump cuts, and interpolated scenes replace the French puns inscribed on spinning disks in *Anemic Cinema* with the footage of the woman and falling coal. Perhaps most important, *Discs* is not a short film made for private viewing.

Duchamp created *Discs* to serve as a dream sequence within *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, a feature-length narrative film made for limited commercial release in the United States. Directed and co-produced by Hans Richter, another recent émigré to New York, *Dreams* integrates Duchamp’s short and six others “based on drawings, objects, and suggestions” by Man Ray, Max Ernst, Fernand Léger, Alexander Calder, and Richter himself within a Hollywood-style fantasy narrative. The protagonist, Joe, is a returning GI who discovers a new ability to “see” dreams, both his own and those of others.

Struggling to pay his rent, he decides to open a small office selling dream views to

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paying clients. One by one, customers enter his office, introduce themselves, and, with Joe’s assistance, begin dreams that feature some element or reference to existing works of modern art with minimal explanation. The first client, a timid bank clerk, dreams in images adapted from Max Ernst’s 1934 collage novel *Une semaine de bonté*; the second, a young woman, envisions a musical sequence with dancing mannequins and an animated cardboard mock-up of Fernand Léger’s painting *Julie, la belle cycliste* (1945). The third dream, belonging to the wife of the bank clerk, adapts the photograph *Ruth, Roses, and Revolvers* (1942–44) by Duchamp’s longtime friend Man Ray and an associated pseudoautobiographical text of the same title. Richter’s dream, the last of the seven in the film, belongs to Joe himself. His skin turns blue, after Richter’s painting *Blue Man* (1917), and he is ostracized by a group of peers.

*Discs*, the fourth dream, belongs to an unnamed criminal character who barges into Joe’s office wearing handcuffs and demands to see a dream that will “tip off who will win the derby this year.” The artwork references of his dream are manifold: the disks and overall structure of the sequence recall *Anemic Cinema*, while the staircase sequences allude to Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, at that time the artist’s most recognizable work (see Fig. 0.8). The coal evokes Duchamp’s installation design at the Paris International Surrealist Exhibition in 1938, where he suspended empty

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5 The expansion of Duchamp’s authorial role in *Dreams That Money Can Buy* beyond *Discs*, argued below, raises the possibility of the framing dialogue (“who will win the derby”) referencing yet another work by the artist: *Monte Carlo Bond* (1924).
coal bags from the ceiling, a more obscure reference for American audiences (Fig. 3.4). Offering no predictions for the races, the dream disappoints the gangster. After the sequence concludes, he pulls a gun on Joe, and, receiving approval from a nearby policeman, knocks him unconscious.

In past studies of Dreams, commentators have focused on this art historical citation in Discs and the other artist episodes, cynically reading it as a self-serving attempt at popularization and commercialization or more generously as an elegy for an avant-garde past foreclosed by the war or reflection of the disjointed temporalities of wartime exiles. Discs constitutes more than a pastiche of past works, however. In this chapter, I read Discs as a complex response to the transformations in avant-garde and commercial film cultures in the twenty years since the creation of Anemic Cinema, one

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6 For more on Duchamp’s installation design and the 1938 Surrealist exhibition, see Michael R. Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009), 32–38; and Lewis Kachur, Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 68–77. The “coal bag” installation design would have been familiar to some American viewers from its replication for “Night in a Surrealist Forest,” a Salvador Dalí–designed benefit held at the Hotel Del Monte in Monterey, California, in 1941, which was attended by Hollywood celebrities and widely reported. See Kachur, Displaying the Marvelous, 161–63; and Paramount News, Dizzy Dali Dinner (Del Monte, California, 1941), 50-second newsreel.

that addresses contemporary models of cinematic spectatorship distinct from those employed by *Anemic Cinema* and the 1920s avant-garde.8

As discussed in chapter two, Duchamp’s filmmaking in the early 1920s developed out of attempts to create a four-dimensional optics in the *Large Glass* and was similarly oriented around the individual experience of four-dimensional space. Duchamp filmed his spinning optical disks for small, private demonstrations, like the one at which he debuted *Anemic Cinema* in August 1926. Rapid social and technological changes in the later 1920s and early 1930s, however, brought *Anemic Cinema* and other early avant-garde films to new screening contexts and audiences not foreseen at the time of their creation.

The Berlin-born artist and filmmaker Hans Richter is central to this story. Richter, through his promotional activities, in *G* and elsewhere, was among the avant-garde’s most prodigious “artist-impresarios,” Noam Elcott’s designation for a figure typical of the interwar period. He was, much like others Elcott names—Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, and Lásló Moholy-Nagy—“not simply an artist but a compiler, popularizer, theorist, collaborator, educator, experimenter.”9 In 1925, Richter helped organize a pioneering survey of avant-garde filmmaking at the UFA Palast cinema in Berlin.

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Nominally devoted to the “Absolute Film,” the program included Richter’s own Film ist Rhythmus (incorporating footage that would he would later reassemble as Rhythmus 21 and Rhythmus 23) alongside other early “abstract” films, such as Viking Eggeling’s Diagonal-Symphonie and Walter Ruttmann’s Opus 2, Opus 3, and Opus 4. As Phillippe-Alain Michaud notes, the survey’s organizers conceived the “absolute film” broadly enough to include Ballet mécanique and Entr’acte.10 Though Duchamp performs a small role in the latter film, his own experimental films remained at that time private and did not screen in Berlin. When he completed Anemic Cinema the following year, he continued to restrict viewings to invited audiences.

Richter interceded by acquiring a print of Anemic Cinema and orchestrating a public screening at the Stuttgart Film und Foto exhibition in June 1929, likely with Duchamp’s tacit approval if not his direct participation. This is believed to have been Anemic Cinema’s public debut. Richter curated a total of fifteen programs at a commercial theater located near the exhibition venue. He showed Anemic Cinema after a feature film, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1919), and Richter’s own avant-garde short, Ghosts before Breakfast (1928).11 The inclusion of Duchamp’s film made

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11 Richter screened Anemic Cinema in Stuttgart under an alternate title, Spirals (Spiralen), suggesting he may have removed the introductory card with the film’s original title. For a reconstruction of the fifteen programs Richter curated in Stuttgart, from June 13 to June 27, 1929, and the critical response, see Helma Schleif, ed., Film und Foto: Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbunds, Stuttgart 1929; Rekonstruktion Des Filmprogramms (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, 1988). Georges Sadoul later recalled a public screening of Anemic Cinema at Paris’ Studio des Ursulines theater in February 1928, pre-dating Stuttgart (“Souvenirs d’un Témoin,” Études
little impact in press coverage of the programs, but proved significant in the film’s reception in the 1930s and 1940s. Richter’s print likely traveled to film clubs in Geneva, Switzerland, and elsewhere over the following decade.\(^\text{12}\) Julien Levy, an American friend of both Duchamp and Man Ray, acquired another print and screened *Anemic Cinema* at his New York Gallery in the 1930s as part of his pioneering but short-lived attempt to create a collector’s market for artist’s films.\(^\text{13}\) Most important was the MoMA Film Library’s acquisition of a 35mm nitrate print directly from Duchamp in 1938.\(^\text{14}\) *Anemic Cinema*’s arrival at MoMA made it the first work by Duchamp, in any medium, to enter a museum collection; it also made an artist-authorized print available to programmers across the United States and Canada through the film library’s lending program. With the postwar growth of museum film departments and university film programs reliant upon on lending libraries, MoMA’s print of *Anemic Cinema* circulated widely throughout the

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\(^{14}\) The museum had coordinated with Duchamp to acquire the film in 1936 for the exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* and noted its inclusion in the exhibition catalogue. An unknown problem with the shipment, evidently overseen by Man Ray, delayed the print’s arrival for some two years. See Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 241-42; Marcel Duchamp to Man Ray, August 25, 1938, in Duchamp, *Affectionately, Marcel*, 216-17.
latter half of the twentieth century and continues to facilitate screenings and exhibitions of the film today.\footnote{For more on the central role of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library in postwar American film culture, see Decherney, 123-60; and Wasson, 149-93.}

Duchamp largely orphaned *Anemic Cinema* in these years, excluding it, for example, from the catalogue raisonné he assembled as a boxed edition of replicas and reproductions in the mid-1930s.\footnote{The Boîte, formally titled *De ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rrose Sélavy*, contains miniature replicas and reproductions of sixty-nine works in total and was initially conceived by Duchamp as “an album of approximately all the things I produced” (Duchamp to Katherine S. Dreier, March 5, 1935, in Marcel Duchamp, *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk, trans. Jill Taylor (Amsterdam: Ludion Press, 2000), 197). Though many works by the artist were excluded from the collection, *Anemic Cinema* is perhaps its most significant omission. Duchamp presumably could have made frame enlargements from his personal print of the film, believed to have remained in his possession through the 1930s.} The so-called *Boîte-en-Valise* (1935-41, Fig. 3.5) contains other manifestations of his “precision optics” experiments, including photographs of his two “optical machines,” *Rotary Glass Plates* and *Rotary Demisphere*, and an optical disk, but not one that appears in *Anemic Cinema*. In 1935, Duchamp had created twelve new color designs, many of them based on the black-and-white disks that appeared in *Anemic Cinema*. Unlike the originals, these were mass produced printed visual amusements that he patented for commercial sale under the name *Rotoreliefs*. Each set sold with a small guide written by Duchamp instructing owners to mount the approximately eight-inch wide disks on their spinning phonograph platter in order to “give the illusion of relief.”\footnote{Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, vol. 2 (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997), 729.}
Duchamp would re-encounter *Anemic Cinema* in the 1940s, again through Richter’s intervention. Both artists fled wartorn Europe for New York, Richter in 1940, Duchamp in 1942. Duchamp initially lived in a spare bedroom at Peggy Guggenheim’s townhouse and then, in October of 1942, moved to a room in the penthouse of Frederick Kiesler, the Austrian émigré architect and theorist who had designed the interior of Guggenheim’s *Art of This Century Gallery*.\(^{18}\) Richter, who had an on-off friendship with Kiesler, frequently visited his home and could have re-connected with Duchamp there if not at Guggenheim’s new gallery or frequent parties. Though they had met previously in Paris, it was in New York, Richter later recalled, “when [they] belonged to the same club” of European exiles, that the “friendship really started.”\(^{19}\)

Within a few months of Duchamp’s arrival, Richter sought his consent to include *Anemic Cinema* in *Hans Richter’s Film Festival*, a compilation of avant-garde shorts packaged for American audiences that he was working on.\(^{20}\) Duchamp evidently attended a live test-screening orchestrated by Richter at MoMA in May 1943. Afterward Duchamp

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\(^{18}\) Duchamp rented the room from Kiesler from October 2, 1942 to October 1, 1943.


\(^{20}\) Richter acknowledges Duchamp’s consent in a letter to Man Ray, November 16, 1942, Man Ray letters and album, 1922-1976, II.2.14, GRI, Accession no. 930027. Richter requested Man Ray’s permission to include a copy of the 1928 short film *Étoile de Mer* and the artist’s participation in the creation of an introductory frame. Richter’s letter makes clear that Duchamp was instrumental in the project already at this early moment: “Cher ami, - Marcel just left me and gave me your address, so finally I can write to you.” Duchamp and Man Ray had met in New York in 1915 during Duchamp’s first visit to the United States. Duchamp had been instrumental in Man Ray’s relocation to Paris and the two maintained a close friendship and collaborative relationship in the intervening years. Duchamp remained in France for two years longer than Man Ray, sailing for New York via Lisbon and Morocco in June 1942.
borrowed a camera and started shooting again for the first time since 1926. The following year, Richter too began plans for a new film, debuting three years later under the title *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. Duchamp’s film, an untitled color sequence of spinning Rotorelief discs, was never released and is now believed lost, but directly anticipates his contribution of a Rotorelief dream sequence to Richter’s *Dreams That Money Can Buy*.

In this chapter, I document the interrelated development of Duchamp’s Rotorelief film and Richter’s feature-length film using a range of newly available and previously unpublished archival sources. More than twenty treatments and scripts in collections in the United States and Germany clarify how Duchamp’s contributions to the project changed as Richter developed *Hans Richter’s Film Festival* into *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. Ultimately, I argue, Duchamp designed his sequence in response the recasting of avant-garde cinema by leftist film theorists in the 1930s, which he encountered belatedly through Richter’s pursuit of a socially-responsible “progressive cinema” in *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. Duchamp’s sequence deviates, however, in significant ways from Richter’s “progressive cinema,” offering a related but ultimately divergent theorization of the film medium that prompted a series of related works by the artist in other media over the course of the later 1940s.

It is important to note that documentary material provides only a partial view into the interrelated genesis of Richter and Duchamp’s projects. None of the treatments or scripts for Richter’s films are dated and many of them are unsigned and untitled. This makes precision in dating and in attribution impossible. Richter worked with multiple collaborators. In addition to writing partners, Richter relied on transcribers to type the
treatment manuscripts. It is likely that two of these transcribers, Herman G. Weinberg and Joseph Freeman, both practiced screenwriters, typed virtually all the manuscripts and included many of their own ideas. Distinguishing their contributions from those of Richter and the other collaborators is also not always possible. Nevertheless, by supplementing the project materials with a range of related materials and textual analysis, I propose a likely chronology, tentatively attribute authorship in many cases, and narrate the progress of the project over three distinct stages: the “film festival” (1942-43), an intermediary narrative-compilation hybrid, *The Movies Take a Holiday* (1943-44), and finally *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1944-47). The stages of the film project are documented in multiple drafts representing distinct sub-stages. I differentiate among these sub-stages when necessary by reference to the original titles given on the drafts or, in the case of untitled manuscripts, an invented alphabetical sequence (A, B, etc.). Orthography present in the original manuscripts has not been altered or standardized.

### The Struggle for the Film

Duchamp’s political orientation and disengagement from avant-garde film culture after the mid-1920s precluded his contribution to Leftist film debates of the later 1920s and 1930s. He would encounter them only after immigrating to New York and reconnecting with Richter there. Richter had continued making films and become a major theorist of Left filmmaking as Duchamp retreated from the medium in the 1930s. As the economic crisis deepened and the National Socialists gained power in his native Germany, Richter brought the formal experimentation of the 1920s avant-garde to a
social activist mode of filmmaking. Moving between Holland, France, and Switzerland in political exile throughout the later 1930s, he produced commissioned industrial films advocating a techno-utopian position and wrote and lectured on the need for a cinema that was not only formally innovative or contrary to commercial film but also “socially responsible” to fight against regressive political movements. In a manuscript titled “Der Kampf um den Film” (“The Struggle for the Film”), unpublished during his lifetime, Richter developed his ideas in a history that emphasized modes of filmmaking he called “progressive cinema,” which, while entertaining a mass audience, also alerted viewers to deleterious social and political conditions and activated in them a critical response.21

Richter had begun this shift already in the late 1920s.22 At FiFO, in 1929, he presented the avant-garde experiments of the past decade together with other historical


22 There is evidence that Richter’s orientation had already begun to shift by the time he edited the special film issue of G in 1926. As Edward Dimendberg has observed, Richter’s own editorializing in the issue promotes avant-garde oppositionality and exclusivity but some of the writings he selected for inclusion present contrasting perspectives. See Edward Dimendberg, “Toward an Elemental Cinema: Film Aesthetics and Practice in G,” in G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926, ed. Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Steven Lindberg and Margareta Ingrid Christian (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 64: “Richter’s
and contemporary currents in cinema forming a tripartite alliance of film art. The fifteen programs addressed three areas: “master works of cinematic production,” “advances of the avant-garde,” and “soviet features and documentaries.”

Richter elaborated in a book he authored to coincide with the Stuttgart exhibition, titled *Filmgegner von heute—Filmfreunde von morgen* (*Films Enemies of Today—Film Fans of Tomorrow*). He united the formal experimentation in the avant-garde with that in soviet feature and documentary film and in cinematic production more broadly as attempts to move beyond the “action and observation” of conventional narrative film and toward a “true poetics of film…rely[ing] exclusively on the imagination.” “Action becomes irrelevant,” he insisted, “It will either disappear, or only play a menial role. There will be no intentions to produce ‘the most detailed and complete image of an event.’” As Esther Leslie observes, Richter’s book promoted the use of “tricks of slo-mo, speed-up, dismissal of the film audience as superfluous might well be a…gesture to retain the purity of an avant-garde practice untainted by the pressures of commercialism, bourgeois philistinism, or mass popularity…. [but] the articles in the issue treat a range of contemporaneous films noteworthy for their simultaneous aesthetic achievements and commercial success.” An essay by L. Hilberseimer, for example, celebrates Charlie Chaplin for “liberat[ing] film from the sphere of banal amusement” and critiques the incursion of the “l’art pour l’art attitude that has held painting in its spell for several generations” into film, appearing to address directly the filmmaking of the artistic avant-garde. (“Do Not Read Banned Film!,” in Ibid., 234) An excerpt from *Vossische Zeitung* celebrates *Battleship Potemkin* as “the best film,” listing its positive qualities as “masses,” “no star,” and “true history.” (“The Mobile Painting,” in Ibid., 238).

23 “Die Stuttgarter Sondervorführen der Werkbundausstellung ‘Film und Foto,’” Lichtbild-Bühne 22, no. 143 (June 6, 1929); trans. in Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919-1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 144.

superimposition, lens distortion, animation,” ultimately asserting that “it is the camera as box of tricks that makes film an artform,” over any conception of a partisan film avant-garde outside the commercial or educational realms.25

Hints of a social program also emerge in Richter’s 1929 text. Filmmakers had a responsibility, he argued, to the “film fans….people [who] need stimulation and distractions because they struggle with so many difficulties in real life yet are still left dissatisfied.”26 “One could lead them into wrong, meaningless, or meaningful directions. One could betray and intoxicate them, or open their eyes, encourage them, educate, help them develop their most precious instincts.”27 The Struggle for the Film, written after the Nazi Party’s rise to power and Richter’s vocal anti-Nazism led to his exile, elaborated and extended these ideas, promoting a vision of film as an instrument in the fight against authoritarian fascism on the one hand and exploitative capitalism on the other.

Richter still considered film to be a powerful communication medium but increasingly feared the threat of its exploitation by capitalist and nationalist interests. “Cinema,” he declared, “is the product of a highly developed, ultra-highly specialized technology” calibrated “to reach the masses and to reach them everywhere.”28 Part of this technology, in addition to international distribution channels and standardized projection formats, is the “optical language” of montage, which makes “abstract notions concretely

27 Ibid.
28 Richter, The Struggle for the Film, 39.
visible in the image.”²⁹ The popular orientation of these technologies, in contrast to traditional “bourgeois” media—painting and sculpture—constituted both a latent promise and persistent threat to Richter. Focusing on montage specifically, he emphasized the “unprecedented possibilities…of dealing with the most profound ideas in such a way that they will be understood and remembered by the simplest intellect.”³⁰ At the same time, “because [film] is a power [in the beliefs of the masses], the different forces of our period are struggling with one another to control it, to infiltrate it and to lend it their coloration.”³¹ Mainstream commercial cinema, or “official cinema” in Richter’s terminology, represents the interests of the industrialists who own the means of production. “Logically, they cannot and will not propagate ideas in their field that might endanger the continued existence of a situation favourable to them.”³² Instead of exposing the social, political, and economic forces affecting spectators’s lives, they favor a “Sunday-school morality” that mystifies their condition, creating obstacles to collective action.³³

Walter Benjamin, in his better-known 1930s theorization of film, similarly described the “capitalist exploitation of film,” whereby “the film industry has an overriding interest in stimulating the involvement of the masses through illusionary displays and ambiguous speculations.”³⁴ Benjamin recommended as a solution the

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²⁹ Ibid., 77–78.
³⁰ Ibid., 162.
³¹ Ibid., 39.
³² Ibid., 97.
³³ Ibid., 86.
compulsory restructuring of the means of film production, writing, “The expropriation of film capital is an urgent demand for the proletariat.”

Richter, who was in close contact with Benjamin at the time and clearly endorsed Benjamin’s critique of industry-made films, did not share Benjamin’s faith in the proletariat, echoing Theodor Adorno’s famous critique of Benjamin’s essay. In private correspondence, Adorno commented on an early draft, recommending the “complete liquidation” of “any appeal to…the actual consciousness of actual workers.” He argued that the masses upon whom Benjamin relied “have absolutely no advantage over the bourgeois except their interest in revolution,…otherwise [they] bear all the marks of mutilation of the typical bourgeois

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35 Ibid.

character.” Instead of appealing to the innate class consciousness of workers, Adorno directed Benjamin to address the role that intellectuals can play in the empowerment of the working class. “The proletariat…needs us for knowledge as much as we need the proletariat to make the revolution.”

Though likely unaware of Adorno’s critique at the time, Richter voiced the same concern. Sensitive to technical and social obstacles in film production from his work as a director, Richter warned that proletariat audiences would not immediately be able to use film capital to their advantage and would first need substantial “activation.” Richter conceived this “activation” in the dramaturgical terms of the Marxist playwright and theorist Bertolt Brecht, with whom both he and Benjamin were in contact during the 1930s. Brecht advocated an “epic theater” that “arouses [the spectator’s] capacity for action” in the place of the conventional “dramatic theater” that “implies the spectator in a stage situation [and] wears down his capacity for action.” Instead of becoming “involved” in an emotional plot, the spectator should be “made to face something,” “brought to the point of recognition” of a social and economic reality that been

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38 Adorno to Benjamin, March 18, 1936, in Taylor, Art and Politics, 125.
39 Richter explicitly refers to Brecht twice in The Struggle for the Film: 139, 147.
concealed. 41 In The Struggle for the Film, Richter argued, “The aim of the progressive cinema is to bring the spectators into conscious contact with reality and to put into their hands or their heads the means whereby they can recognize their real interests and act accordingly…to intervene actively in the consciousness and emotional life of its spectators (but not to cloud their judgement).” 42

By what formal means does one accomplish this in the cinema? Richter cast the 1920s avant-garde as a cautionary lesson, rather than a way forward. Films like Entr’acte, and presumably Anemic Cinema as well, had sought to break the illusion of “official cinema,” according to Richter, but in doing so, they had abandoned the mass audience. As he explained in The Struggle for the Film, “A social content that had lost all claim to consideration was replaced by a lyrico-anarchistic content apparently without any socially definable content at all.” 43 “The avant-garde represented an attempt to explode a stagnant form of the cinema…[that] met little response from [mass] audiences.” 44 Richter nevertheless recognized historical value in its experimentation, attributing to it the revelation of “the inadequacy of the spirit conveyed by the conventional cinema and the form by which it conveyed it,” even if the avant-garde’s cultural elitism limited its impact to “only…a part of the audience.” 45

To avoid this mistake, Richter demanded compromise on the part of the film artists of the avant-garde and on the film industry. “The cinema is the product of a social

41 Ibid.
42 Richter, The Struggle for the Film, 131.
43 Ibid., 119.
44 Ibid., 60.
development that cannot be transformed or determined by artists or individuals alone,” he reasoned. For its part, “the cinema has…already grown too large and ponderous, its social ties are too strong for it to be able to leave the plane of mere entertainment all at once.”

Ultimately, he implied, the ideal solution is a partnership of the two. By working with and within the film industry, the artist could engineer a quasi-illusionistic dramaturgy that would both entertain and edify a mass audience. Audiences do not want the “illusion broken,” but they do “wish to be able to maintain the latent awareness that this reality,” their lived experience, “is reality, and no illusion.”

Richter called this ideal state of activation the “double attitude,” which “enables viewers to maintain their receptivity and even their capacity for working through [the action on the screen] even as they give in to the illusion.” Brecht advocated a similar technique, writing that theater should remain “a piece of fun,” but that “a certain unreality, irrationality and lack of seriousness should be introduced at the right moment, and so strike with a double meaning.”

As Miriam Hansen has argued, Benjamin’s critique of industrial capitalist media placed him at odds with the cultural platform of the Popular Front, the political anti-fascist alliance between moderate democrats, socialists, communists and others on the left, advocated by the Communist International beginning in 1934 and broadly adopted by the Comintern World Congress in August 1935. In some ways, Richter’s “progressive cinema” represented a similar departure from the Popular Front. Like Benjamin, he refused to limit himself to an anti-fascist position, directing his ire against industrial

46 Ibid., 85.
capitalist exploitation as well. Furthermore, where the Popular Front scorned the avant-garde in favor of documentary and poetic realism, Richter embraced a more pluralist approach that integrated modernist formal experimentation and Brechtian dramaturgy with mass-oriented industrial filmmaking. At the same time, Richter’s desire to reform the film industry and move away from the insularity of the avant-garde, no doubt prompted by his personal experiences as a filmmaker, placed him closer than Benjamin was to the Popular Front position.

*Dreams* was the first feature film Richter completed after writing the text, and though his political and cultural situation had significantly changed in the move from Zurich to New York, he aimed both to exemplify and broadcast his proposals for a progressive cinema. He was working at the margins of the American commercial film industry, but Richter nevertheless sought to reach its mass audience, embracing narrative devices and character tropes familiar to American filmgoers. He modeled Joe’s office and customers directly after the noir films of the period. The noir-like narrative and dream sequences would, however, deliver a “double meaning,” instructing viewers on the advantageous alliance of modern art and industry. Joe sells the art-based dreams to paying customers suffering maladies that Richter and others on the left associated with capitalist and fascist modernity, from the banker’s repressed sexuality and the gangster’s police-sanctioned violence to the collective vilification of Joe based on the color of his skin. That is to say, *Dreams*’s development, from Richter’s emigration through its release


50 Many commentators have remarked on the noir tropes in *Dreams*. See, for example, Berger, “The Moving Canvas,” 152.
in 1948, shows a continuation of Richter’s earlier advocacy, a film at once resulting from and articulating his personal vision for the medium.

“Film Festival”

Richter had sought to create a feature-length film demonstrating his theory of “progressive cinema” almost immediately upon his arrival in New York. In Switzerland, he had presented his manuscript material in lecture series at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich and at the Amateur Film Club in Basel, illustrating them with short films and clips from his personal collection. In New York, he planned to continue these lectures without his film collection, which he had to leave behind. He did eventually lecture at several local institutions, including Sarah Lawrence College and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, but struggled with his limited English and the absence of the films and soon sought alternative means to present his ideas on cinema to American publics.

In 1942, Richter invited Herman G. Weinberg, a local film programmer and subtitler, to help translate his manuscript for publication. At the same time, he worked with Iris Barry, curator of the MoMA Film Library, to arrange the importation of his film collection from its storage in Basel. Richter and Weinberg produced a draft of a

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51 Richter worked with Barry under the pretense that the films would be deposited at MoMA. See Richter to Barry, July 22, 1941, “Richter, Hans, file 1/2, A-57, 1936–1969,” Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center, New York (hereafter FSC). Barry requested the assistance of the Rockefeller Foundation, who, in turn, recommended Milton R. Hartmann, a filmmaker in Berne, to manage the shipment. The Archives of the MoMA Film Study Collection include an inventory in Richter’s hand among correspondence
proposal for an English language version, bearing the title *Film and Progress*, and contracted with a local literary agency but could not find an interested publisher.\(^{52}\)

Instead, when his film collection arrived in New York in September 1942, Richter and Weinberg worked to assemble them into a compilation presenting ideas from *Film and Progress* through the films in his collection, with a promise of a screening venue at New York’s World Theatre.\(^{53}\)

There are three different versions of this compilation film. The first is the live test, the content of which is documented on a series of index cards and notes. The second and third take the form of draft screenplays, one titled *Hans Richter’s Film Festival* and the

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\(^{52}\) See “Film and Progress,” folder 9, box 1, Hans Richter Papers, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Manuscript is stamped “Barthold Literary Agency.” Also Hans Richter, “Description of the Project” manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.XII. 3, MoMA Archives, NY. Richter would continue pursuing publication throughout the 1940s, possibly for a period under contract with Yale University Press. See Hans Richter to Jay Leyda, February 9, 1944, box 7, folder 27, Jay Leyda and Si-Lan Chen Papers and Photographs, Jay and Si-Lan Chen Leyda Papers and Photographs, TAM 083, box 7, folder 27, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University. The publication did not materialize until after his death. Late in life, he created a condensed version of the German manuscript, resulting in the posthumous 1976 publication and English translation in 1986.

\(^{53}\) A brief note in the *New York Times* on October 7, 1942, announced that the World Theatre had “acquired for presentation this season a group of abstract and experimental short subjects made during the Nineteen Twenties by advance-guard film producers.” (“News of the Screen,” *New York Times*, October 7, 1942, 35.) The list of films corresponds with Richter’s Berne inventory. “Some of the pictures are silent and currently being prepared with sound,” the *Times* reports, adding, “The management also is negotiating for Joris Ivens’s ‘Rain’ and Man Ray’s ‘Star of the Sea.’”
other titled Magic Lantern Film Festival. Richter seems to have produced Hans Richter’s Film Festival, at least in part, for the World Theatre and privately screened it for a local film distributor. For an unknown reason, the promised World Theatre screening never took place and Richter failed to secure a distribution contract.

“Film Festival” Live Test, May 25, 1943

Richter orchestrated the “live test” for his new film at the Museum of Modern Art in May 25, 1943, an event sponsored by the New York Institute of Film Techniques at the City College of New York, where he had been hired as an instructor in 1942. He created the presentation, personally mailed the 200 invitations, and helped write the introductions, but suppressed his role at the advice of Joseph Freeman who had worked in public relations. Freeman had counseled him to foster the impression that the event was organized by the museum. Richter ultimately asked Freeman to host the evening, and to read from notes that he and Weinberg had dictated to him. This initiated the collaboration between Richter, Weinberg, and Freeman that would continue through the production of Dreams That Money Can Buy.

Freeman’s handwritten notes, preserved on index cards in his personal papers, offer a view of a program that loosely but directly corresponds to ideas articulated in The

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54 Hans Richter to Joseph Freeman, May 6, 1943, box 34, folder 10, Joseph Freeman Papers, Hoover Institution Archives (cited hereafter as JFP). “No mentioning of my name in the invitations, so that the m. of modern art remains the sponsor of everything as your [sic] advise!?”

55 Hans Richter indicates that Richter and Weinberg would dictate the script in his letter to Joseph Freeman, May 6, 1943, box 34, folder 10, JFP.
Both Freeman’s lecture and Richter’s manuscript present the avant-garde as a brief, heroic movement that

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56 As documented in Freeman’s handwritten notes, preserved on index cards in his personal papers, the program consisted of two parts, a didactic oral lecture and the screening of the films and film fragments from Richter’s personal collection. “Avantgarde Film Festival, Museum of Modern Art, Tues-May 25, 1943,” 30 cards in card file (numbered 1-29 with non-numbered title card), box 133, JFP. The Joseph Freeman Papers also includes an untitled alternative version of the lecture text in Freeman’s hand (box 59, folder 3). The lecture evidently began with an introduction to film as a world historical event. After a few welcoming remarks, Freeman announced that in the twentieth century, the industrial revolution’s “transformation of life becomes profoundly apparent” (card #5). The notes outline these changes in a numbered list: “1. Western civ.[ilization] spreads over entire earth. 2. Secular knowledge replaces relig.[ious] knowledge. 3. Science transforms every aspect of our life. 4. Advances in Science: Quantum theory, theory of relativity, atomic theory, cosmic rays, psychoanalysis” (card #5a). This brought a “revolt in all the arts against the past, the prescientific world, the outmoded heritage,” manifesting in music as a “revolt [against] tonality, harmony, melody,” in architecture as “functional[ism],” and in “the film: a new instrument of unbounded possibilities” (cards #6a and #7). This framing corresponds with the first part of *The Struggle for the Film*, subtitled “The Cinema as a Product of the Twentieth Century,” in which Richter draws a similar historical connection between film and industry: “As industry developed, it needed more and more labourers, giving rise to vast accumulations of proletarians in over-crowded industrial ones. These masses lacked appropriate places of entertainment, and the cinema met their aesthetic demands, their desire for spectacle, entertainment and instruction.…In this fact lies the responsibility that the cinema owes to the masses who entrust themselves to it” (Richter, *The Struggle for the Film*, 39).

Freeman went on to introduce the idea of “avant-garde film,” in similar terms as those employed in *The Struggle for the Film*. He explained, “World War I [was] followed by the greatest changes in human life—perhaps the greatest in all history” (card #7). The notes read: “Between the armistice and 1929—surging of social forces—search for new ideas—an art dynamics corres[ponds] to life dynamics,” an “enormous development of the commercial film” and the rise of Avantgarde, an independent, experimental film movement which flourished between 1921 and 1931” (cards #7 and #8). Freeman then defined the avant-garde for unfamiliar American audiences: “1. The ONLY independent art movement in the film. 2. Analogous to similar movements in the plastic arts…3. NON-COMMERCIAL---NON-REPRESENATIONAL***INTERNATIONAL” (card #9). In *The Struggle for the Film*, Richter writes, “The spirit of the avant-garde…was the spirit of modern painting and literature. Coming from this background, the avant-gardists attempted to set cinematographic technology against the vulgar naturalistic theatricality of the fiction film” (Richter, *The Struggle for the Film*, 59).
was largely ineffective. Freeman’s notes add further economic, technological, and political reasons for this conclusion: “End of the Avantgarde: 1. Economic crisis. 2. Sound film arrives: too costly for independent experimenter. 3. Rise of Fascism: the central historic issue of this period. 4. Avantgarde sees issue: some enter commercial film, others the documentary film/ the film as social weapon.” 57 Like The Struggle for the Film, Freeman’s lecture ends with a look to the future of cinema. On a notecard headed, “The Future,” he writes, “Effect of Avantgarde on commer[ial] films—Fantasia, Citizen Kane, boundless possibilities, presence of Avantgarde HERE, a new generation out of war—dawn is tomorrow.” 58

After the lecture concluded, the organizers screen the compilation of shorts from Richter’s collection. The sequence is documented in the notes of an attendee, the German author and critic Siegfried Kracauer, a longtime friend of Richter who had recently immigrated and become a scholar-in-residence at the MoMA Department of Film. 59 The program of fifteen films and film fragments began with a silent black-and-white short made in France representing narrative cinema before the First World War, then referred to as Edouard, the Noble Beggar and Bettlerstolz, but now known as Poor but Proud (1907), followed by: Richter’s Rhythmus 21 (1921), Viking Eggeling’s Diagonale Symphonie (1923), Walter Ruttman’s Lichtspiel Opus (c. 1921-1925, fragments); Duchamp’s Anemic Cinema, Richter’s Film Study (1926), Fernand Léger’s

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57 Joseph Freeman, card #20, box 133, JFP.
58 Joseph Freeman, card #22, box 133, JFP.
Ballet mécanique (1924, fragment), Francis Picabia and Rene Clair’s Entr’acte (1924, fragment), Richter’s Vormittagsspuk (1928), Man Ray’s Etoile de mer (1928, fragment), Herman Weinberg’s Autumn Fire (1931), Jean Renoir’s Fille de l’Eau (1925, fragment), Alexandre Alexeieff’s Die Nacht auf dem Kahlen Berge (1933), and Oskar Fischinger’s Study no. 7 (1931). The program concluded with Richter’s own Everything Turns—Everything Revolves (1929).

Duchamp and Kiesler also attended the MoMA screening and both responded by creating new films. In a letter to his friend Jay Leyda, Richter recounted the screening and added “as a result 3 people are making A.G.[avant-garde] films today: Duchamps [sic], Dwinell Grant, the painter, and of course the all important Kiesler, who wants to make an arriere-garde film.”60 The Duchamp film he refers to is the new short film of the Rotoreliefs, which Duchamp began work on immediately with the assistance of the young American artist and photographer David Hare.61 Duchamp announced the project to Man Ray in a letter, dated July 20, 1943: “I’m making a short film, 16mm, in color, about my Rotorelief disks. I’ve borrowed a Bell and Howell. I plan to make 3 copies and then, if I can market the idea, have a Technicolor version made in 35mm.”62 Stefanie Kiesler’s diary records screenings on July 11 and July 15, suggesting that Duchamp completed and projected some version of the footage, but there is no evidence of sale or distribution and

62 Duchamp, Affectionately, Marcel, 236-237.
Duchamp’s *Rotorelief* film is now believed lost.\(^6^3\) It is nevertheless significant as Duchamp’s first attempt to update *Anemic Cinema* for the modern American audience of Richter’s film. After viewing *Anemic Cinema* again at the MoMA screening, Duchamp apparently sought to eliminate the original’s French title and phrases, which, as he had written to Jane Heap in 1926, were untranslatable, and to remove the title and credits cards.\(^6^4\) Richter’s added frame would have introduced the title and creator of each short instead.

The Kiesler film to which Richter refers cannot be identified. Kiesler’s archives include screenplays and storyboards for two undated film projects, which bear no obvious connection to the MoMA screening. Both Kiesler and Duchamp were, however, involved in the creation of another film later that summer, *Witch’s Cradle*, directed by Maya Deren.\(^6^5\) Deren has recently moved to New York from Los Angeles, where she had made her first experimental short film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, with her husband Alexander Hammid. *Witch’s Cradle*, though never finished, featured a performance by Duchamp, who was then living in Kiesler’s penthouse, and largely took place in Peggy

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Guggenheim’s new *Art of This Century* gallery, which Kiesler had designed the previous year.\(^{66}\) The footage that survives in the collection of the Anthology Film Archives, New York, consists primarily of outtakes and runs approximately twelve minutes. Duchamp sits at an outdoor terrace playing the children’s string game known as Cat’s Cradle; in other scenes, the string loops around the interior of the Guggenheim gallery surrounding a young woman, played by the artist Patricia Matta Clark. Duchamp reappears there and is pictured with the string moving up his pant leg and around his neck.

As Sarah Keller has noted, Deren’s use of the string in the gallery is an apparent allusion to Duchamp’s so-called *16 Miles of String* installation design for the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition at New York’s Whitelaw Reid Mansion the previous year.\(^{67}\) According to Deren biographers Vèvè Clark, Millicent Hodson, and Catrina Neiman, Kiesler’s design for *Art of This Century* “inspired” Deren in the writing of the shooting script, which describes six sequences titled, “Brevoort and Terrace,” “Alive String,” “String Travel,” “Plunge and Animation,” “Idol Sequence,” and “Balloon, Birds, Eye.”\(^{68}\) Stefi Kiesler’s diary documents his presence during the filming.\(^{69}\) It is not known if Frederick Kiesler’s involvement extended beyond this and if *Witch’s Cradle* could be the “arriere-garde” film prompted by his attendance at Richter’s screening; his and Duchamp’s participation in *Witch’s Cradle* nonetheless demonstrates the renewed

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\(^{66}\) Though the film remained unfinished, frame enlargements appeared in the *View* special issue on Duchamp. See *View: The Modern Magazine*, Series V, no. 1 (March 1945), 34.

\(^{67}\) Keller, *Incomplete Control*, 64-65.


interest in filmmaking among Duchamp, Kiesler, and others in the artistic circle around Richter and Guggenheim’s new gallery in the summer of 1943.

“Film Festival” Scripts, Summer 1943

After collaborating on the test at MoMA, Freeman and Richter created two screenplays from the notes, one titled Hans Richter’s Film Festival and the other Magic Lantern Film Festival, with an alternative working title, Adventures of the Magic Lantern—Ten Films Showing 40 Years of Motion Picture Development. The chronology of the two drafts is unclear. Each exist in duplicate, a typescript by Freeman and a copy hand-annotated by Richter. The content of the printed intertitle cards in the Hans Richter Papers closely resembles that of Hans Richter’s Film Festival suggesting that it was this version of the script that Richter ultimately produced and screened for a potential distributor in July 1943.

Both screenplays adapt the basic format of the MoMA program, replacing the live M.C. with a narrator. Hans Richter’s Film Festival closely follows Freeman’s lecture notes with additional verbal elaboration and visual elements illustrating the points. The narrator interjects commentary before and during the shorts. In Magic Lantern Film

70 There are two copies of each script. In both cases, one copy is located in the Hans Richter Archive at MoMA and the other copy is located in the Joseph Freeman Papers at the Hoover Institution. “Hans Richter’s Film Festival,” [Film Festival], 7-page manuscript, box 59, folder 3, JFP; “Magic Lantern Film Festival,” [Film Festival], 6-page manuscript, box 59, folder 3, JFP. “Hans Richter’s Film Festival,” [Film Festival], 7-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.11, MoMA Archives, NY.; “Magic Lantern Film Festival,” [Film Festival], 6-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.11, MoMA Archives, NY.

71 See thirty-two intertitle cards, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.13, MoMA Archives, NY.
Festival, likely a second or alternative draft of the project, this narrator appears as an embodied character in the film. He wears a costume and whiskers in an opening shot and introduces himself as “the announcer of nickelodeon times.” In that era, “Grandiose films…were shown at fairs and in barns, seven or eight for a nickel…The audience often hooted and asked for their money back, because they didn’t [sic] always understand what our pictures were about.” The narrator introduces the social and technological developments that helped to create the cinema of the present. As Richter had declared in The Struggle for the Film, “I believe that it is easier to grasp the spirit of contemporary cinema and to assess its developmental possibilities if one returns to the sources from which it sprang. One can only understand the current form of the cinema if one realises what difficulties had to be overcome to reach it.” Richter’s substitution of a live narrator suggests a growing dissatisfaction with the didactic lecture format, which would compel subsequent reinventions of the project as The Movies Take a Holiday and later Dreams That Money Can Buy.

The Movies Take a Holiday, Version A

Richter showed a version of his “Film Festival” to a distributor, Irving Shapiro, in a rented screening room at New York’s Premiere Theater on July 8, 1943. Shapiro evidently rejected the film, though he would later return to it as Dreams That Money Can Buy’s domestic distributor. Nevertheless, Richter remained committed to the project,

72 Richter, The Struggle for the Film, 65.
73 Hans Richter to Joseph Freeman, July 3, 1943, box 34, folder 10, JFP.
identifying a new partner in Brandon Films by September. At this point, he adopted the new title, *The Movies Take a Holiday*, which appears on one screenplay and a partial set of intertitle cards, as well as two treatments. The screenplay and intertitles belong to a first version of *The Movies Take a Holiday*, referred to here as *Movies A*, likely dating to late summer 1943. The two treatments outline a second version, *Movies B*, believed to date sometime between the fall of 1943 and summer of 1944.

*Movies A* is similar to *Hans Richter’s Film Festival* with a few important deviations. It too adopts its didactic narration from Joseph Freeman’s MoMA lecture and repeats many lines featured in both the lecture and *Hans Richter’s Film Festival*. This version is explicitly credited, listing the “text and musical setting” as being by Herman G. Weinberg and Hans Richter in collaboration with Joseph Freeman. As suggested by the title, however, *The Movies Take a Holiday* takes a much oppositional tone in its stance towards what Richter had called “official cinema” than the previous versions had.

*Movies A* presents the avant-garde shorts as a “holiday” from commercial cinema, rather than a viable alternative or critique. “The machine age influenced all the arts,” the commentary begins, and lists, “Music, literature, painting,” with accompanying images of

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74 “The Movies Take a Holiday” [*Movies A*], 8-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.11, MoMA Archives, NY; “The Movies Take a Holiday” [*Movies A*], 14 intertitle cards, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.12, MoMA Archives, NY. The 8-page manuscript can be dated via the reference to Brandon Films, a short-lived distribution deal made in fall 1943. See Hans Richter to Joseph Freeman, October 7, 1943, box 34, folder 10, JFP.

75 “The Movies Take a Holiday” [*Movies B*], 26-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.11, MoMA Archives, NY; “The Movies Take a Holiday” [*Movies B*], 12-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.12, MoMA Archives, NY. These manuscripts would have been completed by fall 1944, when Richter reconceived the project by deciding to join his old film fragments with those of new films and re-titled the project *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. See below.

76 “The Movies Take a Holiday” [*Movies A*], 8-page manuscript, 1.
a musical score, James Joyce’s Ulysses, and “8 to 10 modern paintings, filmed in color.” 77 “And the movies?” the narrator asks. “Once upon a time they too felt the modern breath. They became bored with routine storytelling. They wanted a holiday from ‘Edouard, the Noble Beggar’ and all the variations of it, even the best ones.” He locates the moment when the “holiday began” as 1921, when Richter and Viking Eggeling “made the first experimental films.” 78 That began a “period when cinematic excursions into the ‘never-never-land’ flourished” that lasted less than a decade, he explains, concluding with the “coming of sound” in 1929. After screening the shorts, the narration concludes, “The end? Not quite…” to be spoken over the final funeral sequence of Entr’acte. “The end of the holiday—yes. But there will always be poets.” The implication, that the avant-garde had failed to accrue a mass public but could inform new industrial filmmaking, matches the conclusion of The Struggle for the Film, but the language is far less critical of contemporary popular cinema.

The Movies Take a Holiday, Version B

The two treatments, one twelve pages, the other twenty-six, belong to an entirely different imagining of The Movies Take a Holiday and mark the first significant departure from the lecture format. This version of The Movies Take a Holiday, referred to here as Movies B, features the same short films from Richter’s personal collection but replaces the lecture format with a narrative. Both drafts of Movies B are located in Richter’s

77 Ibid., 4.
78 Ibid.
papers at MoMA Archives and feature corrections in Richter’s hand. Richter attributed the twenty-six-page treatment to Herman Weinberg in an inscription on the first page. It is likely that Weinberg wrote the initial drafts alone and gave them to Richter for commentary. The writing took place at some point between fall 1943 and the summer of 1944. After the agreement with Brandon Films dissolved, Richter pursued private funding from his friends Peggy Guggenheim and Kenneth MacPherson. The $7,500 they committed to the project apparently encouraged Richter to rethink the project and, with Weinberg, write the more ambitious narrative frame of Movies B. However, in late 1944, he also used a portion of this funding for another project, creating an independent short film with Fernand Léger. He never completed that film and instead incorporated the unfinished footage into a later version of the feature-length film, then titled Dreams That Money Can Buy.

While version B of The Movies Take a Holiday never made it to production, it began a period of some two years of intensive work on treatments and scripts that eventually produced Dreams That Money Can Buy. Elements of Movies B persist into the finished version of Dreams, the most important of which is an increasing emphasis on the psychotherapeutic role of film over its role as a vehicle of socio-political reform. In The Struggle for the Film, Richter had explicitly conjoined the two, conceiving film as a

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79 By September 1944, Richter had decided to change the project to include new shorts, a shift from The Movies Take a Holiday A and B. See Dorothy Norman, “Democracy on Celluloid,” New York Post, magazine and comic section, September 5, 1944, n.p.
mirror to social and economic conditions and their resulting neuroses. This likely originated in his dialogue with Benjamin, who developed an elaborate theory of film’s relationship to psychoanalysis in his discussion of the “optical unconscious” in the “work of art” essay. There he described the optical unconscious as “another nature which speaks to the camera [but not] to the eye.”\textsuperscript{81} “It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis,” he argued.\textsuperscript{82} “Moreover, these two types of unconscious are intimately linked….Many of the deformations and stereotypes, transformations and catastrophes which can assail the optical world in films afflict the actual world in psychoses, hallucinations, and dreams.”\textsuperscript{83}

Benjamin explicitly connected these psychoses to labor conditions and located film’s revolutionary potential in its ability to protect against their ill-effects, immediately adding, “If one considers the dangerous tensions which technology and its consequences have engendered in the masses at large—tendencies which at critical stages take on a psychotic character—one also has to recognize that this same technologization has created the possibility of psychic immunization against such mass psychoses.”\textsuperscript{84} Richter’s “progressive cinema” adopted this idea of film offering psychic immunization against mass psychoses. However, beginning with \textit{Movies A}, and continuing with the successive drafts of the project, Richter increasingly disassociated the idea of immunization against mass psychoses from a critique of capitalist modernity. As I discuss later, this

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{81} Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” 37.  
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 38.  
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.}
reconciliation may have been a practical decision on the part of Richter, either to improve the prospects of the film’s distribution in an increasingly censorious wartime context or to preserve his then status as a German-born temporary resident in the United States. However, it seems more likely that the shift reflected a genuine ideological shift on Richter’s part. As with other European left intellectuals in American migration, Richter’s experiences in the United States and commitment to the ongoing fight against Nazism appears to have moderated his political orientation, bringing it more in accordance with Popular Front antifascism.

The Movies Take a Holiday, version B transforms elements from the narration of version A to create a scenario in a projection booth with a Hollywood film producer, “Mr. Jordan,” his wife, his production partner, “J.D.,” two writers, and a projectionist, “Joe.” The dialogue remains fairly didactic, with the Hollywood producer acting as the foil to one of the writers, who takes over the role of the narrator in explaining the idea of a “different kind of movie” to the producer.

The film opens on the projection booth where the last scene of the producer’s current film is screening. The footage shows a “clinch,” or embrace, between a boy and girl. After the screening ends, the producer is dissatisfied with the film, despite protests from the film’s writer that “it’ll gross a million.” “That’s just it,” the producer explains, leveling Richter’s indictment of “official cinema”: “Maybe I have enough dough, I don’t know—I’ve had enough of this…You don’t stimulate me—it’s always the same story and

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85 “The Movies Take a Holiday: Synopsis of Treatment” [Movies B], 26-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.11, MoMA Archives, NY.
always ends the same way.”

Beyond the lack of stimulation, the producer implies the films are actually degrading. “So I’ve made a fortune at it—so what? My wife has to go to a psychoanalyst and me—what can I do? I can’t play pinochle, I don’t drink—I can’t go to the psychoanalyst!” This is the first mention of psychoanalysis, which returns again later in the script and would take on greater significance in *Dreams That Money Can Buy* where the protagonist performs the role of a psychoanalyst eliciting and interpreting dreams.

The producer fires the film’s writer and calls in a writer visiting from the east coast. The latter is likely modeled on Joseph Freeman, who had spent time in Hollywood in the early 1940s trying to get left-leaning films made with little success. The writer sarcastically refers to the producer as “sire” and “your majesty.” He proposes “some ideas for making different kinds of movies” and then screens examples that he has brought with him, which are actually the avant-garde shorts from Richter’s personal collection. “What I’m going to show you is that movies can be something else than boy meets girl, and vice-versa,” he tells the producer. The producer interjects that “when boy meets girl, it’s box-office!” implying that movies cannot be “something else” owing to financial demands. The writer surprisingly and erroneously responds with a defense of the shorts’s earning potential: “These films made dough too, plenty of it!”

After viewing *Diagonal-Symphonie, Rhythmus 21, Anemic Cinema, Hungarian Dance*, and *Film Study*, the producer becomes agitated and dismissive. The writer, voicing Richter’s belief in the need to educate and activate film viewers, insists, “As soon

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86 Ibid., 2.
as you understand the background of these films and how they came to be made, you’ll know what they are all about and why.”\(^{87}\) He then screens footage lifted from version A of *The Movies Take a Holiday* (itself adapting material from *Hans Richter’s Film Festival*) that presents film as a product of the “machine age” and the avant-garde as a cathartic response to mechanization and rationalization. They then screen more of the shorts, with brief dialogue—over or in between them—serving to explain and contextualize them.

Afterward, the producer remains doubtful that such films can appeal to audiences and asks the writer if any of them deal with love, “the thing that makes the world go round.”\(^{88}\) The writer explains that they do, that “some of the artists…suggest things in their films which you would never dare to do,” but that it remains on a subconscious level. He describes such films as “Freudian” and “psychoanalytic,” declaring, “It’s possible to depict love and sex on the screen in a new way, so that it arouses emotions in you which have been repressed.”\(^{89}\)

He then screens a series of these “Freudian” films, those from Richter’s own collection such as Man Ray’s *L’Etoile de Mer*, with a new addition in Maya Deren’s *Meshes in the Afternoon*. The producer asks the writer what his personal stake is in the films and the writer again verbalizes Richter’s own position, even though it makes little sense in the context of the narrative: “I’ve collected these films because I like them and I like the people who made them. Not one of them would have avoided a concentration

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 13
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 14.
camp if he were in Europe today. Hitler can’t stand free expression in art anymore than he can stand it anywhere else.” In this moment, the writer presenting ideas for films to the producer becomes a European film collector like Richter, casting the preservation of European avant-garde films in explicitly anti-fascist terms.

The sequence concludes in much the same way as the previous versions of the film. When the producer charges that his claims about the films are “speculation,” the writer issues a passionate defense of experimental film’s potential: “So what if you speculate? That’s how new things get done—by taking a chance. Where would science be today if it didn’t speculate by experimenting over and over again in its laboratories? They call it tests—you know, like a screen-test…” This statement pitches experimental film as a supplement to commercial film, rather than as a challenge or critique of it. “Every industry in the world depends on its test laboratories….Think of what modern artists could contribute to the color film—their great experience and talent hasn’t even been touched yet. And that’s only one example.”

Initially convinced by this argument, the producer promises to pursue this kind of film. However, the final scene shows him reverting to the usual Hollywood scenario. A screening of his new film begins with footage of a “clinch” between a boy and girl, implying that the entrenched forces of Hollywood industry would continue churning out the same identical commercial products despite the writer’s protests. The “clinch” was a longstanding emblem for Richter of Hollywood’s failure to address real social and

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90 Ibid., 20.
91 Ibid., 21. Suspension points in original.
92 Ibid., 22.
political concerns of its audience. He had presented it in this context as early as 1926, publishing a graphic representation of clinches in an attack on the convention in the special film issue of the avant-garde journal *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung (G: Materials for Elemental Form-Creation)* (Fig. 3.5). Neither version B, nor the narration-based A, was produced; Richter opted for a new fantasy-oriented narrative later that year, but the “clinch” remains a prominent image in this subsequent version.

Displeased with progress on the feature-length film and encouraged by Léger, whom Richter had met in Paris in the 1920s and reconnected with in New York, Richter decided to create a stand-alone short film with the funding he received from Guggenheim and MacPherson. As he later recalled, “I used to see Léger everyday [sic]. He told me, ‘You’re crazy! When you have the money, make a new film. Why do you want to show these old films? Leave them they are good by themselves.’ I thought it was a good idea and without telling anybody, I just started a new film.” Richter presents the new short as unrelated to his preceding work on *Movies*, describing it as the result of his and Léger’s joint walks around Manhattan where Léger was fascinated by shop windows displaying mannequins in bridal gowns. The short, which presents the courtship and marriage of two mannequins, however, is clearly also a product of Richter and Weinberg’s work on the treatment for the feature-length *The Movies Take a Holiday*. Richter employs new color film stock and works with a modern artist, which is the path to innovation described by the writer character in *The Movies Take a Holiday*. The short

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93 [Hans Richter], “Film is a Cultural Factor of the First Rank,” in Mertins and Jennings, *G*, 235.
film also articulates a critique of the role of love and romance in Hollywood films that is similar to that voiced by the writer. The precise nature of the planned short is unknown, however, as Richter subsequently reconceived his feature-length film to incorporate it, and reshotted and edited the footage to fit that new context.

**Dreams, Version A**

Archival documentation indicates that Richter did not, as he later claimed, abandon his compilation film while working on the Léger short. Instead, the work on the Léger short appears to have encouraged him to further expand the feature film with a more ambitious frame story for the collection of pre-existing short films. In November 1944, Maya Deren would identify this variation on the project with a new title, “Dreams That Money Can Buy.”[^95] At a later date, likely late spring 1945, Richter decided to combine this project and his footage for the Léger short, creating a compilation anthology film joining pre-existing shorts with newly filmed “episodes.”

This again marks a significant departure in the nature of the feature film. The previous versions, both in the original lecture-narration format and the subsequent narrative format of *Movies B*, had presented surveys of pre-existing short films exclusively. Each of the previous versions ended with a statement of purpose for progressive cinema, but as in *The Struggle for the Film*, implied that the entrenched interests of the film industry would impede its future development. Richter’s decision to

[^95]: Maya Deren, Grant application to the Guggenheim Foundation, November 1944, reproduced in Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds., *The Legend of Maya Deren*, 141. Deren’s participation in the project was evidently short lived.
integrate new shorts transformed the project. No longer simply a didactic adaptation of *The Struggle for the Film*, the project became an attempt to realize his progressive cinema, to create a film that embodies the characteristics that Richter had described in *The Struggle for the Film*.

While it was at this point in the chronology that the film obtained the title “Dreams That Money Can Buy,” this version was very different from the one that debuted in Venice in 1947. To distinguish between it and the subsequently released version of the film, I will refer to the former as *Dreams A*, and the latter as *Dreams B*. The first, *Dreams A*, presents a frame story for the same survey of historical short films present in *Film Festival* and *Movies A* and *B*. However, pencil notations on one of the treatments for *Dreams A* indicates Richter’s shifting plans and decision to film new sequences with Duchamp, Léger, and others, with the intention of adding them to the historical survey. *Dreams B* entirely abandons the survey aspect in favor of all new episode sequences.

*Dreams A* is documented in three treatments and related correspondence shared between the two primary authors, Hans Richter and Siegfried Kracauer, in late 1944 and early 1945.96 Richter had known Kracauer since the 1920s and developed a close

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96 Untitled [*Dreams A*], 11-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.33, MoMA Archives, NY; “Dreams That Money Can Buy Treatment” [*Dreams A*], 8-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.33, MoMA Archives, NY; “Dreams That Money Can Buy” [*Dreams A*], 11-page manuscript, 72.3687, KNDL. For relevant correspondence, see Hans Richter to Siegfried Kracauer, April 2, 1945, 72.2876/9, KNDL; Siegfried Kracauer to Hans Richter, April 4, 1945, 72.1725/1, KNDL; Hans Richter to Siegfried Kracauer, undated (ca. August 1945), 72.2876/23, KNDL; Hans Richter to Siegfried Kracauer, July 10, 1947, 72.2876/14, KNDL; Siegfried Kracauer to Hans Richter, July 12, 1947, 72.1725/2, KNDL.
friendship during their exile from Nazi Germany. An early mentor to Theodor Adorno, Kracauer had worked primarily as a journalist and critic, writing on film but also music, architecture, and literature. After arriving in New York in 1941, he focused primarily on film, taking a wartime residency at the Museum of Modern Art Film Library for the analysis of German propaganda films. In this period, he reconnected with Richter and also became friendly with Duchamp. In late 1944, Max Horkheimer, then running the Institute for Social Research in exile in Hollywood, hired Kracauer to consult on a film-based sociological experiment testing anti-Semitic beliefs among American subjects in partnership with the American Jewish Committee. Kracauer wrote an outline and screenplay and recommended Richter as the director of the so-called test film for use in the project, named in various drafts as *The Accident* and *Below The Surface*. While never realized, the project apparently encouraged Richter to invite Kracauer to collaborate on the treatments for the new version of his feature-length film, which they wrote around their meetings for Horkheimer’s test film. Richter addressed their shared work in correspondence with Kracauer, writing that their challenge was to now

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effectively “underlay the story with an idea, i.e. to give it a meaningful (socio-political) view.”

The title of Richter and Kracauer’s treatments, *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, likely emerged from the context of their work with Horkheimer on the test film. It plays on the title of a 1941 film *All That Money Can Buy*, which today is known by an alternate title, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*. That film’s director, the German émigré William Dieterle, had written for the Institute of Social Research’s journal on Hollywood’s role in the fight against fascism and, in February 1941, invited Horkheimer to evaluate the script for *All That Money Can Buy*. It is not known whether Horkheimer suggested the title to Kracauer and Richter for the new film project or whether Kracauer and Richter decided to adopt the new title themselves. Richter did, however, inform Horkheimer of his film project, seeking at one point in early 1945 to solicit him and his contacts for funding. He later sent Horkheimer an excerpt from the *Dreams* screenplay, to which Horkheimer responded favorably.

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100 See Richter to Joseph Freeman, January 29, 1945, box 34, folder 10, JFP; Richter to Horkheimer, June 1, 1946, II.12.213, and Horkheimer to Richter, August 31, 1946, II.12.211, Horkheimer Nachlaß.
101 Horkheimer to Richter, August 31, 1946. Horkheimer describes his “joy over the manuscript,” adding, “The thought that in this time of rapid aesthetic decay a film such as yours can still be produced is a great solace.” Richter (June 1, 1946) had written of his
There are significant differences between the three Richter/Kracauer treatments, all of which feature a fantasy narrative that elaborates upon the idea from the end of *Movies B*, that the films of modern artists should be considered the test laboratories of commercial cinema. *Dreams A* explicitly presents the shorts as bottled potions created by a mad scientist, named in one draft “Professor M.A.,” Professor Modern Art. These potions are the “dreams” referred to in the title. *Dreams A* inverts the presentation in *Movies B*, however. Where the writer in *Movies B* tries to convince Mr. Jordon, the producer, to see the value in avant-garde films by justifying them in the utilitarian terms he will understand, as the test laboratories for commercial cinema, it is the mad scientist in *Dreams A* who resists cooperating with the same Mr. Jordon, now described as a television producer. Both *Movies B* and *Dreams A*, however, end with the producer’s success and reveal the protagonist’s ultimate complacency or complicity in it.

Professor M. A. is unwilling to sell his potions, so Mr. Jordon tries to steal the secret recipes. Jordan sends a young woman, Nancy, to the laboratory to seduce the Professor and learn his secrets. Then, jumping to six months later, Mr. Jordan sends two corporate spies, named Mac and Joe, to discover what Nancy has learned. Nancy here takes on the didactic role performed by Richter’s surrogates in previous versions and explains the potential of progressive cinema to Mac and Joe. She demonstrates several potions and provides the same historical excursus on cinema as a product of the modern age.

desire to screen the film in Hollywood and Horkheimer wrote assuredly, “I trust that the first screening will soon take place.”
The film ends with a twist: Nancy has fallen in love with the Professor. This causes the potions, which are powered by human emotion and desire, to explode, destroying the Professor’s laboratory. After the loss of his potions, the Professor picks up an ax to murder Nancy. A disembodied voice chides him, “Stop Professor…There will be just another corpse, victim of your magic and stubborn individualism. But there is another way.” The Professor then decides to embrace Nancy and abandon his resistance to Mr. Jordan. The treatment describes his appearance suddenly transforming: “The professor stretches himself, takes off his glasses and beard. His clothes and heavy clubfoot falls off and he stands there a tall and handsome man.” It then unexpectedly concludes, “And they lived happily there after in the first monopolized television experimental laboratory for dreams and visions,—collecting ideas of all the artists of the world and trying the never tried before.”

One could read this ending ironically, as a sardonic commentary on the commercial cooption of the modern artist, but Richter and Kracauer present it here in a positive light. The artist must discard his bourgeois individualism; it is only by partnering with industry that he will be able to “try the never tried before.” While this conclusion shares much with that of Movies B, the new fantasy element reads as an attempt to generate the conditions of critical distance that Richter describes as essential to “progressive cinema” in The Struggle for the Film. There Richter argues that the grotesque, fantasy, and comic genres are better suited to the “progressive cinema” than drama: “Pathos is the least appropriate to provide occasion for the process of thought, to

102 Untitled [Dreams A], 11-page manuscript, 11.
allow audience an attitude in which they can think and not be carried away by shocks.”

Comic, fantasy, and grotesque films generally lack a “worked-out plot,” or present a superficial plot that only serves to string together gags, amusements, or effects.

Richter abandoned *Dreams A* in mid-1945 and began work on a new draft of the framestory, creating *Dreams B*, the second and final version of *Dreams*. This version again changed the film’s conclusion and thereby the moral of its allegory for contemporary art and cinema. *Dreams A* was nevertheless important to the development to *Dreams B*, introducing the title and fantasy elements that would persist into that film. In both versions, the protagonist remains a surrogate for the modern artist and the shorts remain dreams that are affected by the subjects’ subconscious thoughts and emotions. *Dreams A*, however, also constitutes a substantial “lost” film in its own right. It is one of Kracauer’s few direct encounters with film production in the United States and offers a powerful allegory for the condition of European avant-garde culture in American “exile” during the 1940s that reaches significantly different conclusions from that of *Dreams B*. Also, crucially, it was during the writing of *Dreams A* that Duchamp’s involvement in the project expanded beyond contributing *Anemic Cinema*.

At some point after the writing of the three treatments, Richter decided to reconceive the project by creating new short films. The treatments themselves reference the same canon of existing shorts that Richter had planned to include in the previous versions, first in his “Film Festival” and then in *The Movies Take a Holiday*. However, one treatment includes a handwritten pencil note reading, “Associations/ Old + New

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103 Richter, *The Struggle for the Film*, 141.
Films,” listing the existing “old” films (Diagonal-Symphonie, Rhythmus 21, Anemic Cinema, Film Study, Ballet Mécanique, Ghosts Before Breakfast, Etoile de Mer, Autumn Fire, Meshes in the Afternoon, Un Chien Andalou) and adding four new films and allied artists: “Spirals w Goldfish (Duchamp),” “Porcelain, Animals, Jewels, + Folklore (ballet) (Léger),” “(Drawings) (Calder),” “Prism Film (Richter).”

Apparently pleased with his Léger footage of “folklore,” Richter decided to integrate it into this new version of Dreams along with a new sequence, “Porcelain, Animals, Jewels.” At the same time, he planned to add new Duchamp and Calder sequences. “Spirals w Goldfish” refers to one of the twelve designs in Duchamp’s Rotorelief set of 1935, titled Poisson japonais. It is not clear if Richter intended to re-use the footage Duchamp had taken in 1943, which presumably was still extant in 1945, or create a new version. In any case, this marks the beginning of Duchamp’s participation in Richter’s project beyond the simple granting of permission for the use of Anemic Cinema.

Duchamp’s new role is evident already in the first treatment. Beyond integrating the artists’s short films, Richter and Kracauer evidently planned to work with several of them to design the set for Professor M.A.’s laboratory. The description in the treatment calls for: “Moving structures (molecules) that the Professor made Calder create,” “cubic forms out of Lezer’s [sic] studio,” “spirals which Duchamp invented,” and a “labyrinth of diagonal strips through the whole room (you wouldn’t believe it: real film strips) conveyor-like moving and flashing in the light.”

The “spirals” that Duchamp invented are presumably the Rotoreliefs, though perhaps enlarged versions to scale with the set.

104 “Dreams That Money Can Buy Treatment” [Dreams A], 8-page manuscript, 1, verso.
105 Untitled [Dreams A], 11-page manuscript, 3.
The labyrinth of diagonal filmstrips is not identified with an artist but seems to reference Duchamp’s string-based installation design for the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition in 1942. The integration of moving film strips into this “labyrinth” also recalls El Lissitzky’s installation design of the Soviet Pavilion at *Pressa* in Cologne, which featured giant printing press conveyer belts.

The second and third treatments expand the artists’s involvement into speaking roles. Richter and Kracauer placed the initial narrative of the mad scientist and Mr. Jordan within a framestory featuring Duchamp, Richter, and other modern artist and composer friends playing themselves. This serves to make the intended allegory of the modern artist’s need to partner with industry even more explicit. A group of artists, including Duchamp, Richter, Fernand Léger, Kurt Seligmann, Alexander Calder, and Edgar Varese, gather in Léger’s studio preparing a show, described in one treatment as a revue and in the other as a television program. A wealthy industrialist, described as a “rich Sausage king”, sponsors the production. This sponsorship, we learn, is contingent on the show starring his fiancé, a woman named Mary Lou, who takes the role of Nancy in the previous draft. When she breaks up with him, the Sausage King cancels the show. This serves to demonstrate the inherent precarity of an outdated artistic patronage model.

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In one draft, an unnamed character, referred to as “The Poet” makes this unambiguous. When he learns that the show in cancelled, he becomes angry with the artists, yelling:

You all belong to the last century with your handicraft. This is the age of speed and mass production. Why can’t everyone be creative? It doesn’t matter whether we have the show or not. I’m interested only in one thing – the rationalization of art – so that everyone’s ideas can come out. Maybe all art could be reduced to its essence and this essence made available to the people. Put it in bottles and sell it for ten cents a bottle. Or a pill that one could take so that he could realize his dreams. You old fossils….cubists, non-objectivists, surrealists, etc you’re all old hat.  

The bottling of art’s “essence” is precisely what happens as the frame narrative shifts to the internal laboratory episode. The building catches on fire and as the flames reach the artists, they turn into pumpkins. Mary Lou, who had arrived in the studio shortly before, faints, and when she awakens she is in the laboratory of the mad scientist, beginning the laboratory sequence outlined in the previous treatment. The mad scientist, played by the same actor as the Poet from the frame, orders Mary Lou to take the pumpkins, make a hole in them, and pour their “essence” into glass retorts. When the two spies, here representing “a large television company,” ultimately steal one of the retorts, it again represents a happy ending, ending the artist’s reliance upon the wealthy sponsor and allowing the Poet to make the visions “available to the people.”

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107 “Dreams That Money Can Buy Treatment” [Dreams A], 8-page manuscript, 3.
108 Ibid., 4-5.
Duchamp’s speaking parts are fairly limited. In the first of the latter treatments, the artists act as a group and receive little further characterization. Duchamp has one line, delivered in response to Mary Lou’s announcement that the Sausage King has cancelled the show. She explains that it was a response to her breaking off the engagement. She begins to say, “He and his money…” but is interrupted by Duchamp who repeats the line, but, the treatment explains, “with a different meaning.” Another explanatory note informs the reader, “They all realize she’s their only chance to get the money for their show” from the Sausage King.” The artists would not have to rely on manipulative individuals like the Sausage King, the film implies, if they were to partner directly with industry and together serve “everybody.” Duchamp’s line has no apparent relationship to his artistic identity. Instead, he is merely performing the generic role of an “artist” character named Duchamp.

The second treatment makes a greater attempt to individualize the artists. The writers ground the artists’s dialogue and actions in their work. Seligmann, who had developed a major interest in the Occult, uses one of “his books” to find that the planned day for their show is “particularly suited for their purpose.” Calder practices his “Circus” and Varèse plays one of his records on the phonograph. For Duchamp, there are no references to works of art, just an expanded speaking part. Early on, when the Poet (who is in this draft a journalist named Ted) raises concerns that the show could get cancelled, Duchamp counsels equanimity, asking him and the other artists, “Why worry?” Later in the treatment, Duchamp notices commotion across the street and

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109 Ibid., 2.
110 “Dreams That Money Can Buy” [Dreams A], 11-page manuscript, 2.
exclaims, “My god there is a fire in this block.” When there is a knock on the door, he alerts the others that it might be firemen: “Open it, before they break the door down—don’t you know that firemen would rather enter a room by breaking the door down first? It’s more fun that way.” Instead of firemen, the guest is Mary Lou. She tells them about the cancelled show and Duchamp retains the line from the previous draft: “He and his money…” This is his last line of dialogue.

Duchamp and the other artists turn into pumpkins that the mad scientist orders Mary Lou to press into juice for his bottles. Later, Mary Lou faints and awakens to find herself in Ted’s arms again in Léger’s studio, which is in flames. At this point, the treatment indicates, firemen arrive. “The five artists from the beginning storm in, alive, but their faces begrimed with smoke.” They immediately attack Ted, thinking that he is harming Mary Lou, but the clock strikes twelve midnight and Ted himself turns into a pumpkin and then into a retort. Mary Lou is distraught but the Sausage King enters and gives her a jewelry box with beautiful necklace inside, which cheers her up. The artists “come over to admire it.” She is then “easily led away the necklace around her neck, by [the Sausage King], the artists and the firemen.” In their absence, the two spies steal the retort that the treatment describes as “once the beloved and promising young Ted.” The film ends with them opening the bottle, smoke pouring out, and shaping the form of the word, “End.”

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111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., 3.
113 Ibid., 11.
114 Ibid.
The depiction of Duchamp and the other artists is caustic, presenting them as complicit with the Sausage King and even more, fixated on his money and the necklace. Ted, or The Poet, is the hero. In the end, his commitment to the cause of the rationalization of art leads to the liquidation of his ego. As in the first treatment of *Dreams A*, the Poet/Ted/Scientist figure is able to realize the goal of art for the masses only by forsaking his “stubborn individualism,” something the other artists are not willing to do.

It is unknown whether Duchamp would have agreed to appear in a film in which he and the other artists were subject to such withering critique. Richter and Kracauer may have written his dialogue based on published interviews and avoided discussion with Duchamp. The “Why worry?” line, for example, recalls a statement by the artist published in the March 1945 issue of *View Magazine*: “There is no solution, because there is no problem.” Kracauer reported to Duchamp that he had purchased and read the *View* issue that April. Duchamp’s awareness and participation in the writing is not documented, but also not out of the question. Many of the émigré artists, following the reconfiguration of cultural politics in the 1930s, adopted a critical or at least detached attitude towards their earlier careers, conceiving them as anachronistic for the present social and political conditions. Léger, for example, returned home to France in 1945 and became a prominent artist member of the French Communist Party. Richter, the co-writer

116 Siegfried Kracauer to Marcel Duchamp, April 28, 1945, 72.1283, KNDL.
of this treatment, included himself among the “embourgeoisified” artists, demonstrating the artists’s capacity for self-critique.

At the very least, Duchamp was aware of the treatments, and it is likely that he was involved in some more significant way as he created works directly related to the planned production that spring. Duchamp designed the cover for the brochure accompanying an exhibition of Man Ray’s work at the Julien Levy Gallery in April. For the cover image, he chose an enlarged positive print of a movie frame showing the profiles of a male and female face as their lips touch in a kiss (Fig. 3.7). The image has no obvious relation to Man Ray’s works in the exhibition and has long puzzled historians.  

In the catalogue, the cover is credited to Marcel Duchamp with the parenthetical, “from a cinema-photo by Hackenschmied.” Alexander Hackenschmied, also known as Alexander Hammid, the filmmaker then married to Maya Deren, created dozens of similar “cinema-photos” showing various kisses from the history of cinema from which Duchamp selected the one for the catalogue cover (Fig. 3.8).  

Dreams A was the source and referent for the image, a relationship lost in the subsequent changes to film.

Each of the three treatments describes a similar scene featuring kisses. When the female protagonist, Nancy or Mary Lou, admits her love for the professor, the retorts respond to her emotion by spewing forth scenes of kisses from Hollywood films. The first treatment describes it in the most detail: “Uncontrolled by human spirit, imagination,

118 The collection of “cinema-photos” is now located in box 36, folder 19, Alexina and Marcel Duchamp Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.
leadership they start an insane nightmare by themselves. Salvoes of kisses, always the same lovers in the same position….A kiss orgy,… nonsensical, mechanical, inhuman, — can’t be stopped. Lover approaching girl – repeats and repeats itself like a bomber attack. Grotesque and terrifying uniformity! The mechanism has taken over." The implication is that the movie industry, without the guidance of the artist represented by the scientist, churns out the same nightmare of uniformity. Hammid, co-creator of Meshes of the Afternoon, may have helped identify appropriate film kisses to use in the planned scene, producing the collection that Duchamp drew from in his catalogue cover. The intended connection to Man Ray, who was not yet associated with Richter’s film, is unclear. Duchamp may have sought to contrast movie clichés with Man Ray’s objects, which were created in Man Ray’s own Hollywood studio, or simply decided to use an image unrelated in any way to the gallery show for the cover.

Duchamp appears to have referred to Richter’s film in another cover design (Fig. 3.9) he made that January for the special issue of View magazine. The cover features a photograph of a bottle, turned on its side, emitting smoke, recalling the imagery of the smoke-filled retorts in Dreams A. Like the Man Ray cover, the smoking bottle may have even originated in the production design for the film. The View issue includes a brief chronicle of the cover’s creation, and the description of Duchamp’s laborious work to perfect the smoke suggests he may have created the effect for repeated use in Richter’s film. Presumably, had the film been produced as planned, the references in both covers

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119 Untitled [Dreams A]. 11-page manuscript, 10.
would have become evident. The bottle on the cover would read as a clever reference to the retorts, equating the contents of the journal with the artists’s dreams in Richter’s film. Two years later, Duchamp would again design a cover related to Dreams, specifically Discs, the sequence he designed. This cover, known as Please Touch, discussed below, goes beyond simply illustrating a scene or image from the film and cleverly operates in conjunction with it.

**Dreams, Version B**

Richter’s decision to incorporate newly filmed sequences, likely dating to late spring 1945, once again changed the project in significant ways. As a result, the internal episodes could now participate in the film’s narrative. He worked over a period of several months to reconceive the film around the new episodes, resulting in the second and final version of Dreams, which I am calling Dreams B.

By September, Richter had decided to replace all of the pre-existing shorts with newly filmed sequences in a format close to that which appears in the finished film. The dampened any hopes of tubing the smoke through the bottle, bottom-to-topwise. So, calling upon thirty years of art-plumbing expediency, Duchamp rigged up a smoke pipe (now invisible) under the bottle, the pipe’s end coinciding with the bottle’s neck and held thereto by a clip extending from the cork’s customary cove. This triumph of the smoking bottle made up for the failure of the much-experimented-with ray of light which was to have shot from page left across the planetarium illusion of the background, under the smoke.”

list of new “films” to be incorporated expanded from four—Duchamp, Léger, Calder, and Richter—to seven with the addition of a Man Ray, Max Ernst, and second Calder. That fall, Richter edited the Léger footage he had shot and began filming the Ernst episode in a new studio space at 24 East 21st Street. At the same time, he rewrote the frame to accommodate the new sequences.

The earliest extant treatments for *Dreams B* date to summer 1946. Richter created three drafts with Joseph Freeman, each headed with the title, “Outline of Framestory for Dreams That Money Can Buy.” Their new narrative was somewhat less ambitious than *Dreams A* had been. Richter, now responsible not only for creating the framestory but also for filming the internal episodes, evidently chose to downscale the frame. This version also eschews the visual effects and complex set design called for by

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122 Duchamp references the seven episodes in a letter to Man Ray, September 9, 1945, series II, box 2, folder 7, Man Ray letters and album, 1922-1976, GRI, 2. Richter also refers to his work on an unrealized Picasso episode in a letter to Max Horkheimer, August 20, 1945, II.12.217, Horkheimer Nachlass. He later refers to three and a half years of work on his “Guernica-idea” in a letter to Siegfried Kracauer, undated (ca. 1948), 72.7876/72, KNDL.

123 Joseph Freeman, who worked on the treatments with Richter, returned to New York in late August 1945 from a trip to Western Europe as part of a USO tour. Freeman’s experiences among American soldiers in postwar Europe likely played a role in the new conception of *Dreams’* protagonist as a G.I. returning from Europe in *Dreams B*. As of November 1945, Richter was still working on the frame treatments and script. See Hans Richter to Man Ray, November 17, 1945, series II, box 2, folder 14, Man Ray letters and album, 1922-1976, GRI.

124 One of the treatments in the Joseph Freeman Papers is headed “Richter-Freeman,” identifying Freeman and Richter as the likely co-authors of these three initial treatments, though others undoubtedly contributed ideas. Hans Richter and Joseph Freeman, “Outline for Frame Story of Dreams That Money Can Buy,” [*Dreams B*], 18-page manuscript, box 59, folder 3, JFP; “Outline of the framestory of ‘Dreams That Money Can Buy,’” [*Dreams B*], 12-page manuscript, box 59, folder 3, JFP; “Outline of the framestory of ‘Dreams that money can buy,’” [*Dreams B*], 11-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.16, MoMA Archives, NY.
the *Dreams A* treatments. Having secured the 21st street studio, he wrote the entire narrative to take place there on a single set.

The protagonist of *Dreams B* remains a surrogate for the modern artist, but is now a returning G. I. turned “dream salesman.” Instead of working as a mad scientist collecting the dreams as potions, he becomes something of a cross between a private detective and a psychoanalyst. Customers visit his office, describe a problem, and he provides them access to their subconscious dreams that, in one way or another, resolve the problem. *Dreams B* retains the same title as *Dreams A* but its “dreams that money can buy” are repressed, subconscious memories and desires rather than potions that react to emotions.

Richter’s changes may have responded to the Alfred Hitchcock film *Spellbound*, which debuted in New York on October 31, 1945. In that film, Ingrid Bergman plays a psychoanalyst named Dr. Constance Petersen. Petersen interprets a dream of her amnesiac patient and lover (Gregory Peck), which ultimately clears him of a murder charge and allows them to be together. Hitchcock presents the dream as a sequence designed by Salvador Dalí (Fig. 3.10). Richter may have recognized the parallels between *Spellbound’s* use of modern art and that of his own developing film, and altered his plans to address faults he saw in *Spellbound*. Several passages in Richer’s writings around *Dreams* suggests that he felt Hitchcock had coopted the vision of Dalí in favor of stale Hollywood conventions, instead of embracing a true partnership with the artist. In a 1948 letter defending *Dreams* from a negative review, he levels this critique of *Spellbound* obliquely: “Discoveries in the natural sciences, in the arts, in psychology, etc., have given
us new thoughts…. Why do these changes not reflect in the gigantic mirror in which we see ourselves nearly every day; in the movies? I don’t call it ‘influenced’ [by these changes] when a psychoanalytical story is superimposed upon a Hollywood cliché.”

Though this “psychoanalytical story superimposed on a Hollywood cliché” could refer to any number of noir-inflected films of the early 1940s, Richter had identified the target of his critique in an article the previous year: “There is every reason to believe, that an injection of modern art into the movies could be a powerful stimulans for their further growth. A stimulans, not a formula. I don’t think that Ingrid Bermann [sic] ever should be photographed in the style of Picassos [sic] Guernica or even of Légers [sic] Grand dejeuner.” Richter appears to have deliberately changed Dreams to correct for Spellbound’s errors. Hitchcock’s narrative uses Dalí’s dream to solve a murder and enable romance. Richter’s film would integrate artist’s episodes to demystify the patient’s social and political conditions.

Richter’s new framestory somewhat didactically explores the idea that the “Poet” articulates in Dreams A, that everyone needs and deserves access to their own dreams, not those of someone else, and that artists play a crucial role in realizing this ambition. The dreams, motivated by or featuring works by named “modern artists,” reveal to the clients their social conditions in ways that are otherwise obscure to them. The customers who visit Joe’s office represent a range of legible social types from both the bourgeoisie

and the working class. Their dreams offer miniature allegories for their experience, which help the clients to understand the effects of contemporary social and political conditions. In recognizing the characters as contemporary social types, audience members could then perceive the repressive social conditions affecting their own lives. Richter repeatedly represents the manifestation of these social ills in sexist and misogynistic ways, characterizing capitalism’s effect on men as a loss of virility and on women as a loss of physical beauty and sexual desirability.

In the final cut of the film, Joe enters a small, dingy office. He sits down at a desk and drinks from an old bottle of whiskey that he finds in one of the drawers. He takes his watch out of his pocket and opens the case to look at an enclosed photo of a beautiful woman. Turning to a framed mirror, he sees an image of the same woman in his own eyes, now smiling at him. A disembodied voice presents Joe’s internal monologue: “Remember a poem you once read: The eye is a camera, it said. Suppose, like a film, it could retain the images that glide so secretly through your brain. Have you ever tried to see the shadow world inside photographed by the retina and held suspended in its memories?” The disembodied voice states: “If you can look inside yourself, you can look inside anyone.” As in the earlier drafts, the film presents this notion not only in moral terms, but also in economic terms. “Customers? There are so many, one can’t count them. What’s the population of the world? Almost two billion. A potential of two billion customers. All with a dream to untangle…Dreams on the installment plan! You’ll be in the money, man!”
The clients arrive one at a time, beginning with “Mr. A.” Joe describes him as a “bank clerk, middle income bracket. Character…methodical, exact.” The timid banker, emasculated by his bureaucratic work and domineering wife, sees in the Max Ernst dream a vision of a man blocked from a woman he desires. Over the course of the dream, he breaks through the obstruction and embraces the woman. Returning from his dream, the man becomes newly confident, openly defying his wife by engaging the next client, a young woman.

The voice-over narration characterizes this young woman as having “organizational neurosis.” She comes to sign Joe up for an organization, listing a range of satirical names: “The League for the clarification of international turntables. The twentieth century Thursday afternoon club…. The daughters of American grandfathers.” When he refuses, she says in an internal monologue, “Doesn’t he realize you like to sign people up? It’s your aim in life, your duty. It’s how you maintain your self-respect. It’s also how you make a living.” Her dream sequence, the “Léger” episode, is a morality tale featuring sales mannequins. The short, set to an original song by Latouche titled, “The Girl with the Prefabricated Heart,” demonstrates the dangers of leading a life prescribed by social convention and commercial culture and directs her to abandon the labor force.

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127 A previous draft identifies the banker’s first name as “Walter.” See “Outline of the framestory of ‘Dreams that money can buy,’” [Dreams B], 11-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.16, MoMA Archives, 3. The conjunction of Walter and an “A” surname suggests an intended reference to Walter Arensberg, the American collector of modern art and longtime patron of Marcel Duchamp. Whether this was Duchamp’s suggestion or an independent invention of Richter and Freeman is unknown. The cast list in the Dreams That Money Can Buy brochure confirms the character names of the husband and wife, played by Samuel Cohen and Ethel Beseda as “Mr. A” and “Mrs. A.” See [Hans Richter, ed.], Dreams That Can Buy (New York: Films International of America, 1947), back cover.
and pursue her true desires, which are, again misogynstically, given to be romantic in nature. Waking, she removes her glasses and grabs Joe for a passionate kiss.

Other clients include Mrs. A, the wife of the banker, who dreams the “Man Ray” episode, the gangster who dreams Duchamp’s *Discs*, and an older man wearing a metalworking apron, who dreams the two Calder sequences. The film concludes with Joe’s own extended dream sequence, the “Richter” episode, titled “Narcissus.” This dream, written by Richter in collaboration with Dadaist poet-turned-psychoanalyst Richard Huelsenbeck, offers its own allegory for the experience of the émigré artist told from Richter’s personal perspective. Joe lists his memories, which include references to Richter’s second wife, the town in Switzerland where he had lived before immigrating, and a friend there, Olly Jacques.128 These memories affirm Joe as Richter’s surrogate in the film. The sequence ends with Joe re-stating his commitment to his artistic mission, despite the antagonism he had faced. “I had not come so far only to jump at the wrong moment. I was out for the great embarrassment and I liked it. I would have gone on anyway, no matter what happened… There is so much ahead of me… So much that I have to find out.”

In the finished version of *Dreams*, this line concludes both the dream and the film, leaving the future of the artist ambiguous. In treatments, however, it segued to an important final scene that was more explicit about the moral. When the dream ends, Joe finds himself back in his office. His landlord barges through the door demanding rent

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money and Joe finds that the gangster client has stolen it. The landlord insists that Joe turn his dreams into a productive business to pay his rent. Three businessmen enter with briefcases. They have Joe sign contracts and then present one million dollars to incorporate a company under the name “Dreams That Money Can Buy.” The businessmen also hang up a sales poster with a giant photograph of a cinematic kiss and tagline: “Inside view into human nature: murders-desire-human rapture-innocence and laughter.” Joe remains speechless. Then a woman enters, the same woman pictured in his pocket watch at the beginning of the movie. She is wearing a bridal gown. She looks at the poster and “is simply delighted.” “She reaches out with her hands towards him, helps him up but he is still dazed.” Instead of the traditional title card reading, “The End,” the treatment concludes with block-letters reading, “Happy End.”129

This deviation inserts a pessimistic coda after Narcissus’s optimism. Only one day into Joe’s life as a “dream salesman,” corporate interests have already coopted the dreams, turning them into typical Hollywood products. The businessmen promise dreams that offer a depoliticized view into “human nature” rather those that would expose broader social and political conditions. That is to say, they turn a potentially radical form—progressive cinema—into Spellbound. As Richter wrote of that film, “a psychoanalytical story” has been “superimposed upon a Hollywood cliché.”

While the unrealized final scene repeats the same events as the ending of Dreams A, a major tonal and conceptual shift has occurred. Dreams A presents the artist’s submission to industry as progress in contrast to those artists who continue to rely on

129 “Outline of the framestory of ‘Dreams That Money Can Buy,’” [Dreams B], 12-page manuscript, 12.
private patronage. With this scene, the same submission to industry results in the
coopition of the artist by the interests of capital. The ending could read as an admission of
defeat before the film industry. It is possible that the debut of Spellbound convinced
Richter of the futility of resisting Hollywood cooption. However, it seems unlikely that
Richter would completely abandon the aims of his long-gestating film project in the short
period between the writing of Dreams A and Dreams B. Instead, the shift in attitude may
have resulted from the rewriting process itself. In simplifying the framestory between the
two versions, Richter scrapped the external frame that had demonstrated the artists’
reliance upon the Sausage King. The new version effectively collapses the Sausage King
character with the opposing Mr. Jordan, the television producer, so that it is no longer
possible to distinguish one from the other.

Alternatively, the shift may represent a new strategy for audience activation. Joe
remains passive in response to the incorporation of his business and the poster imposed
upon him by the businessmen. Richter may have seen this as modeling a negative
outcome for viewers and making explicit the failures of a film like Spellbound, thereby
encouraging artists to partner more actively with business and audiences to reject films
that trade in Hollywood spectacle. The designation of the business as “Dreams That
Money Can Buy” invites viewers to draw a direct comparison between the false
romanticism promised to Joe’s customers by the businessmen and the false “happy
ending” in Dreams itself.
In any case, Richter excised the scene from the final version, likely during or even after the completion of filming. Instead, the film terminates directly after the “Narcissuss” episode. Without a concluding framestory scene, the film’s moral remains ambiguous, and Joe’s fate unresolved. The excision was deliberate. Richter defended the finished film’s newly abrupt ending in a letter to Bill Fitelson, a lawyer helping with the film’s distribution: “The fact that the framestory…has not an ‘ending’ is due to the fact that LIFE itself has not drawn yet to a conclusion. For me, the aspect of life as such, including death, is fascinating and I do not want to draw a conclusion that life itself has not yet drawn.” Already in *The Struggle for the Film*, Richter had critiqued the “happy end” as a vulgar Hollywood confection; it is possible that he felt the absence of an ending better represented the character of his “progressive cinema.” However, earlier in the same book, he had also argued, “Naturally, the spectator who is presented from stage or screen, via characters and their actions, with his own human weaknesses also has a right to demand an explanation or a solution that will help him.” The finished film begins to develop an explanation to help the viewer understand the relationship between the dreamers and their dreams but the non-ending stops short of offering them a neat solution to their “human weaknesses.”

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130 Richter may have filmed at least part of the sequence and re-purposed it during editing. A scene in which businessmen enter with contracts appears at the beginning of the finished film, where the post-synchronized audio integrates it in the scene in which Joe signs the lease of his office.

131 Hans Richter to Bill Fitelson, January 21, 1948, Hans Richter Archive, B.VIII.8, MoMA Archives, NY.

132 Richter, *The Struggle for the Film*, 91.
Knowing the endings that Richter planned and ultimately rejected, his reluctance to provide a conclusion reads as a new ambivalence toward the articulation of his progressive cinema. It is possible that he worried about the continuing relevance of its goals after nearly a decade. Could the program he outlined in the late 1930s still be viable in the emergent postwar conditions in his adopted home? Writing to Fitelson, Richter insisted that he remained committed to defining an alternative to Hollywood film, but was appears newly diffident as to what the character of that alternative should be: “I still see in the FILM the most powerful art-medium of our time with a nearly untouched reserve of beauty (in every sense of the word), and of ideas, not just techniques to be applied later to some Hollywood crap.”

Alternatively, Richter’s reluctance may have been motivated less by doubts surrounding his theory of progressive cinema than by well-founded fear. The writing and production of Dreams B coincided with a sharp escalation in the persecution of Communist sympathizers in the United States, particularly in the film industry. Richter may have remained as committed to the cinema’s status as a “mass art” as he had been in the 1930s but felt that expressing this view was dangerous in his position as a Leftist refugee seeking US citizenship. In a later recollection of a small fire caused by the filming of the final Narcissus episode, he emphasized the wartime environment, his German nationality, and non-US citizenship in describing his reluctance to call the police or fire departments. In this case, he may have preferred to offer no explicit ending and

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133 Richter would become a naturalized US citizen on November 26, 1951.
134 Richter, Hans Richter by Hans Richter, 54.
confuse viewers over the alternative, filming a false “happy ending” to appease censorious parties.

Intriguingly, a version of the businessmen’s poster from the alternate ending re-surfaces in the finished film. The original poster for the “Dreams That Money Can Buy” company was to have read, “Inside view into human nature: murders-desire-human rapture-innocence and laughter.” The final film loosely adapts this poster in an introductory title card sequence: “Everybody dreams/ Everybody travels/ Sometimes into countries where strange/ Beauty/ Wisdom/ Adventure/ Love/ expects him/ This is a story/ of Dreams mixed with reality.” The poster in the alternate ending had presented the appeal to melodrama as a commercial mutilation of Joe’s more progressive dreams. The title cards in the finished film make the same appeal sincerely. This suggests that Richter may have directly appropriated what he saw as the means of Hollywood cooption to pitch his film to skeptical viewers. An external party, Irving Shapiro, who agreed to distribute the film through his company Films International of America in 1947, may have also imposed this change upon Richter in an effort to make the film financially viable. Richter acknowledged his distributor’s involvement in expanding the film’s audience in a 1947 article: “To get [the audience] together that is the problem of the distribution. My American distributor thinks he will solve it. It would be too bad if he wouldn’t….”

With the various changes and concessions made during the planning, filming, and editing, the finished version of Dreams admittedly falls short of realizing the goals Richter had laid out a nearly a decade prior in The Struggle for the Film. As released,

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Dreams is a frequently contradictory, opaque film. The persistence of ideas from various earlier drafts and multiple collaborators created unforeseen conflicts. Richter also made financial compromises in the production that proved self-defeating, such as using a largely nonprofessional cast and crew, drafting many from the classes he taught at the Institute of Film Techniques at the City College of New York. This resulted in uneven performances, out-of-focus shots, and poor lighting. To avoid the costs associated with sound film, he recorded all of the audio in postproduction and made little attempt to match the audio and visual performances, frustrating viewers expecting a basic standard of synchronization. Furthermore, Richter’s failure to secure publication for The Struggle for the Film meant that filmgoers had little access to his theory of progressive cinema. Richter referred to ideas from the manuscript in lectures and magazine articles during the production and initial run of Dreams, but these fragmentary and isolated insights likely only confused viewers further.

As a result, critical accounts from the period largely disregarded the convoluted allegory of the film industry and Richter’s attempts at demystification, deeming Dreams a facile commercialization of vanguard works of art. After viewing an early cut, Henri

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136 Credits cards in the finished film attribute the story to Hans Richter “in association with” Dave Vern, Hans Rehfisch, and Joseph Freeman, and the dialogue to John Latouche. Additionally, they credit Latouche for the lyrics in the Fernand Léger episode, Man Ray for the original story of the Man Ray episode, and Richard Hulbeck [Huelsenbeck] and Hans Richter for the dialogue in the Hans Richter episode. Evidence in early treatments, scripts, and related correspondence indicates that Kracauer, Kiesler, Léger, Duchamp, Ernst, and Herman G. Weinberg also made uncredited contributions to the writing of the framestory or dream sequences. Freeman and Weinberg served as typists for the various treatments and scripts.

Langlois, director and co-founder of the Cinémathèque Française, pronounced Dreams a “caricature and plagiarism” of avant-garde cinema, singling out Duchamp’s sequence as a particularly offensive example: “It is truly a mockery to serve once again, in 1947, Anemic Cinema of 1927 [sic].” Parker Tyler, who was a friend of Duchamp and Richter at the time of Dreams’s production, characterized it in similar terms in the Kenyon Review, calling Dreams a “glaring commercial effort to popularize esoteric art.” Critics from the popular press presented Dreams in an even worse light, deeming it not just a commercial product but a deeply flawed one. In the New York Times, for example, Bosley Crowther cited “purely technical faults of bad lighting, poor sound recording, and faint color for much of the film” as a reason it failed to appeal to “the average audience” before adding, “More troubling…to the patron who simply sits with an open mind, expecting entertainment, is likely to be the obscurity of the thing.”

Siegfried Kracauer published the only positive reading, exploring the allegorical character of film, no doubt as a result of his unacknowledged personal involvement in the writing and production.

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141 Siegfried Kracauer published a largely positive account of the film that addressed the allegorical function of the dream sequences, plainly indebted to his unacknowledged role in the writing. See Kracauer, “Filming the Subconscious,” Theater Arts 32 (February 1948), 37–38.
There is nonetheless value in the reconstruction of *Dreams* as both a critical-theoretical and an artistic project. *Dreams* itself may not have been an entirely successful example, or have spawned the filmic outpouring Richter had looked for, but it is not without interest or consequence in the history of twentieth-century art and cinema. In retrospect, many of the film’s perceived faults read as deliberate attempts by Richter to challenge the conventions of “official cinema,” particularly his emphasis on the maintenance of a “double attitude” toward the artifice of the cinematic experience. That is to say, the irregular sound recording, off-register color, and poor lighting may have been corollaries of his pursuit of a Brechtian popular cinema, even if they ultimately proved ineffective.

Furthermore, Richter completed the film as a German war refugee in a moment when other European filmmakers and theorists were surrendering the medium’s “radical aspirations,” to borrow Annette Michelson’s phrase. Many, including Brecht, had moved to Hollywood to create propagandistic antifascist films or taken work directly with the United States war effort. Others had not survived. Walter Benjamin’s life ended in 1940 during an attempt to flee to the United States from France via Portugal. It is unknown whether his endorsement of a proletarian cinema in the “Work of Art” essay would have endured the war. As Miriam Hansen notes, Benjamin continued to revise the 1936 essay until shortly before his death. The final, so-called third version deviates in

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143 Annette Michelson, “Film and the Radical Aspiration,” *Film Culture* 42 (Fall 1966): 34-42, 136.

144 Hansen, *Cinema and Experience,* 83.
significant ways from the first version but leaves intact its assessment of the potentiality of the film medium as a revolutionary instrument.

Theodor Adorno successfully fled Nazi Germany, settling for a time in Oxford before joining Max Horkheimer’s relocated Institute for Social Research in the United States. Reunited in 1938, he and Horkheimer drafted a text, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” addressing the film industry and mass culture for a larger book-length study of “dialectical logic.” The resulting book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, first appeared as a mimeograph volume self-published by Horkheimer’s Institute of Social Research in 1944, coinciding with Kracauer and Richter’s work on the Institute’s “test film” project and on the early drafts of *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. Adorno and Horkheimer revised and published the first printed edition of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* through the Amsterdam publishing house Querido in 1947, the same year that *Dreams* debuted at the Venice International Film Festival.

In the “Culture Industry” essay, Adorno and Horkheimer present the commercial film industry as a means mutually exploited by capitalist and fascist nations, much as Richter and Benjamin did several years prior in *The Struggle for the Film* and “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” “To impress the omnipotence of capital on the hearts of expropriated job candidates as the power of their true master is the purpose of all films, regardless of the plot selected by the production directors,” Adorno and Horkheimer state.  

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opened an alternative space in the 1920s and, in *The Struggle for the Film*, promoted the reorientation of this alternative space towards the interests of the mass film audience. Adorno and Horkheimer also acknowledge that an alternative film culture had, in the past, seemed viable, at least in Europe:

The belief that the barbarism of the culture industry is a result of “cultural lag,” of the backwardness of American consciousness in relation to the state of technology, is quite illusory. Prefascist Europe was backward in relation to the monopoly of culture. But it was precisely to such backwardness that intellectual activity owed a remnant of autonomy, its last exponents of its livelihood, however meager. In Germany the incomplete permeation of life by democratic control had a paradoxical effect. Many areas were still exempt from the market mechanism which had been unleashed in Western countries…. The political powers, the state and the local authorities who inherited such institutions from absolutism, had left them a degree of independence from the power of the market as the princes and feudal lords had done up to the nineteenth century. This stiffened the backbone of art in its late phase against the verdict of supply and demand.¹⁴⁶

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¹⁴⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 105. The avant-garde that Richter and Benjamin looked to for guidance in the founding of their progressive and proletarian cinemas had relied upon forms of patronage, not only from the state, as Adorno and Horkheimer note, but from capitalist industry itself. In Germany, for example, the major commercial film studio UfA supported the early film experiments of Richter, Eggeling, Fischinger, and others.
Though specifically addressing German culture, Adorno and Horkheimer speak to prefascist Europe culture broadly, identifying its fall with a foreclosure of revolution and film’s role in its service. Fascism monopolized cultural production in ways similar to culture under American technological capitalism. “Technical rationality today is the rationality of domination,” they write. “For the present the technology of the culture industry confines itself to standardization and mass production and sacrifices what once distinguished the logic of the work from that of society.”¹⁴⁷

The subjugation of cinema, and other forms of media, under capitalism, was not inevitable, Adorno and Horkheimer remind readers, but it may be irreversible. “These adverse effects…should not be attributed to the internal laws of technology itself but to its function within the economy today.”¹⁴⁸ Though not internal to the technology, its function, now established, cannot be easily disturbed. Owing to industry’s hegemonic control, the modern cinematic apparatus interpellates its viewers as perfect consumers: “The spectator must need no thoughts of his own: the product prescribes each reaction.” Even the idea that an alternative could still exist, they posit, is a mirage generated by the industry itself. “The idea of ‘exploiting’ the given technical possibilities, of fully utilizing the capacities for aesthetic mass consumption, is part of an economic system which refuses to utilize capacities when it is a question of abolishing hunger. The culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises.”¹⁴⁹ For Adorno and Horkheimer, the only way that cinematic technology could be freed from its function

¹⁴⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, 95.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 111.
within modern capitalism would be to change the economy itself, a possibility the hegemonic culture precludes. No change is possible from within the capitalist system. Richter, subject to the same historical conditions, witnessing the rise of German Fascism and fleeing into the advanced technological capitalism of the United States, recommits to the promotion of a progressive cinema, arduously producing his own feature-length exemplar in *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. By locating himself within popular cinema culture of the United States, Richter opposes Adorno and Horkheimer’s central thesis, while at the same time, holding at bay the full commercial embrace dictated by wartime antifascist politics.

Finally, *Dreams*, while not warmly received by period audiences or critics, successfully propagated Richter’s proposal of “progressive cinema” within the small circle of his artist-collaborators on the film, including Duchamp. Richter and Duchamp communicated about the project over an extended period from 1942 to 1946 and Duchamp eventually designed a dream sequence for the film, oversaw its direction, and helped write and design other dream sequences and the framing story. *Discs*, his dream sequence, offers a sensitive summary of Richter’s critiques of “official cinema” and demand for a “socially responsible cinema.” Duchamp’s solutions to the problem deviate, however, from Richter’s own.

**Duchamp and Dreams, Version B**

Duchamp, involved to a limited extent in *Dreams A*, became one of Richter’s closest collaborators in the shift to *Dreams B*. Although he is not credited in the final
film, there is evidence that he contributed continuously to the project from spring 1945 through spring 1946, when the expiration of Duchamp’s visa required a temporary return to France. His participation included consulting on the new framestory and helping to write and design the Max Ernst and Man Ray sequences in addition to creating his own episode, *Discs*. Richter’s retrospective accounts consistently emphasized Léger over the other artist-collaborators. Léger’s return to France in 1945, however, limited his involvement in *Dreams B* to the initial filming of his own episode. In Léger’s absence, Duchamp became Richter’s primary collaborator, reading and commenting on drafts of the framestory and episodes, and acting as an agent for Richter in communicating with the other artists. In a letter to Man Ray, dated September 9, 1945, Duchamp provided his friend with an update on the film’s progress: “Hans Richter works… on his already-underway film. I gave him my color discs that he [is/was?] filming and as you know, the 7 color episodes must be assembled by a story in black and white. And it is this which is the most difficult.” While minimizing his own involvement, the letter makes clear that Duchamp was cognizant of the ongoing work and the challenges to the production. This, together with a subsequent assertion by Richter that Duchamp knew and approved the framestory of the film, suggests that Duchamp had a hand in the rewriting process.

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150 Duchamp to Man Ray, September 9, 1945, series II, box 2, folder 7, Man Ray letters and album, 1922-1976, GRI.
151 Richter highlighted the extension of Duchamp’s involvement beyond *Discs*, stating, “Duchamp was in full accord with me on the ‘frame’ story, which was the raison d’être for the various dreams,” quoted in Herman G. Weinberg, “The Cult of Glibness in Film Criticism,” Hans Richter Archive, C.XV.1, MoMA Archives, NY, 6. For additional evidence of Duchamp’s contributions to the frame story, see Hans Richter, [“Artikel N.Z.Z.”], ca. November 1945, MS, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.11, MoMA Archives, NY.
In the same period, Duchamp also helped write and design individual episodes, including but not limited to *Discs*. Richter wrote to Man Ray on November 17, 1945: “It is unfortunate that you are not here to work out and develop things together. It was such a pleasure to do that with Marcel, Max, and Julian [Levy] on the [Ernst] sequence.”

Richter then makes a number of suggestions for Man Ray’s sequence, which was to be adapted from a pseudo-autobrographical story Man Ray had published in *View* magazine the previous fall: “Here are my suggestions, which I went through with Marcel…” After describing the conclusion, he adds, “Marcel and I like this little ending very much.”

Duchamp and Richter then turned to the Léger sequence, completing it in November. They began to collaborate on the production of *Discs* at some point between then and May 1, when Duchamp left New York. Richter filmed the remaining episodes and framestory in Duchamp’s absence during the summer and fall of 1946 evidently reshooting a few scenes in *Discs* as well. By the time Duchamp returned to New York in January 1947, shooting was complete and Richter had moved on to the sound recording.

A series of set photographs taken by Arnold Eagle, cinematographer for the Léger, Ernst, and Duchamp sequences, documents Duchamp’s participation in the filming of *Discs*. In three of the photographs, Duchamp is seen manipulating his *Rotorelief* apparatus before the 16mm film camera (Fig. 3.11). A fourth captures Duchamp and Richter standing side-by-side behind the *Rotorelief* apparatus (Fig. 3.12). Duchamp was present at the shoots and evidently co-directed them with Richter. In the

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1950s and 1960s, Duchamp minimized his role in the project, attributing the sequence to Richter. However, there is substantial evidence to the contrary. Richter explicitly credited Duchamp as directing the staircase sequence in one recollection. Duchamp himself claimed full authorship of the episode when Langlois accused Richter of plagiarizing the artists, writing a letter in response insisting that he had willingly participated and been given “carte blanche” in the creation of his sequence. The reality was likely somewhere in the middle. Duchamp directed the sequence but Richter and Eagle provided Duchamp with technical assistance. Richter may have had some input in the design of the sequence but primarily deferred to Duchamp and worked to realize his plans.

Richter’s later recollections have long offered the only account of Discs’s conception and production. As Richter retold it, Duchamp originally intended the sequence to include only the Rotoreliefs and added the other sequences, of the woman on the staircase and falling coal, after filming had already began. The original idea of a Rotorelief film is confirmed by the pencil notes on the Dreams A treatment identifying Duchamp’s film as “Spirals w Goldfish.” Richter offered a limited explanation for the

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153 Lebel, working with Duchamp’s assistance, catalogued the film under the “reproductions” heading for the Rotoreliefs, writing, “The Rotoreliefs were also used by Hans Richter in his film Dreams That Money Can Buy (1946-7) where they were reproduced in color....” Speaking at a public screening of Dreams in 1961, Duchamp continued to minimize his own role. See Duchamp, “Dreams That Money Can Buy.”


155 Richter referred to the existence of formal contracts with the artists of Dreams while discussing profit sharing for a subsequent film, Not for Sale (released as 8x8: A Chess Sonata in 8 Movements, 1957); see Richter to Jacqueline Matisse, October 19, 1953, Association Marcel Duchamp, France. A formal contract may have clarified the individual contributions to Discs. However, if such a contract existed between Richter and Duchamp, it is no longer extant in their personal papers.
decision to add the other footage. He recalled finding the footage of the discs too repetitive and asking Duchamp for some “interrupting shots,” which elicited Duchamp’s proposal for a “filmic version of...Nude Descending a Staircase” using nude models. The choice to create a cinematic rendering of Nude Descending a Staircase as the “interrupting shot” remains unexamined. The immediate rationale may have been to better integrate Discs into Dreams B. The idea of a straight Rotorelief episode dates to the Dreams A framestory, which was written for pre-existing, rather than custom-made, shorts. By the time the filming of Discs began in late 1945/early 1946, Richter had decided to replace the pre-existing shorts with all new “episodes” and rewrite the framestory to engage them.

In the new framestory, the dreams belong to the clients and are elicited by works of modern art. The two episodes filmed prior to Discs, the Léger and Ernst episodes, include imaginatively conceived “filmic versions” of a Léger painting and an Ernst collage, both of which appear in the framestory to illustrate the relationship for viewers. This serves to reinforce the necessary role of modern artists in Richter’s conception of “progressive cinema.” As in the previous versions of the framestory, the artist’s role is the test-lab experimenter or instigator for industry.

The Rotoreliefs of 1935 are non-traditional art objects and were at the time of Dreams’s production little known to American film audiences. Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2), however, was among the most iconic modern paintings in the United States following its American debut at the Armory Show. Located at the time in Louise

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156 Bachmann and Mekas, “From Interviews with Hans Richter during the Last Ten Years,” 31.
and Walter Arensberg’s private collection in Los Angeles, the painting itself could not travel to New York for inclusion in the film. Richter could have used a reproduction in its place, but the painting’s fame, much greater than that of Ernst or Léger’s works, meant that the referent would have been obvious to many viewers even without it.

Duchamp, however, made multiple decisions in the design of the staircase sequence and its integration with the *Rotoreliefs* footage that exceeded the immediate demands of the framestory, casting doubt on certain of Richter’s later recollections. If the filmic version of the painting served the purpose of the framing narrative, why include the *Rotorelief* footage at all? If the staircase sequences were intended to refer to the painting, why instruct the woman to wear round black discs on top of her breasts and genitals? Why did Duchamp superimpose her onto footage of falling coal in two of her four appearances?

In the interview in which Richter explicitly credited Duchamp as the director of the *Nude Descending* footage, he provided his own explanations for the black rounds and coal. He attributed the round patches to the female volunteers, who balked at Duchamp’s requests for full frontal nudity. Duchamp, he claimed, conceived the black velvet as a solution.\(^{157}\) In the finished film, however, there is only a single female model and she does in fact appear partially nude in one of the four sequences. This is due to the fact that Richter re-shot the staircase sequences and replaced Duchamp’s footage for the final cut of the film. During edits, Richter found that he did not like that “the girls came down the

\(^{157}\) Black velvet was a material the artist had previously associated with the cinema in the creation of the *Rotary Demisphere*. See my chap. 2.
stairs like puppets.” In re-shooting the footage, he found a new model, who agreed to pose nude. This new footage is apparently shorter than Duchamp’s original, reducing the episode’s duration by nearly a full minute. A few stills remain extant from Duchamp’s footage and a comparison to the final film suggests that Richter closely mimicked the Duchamp-directed original and included the nudity to realize Duchamp’s original wishes. The retention of the black rounds, though, is puzzling since they no longer served their alleged purpose, covering actresses unwilling to pose nude. This suggests an initial reason for their inclusion other than covering the actresses’s bodies.

Richter’s account of the coal sequence is similarly contradictory. Apparently, when Duchamp planned to create a filmic version of *Nude Descending a Staircase*, Richter warned him about the prohibition of nudity in American cinemas. Duchamp suggested adding shots of “anthracite rolling down the chute” as a solution, reportedly telling Richter, “print over it [the nudity]: so you don’t know what you’re really

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159 John Cage’s score, based on an early cut of *Discs*, runs approximately a minute longer than the finished version, a fact Cage later regretted: “The film was changed after the music was written and I was never informed (although, since I am in the phone book, it is the simplest thing in the world to reach me).” See Cage, “A Few Ideas about Music and Film,” in John Cage: Writer, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 64–65. Originally published in *Film Music Notes* (January–February 1951).
160 Footage in stills published in 1947 visibly differs from the released version of *Discs*, evidently originating from the earlier cut overseen by Duchamp. See, for example, Louise Levitas, “Dreams That Money Can Buy,” *PM’s Picture News*, September 15, 1946, m10. In one of his accounts, Richter (“Hans Richter,” 90) described Duchamp “[trying] to get the scene to look like his famous painting…[making designs] on the girls’ legs with cellophane tape to make them look a little more abstract.” The published stills offer no evidence of Duchamp’s cellophane designs.
If the models had refused to pose nude, however, the coal would have been unnecessary. It is possible that it was later, after Richter re-shot the staircase sequence with a nude model, that Duchamp proposed adding the coal to obscure the view. However, in the final film, the footage of the woman is superimposed on top of the coal, leaving her partial nudity in plain view. This suggests that Duchamp’s intention for the coal was again something other than that recalled by Richter. Duchamp may have presented these justifications to Richter, but they ultimately offer little insight into the actual function of the rounds and coal footage in the finished episode.

**Discs**

Analysis of the *Discs* episode demonstrates that Duchamp added the staircase and coal sequences to the straight *Rotorelief* episode to engage Richter’s conception of “progressive film.” The *Rotorelief* film originated in the previous version of the *Dreams* project, *Dreams A*. That film would have presented the pre-existing short alongside others in a historical survey of avant-garde films. Since these films had been created independently from the frame, there was no need for Duchamp’s contribution to engage the *Dreams* project. However, *Dreams B* replaces the pre-existing shorts with newly filmed “episodes” directed by Richter, blurring the distinction between framestory and shorts that had existed in *Dreams A*. *Discs* was exceptional in this new version as the only episode not directed solely by Richter and Duchamp revised his plans to better

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161 Gideon Bachmann and Jonas Mekas, “From Interviews with Hans Richter during the Last Ten Years,” 31.
accommodate its integration, likely in close collaboration with Richter. The juxtapositions of the *Rotoreliefs* with the live actress and coal articulate a critique of the means of avant-garde films of the 1920s and those of “official cinema,” in favor of the Brechtian “dramaturgy” of Richter’s progressive cinema. Duchamp’s sequence stages the same contradiction that Richter sought in *Dreams* between modern art and Hollywood-style entertainment. In Richter’s film, the contradiction ultimately resolves in favor of entertainment; the illusionism of narrative film remains intact. *Discs* targets the experience of theatrical cinema itself, articulating limits to its potential activation in ways that are similar to but ultimately different from Richter’s own assessment.¹⁶²

Throughout *Discs*, the *Rotorelief* and the actress inhabit distinct spaces. The sequence repeatedly jumps between them, first signifying Richter’s favored contradiction of modern art and commercial cinema, then staging a series of inversions and equivalencies. *Discs* begins with an opening shot of a static *Rotorelief* disk, referencing *Anemic Cinema* but denying its optical effect. After the first “nude descending” sequence, the film quickly cycles into a series of tight close-ups on the disks (Fig. 3.13). Although these disks now spin, the cropping disrupts the optical sensation of deep motion.¹⁶³ Without the illusion effect, the disks are rendered material. The film’s close-ups present the disks not as producing the purely optical effects of *Anemic Cinema* but as worn

¹⁶² Duchamp’s internalization of Richter’s theory of progressive cinema and its consonance with his own theories of spectatorship are suggested by his discussion of the film before a public screening in 1961 (“Dreams That Money Can Buy,” 1): “This film demands more from the audience than just the desire to be entertained…. it asks for collaboration, intellectual as well as emotional from the viewer.”

¹⁶³ Mussman, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Anemic Cinema*,” 154.
cardboard rounds quivering before a black velvet curtain in the shallow space of a film set.

As the film buoy the perception of the optical disks in all of their physical reality, it works to make the live actress look “unreal.” Duchamp and Richter shot her descent using prism lenses that fragment and repeat the image across the screen. This is film mediated through painting, but a painting that itself relied on the formal vocabulary of chronophotography. The actress wears three velvet disks that recall Étienne-Jules Marey’s motion tracers, also evident in *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*. Here they also serve to conceal her breasts and genitals, visually manifesting the corporeal absence of the cinematic object and effacing conventional signifiers of sexual identity. The lighting and limited tonal range effectively flatten the disks against the dark curtain, rendering the body as a cut-paper animation.

When the actress returns in a later scene wearing only one disk at her waist, the expected dynamic of real body and optical illusion flips again; the woman’s sudden disrobing appears to lift the cinematic veil and proffer a direct view of reality. Just as it does so, the rapid introduction of coal cascading down the screen quickly renders this reality effect null and void. The coal does not visually conceal the body, as the footage of the actress is superimposed on top of it, but it no less denies its presence. The vertical fall of the coal reinscribes the plane of the projection, literalizing the movie screen and the “fall” of the film reel through the projector, forcefully emptying the image of its

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illusionistic depth and motion.\(^{165}\) Even as it does so, the falling coal manages, absurdly, to resurrect the most basic promise of cinematic fantasy. Despite its apparent flatness, the film continues to convey the impression of descending coal, creating a sensation of impending collision felt corporeally even without the viewer’s conscious awareness.

Though short-lived, the coal sequence is crucial to *Discs*’s deviation from *Dreams*. The superimposition looks beyond the immediate demands of the film’s allegory to target the cinematic event itself, at once asserting its illusory nature and unmistakable effectiveness. The difference becomes evident in contrast to the dream sequence Richter himself wrote and directed for the film, which employs a subtle variation on Duchamp’s coal sequence. Richter’s episode features a quasi-Surrealist visual style to portray Joe’s skin turning blue and confronting his former friends in his office. Toward the end, he falls off a ladder. Instead of showing him falling, Richter cuts to a visual effect in which colored dye drops into a glass tank of water. Through camera positioning and lighting, Richter creates the illusion that the water is coterminous with the screen; the drops of dye appear to imbue the screen itself, rather than any space beyond it, with expanding plumes of vibrant color. This sequence could, like the footage with coal in *Discs*, obstruct cinema’s spatial illusion, generating the conditions of denaturalization for the audience. Richter, though, delimits the effect by presenting it as symbolic of a literal and figurative fall described in the narration, thereby resolving any momentary confusion in favor of consistency in the cinematic experience. In *Discs*, in contrast, the coal serves no narrative

function. Manifesting the flatness of the screen and the nonnarrative passage of time, it can only disrupt the film.

Discs’s rendering of the “double attitude” is thus more severe and in some ways more cynical that the rest of Richter’s Dreams. In those parts of the film that Richter directed alone, denaturalization strategies, such as nonprofessional actors, postsynchronized sound, fantasy elements, and visual effects, encourage viewers’s awareness of the filmic illusion while allowing them to maintain a level of “self-forgetfulness.” Discs’s coal sequence targets this “self-forgetfulness” directly, intervening in the integrity of the film and compelling audience members to recognize their bodily presence in the theater and relationship to the screen. At the same time, the alternation and aggregation in this effect implies that the breach itself is inauthentic and ultimately just as illusory. The film can render the disks and staircase sequences “unreal” only by contrasting them with a nominally “real” domain, which remains no more or less illusory than the other footage.

In pointing to an upper limit to the audience’s potential activation within the social and material constraints of the filmic apparatus, Discs’s critique of cinema more closely approaches Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s than Richter’s. Unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, however, Discs does seem to condemn the “internal laws of

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166 Richter, The Struggle for the Film, 136.
167 Scholars have previously identified parallels between other works by Duchamp, primarily his Boîte-en-Valise, and Adorno and Horkheimer’s theorization of the work of art within the “culture industry.” See, for example, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers,” in Museums by Artists, ed. A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 45-56; and T. J. Demos, The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), particularly chap. 1.
[the] technology,” not just the function it had come to serve “within the economy today.” Duchamp engineered a provisional solution by intervening in the technology and subverting the operational model that Adorno and Horkheimer ascribe to the corporatized “culture industry”: the clustering or conglomeration of diverse media across distinct domains of cultural production. Whereas industrial culture renders sameness across media, Duchamp conjoined his *Discs* to affiliated works in other media to articulate the limits of film in ways not possible within the medium alone.

*Please Touch, 1947*

Duchamp directed *Discs*’ “nude descending” sequences in early 1946, with technical assistance from Richter, the cinematographer Arnold Eagle, and another friend, the young Surrealist Enrico Donati. \(^{168}\) The following winter, as Richter concluded postproduction on *Dreams*, Duchamp and Donati collaborated on another project, a cover design for the deluxe catalog of the forthcoming International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris (Fig. 3.14). \(^{169}\) The historiographical elision of *Discs* has obscured the interplay they intended between the rubber “falsie” breast encircled by black velvet on the catalog’s cover and the velvet-covered breast in the film sequence, which Duchamp and Richter


arranged to screen in Paris during the exhibition. The catalog, though, makes the relation explicit, prominently publishing a reproduction of the relevant still within its pages.

An inscription on the back cover, “PRIÈRE DE TOUCHER [PLEASE TOUCH],” summons desiring viewers to touch the breast vacated from the film, dramatizing the material absence of the projected body in the movie theater. Of course, the reality effect of Please Touch is itself relative—any lingering doubt as to its nature is extinguished on physical contact—but this seems precisely the point in its relation to the film, that the perceived realism of any representational mode is illusory and always

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170 While preparing the catalog, Duchamp asked Richter to create an hour-long compilation of the dream sequences to screen during the Paris exhibition, which Duchamp was helping to organize with André Breton. See Duchamp to Breton, February 22, 1947, 1, Fonds André Breton, 10592, boîte de la vente Exposition 1947, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, available at http://www.andrebreton.fr/file/279278. Berger (“The Moving Canvas,” 149) has previously related Richter’s sequence in Dreams to the Surrealists’ interest in myth in the 1947 exhibition. She asserts, however, the exclusion of Dreams from that exhibition. In fact, Dreams was included at the Paris exhibition through both the screenings and the reproductions in the exhibition catalog.

171 Breton and Duchamp, Le surréalisme en 1947, xv. The still is from Duchamp’s version of the “nude descending” sequence, subsequently reshot for the final film by Richter and Eagle. Frames from the new sequence were not available at the time of the catalog’s production.

172 As Janine Mileaf has noted, Duchamp and Donati’s Please Touch anticipates Valie Export’s Tapp und Tastkino (Tap and Touch Cinema) (1968), in which the Austrian artist wore a cardboard box over her nude torso and invited passersby to reach into an opening covered by a theater curtain. Mileaf focuses on the two works’ common engagement in “break[ing] boundaries or prohibitions against contact [and] the political and social repercussions of such transgressions.” The association of Please Touch to Discs demonstrates that Duchamp, like Export, did so in specific reference to the conventions of theatrical cinema. See Mileaf, Please Touch: Dada & Surrealism Objects after the Readymade (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 191–93.
The conjunction of the moving image projection and material object denaturalizes the filmic body in ways that film alone, Duchamp argues, cannot.

This solution to the stated subjugation of the audience by the film medium transforms the critical potential of Richter’s “progressive cinema.” Richter sought to reassert cinema’s status as a mass art and encourage artists and industry to collaborate in the interests of social welfare. Conjoining *Discs* to the book cover voids the collectivist impulse of Richter’s progressive cinema, replacing the public forum of the theater with an alternative private mode. Duchamp and Donati designed the rubber cover for the deluxe limited-edition exhibition catalog, that is, as a luxury item for collectors of avant-garde works. Moreover, its publication to accompany a Surrealist exhibition in France meant that the necessary conjunction effect reached few viewers in the American context, which, by the time of *Dreams*’s theatrical release in 1948, had become the focus of Richter’s progressive cinema.

A lack of concern with reaching the masses had, in a sense, already been true of Duchamp’s filmmaking in the 1920s with *Anemic Cinema*, but it took on new significance in the postwar moment of *Please Touch*. During the 1930s, Duchamp had remained unaligned while Richter and many others affiliated with the avant-gardes struggled to articulate an artistic and intellectual position in the service of proletarian revolution. Though he frequently published and exhibited alongside the Surrealists and for a short time wrote a chess column in the pro-Communist newspaper *Ce Soir*,

Duchamp and Donati pushed the reality effect further on the cover of the standard edition catalogs by substituting a look-alike photograph of a real breast surrounded by velvet for the foam rubber breast.
Duchamp remained outside party politics. In late interviews, he frequently cited the book *The Ego and Its Own* by the nineteenth-century anarcho-individualist philosopher Max Stirner as a major influence. As I discuss in chapter two, his interest in the medium of film even in the 1920s had stemmed not from its relation to a mass public but rather from the phenomenological, psychological, and libidinal experience of the perceiving subject before the moving image. This orientation had marginalized Duchamp from the more socially-oriented avant-gardes of the interwar period. He never formally joined Surrealism and avoided the many international artists’s congresses of the 1930s. However, with the outbreak of war and the reconfiguration of the avant-garde in exile during the 1940s, Duchamp abruptly found himself better equipped than many of his peers, including Richter, to critically engage social and political conditions in the United States. The multi-medial character and privacy of his cinema made it an more

174 Marcel Duchamp wrote the chess column in *Ce Soir* for several months in 1937. For two examples, see Duchamp, “Échecs,” *Ce Soir*, April 3, 1937, 9, and November 10, 1937, 9.


176 Though Duchamp addresses the individual rather than the mass subject, the 1940s works otherwise remain focused on the same heterosexual male subjectivities engaged at the time by Richter and many others on the Left.

177 Moira Roth has characterized Duchamp’s political orientation as “always…indifferent” and associated this apoliticism with Duchamp’s emergence as the “perfect European cult hero” for 1950s McCarthy-era United States. See Moira Roth, “The Aesthetics of Indifference,” *Artforum*, vol. 16, no. 3 (November 1977): 46-53. In my discussion of Duchamp here, I seek to reassert the political stakes and contexts of the artist’s work in the immediate post-World War II period.
effective mirror for the midcentury cultural conditions described by Adorno and Horkheimer than Richter’s variation of progressive cinema.

The intrinsic collectivism that Richter, Benjamin, and others sought to nurture and develop in the film experience had also exposed it to exploitation by Fascist governments and American industry. The mobilization of film for propaganda purposes by both sides during World War II confirmed this risk, leading many, including Adorno and Horkheimer, to conflate the cinema with industrial culture and definitively surrender their aspirations for it. In both *The Struggle for the Film* and *Dreams*, Richter avoided this categorical dismissal by opting for a dualist model that recognized both reactionary and progressive forces within the film industry and film public. With *Discs* and its inversion in the *Please Touch* cover, Duchamp contended that doing so was not possible at the scale sought by Richter or even within film media, but he did not abandon the idea of audience activation or deny a place for film in that project. *Please Touch* complements the filmic object; it does not supplant it.

Duchamp would push this strategy further in a second non-filmic work, discussed in the next chapter. Initiated between the production of *Discs* and *Please Touch* and constructed over the span of some two decades, *Étant donnés…*, is a room-size assemblage that adopts elements from his earlier *Large Glass* into a three-dimensional environment viewed through two eyeholes in a locked door. A nude female mannequin, paralleling the bride figure of the *Glass*, holds aloft an illuminated gas lantern before an automated faux-waterfall landscape alluding to two other components in the *Glass*’s complex mythos. With the documentation of Duchamp’s collaborations with Richter
between 1943 and 1946, *Étant donnés* emerges as a hybrid work shaped in no small part by Duchamp’s return to filmmaking in the context of *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. However, by transposing the filmic experience of *Dreams* to the museum gallery, *Étant donnés* redirects its Brechtian activation from the cinematic spectator to the museum visitor.
CHAPTER 4: Étant donnés’s Museum Cinema

Seven months after the death of Marcel Duchamp, the London Sunday Times published the first account of the artist’s room-sized assemblage Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage…. At the time, Étant donnés was installed in the artist’s New York studio, where it had been seen by a small number of family and friends but not yet publicly displayed or shared with the press. The Times’s art critic, John Russell, had learned of the work’s existence from Richard Hamilton, the British artist who had become close to Duchamp in the final decade of his life. Russell’s second-hand report of the “discovery” was thus short on specific details, neglecting even to name the work’s title. Readers learned only that Duchamp had devoted twenty years to the creation of “one of the largest and most complex projects to have been carried through by an artist in this century” and that its subject was “the relationship between a love-goddess and the male sex,” which, according to Russell, “mirror[ed]” that of the Large Glass. Finally, Russell claimed, somewhat inaccurately, that this salacious subject would be viewed “through a peep-hole cut in the wall.”¹ Readers were assured that more information was forthcoming; the mysterious work had been acquired by the Philadelphia Museum of Art and would soon be installed there “in toto.” The opening was set for July, just three months later.

As Russell promised, Étant donnés debuted at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on July 7, 1969. The public display of the work in a major American museum did little, however, to dispel confusion around its structure and subject, let alone the history of its creation. Those critics who traveled to Philadelphia to see it in person struggled to characterize or analyze their experience, a problem exacerbated by the museum’s embargo on photographic reproduction or physical access to the work’s interior. Without information on the internal structure, their reports were limited to step-by-step accounts of the viewer experience, which remains largely unchanged today. One enters a darkened rectangular gallery at the far end of the museum’s wing devoted to twentieth-century art. At the center of the left wall is a two-paneled wooden door set into a brick archway (Fig. 4.1). Although the doors are shut, two small holes at eye-height offer a view inside (Fig. 4.2). In a 1969 essay, curators Anne d’Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps described the sight:

One looks through a jagged hole in a brick wall, apparently a few feet away, at a nude woman lying on her back among a mass of twigs and leaves. Her face is farthest away from the viewer and is hidden completely by a wave of blond hair. Her legs extend toward the door; her feet are obscured by the brick wall. Her right arm cannot be seen, but her left arm is raised, and in her hand she holds up the vertical glass fixture of a small glass lamp, which glows faintly. In the distance a hilly, wooded landscape rises above the waters of a pond, the clouds are soft and white in a blue sky, and to the far right a waterfall flows and sparkles endlessly—
the only moving element in the silent tableau, which is bathed in brilliant light from invisible sources.\(^2\)

Though d’Harnoncourt and Hopps’s careful accounting of the “silent tableau” remains one of the most evocative and succinct in print, it is notably silent regarding the exposed genitalia of the central figure, a focus of nearly every subsequent study of the work. The nude woman does indeed lie on her back, but only her right leg extends toward the door. The other rises sharply in the other direction, an anatomically impossible spread-eagle stance that prominently displays a long cleft generally taken to represent her vulva and perineum.\(^3\) As French philosopher and critic Jean-François Lyotard observed after seeing the work, Duchamp appears to situate the figure so that her crotch coincides with the vanishing point of the tableau, literally drawing the eye toward it.\(^4\)

Integral to d’Harnoncourt and Hopps’s narration of their experience of the work is their insistence on the basic futility of the task, already evident in the lacuna of their account: “What one actually sees can be reduced to words, but the initial impact is one of the most crucial aspects of the work, and one that cannot be rendered second-hand.”

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Nearly all early reviews expressed similar sentiments, asserting the singularity and ineffability of the experience of this mysterious last work by Duchamp. Though a wealth of new information has become available about the work over the intervening five decades, expressions of puzzlement and confusion persist, at times ceding to critical frustration and even anger.

D’Harnoncourt and Hopps’s essay appeared in a special issue of the museum Bulletin published to coincide with the work’s installation. It provided basic information that had been lacking in Russell’s report: the title of the work, the twenty-year stretch of its creation, 1946 to 1966, and its material constituents. The essay explained how the “complex assemblage of materials and techniques [was] lit from within by hidden lights and complete with a small electric motor.” D’Harnoncourt and Hopps drew upon their conversations with Duchamp’s widow, Alexina Duchamp, and with museum conservators to provide insight into the construction: “Some of the elements—the nude figure, the landscape—were clearly made by hand with great care, while the twigs were gathered on excursions into the countryside around New York and the bricks for the inner wall were collected from demolition sites near Duchamp’s studio. The old wooden door is part of one that once opened onto a sunny street in a small Spanish town near Duchamp’s summer home in Cadaqués and was personally chosen by Duchamp there in the early 1960s.”

Information about the construction of the nude figure and landscape is absent from this account, but both elements have been extensively documented in the years

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since. On the occasion of the major traveling Duchamp retrospective in 1973, the
museum reprinted the 1969 Bulletin and d’Harnoncourt penned a new afterword to
address “a few odd bits of visual evidence [that] have turned up.”6 A photograph found in
Duchamp’s personal papers depicted the landscape that served as the basis for the
backdrop and was identified by his widow as a “waterfall near a small village in
Switzerland that Duchamp had first visited sometime prior to 1950.” The discovery of
multiple small studies for the nude figure also offered new clues to the construction of the
figure and the identity of the woman who modeled for it, though d’Harnoncourt left this
evidence largely unexplored.

In 1977, Lyotard published detailed diagrams of the internal structure, which he
had imaginatively projected from the textual and photographic documentation then
located in the museum collection.7 In the early nineteen-eighties, a team researching
Duchamp’s biography identified the site in the backdrop as Le Forestay waterfall near
Chexbres, Switzerland, which Duchamp was known to have visited in 1946.8 A 1997
BBC documentary disclosed the identity of the model as Maria Martins, a Brazilian-born
sculptor who had died in 1973.9 Francis Naumann subsequently revealed the existence of

6 Ibid., 59
7 Jean-François Lyotard, “Étant donnés: Inventaire du dernier nu,” Marcel Duchamp:
8 Jacques Caumont and Jennifer Gough-Cooper, Rrosopopées 4, no. 6/7 (January 1981):
81-112.
Antonio Ramirez had previously speculated that Martins was a model in Ramirez,
Duchamp: el amor y la muerte, incluso (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1993), 235; trans. as
1998).
extensive correspondence between Duchamp and Martins documenting a lengthy romance from the mid-1940s through the early 1950s.\(^\text{10}\)

For the fortieth anniversary of *Étant donnés*’s debut, Philadelphia Museum of Art curator Michael Taylor gathered these findings with major new discoveries for an exhibition devoted to the history and legacy of the work. The exhibition established, in many cases for the first time, basic dates and information about the work’s creation. The catalog remains one of the most comprehensive accounts of a work by Duchamp, or any single work of art for that matter, devoting nearly two hundred pages to a descriptive chronology and analysis of the work’s conception, construction, installation, and legacy, supplemented by two additional essays by the museum’s conservation staff with technical analysis of the various material components, and multiple appendices of photographic and textual documentation.

The publication of Taylor’s research on *Étant donnés* marked an epochal shift in scholarship on the work. Even with the infusion of new technical, archival, and art historical information about *Étant donnés*, however, the enigma alluded to by Russell and reiterated by d’Harnoncourt and Hopps remained in place. In his introduction, Taylor asserted, “No photograph can ever communicate the unique visual experience of seeing firsthand Marcel Duchamp’s *Étant donnés.*”\(^\text{11}\) To emphasize the point, he quoted the artist Jasper Johns’s description of *Étant donnés* as “the strangest work of art any

museum has ever had in it.” After nearly half a century, there was still a sense that *Étant donnés* resisted communication and critical analysis.

What makes *Étant donnés* so enduringly “strange”? All material works of art by definition privilege direct experience. Art history is littered with authors’s denigrations of literary description and pleas for viewers to visit the monuments for themselves, but there is still an expectation of communicability that does not hold true for *Étant donnés*. In this chapter, I argue that the strangeness, the ineffability, of *Étant donnés* originates from a deliberate medial mis-registration and transgression of cultural domains. *Étant donnés* is a work of cinema masquerading as a work of painting or sculpture, a work of “cinema by other means” to borrow Pavle Levi’s phrase. Photographic and written testimony fails the work because *Étant donnés* deliberately muddles the dominant hermeneutic of both modernist art history and its museum home: medium specificity. *Étant donnés*’s resistance to photographic or written testimony is only “strange” when presented in the context of visual art. In cinema and other time-based media, the inherent durational aspect makes firsthand experience compulsory, obviating the need for repeated assertions of its importance in the critical literature.

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Medium and the Reception of *Étant donnés*

Since 1969, *Étant donnés* has been installed in a small terminal gallery of a wing at the Philadelphia Museum of Art devoted to nineteenth- and twentieth-century painting and sculpture. Duchamp had personally selected this location before his death, but the work was conclusively *not* painting or sculpture. Modernist painting self-reflexively refers to the flat rectilinear surface of the wall-mounted canvas. Modernist sculpture might take the form of a wall-mounted relief or a floor-anchored object “in the round,” but it does not envelop all surfaces of a gallery or incorporate lighting and viewing mechanisms in the manner of *Étant donnés*.

For many commentators, including Duchamp himself evidently, the work eluded specific conceptions of painting, sculpture, or other media, and appeared instead to hybridize them. In one of the few recorded instances of Duchamp referring to the work, from private correspondence in the mid-1960s, he called it a “sculpture-construction.”  

D’Harnoncourt and Hopps employed a different hybrid: “tableau-assemblage.”  

Michael Taylor utilized both terms interchangeably and sometimes combined as “tableau-construction,” but also used the alternatives “diorama-assemblage,” and “tableau-diorama.”  

Each hyphenate embeds *Étant donnés* in distinct pre-existing discourses. Duchamp and d’Harnoncourt and Hopps’s selections reference art historical traditions. Duchamp’s “sculpture-construction” invokes “constructed sculpture,” while d’Harnoncourt and Hopps’s pairing of large-scale painting and assemblage conjures

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15 d’Harnoncourt and Hopps, “*Étant donnés*,” 13, 32, 47.
16 For examples, see Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, 24, 193, 197, 210, 222.
Edward Kienholz, whose work was frequently characterized as both “tableau” and “assemblage” in period press. Alternatively, Taylor’s “diorama” hyphenates are museological, embedding Étant donnés in a discourse of museum period rooms and didactic displays, to which he explicitly compared Étant donnés in his catalog.\(^\text{17}\)

Though these assertions of medium are nominally descriptive, they are also performative in the sense that they encourage certain readings of the work and foreclose others. “Sculpture-construction” accommodates the nude figure, gas lamp, and the branch-covered table that supports them, but overlooks the photo-collage backdrop, kinetic waterfall and viewing mechanism. “Tableau-assemblage” improves upon this by recalling the tableau vivant and painted tableau traditions and, to the contemporary reader, Jean-François Chevrier’s later use of tableau to characterize the large-format art photography of the 1980s and 1990s.\(^\text{18}\) This too, however, minimizes the specific viewing apparatus central to the experience of Étant donnés. “Diorama-construction” may be the best of the three, relying upon the adjacency of “diorama” to tableau vivant to convey the

\(^{17}\) Taylor (Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 49-50) associates Étant donnés with the use of mannequins in anatomical and ethnological museum displays through the work of Belgian artist Paul Delvaux. Other authors have related the structure of Étant donnés with that of the museum period room. See, for example, Michael Lüthy, “Étant donnés as a Form of Experience,” trans. Daniel Hendrickson, in Banz, Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall, 132-45; Catherine Craft, An Audience of Artists: Dada and the Emergence of Abstract-Expressionism (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012), 216-20.

spatial and visual character of the work. It too, however, overlooks certain elements of *Étant donné* such as the “peephole” viewing mechanism.

The primary alternative, from Rosalind Krauss’s 2011 book *Under Blue Cup*, entirely voids “medium” as a meaningful measure for *Étant donnés*, effectively placing the work outside any preceding tradition from the history of modern art. What *Étant donnés* looks like, Krauss asserted, is a broad swath of the art that followed it, from the 1970s through to the present, broadly conceived as postmodern, or outside of the modernist tradition. Krauss described these works, from post-minimalism and conceptualism in the 70s to the installation art and “relational aesthetics” of the more recent past, as rejecting the dominant paradigm of modernist criticism—“medium specificity.” Instead, she explained, they introduce “ordinary components into the context of some form of aesthetic institution, whether museum, gallery, or art fair—in order to ask…the general question—‘What makes this art?’”—rather than the specific one of medium.”

Though Krauss has treated these works more analytically elsewhere, in *Under Blue Cup*, she lamented their creation, seeing it as an “aneurystic purge of the visual, a purge meant to bury the practice of specific mediums under the opprobrium of a mindless moralizing against the grounds of art itself.” The medium is more than a material support for representation, she argued. It is the “very foundation,” a mnemonic paradigm of “all possible variations open to a physical substance.” Duchamp had anticipated the

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 17.
“post-medium condition of contemporary art” with his cerebral readymades of the 1910s. It was Duchamp’s Étant donnés, however, that announced the deferred arrival of readymades in the museum and with them “Duchamp’s eclipse of Picasso as the most important artist of the century.” Fulfilling the promise made by the readymades decades earlier, “[Étant donnés] utterly disperses the medium,” she argued, “invalidating it as the basis for any judgment at all.”

Amidst these observations of medium-hybridity and medium vacuation, a few scholars quietly recognized a subtle reanimation of medium-specificity in Étant donnés. In a passing comment in his 1986 essay on Dada Cinema, Thomas Elsaesser characterized Étant donnés as “parody[ing] the cinema by figuring it as a ‘nature morte.’” A few years later, Linda Landis, in an unpublished dissertation, observed “clear analogies with the cinema,” pointing to “the spectator peering through the dark space…at a bright illusionary scene, the spectator’s view controlled through 2 lens (peepholes) and, even the light projected through film,” referring to Duchamp’s use of a lightbulb placed behind semi-translucent tape to create the animated waterfall effect. Indeed, the increasing presence of illuminated projectors in darkened galleries, the so-called black box/white cube phenomenon, has exposed the cinemalike character of Étant donnés. Like many contemporary moving image works, Étant donnés installs a small

22 Ibid., 20.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 126.
cinema within the art gallery. Absent cinematographic film, a cinematographic projector, or other elements traditionally identified with the medium, however, it is a cinema “by other means.”

Pavle Levi, whose 2012 book *Cinema by Other Means* theorized and popularized the phrase, proposes that such works pervade the visual art and literature of the twentieth century. There is, he argues, “an incredibly rich history, stretching from the 1910s to the present of avant-garde endeavors to practice the cinema by using the tools, the materials, the technology, and the techniques that either modify and alter, or are entirely different from those typically associated with the normative cinematographic apparatus…. extraordinary, radical experiments not only with but also ‘around’ and even without film.”

Levi’s survey of “cinema by other means” includes a diverse group of works by Man Ray, Francis Picabia, Raoul Hausmann, Lázló Moholy-Nagy, Karel Teige, El Lissitzky, Lev Kuleshov, Guillaume Apollinaire, Ljubomir Micić, Philippe Soupault, Salvador Dalí, Antonin Artaud, Boško Tokin, Monny de Boully, Maurice Lamaitre, Isidore Isou, Roland Sebatier, Ljubiša Jocić, and Alain Resnais. What unites them, Levi insists, is “not art made under the influence of or referring to the cinema, but conceptualization of the cinema as itself a type of practice that, *since the invention of the film apparatus*, has also (simultaneously) had a history of execution through other, often ‘older,’ artistic media.”

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28 Ibid., 27-28.
29 Ibid., 27.
More than any others among Duchamp’s “moving image” works, Étant donnés appears to belong firmly within this lineage. Levi’s “cinema by other means” relies upon the existence of a “normative cinematographic apparatus” to reflexively interrogate, challenge, counterpose. As I have argued, Duchamp’s kinematic works of the 1910s and optics works of the 1920s display little interest in the “normative” cinematographic apparatus, which at that time was still taking shape. Though the cinematograph itself became available in the 1890s, the competing dispositifs of early film congealed into the apparatus to which Levi refers later and unevenly: the cinema-hall architecture of frontal projection on a wall-mounted screen and visual conventions of feature films in the 1910s, sound and color technology later, in the 1930s and 1940s. Duchamp would have first encountered the normative apparatus in the 1940s through Richter and Dreams That Money Can Buy, examining its architecture in Discs. Étant donnés then executes this cinema through “other” and “older” artistic media.

Designating Étant donnés “cinema by other means” and integrating it in Levi’s list does not fully elucidate the work’s genesis and operations, however. Levi’s examples, he claims, interrogate cinema by “repeatedly evoking, by enacting, the discrepancy between the idea [of cinema] and its technological implementation,” thereby exposing “the essential qualities and the radical, noninstrumentalist creative potential contained in [the medium].” The very name “cinema by other means” incorporates a heterogeneous group of works as being “about” the cinema in some essential way. Étant donnés is not a work “about” the cinema. Instead, I argue, Étant donnés exploits mid-century cinema’s

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30 Ibid., 45.
formal architecture and its attendant discourses of spectatorship to image, to represent, the modern art museum and the viewing experience it provokes. That is to say, *Étant donnés* uses the alternative means of photography, body casts, and assemblage to extend Duchamp’s critique of cinematic spectatorship to the mid-century museum, a site where the medium-specific discourses of modernism clashed with activated avant-garde exhibition modes innovated in the 1920s and 1930s.

**The Three Phases of Duchamp’s *Étant donnés***

The absence of documentation surrounding both *Étant donnés* and *Discs’s* creation has masked the place of cinema in *Étant donnés’s* development and operation. Duchamp had inscribed the date range 1946 to 1966 in black paint on an interior section of the work but, as the *Bulletin* essay explained, evidence in support for these dates was scant. The “earliest concrete evidence” to be found was a small pencil on paper sketch of Martins’s body that Duchamp had signed and dated “Dec. 1947.”  

31 There was another study featuring the figure, which, though undated, likely followed it, and a third, which Duchamp had signed and dated “1948-49.” Even these were only preliminary studies. No material evidence existed for dating the material constituents of *Étant donnés* beyond the artist’s inscription.

31 d’Harnoncourt and Hopps, “*Étant donnés,*” 11.
In 1981, the identification of the waterfall pictured in the photo-collage backdrop provided the first evidence for the work’s origination in 1946. On the basis of this photograph, Jacques Caumont and Jennifer Gough-Cooper, pouring over correspondence for a planned biography of Duchamp, identified the site as the Le Forestay waterfall near Chexbres, Switzerland, which Duchamp was known to have visited between August 5 and 9, 1946. However, this alone could not resolve the chronology. As noted above, the earliest study was dated December 1947, more than a year later, leaving open the possibility that the photographs Duchamp used in the construction of the backdrop preceded the conception of the project.

Michael Taylor addressed this problem by drawing upon evidence from a range of newly available or previously overlooked sources. He re-dated the “Dec. 1947” study to 1946, reasoning that its creation likely coincided with that of a similar drawing of Martins by Duchamp, which was signed and dated “1946.” The inscribed date, “Dec. 1947,” he conjectured, records the date Duchamp gave the study to Martins, possibly as a Christmas gift. This then opened the possibility that the subsequent undated study also dated to 1946. The third study, he surmised, may have originated in 1946 as well. Though Duchamp had inscribed 1948-49 on that work, the artist allegedly reported to editor Hugh

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32 When d’Harnoncourt first reported on the discovery of one of the source photographs in 1973, the date of their production was unknown. Duchamp’s widow, Alexina Duchamp, confirmed that Duchamp had first visited the waterfall sometime prior to 1950 but offered no date for the photograph itself. See d’Harnoncourt, “Afterword,” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 64, nos. 299-300 (April-September 1969), second reprint (1987): 59.

Shaw that he made it in 1946. However, there is also a possible reference to its completion in a letter from Duchamp to Martins, dated September 1948. Taylor settled on a tentative dating of 1946 to 1948, taking the “1948-49” inscription to be an erroneous date of execution or factual record of gift to Maria Martins.

Duchamp’s work on *Dreams That Money Can Buy* in 1945-46 corroborates Taylor’s re-dating of the early studies and offers additional insight into their interrelated conception. It also resolves a recurrent problem of existing interpretations of *Étant donnés*, which have followed museological convention in privileging the final installed version of *Étant donnés* and subordinating earlier or alternative versions as preliminary studies, thereby overlooking significant variation in them. D’Harnoncourt and Hopps’s *Bulletin* essay claimed, for example, “the conception of the whole…must have been clear in Duchamp’s mind from the first.” Hopps and d’Harnoncourt minimize later deviations by casting them as a result of “inventive interaction between the conception of the piece and its execution,” in which “familiar materials [were] chosen because they fit the purpose, perhaps altering the total effect of the assemblage slightly as they were introduced.”

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36 d’Harnoncourt and Hopps, “*Étant donnés*,” 12

37 Ibid., 40.
Taylor asserted that Duchamp’s conception of *Étant donnés* substantially changed over two distinct phases of construction, specifically in reference to two elements: the viewing mechanism and the object held aloft by the mannequin. \(^{38}\) *Étant donnés*’s development out of Duchamp’s work on *Dreams* also lends support to this idea, pointing to the existence of an alternative first version of the work in much closer dialogue with *Dreams That Money Can Buy* that specifically mimicked the structure of the “keyhole” film convention that appears in that film. A second phase of construction, in the 1950s and 1960s, altered the viewing mechanism and mannequin to create the version we know today. Here, I also distinguish a third phase in the construction, comprising additions made between 1966 and its July 1969 installation in Philadelphia that substantially modified the work. These late changes include those planned by Duchamp and installed by others after his death in 1968, such the brick archway, as well as other elements not foreseen by the artist but made necessary by the move to the museum. The changes in the second and third phases alter the work’s original engagement with *Dreams That Money Can Buy* in important ways, but cinematic analogies remain central throughout.

*Étant donnés, Phase One*

The first phase of *Étant donnés* developed in close conjunction with Duchamp’s work on *Dreams That Money Can Buy* and *Please Touch*, taking up ideas developed

\(^{38}\) Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, 77. Juan Antonio Ramírez had previously hypothesized a two-phase construction: one for the development of the nude and landscape (ca. 1944-50) and another for the installation and optical apparatus (1950-1968). See Ramírez, *Duchamp*, 236, 244.
there. As documented in the previous chapter, Han Richter’s fall 1942 invitation for Duchamp to contribute Anemic Cinema to a feature-length survey of historical avant-garde films prompted a return to filmmaking by the artist after a recess of seventeen years. In June 1943, Duchamp made a short color film focused on the motion of his Rotorelief from 1935. It was never released. Two years later, Richter again enlisted Duchamp, now to help him reconceive the survey project as a narrative film titled Dreams That Money Can Buy. Between the summer of 1945 and May 1946, Duchamp worked steadily with Richter on the frame narrative and individual artist sequences for Dreams. He was overseeing the production of his own sequence, titled Discs, in winter and spring 1946 when attempts to extend his visa failed, requiring a last-minute return to France. Obstacles in the visa renewal stranded Duchamp there for more than eight months, a period during which he worked with André Breton to plan the upcoming surrealist exhibition in Paris to which he would contribute the Please Touch catalog cover.

Duchamp likely made the first study for Étant donnés, the pencil drawing of Martins’s nude body (Fig. 4.3), in late winter or early spring before he left New York for Paris, that is, during the production of Discs for Dreams That Money Can Buy. Several other works relating to Martins can be firmly dated to this period. In one (Fig. 4.4), Duchamp loosely sketched a nude body that appears to join elements of his and Martins’s bodies in simultaneous side and frontal views. A single line traces the hourglass contour of breasts and buttocks; toward the bottom faint markings outline an erect penis. Small pieces of transparent tape adhere clumps of human hair near the head, armpits, and
genitals to the paper support. The hair at the head, a dark brown, likely came from Martins, while that of the armpits and genitals is reddish-brown and presumably originated from Duchamp himself. Another “drawing,” Paysage Fautif (Wayward or Faulty Landscape) (Fig. 4.5), is a small sheet of plastic backed with black satin on which Duchamp splashed seminal fluid. A third drawing (Fig. 4.6), a small pencil sketch of Martins’s foot, dates to 1946 as well, likely that same spring.

The nude drawing of Martins is recognized as the first study for Étant donnés due to Duchamp’s inscription: “Étant donnés: Maria, la chute d’eau et le gaz d’éclairage.” The drawing itself works out the orientation of the figure, sketching her torso, legs, and feet much as they appear in the final work and similarly ignores her lower arms and head. Here, however, she appears upright, not on her back as in Étant donnés. Her right foot is arched and her left foot is raised several feet in the air. Holding this position would have been physically exhausting after only a few moments (if not entirely impossible) leading some commentators to conclude that Martins posed with the aid of a support. The presence of certain anatomical distortions suggest that Duchamp may have instead worked from individual plaster casts taken from Martins’s body. Duchamp and Martins are known to have taken private lessons in life casting from a specialist, Ettore Salvatore, 39

39 Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 69.

40 Unlike the other two works, he would retain ownership of this drawing for a time before including it in a deluxe edition of the Boîte-en-Valise for Enrico Donati (date of sale unknown).

at some point in the 1940s, and used their casts in the creation of the *Étant donnés* mannequin.⁴²

Taylor, who discusses the casts at length, proposes that Duchamp used them to translate the life drawing into a full-scale mannequin in the later 1940s resulting in anatomical errors, particularly those in the mannequin’s genitalia. Amelia Jones and other art historians have read the strange distortion of the vulva and perineum into a single long cleft as a deliberate act of violence on the woman’s body.⁴³ Taylor conversely argues, “The physical deformations of the genital area, seen in…the completed work, almost certainly were caused by the body-casting process that Martins underwent, as well as the figure’s accretion of cast body parts.”⁴⁴ Certain anatomical errors are already evident in the first pencil sketch, however, intimating the use of casts. The genitals are obscured here under pubic hair (absent in the mannequin) but other aspects appear deformed.⁴⁵ The joints between the legs and the torso appear particularly abnormal, displaying a range of motion not possible for the human body. The upper thighs and pubis appear flattened,

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⁴⁵ As Taylor (*Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, 69) notes, pubic hair would have been removed for the casting process. If he based the drawing on the casts, Duchamp could have imaginatively added the hair back in to the image. Indeed, Francis Naumann (“Notre Dame des désirs,” 155) has speculated that Duchamp may have originally intended to add public hair to the finished figure, which would have cloaked the body’s distortion.
seen from below, displayed such that the back of the right thigh and perineum are simultaneously visible, while the upper body and below the knee are seen frontally.

The use of body casts at an early stage would corroborate Duchamp’s plans for a large-scale three-dimensional figure from the inception of the project. The persistence of certain distortions from the drawing phase through to the final mannequin indeed appears to confirm it. Duchamp’s reliance on the casts, though likely producing the distortions, does not fully explain his continued fidelity to them. He presumably could have amended them at this or any later stage were he concerned with anatomical accuracy. Is it possible, as Jones argues, that the scene depicts bodily violence? Mark Nelson and Susan Hudson Bayliss have gone further, proposing Duchamp modeled the figure after the horrific crime scene photographs of the 1947 Black Dahlia murder.\footnote{Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss, \textit{Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder} (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006). Nelson and Bayliss’s argument extends similar claims by Jean-Michel Rabaté and Jonathan Wallis. See Jean-Michel Rabaté, “Étant donnés: 1° L’art, 2°: le crime; Duchamp criminal de l’avant-garde,” \textit{Interfaces}, no. 14 (June 1998): 113-30; Jonathan Wallis, “Case Open and/or Unsolved: Marcel Duchamp and the Black Dahlia Murder,” \textit{Rutgers Art Review} 20 (2003): 7-23.}\footnote{Taylor, \textit{Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés}, 195-97.} Taylor scrutinizes and largely discredits these claims, noting that the woman portrayed was, at the time of the drawing, his romantic partner and a full collaborator on the project.\footnote{Taylor, \textit{Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés}, 195-97.} Moreover, he points out, the re-dating of the first \textit{Étant donnés} drawing to 1946 denies precedence to the Black Dahlia murder, making Duchamp’s mimicry impossible. If the bodily distortion was deliberate on Duchamp’s part, it may have instead served the scene’s overall collage-aesthetic shared by the landscape backdrop (discussed below) in an attempt to mimic cinematic montage effects. If not forced to cohere as an impossible static tableau, the
disjunctures of the body and landscape effectively animate the scene. Noam Elcott has observed a similar effect in the Dada photomontages of John Heartfield and Raoul Hausmann, writing that they employ “the means of film—namely montage” to effect a “cinema by other means.” Duchamp’s use of body casts here, and altered photographs in the landscape backdrop, amplify this impression, substituting alternative indexical means for the cinematographic film of the movie camera. The undercurrent of bodily violence would seem then to be related to that of the movie camera and its compulsive dissection and magnification of the female body. As critic and theorist Siegfried Kracauer, whom Duchamp knew through his work on Dreams That Money Can Buy, had famously characterized the gymnastic Tiller Girls and the “body culture” on view on Weimar Berlin’s screens in the 1920s: “[The images] can no longer be reassembled into human beings after the fact…. Arms, thighs, and other segments are the smallest component parts of the composition.”

Duchamp retained possession of this sketch of Martins’s cast body when he left New York for Paris, despite giving away his other Martins-related works from that spring; the body hair “collage” went to Roberto Matta and the seminal fluid “painting”

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49 On the indexical character of the body casts, see Elena Filipovic, The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 243-47. Filipovic (Ibid., 246) notes that Duchamp must have deliberately maintained the bodily distortions.
directly to Martins. That summer, he vacationed in Switzerland with his longtime companion Mary Reynolds, and while there, took seven monochrome photographs (Figs. 4.7-4.8) of the waterfall in Chexbres. He also made careful notes regarding the colors of specific elements of the landscape, evidently already envisioning hand-colorization of the scene at some future date. Then, back in Paris or following his return to New York in January 1947, he created a small photocollage combining the nude sketch of Martins with the waterfall photographs. The hybrid work on paper (Fig. 4.9) served as a maquette for a three-dimensional manifestation, offering the first definitive evidence for the existence of plans for the larger-scale version of the work.

For the photocollage, Duchamp copied the original nude portrait onto a second sheet of paper, adding in the process a partial right arm and full left arm to the figure. He then cut out the drawing and pasted it on top of a landscape assembled from fragments of his Le Forestay photographs. The nude towers over the landscape creating the impression of a giant woman who straddles the banks of the cascading falls. Like the nude, the landscape combines fragments to create a fictive, even fantasy, whole. Duchamp cut out elements from two of his seven photographs, first adhering a single large cut-out onto the wood support and then mounting smaller fragments on top of one another and parts of the nude drawing. A conservation analysis in 2009 revealed the presence of thin pieces of wood or cardboard hidden behind two of the cut-outs—the hillside on the lower-left and the vertical tree obscuring the figure’s leg (Fig. 4.10). As the hillside and tree originate

in the landscape foreground, their elevation from the surface contributes to the sense of depth, which Duchamp amplifies by occluding portions of the landscape behind overlapping fragments.\textsuperscript{52} Finally, before completing the collage, Duchamp cut wide strips of blue-gray paper and placed them over three edges of the image, effectively obscuring the view of the top, bottom, and right registers.

This photocollage appears to anticipate many of the elements present in the final state of \textit{Étant donnés}. Modeling wax on the surface of the drawn figure and the layering of the photographic elements confirms that Duchamp planned to render the scene in three dimensions. The strip of paper surrounding the image on three sides prefigures the inner brick frame.\textsuperscript{53} The depth effects and frame also affirm the mimicry of the filmic image detected in the montage elements of the nude figure and landscape. There is no indication, though, of a binocular viewing apparatus, kinetic waterfall, or illuminated lantern, all of which appear in the finished work. Also missing is any evidence of the final work’s title. The Taylor chronology suggests that it was after creating the photocollage that Duchamp decided to give the first pencil portrait to Martins, signing and dating it in December 1947 and adding the inscription that would serve, in slightly varied form, as the final title of the work.

Like the title that Duchamp would inscribe on the surface of the mannequin in \textit{Étant donnés} in 1966, the inscription adapts a line that Duchamp had written in two notes

\textsuperscript{52} Taylor, \textit{Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés}, 266.
\textsuperscript{53} According to a 1969 memorandum, Alexina Duchamp claimed that Duchamp did not conceive the inner brick wall until the 1950s. See Anne d’Harnoncourt and Theodore Siegl, “Notes on the History of the Tableau,” box 1, folder 2, Twentieth-Century Art Department Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives, 2. See also Taylor, \textit{Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés}, 115.
for the *Large Glass*: “Étant donnés 1º la chute d’eau 2º le gaz d’éclairage...,” usually translated as, “Given: 1st The Waterfall 2nd The Illuminating Gas...” These notes, and others written for the *Glass* between 1912 and 1915 and published in 1934, identify the waterfall and illuminating gas as energy sources in the left side of the Bachelor’s Domain powering and compelling the complex procession of events in the *Glass* leading to the ineffectual “stripping” of the Bride in the upper register. The fall of the water, ultimately not represented on the *Glass*, would spin the water mill and the connected chocolate grinder. The gas, also invisible except for its effects, would arise from the “malic molds,” representing the “malic” desire for the Bride, which not only results in and from her “stripping bare” but in the “illumination” of the entire scenario.

The inscription on the pencil sketch interpolated Maria Martins’s first name into this list and removed the numeration: “Étant donnés: Maria, la chute d’eau et le gaz d’éclairage.” Martins’s inclusion among the energy sources generating the stripping of the Bride implies a distinction between her and the Bride that is absent from the finished work, where her figure appears synonymous with it. Michael Taylor proposes this inscription as the original title for the entire project. If true, Duchamp may have sought to revise the formulation of the *Large Glass*’s preface in *Étant donnés*. Though it is certainly possible, it seems just as likely that the inscription served as a playful variation on the already selected final title (“Étant donnés 1º la chute d’eau 2º le gaz

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d’éclairage...”) intended only for the private sketch, or that Duchamp had not yet devised any title for the larger project.

In any case, the 1947 inscription makes clear that Duchamp saw the elements in the new work as surrogates for their counterparts in the *Glass*, the work whose primary construction had ceased more than twenty years prior but which had remained the focus of much of his energy since, from the assembly and publication of the *Green Box* to its repair and mounting at Katherine Dreier’s Connecticut home. Positing a direct relationship between the two works has been central to the reception of *Étant donnés* since its opening in 1969. In that year, d’Harnoncourt and Hopps wrote in the *Bulletin* essay, “The materials used in the assemblage make literal references to elements that seemed purely imaginary in the notes [for the *Glass*].”56 “It is inevitable to speculate” they added, “that the nude figure lying spread-eagled among the twigs...is the Bride Stripped Bare.” Even smaller elements corresponded to the *Glass*’s conceptual iconography. The sticks under the mannequin were the “boughs frosted in nickel and platinum,” referenced in the notes for the *Glass*. The brick wall and doorway were the “brick base” described in the notes as part of the Bachelor Machine.

The photorealistic waterfall had an obvious and direct analog as did the illuminated gas lamp held aloft by the nude. The Bachelors were less evident to d’Harnoncourt and Hopps. They declared them absent, but hinted at by the glass lamp, which they called a “malic mold.”57 Subsequent commentators have affirmed their reading of *Étant donnés*’s relationship to the *Large Glass*, though some identify the

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56 d’Harnoncourt and Hopps, “*Étant donnés,*” 22.
57 Ibid., 24.
Bachelors as present in the viewers peering through the peepholes, a position that d’Harnoncourt and Hopps had aligned with the Glass’s “Oculist Witnesses.” Still, they had anticipated this possibility. After noting that the absence of the Bachelors “could be taken to intimate a more hopeful mood” than their hapless performance in the Large Glass, d’Harnoncourt and Hopps proposed it could also mean “the Bachelors have been literally shown the door, and are left (with us) to peer at the Bride from the other side of a wood and brick barrier…, their frustration and her isolation…more drastic than ever.”

The perceived transposition of elements from the Large Glass to three-dimensions in Étant donnés has contributed to negative assessments of the later work. Some early commentators cast the naturalism of the scene as a retreat from the post-cubist formal experimentation of the Glass and a renunciation of the artist’s former radicality. Cleve Gray asserted that more astonishing than the revelation of Étant donnés’s existence was its frank appearance: “It derived from the same subject matter as the Large Glass, but it was a total about-face in style. From pure, intellectual abstraction in an esoteric medium, Duchamp had made a complete reversal into theatrical realism. He had produced an erotic crèche.”

“For the first time,” John Canaday wrote in the New York Times, “this

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cleverest of twentieth-century masters looks a bit retardaire.”61 Joseph Masheck agreed, describing the style as “totally divorced from modernist abstract tendencies” and adding that he found it “startlingly gross and amateurish.”62 Even d’Harnoncourt and Hopps acknowledged that the realism of Étant donnés “may at first seem a disturbing contrast” to previous works such as the Large Glass, though they considered it resolved by a kind of biographical parallelism in the artist’s paintings before encountering cubism, the “realistic, stolid nudes of the 1910-1911.” “The airy schematizations of The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, which once seemed the very end of the possible exploration of this theme, now appear as a great midway point on the trajectory that curves back upon itself (although not in any sense returning to its starting point).”63

The presence of iconographic elements from the Glass in the early studies for Étant donnés offers significant insight into the role they played in the genesis in the work, contradicting impressions of a direct relationship between Étant donnés and the Large Glass. Duchamp’s turn to the Glass between 1945 and 1947 was, I would like to argue, mediated by his participation in Richter’s film. For, if the adaptation of the Large Glass in Étant donnés looks like anything, it is period cinema. One thinks immediately of Dreams That Money Can Buy, but also of the prominent incorporation of modern painting in contemporary films like Alfred Hitchcock’s Spellbound (1945) and Albert Lewin’s The Private Affairs of Bel Ami (1947). Étant donnés’s transposition of a static

work of art into photorealistic three-dimensions is consistent with Dreams’s adaptations of works of visual art, and more specifically, with Duchamp’s own Discs sequence.

First participating in Richter’s aborted compilation of avant-garde short films, Duchamp worked more closely with Richter in 1945 and 1946 on the production of Dreams. Initially conceived as a frame story to integrate the avant-garde shorts, including Duchamp’s Anemic Cinema, Dreams developed into something else over the course of 1944 and 1945. As I document in chapter three, Richter at first sought to supplement the pre-existing shorts with four new sequences based on ideas from Duchamp, Fernand Léger, Alexander Calder, and Richter himself. He eventually discarded the pre-existing shorts altogether and filmed seven entirely new sequences lasting between three and ten minutes long, adding Max Ernst, Man Ray, and another Calder sequence to the list.

In the early treatments for Dreams That Money Can Buy, the envisioned sequences were as diverse as those in the historical compilation. Duchamp, for example, was to contribute color footage of his spinning Rotorelief disks and Léger was to provide shop-window mannequins for a sequence addressing the subject of “American folklore.” Then, in the summer and fall of 1945, after production of Léger’s sequence had already begun, Richter decided to unify the artists’s shorts around a common theme: the incorporation of works of modern art. The new sequences employ several techniques of doing so. For the already-filmed Léger mannequin sequence, Richter shot new footage of an “animated” Léger painting featuring a motor-driven wooden bicycle wheel depicted in the original. The two Calder sequences document Calder’s kinetic mobiles and puppet-like circus in motion. The Ernst, Duchamp, and Man Ray episodes all “dramatize” pre-
existing works by those artists. The Max Ernst short stages an image from the artist’s collage novel *Une semaine de bonté* on an imitation set with live actors, inventing an allegorical narrative to go along with it. The Man Ray episode closely adapts a pseudo-autobiographical text published by the artist, titled “Ruth, Roses, and Revolvers,” in *View magazine* in 1944.\(^64\) Duchamp supplemented his earlier plan for a *Rotorelief* film with brief interrupting sequences of a live staging of his oil painting *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* (1912).

In a sense, this live-staging of graphic works proceeded from the tableau vivant, the “living picture” theatrical format that enjoyed wide-spread popularity in the nineteenth century. The static composition of costumed bodies in the era’s history paintings adapted well to the stage. Richter evidently felt filmic technology would better approximate the temporal and spatial disjunctions in modernist painting.\(^65\) The adaptation of works of visual art also had more proximate predecessors in the history of avant-garde theater and cinema. As discussed in chapter two, George Baker has argued that the ballet and film ensemble production of *Relâche/Entr’acte*, staged by Francis Picabia and René Clair at Paris’s Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, adapted the theme from Duchamp’s *Large Glass* to the stage.\(^66\) Picabia and René Clair staged another ballet for *Relâche’s* closing night, titled *Ciné-sketch*, in which three scenes unfolded simultaneously. Spotlights directed the audience’s attention to one at a time, mimicking the “montage effect”

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\(^{64}\) See Man Ray, “Ruth, Roses, and Revolvers,” *View* 4, no. 4 (December 1944), 120-23.


emergent in film editing. Duchamp, a close friend of Picabia, appeared as an actor in both
*Cine-sketch* and in *Entr’acte*, the film Picabia and René Clair made to play during the
intermission of *Relâche*, and, as I argue in chapter two, likely contributed to the design of
the ballets and the film. In *Cine-sketch*, he performed in a live reenactment of a painting,
*Adam and Eve* (ca. 1510), by Lucas Cranach the Elder. Though historians frequently
describe the reenactment as a *tableau vivant*, the mimicry of filmic conventions in *Cine-
Sketch* places it closer to the staging of visual art in *Dreams That Money Can Buy*.

Richter employed the pre-existing idea of live adaptations of static works of art in
*Dreams That Money Can Buy* to address contemporary social and political issues. As he
elaborated in a programmatic text written over the course of the later 1930s titled *Der
Kampf um den Film* (*The Struggle for the Film*), Richter believed that the avant-garde
cinema he had helped pioneer and propagate in the 1920s had to change to counter the
reactionary forces of nationalist politics and industrial capitalism. He proposed a
partnership between artists and industry for the creation of a “progressive cinema” that
would both entertain and empower viewers. *Dreams*’s narrative became an allegory for
this proposal. The adaptation of pre-existing works of art in the dreams represents the
reconciliation of artist and industry in progressive cinema. The framestory didactically
demonstrates the ways in which this cinema could assuage the deleterious effects of
contemporary society on the individual.

Duchamp participated in Richter’s project by incorporating a filmic adaptation of
*Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* into his dream sequence *Discs*. As in his early plans
for *Étant donnés*, the “Nude Descending” sequences in *Discs* employ a live female model
(Fig. 4.11) to approximate the more abstracted nude of his painting of 1912. Duchamp even sought a design that would visually resemble the cubistic faceting in the painting. As Richter later recalled, “Marcel….made designs on the girls’s legs with cellophane tape to make them look a little more abstract.”67 At the same time he was filming these sequences, Duchamp was creating the first studies for Étant donnés. Though the early pencil sketch of Martins’s body does not attempt to directly reproduce the visual experience of the Glass, it adopts the idea of using a live model as the substitute for a painted nude and introduces other “real” surrogates for other graphical elements in the Glass: the sticks and brick walls, the waterfall and illuminated lantern.

The adaptation of the Glass in Étant donnés clearly has precedents in Duchamp’s contributions to Dreams That Money Can Buy. The use of similar strategies in two earlier works by Duchamp raises the possibility that it was Duchamp, and not Richter, who introduced the concept into Dreams. In the winter and spring of 1945, when Dreams That Money Can Buy was still at an early stage of development and had not yet adopted the adaptation theme for the artist dreams, Duchamp used a live model to represent the Glass’s Bride on two occasions. In May 1945, Vogue magazine photographed a fashion model posing behind the Large Glass, installed then at the Museum of Modern Art (Fig. 4.12). The photographer Erwin Blumenfeld, like Duchamp, was a European émigré in New York, a German-born Dadaist turned American fashion photographer. In the published photo, the model interacts with the Glass’s esoteric iconography through careful framing. Blumenfeld cropped the upper register with the Bride, leaving the

model, dressed in white, to replace her. Her presence, directly behind the “Sieves” in the Bachelor’s domain, also creates the impression, however, that she has a flaccid penis, an apparent allusion to the Glass’s theme of frustrated desire and to Duchamp’s own gender play as “Rrose Sélavy.”

Though photographed by Blumenfeld, Duchamp himself evidently orchestrated the cover. Duchamp had previously designed a cover for the magazine (Genre Allegory, 1943) and though Vogue ultimately chose not to use it, Duchamp remained in contact with the magazine’s art director, Alexander Liberman, and shared a mutual friend in Frederick Kiesler. There is no extant documentation of his role, but Duchamp’s stepdaughter, Jacqueline Matisse Monnier, later asserted that the artist had wanted Maria Martins to be the model on the Vogue cover, reinforcing the sense of a relationship between the Vogue cover, Dreams That Money Can Buy, and Étant donnés.  

For an unknown reason, Martins did not pose for the cover. The model, Ruth Ford, is nevertheless a woman with a direct connection to Duchamp and Dreams That Money Can Buy. She had been photographed by Man Ray in Los Angeles and was the “Ruth” he referenced in the View article that served as the inspiration for Man Ray’s Dreams sequence. Duchamp would have known her both via Man Ray and via Charles Henri Ford, her brother. Charles Henri Ford was editor and publisher of View magazine, which had in March 1945, published a special issue devoted to Duchamp. Duchamp had designed the issue, in which he collaborated with Friedrich Kiesler on a photomontage.

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69 The Vogue issue does not name the model. Period photographs suggest she was Ruth Ford.
insert (Fig. 4.13) that anticipates the *Vogue* cover. Employing a variety of dark room techniques, the *View* spread superimposes an image of the *Large Glass* onto an image of a live figure, this time Duchamp himself, seated at a desk in his fourteenth street studio. Kiesler hired a professional, Percy Rainford, to photograph Duchamp in his studio, then through careful masking, editing, and double printing juxtaposed the photographs with the *Large Glass* and other works by Duchamp as well as images of cars and streets. Though frequently described as a simple photomontage, the tripartite spread included directions for readers to fold it out, creating a three-dimensional screen. This transformation into screen amplifies the “cinematic” character Elcott notes as already present in the Dada photomontages of the 1920s.

Both the *View* and *Vogue* photographs precede the use of live actors to animate works of art in *Dreams* and in *Étant donnés*. The production of the Max Ernst episode, written in the summer of 1945 and filmed that fall, introduced adaptation to *Dreams* and it soon became the unifying theme for other artist’s sequences. Duchamp was intimately involved with the production of the Ernst sequence for *Dreams*. It is difficult, however, to isolate the genesis of *Dreams*’s adaptation of artworks and definitively attribute it to either Duchamp or Richter. By the time of the *Vogue* and *View* photographs, Duchamp had participated in Richter’s projects preceding *Dreams* and may have been responding to conversations with Richter. Whether Duchamp or Richter conceived it independently or it was the result of a dialogue between them and other collaborators, such as Frederick Kiesler, which seems most likely, there are specific elements in the early plans for *Étant donnés*.

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70 For evidence for Duchamp’s role in the production of the Ernst episode, see my chap. 3.
...donnés that emerge directly out of Duchamp’s work on Dreams. That is to say, the early plans for Étant donnés were both shaped by and responsive to Duchamp’s contributions to that film.

As Michael Taylor notes in his 2009 catalog, the first, unrealized version of Étant donnés would have represented the iconographic elements of the Glass in a different manner. The illuminating gas and Bachelors do not figure directly in any of the early studies. Instead, there is evidence for an alternative representation of both through the integration of a viewer-facing mirror. In the 1946 study, Duchamp drew a left arm on the nude in a faint pencil line. It lacks a hand, however, and thus grasps no object. Duchamp added the hand in the photocollage. There, Martins has a fully articulated left arm, raised almost perpendicular to her body. Compared to the rest of the arm, the rendering of the hand is awkward and appears to have been drawn without the benefit of a life cast. It reaches outward as if ready to grasp another hand, but instead of an open palm, the fingers fold inward. The thumb too bends toward the palm, its joint visibly extending over the others. This formation suggests the holding of an object, small enough to fit in the nearly-closed grasp. As Taylor notes, a drawing made by Duchamp in 1948 reveals this object to be a vertical rod with a small round mirror atop it.

In the pencil drawing, titled Reflection à Main (Hand Reflection) (Fig. 4.14), Duchamp renders the arm and hand in a manner similar to that in the photocollage. The

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71 Frederick Kiesler’s precise role in the conception of Dreams That Money Can Buy is unknown. He designed the promotional pamphlet for the film and his name appears crossed-out in the list of credits in an early screenplay draft. See “Dreams That Money Can Buy,” sixteen-page manuscript, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.23, The Museum of Modern Art Archive, New York, 5.

72 Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 77.
held-alof mirror, mounted through a cutout circle in the paper, faces the viewer. A 1949 photograph (Fig. 4.15) confirms the connection between this drawing and the early plans for Étant donnés. It pictures the first full-scale plaster study for the mannequin, which Duchamp made from body casts and modeling clay. The shape of the left hand mimics that of the drawing and clearly grasps the base of a dowel. The top of the dowel is out of the frame, excluding from view the mirror top, but it is otherwise perfectly consistent with the drawn hand of Reflection à Main.

The image that would have appeared in the mirror is unknown. There is no indication of a specific viewing apparatus in the studies, leaving it unclear how and where these elements were to be installed and seen. Yet, the absence of a head on the mannequin and use of the mirror does suggest that Duchamp planned for it to picture the viewer in some way. The position of a spectator before a work had been a longstanding interest of Duchamp. An undated note, likely from his work on the Large Glass, reads: “Make something which should be seen from a certain position (lying on one’s back for ex.)—give a photo of the position required to view this thing.”

In Étant donnés, the mirror reflection would likely have integrated the viewer into the scenography as a Bachelor, implying that the viewer’s desire supplemented the illuminating gas and the waterfall as the sources powering the forever-unfolding event.

In addition to the mirror, Taylor surmises that Duchamp planned at the inception of Étant donnés to include a single ocular hole, which he later replaced with the binocular

holes now present in the work. As there is no physical evidence in the studies themselves pointing to the existence of a single ocular hole, Taylor conscripts another contemporary work by Duchamp, *The Green Ray* (Fig. 4.16), as evidence. *The Green Ray* was a site-specific work conceived by Duchamp and executed by Friedrich Kiesler for the International Surrealism Exhibition, for which Duchamp also designed the *Please Touch* catalog cover. The title of the work refers to the rare natural optical phenomenon of the same name, whereby a momentary green light appears at the horizon line owing to atmospheric refraction of sunlight. As documented in installation photographs of the exhibition and Kiesler’s preparatory study (Fig. 4.17) and recounted by Taylor, the design of Duchamp and Kiesler’s version involved a single ocular “porthole” cut into the fabric-covered wall of the gallery. Viewers looked through the hole onto an ocean view with an intermittent green ray. Kielser created the light effect apparently at Duchamp’s direction, mounting a bulb behind a photograph in a shadowbox. The light shone through a thin aperture at the horizon line, where blue and yellow glass met to generate the impression of green light for the spectator.

As art historian Herbert Molderings has convincingly argued, Duchamp’s conception of *The Green Ray* likely responded to a Jules Verne story of the same title, in which a group of adventurers set out to experience the light effect. Though not previously noted, this story also rehearses a central conceit in *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, corroborating the idea that Duchamp and Kiesler’s creation of *The Green Ray* and

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Duchamp’s design for Étant donnés relates to that project. In Verne’s tale, the main characters argue over the validity of a magical understanding of the optical phenomenon. A young woman, Helena Campbell, favors a local legend that attributes powers to the green ray: “At its apparition all deceit and falsehood are done away, and he who has been fortunate enough once to behold it is enabled to see closely into his own heart and read the thoughts of others.”  

Whether the story contributed to the conception of the dream salesman character in Dreams or Duchamp subsequently noted the parallel, the repetition of the trope of reading internal thoughts and desires provides further evidence for the continuity between Dreams and the two works Duchamp contributed to the 1947 Surrealist Exhibition, Please Touch and The Green Ray. Beyond this relationship, an interest in optical phenomena and spectatorial address clearly unites the works Duchamp created in the aftermath of Discs. It seems likely then, as Taylor has argued, that The Green Ray was a study of sorts for elements in Étant donnés, namely the unrealized porthole-like viewing apparatus and the illuminated waterfall. The finished version of Étant donnés would deviate from Duchamp and Kiesler’s The Green Ray by substituting binocular holes and by adding an intermediary framing mechanism. The blue-grey tape placed over the edges of the photocollage acts as a rectilinear frame and anticipates the inner brick wall in the finished work.

The form of the first, unrealized version of Étant donnés thus closely resembled, but was not identical to, the final work. In place of the binocular viewing holes, Duchamp probably planned for a single hole of unknown size. In the place of the lantern was a

mirror reflecting back to the viewer a view of him or herself peering onto the scene. These elements correspond with Duchamp’s critique of film-based cinemas in *Discs*. As I argue in chapter three, the descending nude sequence in *Discs* participates in Richter’s proposals for a “progressive cinema” but Duchamp’s superimposition of the nude over falling coal in several shots of *Discs*, and his subsequent transposition of the filmic nude breast to an exhibition catalog cover, ultimately undermine the case for a theatrically-projected “progressive” film. Whereas Richter had insisted on an inherently emancipatory potential to the medium, Duchamp articulated an upper limit to the audience activation possible within the material and social constraints of the modern filmic apparatus.

With this in mind, Duchamp’s early plans for *Étant donnés* appear to use cinematic analogies in a more direct and explicit way than the finished work. The envisioned work collapses scenes of film production and reception, the viewing “porthole” analogizing the monocular view of the camera lens and the human viewer standing before it, the camera operator or the film spectator. The bare-all nudity of the central figure, much like the *Please Touch* catalog cover, presents front and center precisely that which was suppressed in *Discs*. Its distortions and reliance on casts, as I have argued, already mimic the “body culture” and indexical character of popular film. Just above and to the nude’s right is the mirror, and reflected in it, an image of the live voyeur, ever-present in the movie theater but invisible before the projected image. The presence of the mirror, breaking the so-called fourth wall, confirms that this is a work about film-based cinema, doing things that film cannot.
The subject and structure of this étant donnés variant is specific to the history of cinema, the view of the nude woman through the door hole mimicking the so-called “keyhole” genre in early film. “Keyhole” shorts played on the privacy of the monocular viewing devices of the late nineteenth century by picturing scantily clad women as seen through keyholes and other ocular frames, such as telescopes or peepholes (Fig. 4.18). The fragmentation of the nude figure and focus on her lower body rehearses the objectification of the female body in keyhole films. As John Hagan has noted, “In [keyhole] films, there is an almost fetishistic attention paid to certain objects, especially women’s legs…. An emphasis is placed upon the woman’s legs to the extent that they come to seem almost separate from her as a person.”

The visual “keyhole” trope transcended these devices and became popular in early theatrical films, despite the shift from singular to collective viewing. For example, the silent short A Search for Evidence (1903) repeatedly employs the keyhole view, cleverly inverting expected gender dynamics of the genre sometimes referred to as “Peeping

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77 Juan Antonio Ramírez has associated the finished, binocular version of étant donnés with the “recurrent theme in popular erotic iconography” of “spying through the keyhole,” comparing it to keyhole images of disrobing women on two 1910 postcards that “formed part of an almost cinematographic sequence of undressing.” Ramírez, Duchamp, ill. no. 252. Other commentators have related étant donnés to physical “keyhole” and “peepshow” models. See Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: étant donnés, 51–54, 74, 77; Kachur, Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 201–04; Dalia Judovitz, Drawing on Art: Duchamp and Company (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 195–201; and Krauss, The Optical Unconscious, 111–13.


79 For an overview of the keyhole genre in early cinema, see André Gaudreault, ed., Ceci que je vois de mon ciné...: La représentation du regard dans le cinéma des premiers temps (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1988).
Tom” films. A woman goes through a hotel with a male private detective, looking in the keyholes of various rooms in search of her adulterous husband. A shot of the woman crouching to look through a keyhole from one side of the door cuts to her point of view through the keyhole onto the room on the other side, signified to the audience by the addition of keyhole-shaped masking on the camera lens (Fig. 4.19). As Noël Burch has argued, the effect instructed film viewers to unself-consciously identify with the camera, encouraging a particular mode of cinematic spectatorship. “The alternation of views…from watcher to the watched,” Burch writes, gave early filmgoers their “first, very simple lesson in camera ubiquity, in identifying with the camera, since the voyeur on the screen is the spectator’s obvious surrogate.”

As Burch demonstrates, the keyhole trope had been exploited by the avant-garde before Étant donnés. In the famous hotel sequence of Jean Cocteau’s 1930 film Blood of a Poet, its historical association with erotic fixation produces a mise-en-abyme for the cinematic experience, a sequence that looks beyond the immediate narrative demands of the film to allegorize a specific conception of the viewer as voyeur. As in A Search for Evidence, the protagonist, known here as the Poet, walks down the hall of a hotel,

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82 Ibid., 498–500.
83 The set design of this sequence includes a large optical disk resembling Duchamp’s smaller-scale Rotoreliefs. Lebel (*Marcel Duchamp*, 173) identifies the disk as one of Duchamp’s Rotoreliefs; and Schwarz (*The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, vol. 2, 731n1) identifies Duchamp as having “designed” the set. Duchamp’s direct involvement in the Cocteau sequence is possible, but I have found no supporting evidence in extant documentation.
peeping through various keyholes. Cocteau similarly juxtaposes shots of the Poet crouching in front of doors with his point of view through the keyholes (Fig. 4.20). In front of one of the closed doors, the Poet notices two shoes, one coded masculine and the other feminine, and crouches to the keyhole expecting to see a man and woman together. Instead, his gaze falls on a single half-naked figure lying on a divan, its sexual identity ambiguous. Cocteau visually constructs the character, referred to in the narration as “the Hermaphrodite,” in a rapid montage sequence combining the head, arm, and legs of a live actor with a chalk-on-board body that invokes the painterly tradition of the reclining nude. A blanket is drawn over the midsection, masking any evidence of sexual identity. The Poet retreats from the keyhole, and when he returns, the figure reaches down and removes the blanket. Instead of exposing genitalia, the uncovering reveals a representational void (see Fig. 4.19), a blank white hole in the black panel on which the scene is taking place, in which Cocteau has inscribed the words “mortal danger [danger de mort]” in black ink, depriving both the Poet and film viewer of the visual disclosure they had come to expect “at the keyhole.”

Duchamp himself may have adapted the keyhole trope in film before doing so in Étant donnés. The visual device turns up in the “Max Ernst” sequence of Dreams, one

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84 Duchamp also employed keyholes and other framing devices in other works dating to the 1940s. See, for example, the “Sixteen Miles of String” installation design in the 1942 First Papers of Surrealism exhibition and keyhole page design in the exhibition’s catalog. André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, First Papers of Surrealism (New York: Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, 1942).
of the artist episodes that Duchamp helped design. There it takes the form of a tableau vivant–like adaptation of a specific illustration from Ernst’s collage novel Une semaine de bonté in which a man stands before a barred doorway and peers into a room where a woman lies atop a bed with water pouring forth from its base (Fig. 4.21). The film does not directly replicate this image. In the original, the bedroom occupies the foreground and the man stands behind it, facing the viewer. Dreams inverts this orientation so that the man stands in the foreground, his back to the camera, and looks through a barred doorway into the bedroom scene beyond (Fig. 4.22). With the change in camera angles, the scene resembles the keyhole film trope employed by A Search for Evidence and The Blood of a Poet and is similarly “instructive.” Unlike Cocteau’s Poet, however, the man in Dreams eventually breaks through the bars, gains access to the bedroom, and embraces the woman. In the context of Richter’s film, this serves as an object lesson to both the timid bank clerk having the dream and to the complacent viewer in the audience. The ineffectual clerk learns to overcome his passivity and pursue his desires, while the film audience apprehends the tyranny of a mollifying “official cinema” and need to seek action. Though the imagery originated in Ernst’s collage novel, the design of the film sequence transformed the scenario into an allegory for the promise of progressive cinema, offering an immediate model for the early Étant donnés, which similarly worked to “activate” its viewer by conflating erotic satisfaction and social liberation and may

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85 Richter’s personal papers include a number of sketches for the set design of the Ernst episode. Their depiction of the bed beneath a lighting array and the placement of the camera resembles Duchamp’s designs for Étant donnés. See Richter, untitled notes, ca. 1945, Hans Richter Archive, C.IX.20, MoMA Archives, NY.
even have borrowed from the same Ernst collage, with its supine female subject, situated atop flowing water, visible and physically isolated from the male viewer.

Duchamp’s translocation of the “keyhole” from film into a three-dimensional mixed-media assemblage nevertheless marked a major departure from its manifestation in *Dreams*, possibly a direct response to the conflicts in Richter’s project. The expenses involved in the film’s production and distribution had required repeated compromises, to a point where the finished product was barely recognizable as a realization of the proposals made in *The Struggle for the Film*. Cognizant of Richter’s challenges, Duchamp sought to create a truly independent cinema in *Étant donnés*, one that would not rely on film industry actors, crew, cameras, equipment, distribution, or even film stock. For the most part, production of *Étant donnés* required only a single collaborator, the sculptor Maria Martins, who served as the live model for the mannequin and advised Duchamp on its construction.  

*Étant donnés*’s operation outside of film also provided means to assuage what Richter and other Left-affiliated intellectuals of the 1930s and 1940s considered to be the hazards of passive film spectatorship, discussed in chapter three. Though Richter, and Walter Benjamin, had sought to redirect industrial means of film production in the service of a new collectivism, Duchamp evidently concluded, much as did Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, that doing so risked further industrial or authoritarian exploitation. Rather than abandon or repudiate cinema entirely, though, Duchamp

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resolved to change its technological means. In replacing the cinematic dispositif of theatrical projection and celluloid film with that of Étant donnés, he effectively reengineered Richter’s “double attitude,” the mirror reflection making viewers aware of their individual presence in the theater of Étant donnés even as they participated in the illusion.

Rosalind Krauss has discussed a similar effect in the finished version of Étant donnés, though not in relation to cinematic models. In her book The Optical Unconscious, Krauss describes Étant donnés as an “optical machine” compelling viewers’s recognition of their own embodiedness as libidinal voyeurs peeping at a work of art. “The voyeur….is positioned at the peephole, penetrating the door of the assemblage Étant donnés, all attention focused through this funneling of the gaze toward the waiting display.” She is explicit about the display, recalling Lyotard’s observation about the placement of the vanishing point: “The vanishing point, or goal of vision, is manifested by the dark interior of a bodily orifice, the optically impenetrable cavity of the spread-eagled ‘bride.’” Krauss recognizes the formal structure of the work as staging this act of voyeurism, writing, “Duchamp’s viewer has in fact entered a kind of optical machine through which it is impossible not to see.” According to Krauss, the deliberate

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87 Duchamp would participate in Richter’s film projects in the 1950s, though in reduced roles. In 1950, Richter drafted Duchamp and Maria Martins, then collaborating on Étant donnés, as advisers for an unrealized color film about the history of modern art. See Hans Richter, “Project for a Color Film about Modern Art,” 1950, Hans Richter Archive, C.XII.1, MoMA Archives, NY, 2. Duchamp also played a small role in Richter’s feature film 8x8: A Chess Sonata in 8 Movements (1957).
88 Krauss, The Optical Unconscious, 112.
89 Ibid., 113.
90 Ibid., 112.
setting of “optical machine” within an art museum forces self-awareness and self-recognition of the trap: “Duchamp, leaving nothing up to his old buddy Chance, willed the scene of *Étant donné* be set within a museum, which is to say, within an unavoidably public space. And this means that the scenario of the voyeur caught by another in the very midst of taking his pleasure is never far from consciousness as one plies the peepholes of Duchamp’s construction.”

Krauss considers this dialectic, between carnal voyeurism and its disclosure, essential to the work’s significance, which she characterizes as an “attack on the whole system of the visual” common to the institution of the art museum and to modernism.

“The museum as we know it was…constructed around the shared space of a sense of the visual grounded in the possibility of individual subjects forming a community. Yet it is this system of the museum that *Étant donné* enters only to disrupt by ‘making it strange.’”

Similarly, modernist painting presents the visual as “a kind of self-sufficient or autonomous realm of activity.” “It was the idea of this self-sufficiency and the closed logic of this newly conceived retino-pictorial surface that gave a program to early abstract painting.” “Duchamp objects [to this],” she insists. *Étant donné* reveals vision to be “carnal, not conceptual,” “within the opacity of the organs and the invisibility of the unconscious.”

Documentation of the first phase of *Étant donné* demonstrates that the effect Krauss attributes to the museum had been integrated into the formal structure of *Étant*
Étant donnés itself. The mirror facing viewers would have confronted them with the image of themselves as voyeurs; there was no need for installation in a public gallery where viewers would feel themselves “prey to the intervention of the Other,” as Krauss puts it. Though Krauss’s perceptive reading preceded awareness of the early mirror-design, documentation of the design and its relationship to Discs reinforces her observations and illuminates its material development in Duchamp’s return to filmmaking in 1940s New York. As Burch’s analysis of the keyhole film genre and Linda Williams’s studies of nineteenth-century erotic visual culture have demonstrated, the embodied, libidinal voyeur whom Krauss recognizes at the door in Étant donnés has a subterranean prehistory in cinema and other nineteenth-century visual technology, where its association with pornography long precluded its proper critical evaluation. That is precisely the lineage that Duchamp engaged with his repeated representation of female nudity in Discs, Please Touch, and Étant donnés. By rehearsing the structure and subject of these films both inside and outside the medium, Duchamp sought, in a sense, their contravention, forcing a presumed heterosexual male viewer to become consciously aware of his reflexive voyeuristic participation.

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95 Ibid., 113.
97 As Williams, Hansen, and others have demonstrated, the actual gender and class viewership for the female bodies pictured in early cinema halls was heterogeneous. Thus, Discs, Please Touch, and Étant donnés engage the imagined, rather than real viewers of the genre. For an important discussion of a similar friction between the imagined and real
Krauss situates this intervention in the “institutional setting [of] the great museums that are part of the development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture” and specifically in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA), which grew from the Enlightenment-era ideal of the “universal communicability” of aesthetic judgement and edification. Indeed, the PMA was founded in 1876 and became one of America’s “great museums” in this tradition after inhabiting its present neo-classical templelike building in 1929. However, in 1946 Duchamp could not have foreseen installation there, or indeed at any of the encyclopedic art museums that had so far shunned his work. Instead, *Étant donnés* appears to address the modern museum institution emergent in that era. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. at MoMA and his predecessors, including Alexander Dorner in the Hannover Landesmuseum and even Duchamp himself with *Societe Anonyme, Inc.*, had sought to break from the visual regime of the Enlightenment museum by adopting strategies of viewer engagement from other domains, including cinema. As Noam M. Elcott has written of Dorner’s unrealized collaboration with the artist Lásló Moholy-Nagy to create the multi-media exhibition space *Room of Our Time* (1930), avant-garde artists “strugg[ing] to activate the space of reception…[had] turned to cinema as the solution” already in the 1920s and 1930s. In this sense, the early *Étant donnés* participates in a lineage within modernism separate from that characterized by Krauss: what Elcott narrowly defines as the short-lived “multi-media museum” idea of the late 1920s, but

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which could be extended more broadly as the “modern museum,” the widespread interest in the use of modern media and didactics to “activate the space of reception” on the part of both artists and curators across the first half of the twentieth century.

At the moment of Étant donné’s inception, MoMA was emerging from an extended “laboratory phase” during which it had introduced avant-garde museological theory into mainstream museum discourse in the United States through a series of “activated” exhibitions that included audio-visual and viewer participatory elements.99 There is significant evidence that Duchamp for a short time in the early construction of Étant donnés envisioned the work’s eventual installation in this context. Michael Taylor’s chronology definitively demonstrates that Duchamp began customizing Étant donnés’s for installation in the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the mid-1950s, nearly a decade into the work’s construction. When Duchamp first conceived Étant donnés in 1946, he had just begun working as a guest curator for an upcoming exhibition at MoMA.100 He was, at the same time, in discussions with James Johnson Sweeney, the head of the museum’s department of painting and sculpture, and Alfred Barr, Jr. for a retrospective of his work at the museum and helping Sweeney and Barr acquire new work in France.101 He was

100 Florine Stettheimer, October 1-November 17, 1946. Though Duchamp would contribute to the early planning for the exhibition, the expiration of his visa in May stranded him abroad during the later planning and installation.
101 Barr had expressed interest in organizing a MoMa exhibition devoted to the artist’s work as early as 1936. See Alfred H. Barr, Jr. to Marcel Duchamp, May 8, 1936, folder 55, Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records 1929-1959, MoMA Archives, NY. Duchamp participated in a series of intensive autobiographical interviews with James Johnson Sweeney between 1945 and 1947, which Sweeney intended to use in a future
also associated with a third exhibition at the museum on the relationship between art and architecture, another collaboration between the artist and Frederick Kiesler.102

The architect and sculptor Kiesler, like Dorner and others, had been designing “activated” exhibition spaces since the 1920s. His innovative “L and T system” for the Vienna Exhibition of New Theater Technique in 1924 consisted of freestanding modular wooden structures that visitors could raise, lower, or rearrange to their preference. At Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of This Century Gallery in New York in the early 1940s, he installed similar freestanding mounts and a number of additional features, such as curved publication. See James Johnson Sweeney, notes from conversations with Marcel Duchamp, box 3, folders 5-25, Alexina and Marcel Duchamp Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives. On Duchamp’s friendship with Sweeney and activities at MoMA, see also Michael R. Taylor, “Resisting Courbet’s Retinal Revolution: Marcel Duchamp’s Étant donnés and the Erotic Legacy of Cubist Painting,” in Banz, Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall, 117-18.

Duchamp sat for a private interview with Barr on December 21, 1945, documented in Alfred H. Barr, Jr., notes from interview with Marcel Duchamp, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, VII.A.9 mf, MoMA Archives, NY. Duchamp refers to the planned MoMA retrospective in two fellowship activity reports: “I made a trip to Paris where I collected information and documents for the catalog of a retrospective show of my painting to be held at the Museum of Modern Art” (Duchamp, “Marcel Duchamp: Report on work done from March 1, 1946 to the February 28, 1947 as holder of a fellowship from the Museum of Modern Art,” Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, I.A.301 mf, MoMA Archives, NY); “The Museum of Modern Art is planning an important exhibition of my two brothers, Jacques Villon and Duchamp-Villon and of my own work. I propose to gather data and documents for the catalog and the presentation of the show (Duchamp, “Marcel Duchamp: Report on work done from March 1, 1947 to the present (Friday, February 13, 1948) as holder of a fellowship from the Museum of Modern Art,” Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, I.A.301 mf, MoMA Archives, NY). Duchamp’s assistance with MoMA acquisitions is evident in James Johnson Sweeney to Marcel Duchamp, April 25, 1946, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, VII.A.10 mf, MoMA Archives, NY. Barr continued his pursuit of a Duchamp exhibition at MoMA until at least 1952. See Alfred H. Barr, Jr. to Andrew C. Ritchie, “Re: Duchamp Show,” February 21, 1952, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, I.A.301f, MoMA Archives, NY.

walls, lighting and sound effects, and a rotating viewing mechanism. The MoMA exhibition, which Kiesler formally proposed to Sweeney on April 16, 1946, was to continue this focus on the interrelationship of architecture and art, but address the home instead of the art gallery. The proposal manuscript indicates a plan to construct three rooms in the museum to scale, a bedroom, bathroom, and living room, and to invite “one or two painters and one or two sculptors for the execution of special parts of the demonstration.” Among the design questions to be addressed was: “Has the designer of today no escape from the three standards of decoration 1) a framed picture 2) a mural or 3) just a painted wall? Or are there not other possibilities of plastic expression?”

Duchamp noted on a fellowship application that he was working with Kiesler on the exhibition and was presumably one of the artists who would be invited “for the execution of special parts of the demonstration.” The exhibition’s format of constructed rooms and Kiesler’s involvement suggest that Duchamp may have initially conceived Étant donnés as an installation for the exhibition.

Furthermore, in 1946, MoMA, not the PMA, was home to the Large Glass, the nominal referent of Étant donnés’s title. Alfred Barr, who had been campaigning for the gift of the Large Glass since the mid-1930s, had finally secured its extended loan from owner Katherine Dreier with Duchamp’s help in 1943. When Duchamp began work on Étant donnés, MoMA’s eventual acquisition of the Glass would have seemed likely, if not inevitable. Furthermore, Taylor’s publication of the Duchamp-Martins

103 Taylor associates the structure of Étant donnés with the kinetic wheel-peephole display designed by Kiesler for Art of This Century. See Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 48-52.
correspondence in 2009 revealed that Duchamp had actually discussed his new project with Barr, all but confirming the museum as its likely destination for a brief time in its early construction.105 MoMA was also the site of the *Vogue* cover photograph, shot in the months before the first studies for *Étant donnés*. As previously discussed, the photograph crops the figure of the Bride in the *Glass*’s upper register and replaces her with the model standing behind, dressed in a white gown, a transformation of the *Glass*’s iconography that seems to parallel that in *Étant donnés*, particularly considering Duchamp’s wishes for Martins to be the “bride” on the cover. Martins, in addition to being Duchamp’s partner at the time, was the wife of the Brazilian ambassador to the United States and a major artist-benefactor of MoMA. Her sculptural works, many of which feature female figures and sexual metaphors, were in the museum’s permanent collection.106

Considering the explicit nature of Martins’s pose, the black box format, and Duchamp’s associations with the museum at the time, the first version of *Étant donnés* would indeed appear to have been a provocation specifically designed for the Museum of Modern Art. There, *Étant donnés* would not introduce the cinematic “embodied spectator” to the museum but rather belatedly register its arrival there. The self-awareness generated by the mirror would in this case contravene the “embodied spectator” effect, providing the viewer with a representation of their experience in the modern museum.

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The museum-critical aspect of *Étant donnés* remained latent, however, in the first phase of development. For, if MoMA was for a time a potential home for *Étant donnés*, it was only a brief moment. The planned MoMA retrospective was never realized. Kiesler withdrew his proposal for the exhibition in June 1946, shortly after Duchamp left New York for Paris. James Johnson Sweeney, the member of the museum staff who had been most closely affiliated with Duchamp, resigned his post in late 1946 and Alfred H. Barr, Jr.’s role in exhibition planning was greatly reduced with the appointment of a new director, René d’Harnoncourt, in 1949. The artist would not receive his first museum retrospective, at the Pasadena Art Museum, until 1963.

Had Duchamp completed and displayed a version of *Étant donnés* at MoMA or another venue around the time of *Dreams*’s American release in 1948, it is possible that the relationship between *Dreams* and *Étant donnés*, cinema and the museum, would have registered with period viewers. As late as 1950, four years into the Duchamp’s construction of *Étant donnés*, Duchamp was participating in Richter’s continuing projects to “film” modern art. In that year, Richter listed Duchamp as a partner in a proposal for another “color film about modern art.” Apparently drafted for prospective production partners and possibly included as part of an application to the Guggenheim Foundation, the proposal outlines a film “to introduce modern art to a general audience.”

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107 This exploitation of cinema to critique museum viewing may extend to Duchamp’s concurrent work on *Please Touch* as well. As Elena Filipovic has documented (*The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp*, 190), Duchamp specifically modelled the typeface of the inscription “Please Touch” after signs then posted in French museums reading, “*Prière de ne pas toucher.*”

108 Richter, “Project for a Color Film about Modern Art,” 1. Plans for the film began at least two years earlier. Duchamp references the project in a report for a Southern
by *Dreams That Money Can Buy*’s adaptation of existing works of modern art, the film would “not be made as a catalog… it is not planned to reproduce single (or several) works of art as such.” Richter wanted instead to “show [works of art] in movement or to recreate them out of their principles” through the use of the “newest and most dynamic medium,” claiming that “many ways and forms to do that have been found” but also admitting that “others [will] have to be invented.”

Richter announced that two artists he considered central to the “phenomenon of modern art” would serve as his advisors on the project: Maria Martins and Marcel Duchamp. It is not clear precisely what role Duchamp and Martins would have performed had the film been made but Duchamp and Martins’s contemporaneous collaboration on *Étant donnés* would presumably not have appeared so “strange” to viewers who saw it beside Richter’s filmic “recreations” of works of modern art, whether in *Dreams That Money Can Buy* or this subsequent unrealized color film.

Duchamp did not complete *Étant donnés* in the 1940s or display the work at MoMA, however, and Richter’s attempts to propagate his progressive cinema in the United States proved largely ineffectual. In 1950, the largest collection of Duchamp’s works left private hands and went to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, not MoMA, followed there by the *Large Glass* in 1952. As Taylor has noted, this gift determined the

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109 Richter, “Project for a Color Film about Modern Art,” 1-2.
future home for *Étant donnés* more than a decade before the work’s eventual installation there.\(^{110}\) Beginning in the early 1950s, Duchamp appears to have begun a second phase of construction calibrating *Étant donnés* for a specific gallery at the museum.

**Étant donnés, Phase Two**

*Étant donnés* significantly changed over the course of the later 1950s and early 1960s. With the move away from a temporary installation, whether for MoMA or another venue, towards a more dedicated space at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the critical failure of *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, Duchamp worked to realize *Étant donnés* as a self-contained, independent work. This entailed replacement of the mirror and monocular viewing hole as well as the materialization of a number of entirely new elements. These changes altered the work’s relationship to *Discs* and the mid-century museum but do not entirely sever the work from the context within which it first emerged.

Duchamp’s correspondence with Martins demonstrates that the artist began constructing a slightly larger scale model of the nude in leather and plaster shortly after the photocollage “maquette,” completing it by late 1948 (Fig. 4.2).\(^ {111}\) This model, now in the collection of Stockholm’s Moderna Museet, renders the body in shallow relief and frames it with green velvet panels but completely evacuates the photographic landscape. As documented in the Taylor chronology, Duchamp suspended virtually all work on the

\(^{110}\) Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, 77-78.  
\(^{111}\) Ibid., 75-76.
landscape in the late 1940s, focusing on the nude figure for much of the next decade. He apparently struggled to create the impression of a life-like “skin,” describing experiments with different materials in a letter to Martins dating to the summer of 1947. Duchamp’s next reference to the pressing of the skin occurs in a letter more than a year later in September 1948. In October, he wrote that he would use this skin for a “test,” putting it “under the nails,” likely referring to small screws that he used to shape and mount the vellum “skin” to the plaster figure in the Moderna Museet study.

Apparantly satisfied with the Moderna Museet figure, he began work to translate it to a full-scale, three-dimensional figure. In his October letter, he wrote that the test of the skin would be “more or less definitive,” the final step before “starting on the full-scale plastilene,” Plastilene being an commercial oil-based modeling clay. By June 6, 1949, he reported to Martins that he had finished the model and would take it to a specialist for casting in plaster. Duchamp next planned to press a “skin” of parchment onto the plaster cast. The pace of construction slackened precipitously, however, and Duchamp continued to work on the skin for the next several years.

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114 Marcel Duchamp to Maria Martins, October 12, [1948], trans. Paul Edwards, in Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 409. See also Melissa S. Meighan, “A Technical Discussion of the Figure in Marcel Duchamp’s Étant donnés,” in Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 243-44.
115 Duchamp to Maria Martins, October 12, [1948], in Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 409.
Duchamp struggled to fully realize the skin, experimenting with several different techniques that resulted in damage to his first plaster cast. He created a second cast in 1950 or 1951, likely using the same original mold, and then used the cast to shape a new parchment skin. Between 1951 and 1959, he conceived a new way to present this skin, removing the parchment from the plaster sculpture he had created in the late 1940s and attaching it to a new hollow armature. As Taylor has observed, this permitted Duchamp to add paint to the underside of the parchment, creating flesh-like undertones. The armature would also permit greater maneuverability, necessary to calibrate the scene to the specific installation conditions at the Philadelphia Museum.

The Taylor chronology indicates that heat damage to the parchment skin in 1959 prompted Duchamp to make changes to the mannequin. In order to hide the damaged right arm, he shifted the framing of the scene. The left arm, essential to the iconography, was recast. No longer in a relationship with Maria Martins, Duchamp cast the arm from a new model, Alexina Duchamp, née Sattler, whom he had married in 1954. Though it is unknown precisely when Duchamp swapped the right hand’s mirror for the illuminated lantern, it seems likely that Duchamp would have used the occasion of the heat damage to make the substitution. Martins’s hand had been cast in a specific gesture to hold the mirror-mounting rod starkly upright and she was not available earlier in the decade to make the changes necessary to support the lantern. The cast of Alexina’s hand, visible in a period photograph, makes a different gesture (Fig. 4.2). Though the fingers still curve inward toward the palm and clearly grasp an object, the projection of the entire hand at an angle suggests the presence of a wider object. This change in the orientation of the hand
was necessary to accommodate the illuminated lantern. Though not visible or actually constructed for *Étant donnés*, the mounting for a lamp of that type (referred to by Duchamp as “Le Bec Auer”) flares at the base, similar to that of a candlestick.

While Duchamp reconfigured the mannequin, he also designed the landscape, creating the prototype for the backdrop that appears in the finished work. A study on plywood (Fig. 4.25), now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s collection, employs Duchamp’s photographs of Le Forestay waterfall from 1946 and resembles the smaller undated photocollage he had assembled from the same set of photographs likely from 1946 as well. The precise date of origin for the landscape study is unknown and could have been as early as 1946 but Michael Taylor tentatively dates its creation to the late 1950s since Duchamp would have learned the approximate dimensions of the museum site around 1954. In any case, it was complete by 1959 according to the recollections of Alexina Duchamp. The 1946 photocollage had been created wholly from photographic fragments. In the circa 1959 full-scale version, Duchamp painted a photorealistic sky on paper and used that as the upper background. He then cut out fragments from enlargements of two of the original landscape photographs, sometimes repeating elements, and layered them on top of one another to elaborate the full scene. He colorized the monochrome photographs with oil paint and graphite, using his notes from 1946 to apply photorealistic hues to the foliage and trees.

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118 Ibid., 90.
119 In the early 1960s, Duchamp used this study as a prototype for the finished landscape. He first translated the collage into collotypes printed in ink on two types of paper. He then cut out elements from multiple prints, coloring and assembling them in a manner
Though significantly altered in the 1950s, the mannequin and landscape were both evident already in Duchamp’s first studies for *Étant donnés* in 1946. Duchamp did, however, introduce additional elements in this later phase of development for which there is little or no prior evidence. According to the artist’s widow, the inner brick wall, which frames the view through the eyeholes, was not present in Duchamp’s original conception, and was added by the artist in the 1950s or early 1960s. As previously noted, the tape in the 1946 photocollage anticipates this addition, but does not directly correspond to it.

There is no prior evidence for other elements that are today considered integral to the experience of *Étant donnés*. Taylor’s chronology employs receipts in Duchamp’s papers to trace the addition of an overhead lighting array and the kinetic waterfall to the early 1960s. Duchamp bought the work’s large quantity of bulbs, fixtures, and wires between 1962 and 1964 and carefully documented his design of various fixtures in the overhead array in the two installation manuals he assembled in 1965 and 1966 (Fig. 4.26). Another invoice confirms the addition of the waterfall in December 1963.

Duchamp purchased an electric motor from Brevel Products Corporation and constructed the ingenious waterfall mechanism inside a cookie tin (Fig. 4.27). Hidden behind the landscape backdrop within the tin, the motor drives a perforated aluminum disk in front of a light bulb. The vacillating light shows through a hole in the tin, which Duchamp

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120 Though the brick solution dates to this second phase of *Étant donnés’s* construction, the presence of a framing device in the early photocollage study (ca. 1946) suggests that Duchamp foresaw the inclusion of some kind of framing device already in the 1940s phase.

covered with translucent glue, creating the illusion of cascading water. Though there is loose precedent in the lightbulb mechanism in The Green Ray, neither the kinetic waterfall nor the lighting array can be detected in the early studies for Étant donnés and there is no reference to them in Duchamp’s period correspondence.

Among the final elements Duchamp added to Étant donnés were the external wooden door and brick archway. Duchamp purchased the door in La Bisbal, Spain, during one of his summer vacations in nearby Cadaqués in the early 1960s. In its original location, documented in a photograph in Duchamp’s papers, the door was substantially taller and wider and surrounded by a brick archway similar to that in Étant donnés (Fig. 4.28). After shipping the door to New York, Duchamp cut it to the appropriate size and mounted it within the ensemble of Étant donnés taking shape in his 14th street apartment. Photographs of it there (Fig. 4.29) show the door hung from a steel bar several feet in front of the inner brick wall with two small holes bored at eye-level, temporarily plugged with removable nails. A canopy of black velvet shrouds the intermediary space between the door and inner wall, creating the now-familiar black box effect.

Duchamp purchased the bricks for the external archway on a later trip to Cadaqués, made in the summer of 1968, that is, after the nominal date of completion that Duchamp inscribed on the work, 1966. Photographs of his studio from 1966 show that he had instead mounted faux-brick vinyl panels around the door, which would not be replaced with real bricks until the work’s installation in Philadelphia in 1969, nearly a year after Duchamp’s death. The brick archway was one of a number of changes made

122 Ibid., 114.
between 1966 and the opening of *Étant donnés* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1969. These changes constitute a third, albeit brief, phase in the work’s construction, which I discuss below.

The second phase of construction, coupled with *Dreams*’s critical and commercial failure, might initially seem to confirm critics’ attacks on *Étant donnés* as retrograde realism. Just as Richter’s late changes to *Dreams* rendered its allegory illegible to viewers, late changes to *Étant donnés* in the 1950s and 1960s obscured its initial conception in the 1940s. Gone was the mirror that confronted the viewer with his or her own spectatorial presence. In its place were superficial autobiographical avatars, various elements reflecting Duchamp’s own life and career—the mannequin composed from casts of Maria Martins and Alexina Duchamp, the lamp repeating an object from one of Duchamp’s first drawings, the door found near his vacation home in Cadaqués.

The second phase changes to *Étant donnés* do not sanitize the work, however. *Étant donnés*’s presentation in the 1960s and even today remains, in many ways, a product of Duchamp’s engagement with Richter’s “progressive cinema,” extending its critique of cinematic spectatorship to museum viewing. The motion of the cascading waterfall confirms the continued intention of a filmic effect. The fall of water, created by a rotating wheel, registers the temporality of the looping film reel directly on its surface. Similarly, other elements that Duchamp added to *Étant donnés* in the 1960s introduce new filmic effects. The intermediating frame between the wooden doors and the scene mimics the aperture effect in keyhole films created “in-camera” by masking applied to the lens. The lighting array and blackout curtains surrounding the mannequin, hidden
from the viewer but visible in photographs of the work’s inner scaffold, effectively create
the “black box” shared by both the theater of film projection and the soundstage of film
production (Fig. 4.30).123

Michael Taylor, discussing the blackout curtain, has compared its effect to “the
optical devices of early photography…as well as the cinema.”124 For support, he cites
Duchamp’s own reference to the blackout curtain, from the second of two installation
manuals he created in 1965 and 1966. There Duchamp describes its effect as creating
“une sorte de chambre complètement noire quand on regarde par les trous du voyeur,”
which Taylor quotes in the English translation rendered by Paul Edwards for the
museum’s revised facsimile of 1966 manual. Edwards’s version reads, “a kind of
completely dark camera obscura when looking through the voyeur’s peepholes.”125 In
fact, this translation may understate the photographic and cinematic references in the
original French. In English, the Latin noun is left untranslated and often refers
specifically to the Renaissance-era optical device. In French, the Latin camera obscura is
translated as chambre noire, which is also the name of the “dark room” in which
photographs are developed. In characteristic fashion, Duchamp denies any direct
translation through the interjection of the modifier “complètement.” In the context, “a sort
of completely dark room” could simultaneously refer to the chamber inside a camera or

123 Juan Antonio Ramírez (Duchamp, 210) compares the lighting above the “open roof”
to a “miniature cinema studio or theatre stage.”
124 Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 117.
125 Marcel Duchamp, Manual of Instructions: Étant donnés: 1º la chute d’eau, 2º le gaz
d’éclairage... (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987), revised bilingual
edition with translation by Paul Edwards (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art,
2009), xiii. Originally produced in 1966 as a holograph manuscript with photographs in a
three-ring binder.
film projector where film stock is exposed to light and to the projection spaces where moving images are viewed.\textsuperscript{126}

**The Manual of Instructions and Étant donnés, Phase Three**

Further scrutiny of Duchamp’s instructions for the installation of Étant donnés contained in the two manuals provides other insights into the work both at the time of its nominal completion and after the subsequent changes made for its installation at the museum. Duchamp prepared the first manual in the fall of 1965 when he learned that he would have to vacate his apartment at 210 West Fourteenth Street. He had rented the space since 1943 and constructed Étant donnés there in a connected studio space. The first manual takes the form of a red plastic binder with some seventy photographs capturing every aspect of the installation from multiple angles, some of which Duchamp notated. Inside, a handwritten manuscript lists twelve “assembly operations” with a hand-drawn diagram demonstrating the proper placement of lights in relation to the work’s physical components (door, inner brick wall, bec auer lamp, etc.). Duchamp created the second manual (Fig. 4.3) in 1966 after he had moved studios and deemed Étant donnés’s construction complete.\textsuperscript{127} This black plastic binder includes the original

\textsuperscript{126}Judovitz (*Drawing on Art*, 199) compares the “dark chamber” of Étant donnés to a camera body; Linda Landis (“Critiquing Absolutism,” 40) compares it to the darkened film theater. On the broader significance of the chambre noire in the history of modern art, photography, and cinema, see Elcott, *Artificial Darkness*, particularly chap. 1.

\textsuperscript{127}The second manual includes a photograph of the inscription of artist’s title, date, and signature on the mannequin’s arm, which is absent from the photos in the first manual. Duchamp also wrote this title, date, and his signature on one of the pages.
photographs supplemented with new images, hand-drawn diagrams, and photocollages. Duchamp also added three operations to the original twelve and reordered them.

The functional appearance of the manuals and deferrals of public access to them has delayed scholarly study. But, as Michael Taylor has poignantly written of the second binder, known as the Manual of Instructions, they are significant due to the absence of other period statements from Duchamp about his conception or plans for Étant donnés: “Although the Manual of Instructions does not provide a guide that would allow one to decipher or explain Étant donnés, its unexpected conjunctions of words and images, carefully constructed folds of text, startling photocollages, and delicate drawings…transcend the notebook’s practical purpose.”

Taylor also echoes this evaluation in a discussion of the photographs contained the first manual: “Although intended as a visual aid, these photographs transcend their initial documentary purpose, since collectively they provide an unforgettable behind-the-scenes tour of the artist’s Fourteenth Street studio.” While the manuals provide documentation of Duchamp’s studio and working method, it is less clear what information they offer about Étant donnés itself. Though, as Taylor notes, they do transcend their documentary and practical purposes, they are not transparent reportage of Étant donnés’s assembly in the artist’s studio; Duchamp created them as texts to serve a specific end.

How then to conceive of the manuals? Commentators have struggled to find an appropriate model. John Cage compared the fifteen operations in the Manual of Instructions to a score in avant-garde music, which, as he explained, provides “directions

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128 Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 139.
129 Ibid.
for ‘doing’ something.” Jean-François Lyotard favored a theater metaphor, describing the Manual in his influential study of Étant donnés as stagecraft: “Instructions…intended for the set designers, propmen, and electricians of the theater where the scene of the nude is played.” One could also see them as anticipating the complex legal contracts negotiated by conceptual and installation artists popularized in the 1970s.

Lyotard’s interpretation of the manual as a form of stage instructions recalls Richter’s reliance on Brecht’s dramaturgical theory in the conception of “progressive cinema.” Duchamp’s Manual goes beyond the stage itself, however, directing the audience and theater architects as well. Lyotard acknowledges this elsewhere in his essay by comparing the fifteen operations to instructions for machine operators. I would argue that documents employed during film production and distribution might offer the best analogs for the manuals. Duchamp’s operations read as a hybrid of a cinematographer’s instructions for the lighting and framing of a shot and a distributors’s notes to projectionists for correct sound and speed settings for the film. Both are trying to maintain consistency in the experience of viewers. That is not to say that Duchamp must have adopted the idea for the manuals directly from the domain of filmmaking as he did other aspects of Étant donnés, but rather that the nature of the illusion he sought to create,

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131 Lyotard, Duchamp’s TRANSformers, 155.
133 Lyotard, Duchamp’s TRANSformers, 158.
its light and positioning requirements and the reliance on a third-party, closely paralleled those of commercial filmmaking.

The first manual is primarily self-directed, providing information that Duchamp himself would have needed in order to transfer Étant donnés to a new studio space. The second manual repeats many of the same operations from the first manual and is clearly adapted from it but deviates by addressing a secondary audience of future installers. As such, the second offers a view of Duchamp’s period conception of Étant donnés in 1966 for its foreseeable future. Duchamp’s inclusion of identifying information—the title, date, and creator of the work—in the opening pages confirms the projection of a future readership beyond Duchamp himself. Taylor has speculated that Duchamp may have foreseen the likelihood of his death before the installation of Étant donnés in Philadelphia and amended the manual to serve museum staff in his absence. \(^{134}\) Though these events would indeed transpire in the subsequent two years, wording in the manual itself suggests an alternative motive at the time of the manual’s creation. Rather than planning for the likelihood that he would not personally oversee the work’s permanent installation in Philadelphia, Duchamp’s manual appears to anticipate a future in which Étant donnés would be mounted repeatedly in temporary installations for which he could not be present.

At the time of the manual’s creation, Duchamp had not yet arranged the work’s acquisition by the Philadelphia Museum of Art via Bill and Noma Copley’s Cassandra Foundation. And though he and his heirs would subsequently orchestrate its permanent

installation there, the manual indicates that Duchamp planned Étant donnés in 1966 to be maneuverable, or, in his words, “de-mountable.” On the first page of the manual, above the title, Duchamp wrote an explanatory note: “Demountable approximation, executed between 1946 and 1966 in N.Y. (Approximation démontable, exécutée entre 1946 et 1966 à N.Y.).” He then addressed the meaning of “approximation” parenthetically: “by approximation I mean that there is a margin of ad libitum in the disassembly and reassembly (par approximation j’entends une marge d’ad libitum dans le démontage et remontage).”

Duchamp may have already hoped to place Étant donnés in a permanent installation at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, as Taylor and others have argued, but at this point in the development of the work, he could not be assured this would come to pass and seems prepared for an alternative scenario. The 1966 manual describes Étant donnés as a work that could be taken apart and reassembled. Furthermore, it specifies a certain margin of error or “approximation” in the repeated reinstallations, even implying that his own assembly of the work between 1946 and 1966, was itself an approximation and not a prototype to be copied exactly. As Lyotard and Taylor have both noted, this remark suggests a degree of liberty in the installation that the operations themselves...

135 Duchamp, Manual of Instructions, ix.
countermand. The operations identify specific places where there is a “margin of ab
libitum in the disassembly and reassembly,” namely in the positioning of cotton “clouds”
and the brightness of the waterfall’s lightbulb, implying by contrast that all other
instructions must be followed precisely in order for the intended illusion to be effective.
Duchamp sought to ensure a modicum of continuity between the various installations of
Étant donnés even while acknowledging the inherent variability introduced by “de-
mountability.”

The reality of the work’s complex assembly ultimately made temporary
installation unfeasible for the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The provision for re-
mounting is one of several ways in which the Étant donnés of the second Manual of
Instructions differs from that which was permanently installed at the Philadelphia
Museum of Art in 1969. More significant to the experience of the work is the change to
the exterior wall enclosing Étant donnés’s internal apparatus.

Duchamp references the walls of Étant donnés on a final page in the second
manual, headed “General remarks and photos of details.” These remarks, unlike those
in the preceding pages, vacillate between addressing the assembly of Étant donnés and

137 Lyotard, Duchamp’s TRANS/formers, 155; Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 139.
138 The acquisition agreement between the museum and the Cassandra Foundation,
negotiated after Duchamp’s death in the summer of 1969, stipulates a fifteen-year
installation in a gallery “within or adjoining Museum’s collections of works by Marcel
Duchamp,” not specifying Gallery 1759. The museum has been free to de-install it since
1984. The agreement prohibits loan of the work indefinitely. See Philadelphia Museum of
Art and the Cassandra Foundation, “Memorandum of Agreement between the Cassandra
Foundation and the Philadelphia Museum of Art,” July 1969, reproduced in Taylor,...
139 Duchamp, Manual of Instructions, xv.
that of the manual itself. Duchamp writes, for example, “Take photos of the waterfall from behind and from in front with different lighting combinations and, if possible, showing the plastic film that filters the beam of light coming from the round lamp. Add written explanations on or near the photos.”\textsuperscript{140} The addition of an x-mark next to that instruction indicates its subsequent completion and indeed those photos are present in the album. The inclusion of these self-referential notes in the second manual suggests that Duchamp may have anticipated a future revision, thereby creating a third version of the manual. With his death in 1968, this would not come to pass.

The list continues onto the verso of the page. There Duchamp addresses the “3 vinyl walls outside,” referring to the faux-brick panels (Figs. 4.32-4.33) that he had mounted on top and to either side of the wooden door. At some point after the completion of the manual, he would decide to replace these panels with actual bricks sourced from Cadaqués, though his death prevented his personally installing them. In the absence of a specific design from the artist, Duchamp’s heirs and museum staff built an archway based on Duchamp’s photographs of similar brick archways in Cadaqués within the constraints imposed by the number of bricks that Duchamp had purchased.\textsuperscript{141} The installation team then set this brick archway into a solid plastered cinder-block wall that bars the visual and physical access that the faux-brick vinyl walls would have granted.

The museum also instated new rules to manage visitors’ experience of the illusion in the work. The memorandum of agreement between the Philadelphia Museum

\begin{footnotes}
\item[140] Ibid.
\item[141] Duchamp had ordered 150 bricks but twenty-eight broke in transit. See Taylor, \textit{Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés}, 164.
\end{footnotes}
of Art and the Cassandra Foundation, which had acquired Étant donnés from Duchamp in order to assist with its transfer to the museum, stipulated that the museum “not permit any copy or reproduction of ‘Étant donnés’ to be made, by photography or otherwise, excepting only pictures of the door behind which said object of art is installed.”\(^{142}\) Additionally, the memo restricted access to the installation manuals, which came to the museum as part of the gift with facsimiles remaining in possession of the Cassandra Foundation. “It is understood that neither party will release [the manuals], or the contents thereof, for publication, or allow the same out of its possession, during the aforesaid fifteen [15] year period.”\(^{143}\) Though the agreement explicitly granted the museum permission to share the manuals with “reputable scholars,” this was not publicized and few scholars were aware of their existence. The museum also instituted an indefinite ban on visitation to the interior of the work, a measure not stipulated in the agreement but which remains in force today.

These restrictions sustain the illusion of Étant donnés. If Duchamp made any such requests, he apparently did so after the creation of the second manual in 1966.\(^{144}\) In the absence of directions from the artist himself, it seems likely that some, if not all, of the safeguards were put in place after his death without his personal knowledge or consent.


\(^{143}\) Ibid.

\(^{144}\) The only evidence for Duchamp’s involvement is second-hand. William Copley, a close friend of Duchamp who acquired *Etant donnés* through his Cassandra Foundation and oversaw the gift to the PMA, insisted in a letter to Anne d’Harnoncourt that Duchamp requested that the work never be moved or reproduced. Quoted in Filipovic, *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp*, 324n118. Filipovic (Ibid.) notes, “It is hard to know for certain whether Duchamp would have been happy about the ban.”
Neither the first nor the second manual refer to an archway or to a solid wall surrounding the door. They also make no mention of the embargo on photography or access to the interior of the work or the restrictions on access to the instruction manuals. In fact, in some cases, it is quite the opposite. In the 1966 manual, Duchamp explained that he had mounted the upper panels of the wooden door onto a horizontal steel rail to enable photography: “These panels can slide horizontally and separately on the steel rail, allowing photos to be taken from the exact point of view of the voyeur.”145 He then provided precise step-by-step instructions for the best way to take “good color photos.”

The decision to limit access to the manuals also seems counter to Duchamp’s intentions. By producing the extensive photographic documentation of the interior and minute instructions for its construction in the two manuals without any demands for their embargo, Duchamp had effectively ensured that the interior would be photographically available to scholars, if not the general public. By 1966, Duchamp would have known that any and all of his writings and photographs would be studied by historians. The popularity of the 1958 volume of his collected writings had set a precedent for broad circulation.146 This suggests he intended the interior to be visually or even physically accessible to visitors in the museum. In both of his own installations of the work, first at the 14th street studio and then at 10th street, this had been the case. The “back,” or interior, of the work could be viewed and traversed. Though likely necessary for maneuverability as Duchamp continued to tweak internal elements, the accessibility of Étant donnés may

145 Duchamp, Manual of Instructions, xi.
also have been a deliberate formal choice on Duchamp’s part, one he planned to maintain at the museum.

In the manuals, Duchamp does not directly address the accessibility or inaccessibility of the interior, but there are suggestions of his plans. In reference to the three vinyl “walls,” he writes: “Depending on the site where the assembly will finally be exhibited, the 3 walls can be altered and adapted more closely to their environment.”

Apparently shifting from a secondary audience to a direction meant for himself, he adds, “For the moment, they could perhaps be partially whitewashed with distemper in order to obtain a white that is slightly transparent, allowing the outline of the bricks to show through—or made completely white like plaster?” The passage suggests a remarkably different conception of work’s installation than that which was realized in 1969 and remains in place today. The vinyl panels could be “altered or adapted more closely to their environment,” by which Duchamp evidently meant painted, not removed. These panels provided a faux-wall around the door and could be made to aesthetically resemble the surrounding wall surfaces but would not coincide with them.

This creates the impression that the Étant donnés of 1966 was indeed traversable. The doorway would

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147 Duchamp, Manual of Instructions, xv.
148 There is a possible reference to a solid wall in the first manual of instructions (1965). In a drawing for the lighting apparatus, Duchamp drew a solid horizontal line across the width of the paper, extending past the sides of the door. This plan dates to the 1965 manual and is not reproduced in the 1966 manual, however. Furthermore, this line could also have represented the vinyl faux-walls that Duchamp mounted on top of and on either side of the door. See Taylor, Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés, 138, fig. 3.9.
149 Duchamp’s choice not to enclose the mannequin under blackout curtains, as he had for the interstitial space between the door and inner wall, also encourages this impression. Doing so leaves visible the signature, title, and date that Duchamp inscribed on the mannequin’s arm, which the cinderblock wall has hidden from visitors. Duchamp had
provide an obvious “front” to the work for the viewer to approach. The resemblance of its faux-wall panels to the gallery walls would make explicit the intended allusion to the institutional mode of viewing painting without having to fully mimic it by resting even with the wall. After taking in the scene at the eyeholes, the viewer would step away from the door, possibly seeing the outline of the bricks showing through the transparent paint, and walk around the free-standing ensemble. There, he or she would see the blackout curtains creating the “keyhole effect” as well as the overhead lighting array and mannequin’s scenography.

French sculptor Richard Baquié created just such a traversable version of the work for the 1991 Lyon Biennial, re-imagining Étant donnés as it was installed in Duchamp’s studio in 1966 (Fig. 4.3). In Baquié’s version for Lyon, titled Sans titre: Étant donnés: 1° la chute d’eau, 2° le gaz d’éclairage, the interior was fully visible to viewer, though it evidently lacked the improvisational character operative in the original. As Michael Taylor has noted, “Those visitors who circumambulated his replica at the Musée d’Art Contemporain de Lyon [were] often surprised at its lack of intensity, especially evident in the slick, lifeless nude and the mundane, drab appearance of the landscape backdrop.” Baquié had created the copy based solely on the Manual of Instruction without first-hand knowledge of the final version of the work, replacing Duchamp’s hodgepodge materials with modern media, and evidently deemed his re-

creation a failure.\textsuperscript{151} In Duchamp’s version of the work, the ramshackle appearance of the interior elements would not have been incidental to the design, but an essential, if not the essential, element of \textit{Étant donnés}, denoting the fragile artifice of the visual regime common to both the cinema and the museum.

Thus, despite the many changes from the first to second phases of construction, \textit{Étant donnés} from 1946 to 1966 consistently sought to create an illusion of astounding verisimilitude at the peepholes in the wooden door only to reveal the artifice, the constructedness of that vision. In the 1940s phase, this was achieved via the pseudo-Brechtian effect of the mirror. By 1966, Duchamp had replaced the mirror with the lantern and sought other means to shatter the illusion, either via the photographs of the interior scenography in the \textit{Manual} or via physical access to the internal apparatus. Whichever way Duchamp foresaw viewers gaining access to the interior of the work, the \textit{Étant donnés} of 1966 would have been much closer to Duchamp’s “progressive cinema” works of the 1940s than the version of the work installed at the museum in 1969.

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At some point between the completion of the 1966 manual and the July 1969 opening of \textit{Étant donnés}, subtle changes to both the material constitution of the work and the installation protocol enacted a different vision of \textit{Étant donnés}. Duchamp replaced the faux-brick vinyl panels with an archway constructed from real bricks. Those overseeing the museum installation, including Anne d’Harnoncourt, museum conservator Theodore Siegl, and Duchamp’s step-son Paul Matisse, realized this brick archway by setting it into

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 212.
a solid cinder-block wall, barring public access to the infrastructure of the work. The
PMA and the Cassandra Foundation also instated the embargo on photography and on
scholarly access to the manuals. Though it is possible Duchamp himself had
reconsidered, even reversed, the basic principle of the original work, he had not done so
by 1966 and it seems unlikely that he did in the intervening two years before his death.
His brick archway, like the vinyl panels before them, presumably would have visually
framed the doors while permitting transit around them.

It appears that, after Duchamp’s death, the stakeholders in the work made a
decision to restrict information on the internal structure in a dual effort to respect what
they believed to be Duchamp’s wishes and to protect the fragile work from possible
damage or misinterpretation. Duchamp had created the work in relative secrecy since
1946 and, as Anne d’Harnoncourt and Theodore Siegl noted in an internal memo, “it was
felt that…the piece [should] be permanently installed and opened to the public with
similar discretion.” The installation of a solid wall also helped preserve the physical
media in the work, which were, in 1969, already deteriorating. The memo identified
nineteen cracks in the “skin” of the mannequin and deleterious effects of humidity
fluctuation. “According to our experience, the skin expands and bubbles above 40% relative humidity, and probably shrinks and cracks below 30%. Any drastic changes in humidity are by all means to be avoided.” Placement of a wall between the mannequin and the visitor side of the small gallery made it possible to control the humidity level. It

\[153\] Ibid., 9.
also prevented physical accidents from stumbling or overly curious visitors interacting with the precarious scaffolding and wiring.

In addition to these considerations, the stakeholders expressed substantial and legitimate concerns about potential misreadings of the work. As Taylor documents in his catalog, museum staff feared the bare-all nudity and peepholes in the work would prompt critical rejection or civic censure amidst the period’s civil rights, women’s rights, and anti-war movements. One could imagine criticism from progressives, seeing a scene of pornography, sexual violence, or death, and from conservatives for much the same reasons. Indeed, one cannot overstate the audacity of the museum’s decision to acquire and permanently install the work in 1969. Although, as Taylor and others have noted, scenes of frank sexuality and nudity pervaded the period’s contemporary art, few, if any, of these works received similar support from a major American museum. From this perspective, changes made to the work during the installation, while affecting elements present in the 1966 version, were necessary compromises. Without the bold and visionary efforts of d’Harnoncourt, Siegl, Duchamp’s heirs, and the Cassandra Foundation, Duchamp’s explicit wishes for the work’s acquisition and installation in the museum could not have been realized and Étant donnés would almost certainly not have survived in the condition that it does today.

Furthermore, d’Harnoncourt’s sustained stewardship of Étant donnés over ensuing decades ultimately resolved the initial changes made in 1969 and delivered a version of work much closer to that described by the 1966 Manual. In the mid-1970s,

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d’Harnoncourt, then Curator of Twentieth-Century Art at the museum, co-organized a major retrospective on Duchamp and granted rare access to the *Manual of Instructions* to Lyotard. Lyotard’s study would be the first critical analysis of *Étant donnés* to benefit from Duchamp’s own documentation. Later, the expiration of the fifteen-year embargo in 1986 permitted d’Harnoncourt, now director of the museum, to publish a facsimile of the *Manual*, which in turn prompted an outpouring of new scholarship focused on the constructedness of the illusion, most notably Krauss’s *The Optical Unconscious*. Michael Taylor’s exhibition and catalog, one of the final projects championed by d’Harnoncourt before her death in 2008, provided the most complete documentation and analysis on the genesis of the work’s various elements to date.

D’Harnoncourt’s staunch support for these scholarly endeavors overlapped with a belief that they threatened to undermine an integral element of the work. As she wrote in her preface to the *Manual* facsimile, its publication “[seemed] appropriate, now that time has elapsed and the initial shock of *Étant donnés* has become part of the unorthodox canon of Duchamp’s work.”¹⁵⁵ This belief was hardly unique to d’Harnoncourt and is echoed by nearly all assessments of the work that emphasize its residual “strangeness” or ineffability. Due to the absence of information about the internal structure, the “initial shock” of viewing the work never abated; viewers had little recourse to understand the construction of the scene they viewed through the eyeholes.

The publication of documentation may affect the experience of the work as it is installed at the museum, but the “progressive cinema” origins of *Étant donnés* suggest

that this actualizes, rather than diminishes, Duchamp’s vision for the work. Much like Discs and his early mirror-based conception of Étant donnés, the revelation of the internal apparatus in Étant donnés does not undermine the work but instead delivers its essential denouement. For Étant donnés to be, as Rosalind Krauss has argued, an “optical machine” compelling viewers’s recognition of their embodiment before the work of art, the illusion of disembodied vision, left intact by other forms of museum vision, must be contravened.

For Krauss, it is enough that Étant donnés is installed in a public museum gallery, where visitors standing at the eyeholes feel the gazes of others at their backs and in that moment become self-aware.156 That was not the foreseen setting, however, during the first decade of Étant donnés’s construction. As this chapter has demonstrated, Duchamp originated Étant donnés during his return to filmmaking in the 1940s and it was the movie theater and modern museum, rather than the Enlightenment-era gallery, that served as its first discursive sites.

In cinema, the darkened theater and projection screen negate the viewing conditions that Krauss attributes to the gallery. The “mass” viewing conditions that so fascinated Richter, Kracauer, and Adorno and Horkheimer were not the same as those of the eighteenth-century museum. Despite being together and participating in a shared spectacle, cinemagoers were effectively isolated from one another. Instead of viewing other subjects, they were all fixated on the screen and its mode of camera-based vision.

156 Krauss, The Optical Unconscious, 113.
Étant donnés mimicked this experience and through the integration of a mirror contravened its central tenet, revealing the viewer’s embodied presence before the screen.

Later, after determining a likely museum site for Étant donnés in the 1950s, Duchamp continued to integrate illusion-defeating measures into the work itself, rather than relying on the public interactions of museum spectators. This would suggest that the idea of the museum as public space invoked by Krauss was no less an Enlightenment myth than the regime of “disembodied vision” she scrutinizes. Or, if it had ever been true, it no longer existed in a meaningful sense by mid-century when modernist painting coexisted with Hollywood film and Vogue fashion shoots at the Museum of Modern Art. The modern museum-goer anticipated by Étant donnés cannot “become a body aware” through an encounter with another museum subject; instead, Étant donnés argues, its atomized experience had become commensurate with that of the cinemagoer. Thus, any strategy to prompt self-awareness on the part of the viewer, in the museum much as in the cinema, must originate from the media architecture itself. Though Duchamp is often associated with the maxim, “It is the spectator who makes the picture,” the mirror in the early Étant donnés and its successors in the 1966 version of the work suggest the artist was, at least for a time, anxious that the very opposite could also be true—that it was the picture that “made” the spectator, doing so in ways not yet recognized or fully understood.157

157 Duchamp’s original statement, “It is the spectators who make the pictures [Ce sont les regardeurs qui font les tableaux],” was made in reference to the posthumous appreciation of the Spanish painter El Greco. “The public paints his pictures three hundred years after [El Greco did himself].” Duchamp, interview by Jean Schuster, in Schuster, “Marcel Duchamp, Vite,” Le Surréalisme, Même 2 (Spring 1957): 143. The statement is
Recovering this history and the context in which *Étant donnés* emerged does not lessen the achievement of *Étant donnés*. For, even if the form of *Étant donnés* originates in Duchamp’s 1940s return to filmmaking, his transposition of this tradition to the museum gallery does, as Krauss argues in *Under Blue Cup*, anticipate a broad swath of later artistic production, from post-minimalist body and performance-based work to the installation art of the 1990s and 2000s. It does, however, offer a justification for the work’s persistent “strangeness” in the critical literature. Recognition of cinema’s place at the inception of this mode of production is a necessary corrective to its marginalization in the historiography of art in the post-World War II period, revising notions of a continuous spectatorial paradigm for visual art from the Enlightenment-era through the present. Many works of post-World War II art, I will argue in the dissertation’s conclusion, respond to cultural conditions that emerged with the mid-century museum and express the same anxieties about them as *Étant donnés*.

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CONCLUSION

Admission of Discs, Please Touch, and Étant donnés into critical debate on Duchamp’s cinema recasts, but does not ultimately unseat, the existing impression of its basic “anemia.” Like Anemic Cinema, these works cultivated spaces and positions that upend standard conceptions of cinematic experience for the period, so much so that they rarely registered as bearing a relation to filmmaking at all. Nonetheless, they help us to see Duchamp’s engagement with cinema dialectically, outside the existing critical paradigms arising from the belated response to Anemic Cinema. Duchamp was clearly not “anti” cinema in some general sense; instead, this analysis shows him to have been interested in the dynamics of specific formats and frameworks. The 1940s works reveal Duchamp’s cinema to be responsive to changes in the commercial technology of and discourses around filmmaking over the span of his long career. It was also internally complex, exploiting certain aspects of the cinemas of his time while negating or contravening others.

This situation is not unique to Duchamp. Noam Elcott observes other artists in the interwar avant-garde who “struggled to activate the space of reception, but rather than see cinema as the problem,…often turned to cinema as the solution.” Referring specifically to Lásló Moholy-Nagy and El Lissitzky’s involvement in short-lived “multi-media museum” projects, he continues, “Rather than negate or subvert the cinematic dispositif, they worked dialectically to conserve and abolish it.” Rarer, however, is Duchamp’s form of engagement with filmmaking during two distinct moments in its historical
development. At the time of *Anemic Cinema*, the cinematic remained a highly contested cultural arena with various formats and audiences competing for dominance. As recent studies of the cinematic imaginary in the pre- and interwar avant-gardes by Wild, Elcott, and others have demonstrated, Duchamp’s silent, seven-minute film intended for a private audience developed alongside the broad media experimentation in both the artistic and the commercial realms during the 1910s and early 1920s. Though Duchamp completed *Anemic Cinema* later, in 1926, after the growth of both the international film industry and the emergence of an alternative avant-garde film circuit in Paris, the long gestation of the film, from the opticeries of the *Large Glass* to the optical machines and notes for films, placed *Anemic Cinema* outside these production and distribution channels.

Duchamp’s decade-and-a-half retreat from filmmaking after *Anemic Cinema* precluded his participation in the growing ciné-club and film society culture that inscribed earlier works like *Anemic Cinema, Retour à la Raison*, and *Entr’acte* in a nascent canon of avant-garde film prints. Duchamp’s absence in the critical years from 1928 to 1931, not only from film but from avant-garde artistic circles more generally prevented further development and circulation of the ideas motivating *Anemic Cinema* and isolated Duchamp from the shift towards more activist, political filmmaking by Richter and many others. Film historian Malte Hagener has called these the “peak years” of European avant-garde film culture. As Hagener explains in *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919-1939*, the alternative production and distribution systems that emerged in France in the mid-1920s
heralded a “sudden boom in film societies.”¹ In Paris, the first ciné-clubs, *Vieux Colombier*, *Studio des Ursulines*, and *Studio 28*, were joined by fourteen additional cinemas showing films identified as “avant-garde.”² The boom extended beyond France, across Europe, the United States, and the Soviet Union, helping to prompt the incisive socio-cultural analyses of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Richter in the later 1930s. “For a brief moment the cinema became the rallying point for circles interested in political, social and cultural transformations through modern media.”³

*Discs, Please Touch*, and *Étant donnés* date to a later moment, after the standardizations of the formal language of narrative filmmaking and theatrical projection of sound film ushered in the golden age of Hollywood cinema. As Hagener notes, sound technology’s arrival in 1928, while not itself antithetical to avant-garde filmmaking, “intensified the capitalisation of the film industry.” “Smaller companies ceased to exist or merged with larger corporations…. Film production became more costly and consequently, films had to recoup more money per release. Film societies and alternative screening spaces often could not compete anymore with commercial exhibitors. Those films that had in the past guaranteed the survival of the organizations now went to commercial art cinemas that became increasingly professionalized.”⁴ In the cases of filmmakers such as René Clair and Fritz Lang, Hagener continues, “filmmakers

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² Ibid., 96.
³ Ibid., 95.
⁴ Ibid., 107.
associated with the avant-garde [in the 1920s would go on to make] sound films.”

However, “[these sound films] were often commercial and produced by large companies.” Others, like Hans Richter, would rely upon industrial commissions to sustain them.

As I argue in chapter three, Richter’s dedication to the production of a new feature-length film after his relocation to the United States during World War II represented a partial recovery of the 1920s avant-garde tradition. He operated largely outside the established film industry, raised his own funds, and employed students from classes at the City College Institute of Film Techniques. At the same time, he sought to exploit the mass audience of industrial sound film in the United States, creating a color, sound film that embraced the narrative and formal conventions of popular commercial films of the time. Though *Dreams That Money Can Buy* would never circulate as widely as Richter had hoped, it nevertheless helped build a new alternative film culture in the postwar United States.

As Scott Macdonald has documented, the organization of *Dreams That Money Can Buy*’s New York premiere helped launch Amos Vogel’s membership film society Cinema 16 and promote that model for the support of experimental film in the United States. Richter also fostered a new generation of American filmmakers through his teaching at the Institute of Film Techniques. His students there included Stan Brakhage, Shirley Clark, and Jonas Mekas, who would later form the New American Cinema

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5 Ibid.
Group, announcing its creation in a manifesto reminiscent of Richter’s *Struggle for the Film*. Their program called for a break from a deleterious “official cinema”: “The official cinema all over the world is running out of breath. It is morally corrupt, esthetically obsolete, thematically superficial, temperamentally boring.”\(^7\) Recalling Richter’s hopes for a “progressive cinema” in *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, their cinema would be “a personal expression,” “reject censorship,” and “seek new forms of financing, working towards a reorganization of film investing methods.”\(^8\)

In this context, Duchamp’s cinema was exceptional. The conjunction of a narrative film sequence with a deluxe catalog cover and the installation of a single-person “cinema by other means” in an American museum defied the capitulation to more standard film media by Richter and the new generation of postwar filmmakers including Deren, Clark, and Mekas without abdicating all claims to the medium. Although intermediality and privacy had characterized Duchamp’s filmmaking already in the 1920s, they took on new significance in wartime and postwar New York. Belatedly encountering 1930s theories of film and media through his participation in *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, Duchamp rejected appeals to a mass audience, or indeed to any audience beyond the lone spectator. If recent crises had demonstrated the failed character of bourgeois individualism, as Richter, Benjamin, and Adorno and Horkheimer maintained, Duchamp’s move from *Discs* to *Étant donnés* targeted its persistent


mythologizing, both in the celebrations of Enlightenment-era institutions such as the
public art gallery and in the denigrations of the emancipatory promises of left-wing and
right-wing collectivities. By addressing the lone spectator in its museum cinema, Étant
donnés encourages recognition of a mediated subjectivity common to both the cinema
hall and the modern museum but not yet figured on their walls.

In this way, Duchamp’s 1940s works presage the more aggressive deconstructions
of Lettrist cinema and structural-materialist film in the 1950s and 1960s.9 Andrew
Uroskie credits the Parisian Lettrists, among them Isidor Isou, Maurice Lemaître, and Gil
J Wolman, as the “first theorists of the postwar expanded cinema,” who promoted a
“postwar rehabilitation of the Dada legacy as distinct from the watered-down surrealism
into which it had descended.”10 As in Dada cinema, the Lettrists’s filmmaking often
extended beyond the film prints themselves to the screening environments in which they
appeared. Wolman’s The Anticoncept (1951), for example, paired the projection of a film
featuring images of a white disk on a black background and a soundtrack voiceover with
a helium-inflated weather balloon. Wolman orchestrated the projector and balloon so that
the projection of the white disk matched as neatly as possible the circumference of the
round balloon, which he placed at the center of the room. Through the luminosity of the
projection on the white balloon and its contrast with the darkness surrounding it on all
sides, as well as the disjunctive soundtrack, Wolman sought to create a sensorial affront

9 P. Adams Sitney positions Anemic Cinema as a major predecessor of structural-
10 Andrew Uroskie, Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and
to the spectators’s bodies. As he recalled of the premiere, “The spectators that closed
their eyes perceived the movement through the eyelids. Even those that turned around
could not escape: the movement became one with the space.”11 Although Duchamp had
not articulated himself in manifestos like Wolman and the other Lettrists did, he deployed
similar strategies of spectatorial antagonism and site-specific projection that he himself
had innovated decades earlier as an affiliate of the Paris Dada group.

Duchamp’s deliberate confusion of medial conventions in Étant donnes also
anticipates the rise of installation art and moving image projections in the “grey boxes” of
contemporary museums and galleries. In the aftermath of Happenings, Pop art, and
Minimalism, artists such as Robert Smithson and Judy Chicago began creating mixed-
media assemblages for specific sites and durations, initially favoring alternative artists’s
spaces and later moving into museum galleries, where they were joined by video artists
and filmmakers in the 1980s. As I discuss in chapter four, Rosalind Krauss has associated
Étant donnes with this development, which she assesses negatively. “With a stroke,”
Krauss writes, “Duchamp’s installation sweeps away centuries of wisdom about both the
nature of the museum and that of art…. His art utterly disperses the medium, invalidating
it as the basis for any judgment at all.”12

Étant donnés’s origins in Duchamp’s work on Dreams That Money Can Buy
challenges the idea that his work “disperses the medium.” Indeed, Etant donnes, like
many of the installation works that followed in its wake, adopts elements and models
from existing media, chief among them, photography and cinema. Its affront to medium-

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11 Ibid., 78.
specific discourse is borrowed. As Krauss herself noted in another context, the heterogeneity of the photographic image and its hybrid status as both document and aesthetic object make it the perfect “tool for deconstructing” medium-specificity, “whereby the specificity of the individual medium is abandoned in favor of a practice focussed [sic] on what has to be called art-in-general, the generic character of art independent of a specific, traditional support.” As such, Étant donnés registers the effects of modern media on earlier models of aesthetic judgment, and on the models of subjectivity they require, rather than inventing and violently enacting those changes itself.

In a final assessment, Duchamp’s later cinematic works appear to proffer the intervention in commercial narrative cinema that scholars have long attributed to Anemic Cinema. It is Discs, Please Touch, and Étant donnés that most directly engage the dispositif of commercial cinema, doing so, I have argued, to address a spectatorial subjectivity shared with the modern museum. With this recognition of the later works, Anemic Cinema can reoccupy its place in the early history of avant-garde experimentation beside Duchamp’s paintings, the Large Glass, and optical machines, when the promise of the moving image remained largely outside the cinematographic apparatus.

FIGURES

Images removed by the author of this dissertation for copyright reasons.
0.1 Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23.
0.2 Marcel Duchamp, *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)*, 1920.
0.3 Marcel Duchamp, *Anemic Cinema*, still showing title card, 1926.
0.4 Marcel Duchamp, *Anemic Cinema*, still showing one of the ten *Optical Disks*, 1926.
0.5 Marcel Duchamp, *Anemic Cinema*, still showing one of the nine *Disks Inscribed with Puns*, 1926.
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0.7 Marcel Duchamp, *Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)*, 1924.
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0.9 Marcel Duchamp, Frames from Stereoscopic Film, 1924-25.
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0.11 Marcel Duchamp, *Fania*, 1915.
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0.15 Marcel Duchamp, “Faire un cinema” note, ca. 1920 – 26.
1.1 Marcel Duchamp, Ten-page “cinématique” manuscript, ca. late 1912 – early 1913.
1.2 Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even (The Green Box)*, 1934.
1.3 Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, detail of “Draft Pistons,” 1915-23.
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