**Anemic Cinema**

Considered one of the important experimental films of the pre-war European avant-garde, *Anemic Cinema* (1926) is a short experimental film by Marcel Duchamp who authored the film under his pseudonym Rrose Sélavy. Earlier in the decade, Duchamp had experimented with a series of optical devices and motorized sculptures that would later form the basis for *Anemic Cinema*. These mechanical pieces, which Duchamp called *rotoreliefs*, involved the rotary movement of black concentric circles painted onto flat cardboard discs whose spinning, powered by a phonograph turntable, created a pulsating optical illusion or pseudo-3D effect. After a series of unsuccessful attempts, Duchamp, along with Man Ray and Marc Allégret, successfully filmed these rotoreliefs pieces in motion for the finished version of *Anemic Cinema*. The structure of the film is simple: a static camera films ten shots of spinning optical rotoreliefs discs alternating with nine spinning textual discs. These spinning textual discs, to be read from the outer concentric rings to the inner rings, act to intentionally confound the spectator’s fixed and stable position. It is near impossible to read these counter-clockwise spinning discs, for example, without craning one’s neck or adjusting one’s viewing position. Drawing his text and allusions from such disparate sources as French advertising copy and homosexual innuendo, Duchamp’s clever and idiosyncratic use of French puns, idioms, and alliteration would have a bewildering effect on French-speakers, and it would make interpretation or transliteration into other languages a futile prospect. Duchamp would later adapt his optical rotoreliefs discs for a sequence in Hans Richter’s feature-length experimental film *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1948).

**Further Reading:**

Betancourt, M. (2003) “Precision Optics / Optical Illusions: Inconsistency, *Anemic*

*Cinema*, and the *Rotoreliefs.”* *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*.

http://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue\_5/articles/betancourt/betancourt.html

Martin, K. (1975) “Marcel Duchamp's Anemic Cinema,” *Studio International* 189 (973):

53-60.

Tomkins, C. (1996). *Duchamp: a Biography*. New York, H. Holt.

**Paratextual Material:**

1. “Have you ever put the marrow of the sword into the stove of a loved one” A close-up of one of the textual rotoreliefs.

2. “Let us flee the bruises of the Eskimos who have exquisite words” A close-up of one of the textual rotoreliefs.

3. Marcel Duchamp with optical rotoreliefs used in segment in Hans Richter’s film *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947).

*Anemic Cinema* (1926) – out of copyright

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXINTf8kXCc

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