'Polycythemia,' or Surrealist Intertextuality in the Light of Cinematic 'Anemia'

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Anemia is a decrease in hemoglobin or the number of red blood cells carrying oxygen throughout the body. Polycythemia is a state in which the opposite happens—there is a problematic increase in red blood cells. In the context of this publication on "anemic cinema," I am using polycythemia in my title to symbolize a seemingly uncontrolled proliferation of meanings.[1] My thesis is a simple one. Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* (1926) is a short film composed of rotating discs that create pulsating optical illusions that alternate with spiraling, risqué wordplays and spoonerisms like "Bains de gros thé pour grains de beauté sans trop de bengué" (baths of vulgar tea for beauty marks without too much Ben-Gay).[2] Where Duchamp's cinematic anemia seems to be a type of mimesis-*reduction* that is still capable of producing diegesis, Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's 1928 film collaboration *L'Etoile de mer* seems in contrast to indulge in the kind of *superabundant* diegetic mimesis that characterizes later, more narratively surrealist films.[3] Indeed, except for one brief sequence, *L'Etoile de mer* does not resemble *Anémic Cinéma* at all. Despite that, I hope to show that *L'Etoile* is a kind of stepping-stone between Duchamp and the Surrealists in a dialectical process indebted to the former's punning pulsations.

Said to have been based on a disjointed poem by Robert Desnos, *L'Etoile de mer* has long been considered an exemplar of the surrealist love story: a young man (played by André de la Rivière) meets a young woman (Kiki De Montparnasse); experiences castration anxiety; replaces her with a protective fetish in the form of a starfish in a glass vessel; overcomes his fear but loses her to another man (Robert Desnos); and replaces her again, after which things end with a cryptic shock. Despite predating the thematically similar but more overtly shocking cinematic collaboration of Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, *Un Chien andalou* (1929), *L'Etoile* has usually taken

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a back seat to it in historical reception. It is, however, rich with possibilities, having been analyzed in terms of:

•its formal experimentation;[4]

•how it illustrates and deviates from a scenario in Desnos's hand, with annotations by Man Ray;[5]

•some of its more obviously Freudian iconography;[6]

•other kinds of thematic conceits, like alchemy;[7]

•the processes by which artistic collaboration and different personalities lead to different types of relationships between the literary and the visual, "particularly through its use of intertitles."[8]

This has led some critics to conclude that the film's narrative and symbolism are almost wholly Desnos's and therefore Surrealist, because of his much-admired "automatic" wordplays in the *époque des sommeils*.[9] In contrast, some argue, the execution is largely Dada, the contribution of the more technically experimental photographer Man Ray, which "betrays an overriding interest in formal organization that seems somewhat at odds with the aims of Surrealism."[10] One can certainly use the historical specifics of the film's creation to establish authorial responsibilities and to unpack the film as a closed work or "readerly text," but I am more interested in how the historical specifics can be used as supplements to the obvious details of the film and its scenario in the creation of an affective meaning in an open, "writerly text."[11]

In comparison to the elaborate iconographical untangling afforded *Chien*,[12] analyses of *L'Etoile* oversimplify the film's dense intertextuality by describing it from one Freudian perspective only; by venturing new interpretations based on limited or even faulty information; or by limiting themselves to the film's avant-garde cinematic style—for instance, its unconventional cinematography and rhythmic editing,[13] or the subversive function of its poetic subtitles relative to its seemingly unrelated visual images.[14] Although there has been some scholarly exploration of specific symbolism, the film exhibits many political-philosophical intertexts that have not yet been explored. I will address the interrelations of five of them in this paper.[15]

The first of these is an arresting moment in which the sole female character steps out of bed onto a book (Fig. 1). This was an element so salient to Man Ray that he reproduced it separately in a surrealist periodical as a still photograph. One of the very few publications that specifically mention the book speculates that it "has all the appearance of being an alchemical text,"[16] and this assumption is uncritically repeated in at least one later text.[17] I disagreed, publishing a reading based on an equally shaky assumption that the book had something to do with the processes of female reproduction. Indeed, I interpreted the sequence as a repudiation of contemporary French natalism, the policy of repopulation between the world wars.[18] It appears I was quite wrong.

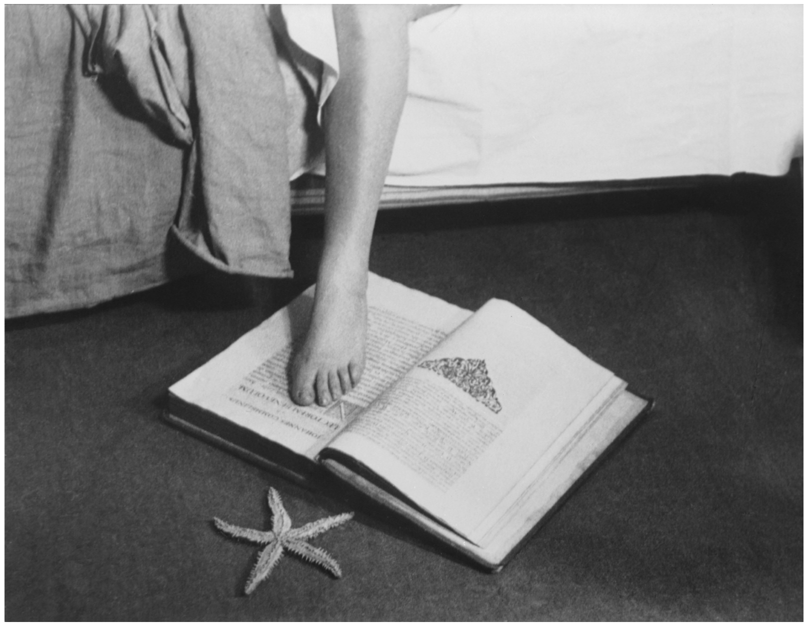


Fig. 1. Man Ray, foot on book at 11:17-11:22, film still from *L'Etoile de mer* (1928) © Man Ray Trust/ SODRAC (2016)

I had always been intrigued by this image because most of the film was shot through gelatin to produce "surreal" distortions preventing close observations of details. This shot, however, is one of several in relatively sharp focus, as if to invite close reading intermittently throughout the film. Initially, I was chiefly concerned with finding a prototype for the action of stepping on a book. After some time, I discovered the frontispiece to the Marquis de Sade's *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu*, a copy of which was, according to painter André Masson, on the mantel over the fireplace in 15, rue de Grenelle, Paris—the so-called Bureau of Surrealist Research—along with Freud's *Introduction à la psychanalyse* and Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*.[19] In it, the personification of Virtue is corrupted by Luxury and Irreligion, whose identity is revealed by a foot trampling a Bible with a cross nearby. Consequently, I was content with the idea that the shot merely represented surrealist anti-clericalism,[20] but other aspects of the surrealist enterprise began to cloud the issue. One such was a caption repeated in Max Ernst's collage-novel *La Femme 100 têtes*, "the phantom of repopulation," that functioned in a manner rather like that of an intertitle in a film.[21] "Repopulation" conjured up associations with the contemporary French policy of natalism, and I began to wonder whether others in the surrealist orbit were aware of politically and socially conservative attempts in the 1920s to restrict access to contraception and otherwise encourage women to produce babies to make up for the devastating losses of the Great War. Surrealism's condemnation of natalism would have been motivated by general concerns for human liberty and access to "free love" without the encumbrance of children. Indeed, this is one of the reasons that Surrealism, despite its misogynistic reputation, actually seems to be proto-feminist in some regards.

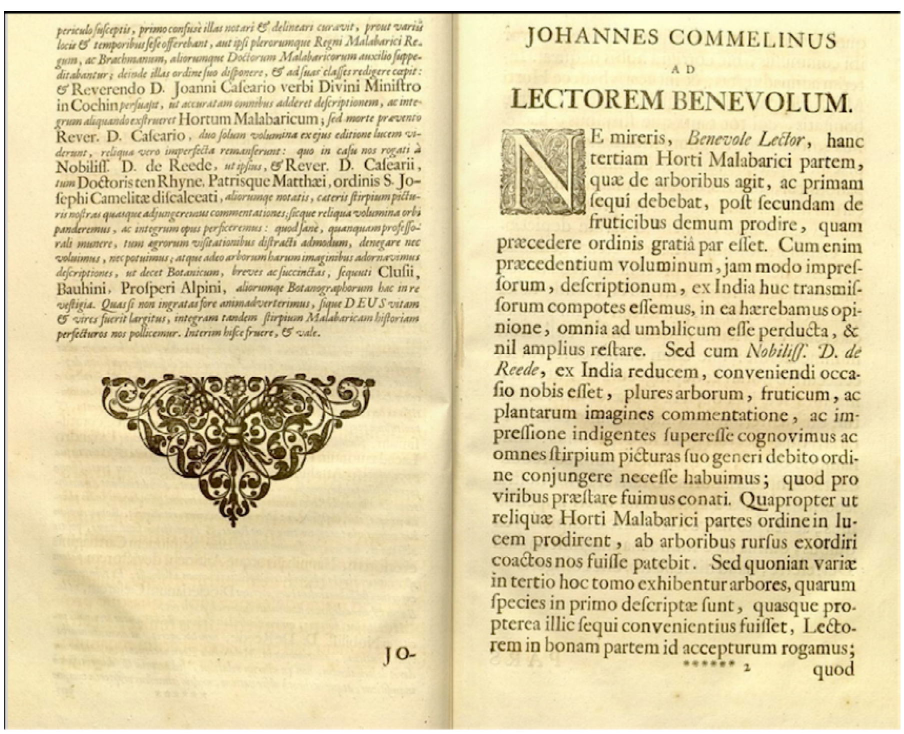
This new association motivated my intense preoccupation with the true identity of the book in the film. Was it a pro-natalist policy document that Desnos and Man Ray had their female protagonist stomp in surrealist defiance of its requirements? Was it a collection of popular images enjoining women to "win babies," as some interwar postcards and flyers would have had it?[22] Was it simply a story about motherhood and therefore worthy of crushing beneath the feet?

After a number of false starts, I determined that the book seemed to have been authored by someone named Commandeur, but I was unable to determine if it was Johannes, who wrote an 1832 treatise on Hippocrates as the father of true, evidence-based medicine, or Ferdinand, who wrote articles on obstetrics and gynecology between 1890 and 1910. Either way, I became convinced that the trampling of the book represented some sort of surrealist rejection of conventional medical knowledge. I indulged in confirmation bias by preferring the latter, gynecological allusion because the endplate in the book itself, just left of the foot, could be construed as a pubic triangle. Meanwhile, the nearby starfish—which elsewhere in the film appears in conjunction with a knife-wielding female (12:47-13:19)—corroborated a growing impression that the sequence was a metaphor of the ever-threatening sex act itself. This conclusion, by the way, provided an explanation for an early sequence in the film in which the male protagonist chose not to sleep with the female character (03:21-03:37). That is, he was afraid of castration, an interpretation aligning with that of most critics.[23]

I was so convinced that I published this conclusion as if it were the gospel truth. However, I could never really let go of the fact that I wasn't sure which Commandeur was which, so I continued to search for about fifteen years. I resisted advice from the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland, that it was likely not a book of the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, based on the elaborate initial "N" near the toes. I continued to resist even when a kind librarian in Amsterdam finally found an original and very rare, uncut copy of Johannes's book which, when opened, bore no trace of the initial or the endplate. But I pressed on until finally, with the assistance of a superior film still provided by the Man Ray Trust, I found the original book. It came from a source so different that it required a complete reassessment of my interpretation.

Never identified before, my first unexplored intertext is the book in this sequence, a single volume from a twelve-volume work entitled *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus* . . . (Fig. 2) by Dutch soldier and amateur botanist Hendrik van Rheede tot Draakenstein and nine others, including Jan Commelin (not Commandeur), whose name can just be discerned in Latin on the page directly under the extended foot. The rarity and expense of this collection (which was only translated into English in 2003) indicate that its use in the film is unlikely to have been entirely arbitrary. The identification is secure, for the initial "N" and the phrase "*ad lectorem benevolum"* clearly match the film still, as does the adjacent endplate. The latter, by the way, appears to have been a generic emblem that had been in use in prayer books as early as 1738.[24]

The book concerns the flora of the Malabar Coast in southwestern India, and its luxurious, foldout engravings of as many as seven hundred plants are quite precious and memorable.[25] However, it has been argued that the entire enterprise of publishing such a magnum opus was less a botanical enterprise than a personal and political one. Its grandeur was part of van Rheede's attempt to stop his powerful rival, General Ryklof van Goens, under whom he had served earlier in Malabar. Recognizing the younger man's rapid climb to success, van Goens forced van Rheede to resign from the Dutch East India Company to block his advancement. Moreover, van Goens wanted to establish the Dutch colonial capital in Colombo, Sri Lanka,


periculo susceptis, primo confusè illas notari & delineari curavit, prout variis locis & temporibus sese offerebant, aut ipsi plerorumque Regni Malabarici Regum, ac Brachmanum, aliorumque Doctorum Malabaricorum auxilio suppeditabantur; deinde illas ordine suo disponere, & ad suas classes redigere cœpit: & Reverendo D. Joanni Caseario verbi Divini Ministro in Cochin *persuasit, ut accuratam omnibus adderet descriptionem, ac integrum aliquando exstrueret* Hortum Malabaricum; *sed morte prævento* Rever. D. Caseario, *duo solum volumina ex ejus editione lucem viderunt, reliqua vero imperfecta remanserunt: quo in casu nos rogati à* Nobiliss. D. de Reede, *ut ipsius,* & Rever. D. Casearii, *tum* Doctoris ten Rhyne, Patrisque Matthæi, ordinis S. Josephi Camelitæ discalceati, *aliorumqe notatis, cæteris stirpium picturis nostras quasque adjungeremus commentationes; sicque reliqua volumina orbi panderemus, ac integrum opus perficeremus: quod sanè, quanquam professorali munere, tum agrorum visitationibus distracti admodum, denegare nec voluimus, nec potuimus; atque adeo arborum harum imaginibus adornavimus descriptiones, ut decet Botanicum, breves ac succinctas, sequuti* Clusii, Bauhini, Prosperi Alpini, *aliorumqe Botanographorum hac in re vestigia. Quas si non ingratas fore animadverterimus, sique DEUS vitam & vires fuerit largitus, integram tandem stirpium Malabaricam historiam perfecturos nos pollicemur. Interim hisce fruere, & vale.*

JO-

JOHANNES COMMELINUS

AD

LECTOREM BENEVOLUM.

NE mireris, *Benevole Lector*, hanc tertiam Horti Malabarici partem, quæ de arboribus agit, ac primam sequi debebat, post secundam de fruticibus demum prodire, quam præcedere ordinis gratiâ par esset. Cum enim præcedentium voluminum, jam modo impressorum, descriptionum, ex India huc transmissorum compotes essemus, in ea hærebamus opinione, omnia ad umbilicum esse perducta, & nil amplius restare. Sed cum *Nobiliss. D. de Reede*, ex India reducem, conveniendi occasio nobis esset, plures arborum, fruticum, ac plantarum imagines commentatione, ac impressione indigentes superesse cognovimus ac omnes stirpium picturas suo generi debito ordine conjungere necesse habuimus; quod pro viribus præstare fuimus conati. Quapropter ut reliquæ Horti Malabarici partes ordine in lucem prodirent, ab arboribus rursus exordiri coactos nos fuisse patebit. Sed quonian variæ in tertio hoc tomo exhibentur arbores, quarum species in primo descriptæ sunt, quasque propterea illic sequi convenientius fuisset, Lectorem in bonam partem id accepturum rogamus;

****** 2 quod

Fig. 2. Hendrik van Rheede tot Draakenstein, et al., *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus*, 22–23. https://archive.org/stream/mobot31753003370084#page/n21/mode/2up. Courtesy of the Peter H. Raven Library/Missouri Botanical Garden.

whereas van Rheede's aspiration was to place it in Kochi (Cochin), Malabar. The pretext of the book, then, was "to prove Malabar's superiority in terms of [a] ready supply of valuable spices, cotton and timber. More importantly he was able to show that many valuable drugs purchased in European cities, including those used for the treatment of Dutch officers in the Indies, were actually made from medicinal plants originating in Malabar and exported through Arabian and other trade routes."[26]

So—what does this mean? Well, a full explanation requires yet another set of spiraling surrealist digressions akin to the proliferation of blood cells characteristic of polycythemia, which brings me to my second intertext. At one point in the film, the male protagonist reads a story in a newspaper that had been blowing around in the wind, possibly due to his having removed the starfish vessel, which had been functioning as a paperweight (05:24). Despite three stars pasted on to the news story to obliterate some of the text in another gelatin-free close-up, we can make out that in March, "Warsaw published [this] morning the response of M. [Voldem] aras to the recent note from M. [Z]aleski which was a formal notice of sorts. The Lithuanian statesman feels bound, before complying, to bring into [play] all sorts of arguments…."

The article is a contemporary account of Polish-Lithuanian relations: at the end of the Polish-Soviet War (1919–1920), the Moscow Peace Treaty gave Lithuania control of the city of Vilnius, the majority of whose population was Polish and forty percent of whom were Jewish.[27] This gave rise to fears in Poland that there would be a renewal of the Polish-Lithuanian War (also 1919–1920), so Polish General Lucjan Żeligowski, pretending to be a mutineer, took control of the city in a coup late in 1920 and established the Republic of Central Lithuania (not to be confused with the Republic of Lithuania proper). Not long afterwards, the parliament of the new republic formally surrendered itself to Poland, and it was soon revealed that the entire enterprise had been staged.

The Lithuanians did not accept this subterfuge, and from 1926 to 1929, Augustinas Voldemaras, their dictatorially inclined Prime Minister, exchanged so many letters with August Zaleski, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the Poles complained that "Voldemaras was attempting to submerge them in a flood of paper."[28] These exchanges had to do with demands for war reparations; clarity around railroad, postal and telegraph communications; establishing a demilitarized zone; and the like. The formal notice (*mise en demeure*) in the newspaper was Zaleski's notification to induce Voldemaras to comply.

Neither the manuscript scenario nor the film explores any of this in detail.[29] The scenario says only, "He catches one [blowing newspaper]. You can read 'Mr. ***'."[30] As filmed, however, the story in the paper does seem to trigger some kind of concern in the protagonist, for he looks apprehensive and we next see him lying with his head in the lap of the woman, who strokes his hair as if to console him before a frightening journey (08:13-08:23). That journey, the scenario tells us, takes place on

L'Etoile du nord, a passenger train that in 1927 began offering luxury service between Paris and Amsterdam (where van Rheede's book was published).[31] Contemporary travel posters for the rail line often featured a young couple like that in the film. In one, a woman wears a flapper-style hat (as does Kiki in the film's opening sequence), and we can see her ankles under the dining car table at which she sits.[32] Indeed, she is posed much as Kiki was when her ankles were juxtaposed with an intertitle alluding to the beauty of women's teeth (01:50-02:15), an image thought by many commentators to be an allusion to the *vagina dentata*.[33] The man in the railway poster sits opposite her, smiling at her rather forcefully, almost as if leering at her over his newspaper. Above the vignette is the logo of the line, a white star. All of this connotes a luxury to be shared between lovers, and I argue that it gets transformed into a highly oblique sexual encounter in the film.

The footage of the train creates some flashing, "abstract" effects (08:39-08:51) like those in Man Ray's more Dada films *Le Retour à la Raison* (1923) and *Emak-Bakia* (1926), but it soon arrives at a port where bilge water gushes into the harbor in a surrealist manner suggestive of sexual discharge (08:56-9:07). Given the placement of some male arms on the ledge above, the forced perspective position of this discharge is just about anatomically right. The trip is thus a metaphor of the sexual act the man feared, which is why he had to be consoled at its beginning. It was precipitated by a newspaper story involving a seemingly unrelated revolutionary struggle—although it is certainly possible that, as Jews, the artistic collaborators were responding to the anti-Semitic subtext of the news item. Even without that connection, the trip becomes an expression of the convulsive, revolutionary nature of surrealist imagery, which typically operated by conflating images that were extremely distant from each other in root meaning. The last sentence of André Breton's *Nadja* was "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all," because he felt that the strongest Surrealist image "is the one that is arbitrary to the highest degree.[34] *L'Etoile*'s conflation of political revolution, the masculine gaze, modern train travel, and repressed sexuality makes perfect sense in this context.

What does this lengthy digression mean for our discovery in the film of a two-century-old Dutch botany book with some faintly political overtones? I have come to believe that choice of the book was a conscious decision to set into motion a metaphorical chain of associations that will bring a third intertext into focus. Immediately following the train journey (09:40), a Dutch hyacinth (*hyacinthus orientalis*) twice appears in another of the film's close-ups, and its presence has usually been explained by its association with the intertitle following it in turn, which reads, "Si les fleurs étaient en verre" (if flowers were in glass)." The usual explanation of this is that the protagonist's initial defense against his castration anxiety was the fetishization of the starfish, which he first encountered when it was safely ensconced in glass. That is, flowers are conventional signifiers of female sexual anatomy, so a flower in glass would be a symbolic cognate of a starfish in glass—just another fetish to guard against castration anxiety.[35] "Si les fleurs étaient en verre" thus implies that a hyacinth, specifically, is an inconsequential example of "flower" in this fragment of a conditional sentence, and that any number of other flowers could serve the same purpose. The pubic triangle of the botany book's endplate seems more important than any of the elaborate flower engravings.

I think, however, that there might be more to it, and so do others. Sitney, for instance, sees *L'Etoile* as "a film about seeing the world through layers of glass… The implication is that the so-called normal lens is as artificial as the stippled one."[36] I would venture even more: "*en verre*" is a homonym of "*envers*," so "in glass" also resonates with "upside down" or "backwards." The intertitle thus hints at the idea, "If flowers were upside down." In Freudian terms, this would mean that a flower grows back into the earth, transforming its "flower = vagina" parallelism into "flower = phallus," thus making "flowers in glass" a metaphor of an *accomplished* sexual act rather than a fetishistic *avoidance* of one. Moreover, the hyacinth, a bulbous plant and therefore a common symbol of rebirth, implies that it can arise again and again, season after season. This further suggests that male virility is reborn after this metaphorical sex act, suggesting that there is no need to be anxious about castration, thus rendering frequent allusions to it in surrealist criticism moot.

Indeed, the intertitle functions as the textual antecedent of a bimodal conditional statement. That is, the consequent is not presented as text but as a composite image of twelve panels in a grid, most containing rotating objects and/or objects—including the starfish—under glass (09:47-10:16). Some of these components—particularly two at the bottom showing a roulette wheel—are visually reminiscent of the rotating discs in Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*, but several of the remainder are emphatically polycythemic: one that has been noticed before is the second from the top left, where a hand vigorously removes, twists and reinserts a sword into a scabbard.[37] The Freudian significance of this should be obvious enough, but perhaps less known is the possibility that it comments on one of Duchamp's spoonerisms, "Avez vous déjà mis la moëlle de l'épée dans le poêle de l'aimée," which one translator renders as, "Have you ever put the marrow of the sword into the stove of the loved one."[38]A component that has not been analyzed before is at the bottom right, where a beaker pours what appears to be salt, but the vignette runs *in reverse*, so the salt is mysteriously "vacuumed up" into the beaker. Far from being merely a reminder of the chance patterns created by salt poured onto film in *Le Retour à la Raison,* the vignette here suggests symbolically that there is some sort of sexual parallelism between rotation and reversal. To be clear, I am thinking that male detumescence can and will be followed by retumescence.

The full visual-verbal conditional statement is effectively, "If flowers represented male virility, then all these cyclical movements imply renewal and restoration." The composite image is then followed by the same hyacinth, with an iris-in to the blooms, and then the same intertitle, "Si les fleurs étaient en verre."[39]

The entire sequence thus implies that interpretations limited to castration anxiety are grossly overused in surrealist criticism because the film also shows it being followed by renewal, which of course allays the anxiety. Indeed, sometimes the threat and its confutation are in the very same frame: in the film still with which I began, the cropped female leg actually implies a synecdoche of the male anatomy, "which acts according to the principle of the fetish to project phallic presence where absence would otherwise obtain."[40]

I conclude that the trampling of a Dutch botany book (which seems marked as female) corroborates the reading of a Dutch hyacinth as a signifier of phallic rebirth—making the film a kind of almost Duchampian in-joke about what nonsense castration anxiety is. Since the threatening female later reappears, we are in an endless loop of threat/consequence/revitalization/threat. In its risqué, cinematic badinage, playing in the spaces between the visual sign and the verbal intertitle, this sexual loop is a mimetic elaboration of Duchamp's non-mimetic, punning gyrations. Similarly, *L'Etoile*'s alternation of focused and unfocussed shots reminds us of Duchamp's non-mimetic, ambiguous spirals pulsing endlessly in and out.

This brings me to my fourth unexplored intertext. A later intertitle (11:43) coincides with the reappearance of the woman, describing her as "Belle, belle comme une fleur de verre" (beautiful, beautiful as a flower of glass). This intertitle dissolves into a close-up of the starfish, leading most commentators to restate the *vagina dentata* trope and stop. But the old French expression "avoir le verre de lampe" means to have an erection, so the association of glass solely with the female may be misleading.[41] Indeed, if "a flower of glass" can imply the restoration of male virility, then the intertitle can actually be understood as "beautiful, beautiful as another erection." For the moment, let's just say the woman is cinematically described as beautiful as a flower made of glass, and the penultimate sequence in the film features the word "beautiful" breaking in a mirror in which she is reflected (16:40-17:10).[42] A purely Freudian reading would see the resultant shards as implying that sexual attractiveness equals danger (another *vagina dentata*). A Duchampian reading adds another, more discursively critical possibility. Consider that Duchamp described his *Large Glass*—*La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, 1915–23)—as a "*retard en verre*" (a delay in glass), which some writers assume is also a punning reference to "*envers,*" or "on the other side."[43] The *en verre/envers* wordplay might be roughly transcribed as "lenses inside out," an apt way to describe the non-mimetic, non-diegetic *Anémic Cinéma*, which was made in 1926, the same year that *The Large Glass* was famously shattered. Since Man Ray seems to have been the one to add an "explosion" to the scenario at this point, it seems reasonable to read his breaking "beautiful" as an homage to both Duchamp (for its imagery) and Breton (for its convulsive nature).[44]

Let us also not forget that Man Ray was an expatriate American. His depiction of shattering beauty is also a "cracked bell[e]," which inevitably conjures up a fifth and final intertext—the iconic Liberty Bell of the American Revolution. Man Ray could easily have seen it in Philadelphia as a boy. Moreover, it appeared frequently on the masthead of *The Liberty Boys of '76* (1901-1925), a series of pulp picture books he read in his youth.[45] He surely could not have been unaware of its significance, and its resonance in the film saves the woman from being merely a castration threat. Kiki plays the role of a castrating goddess, for she is described earlier (03:41) in the punning intertitle "Si belle! Cybèle?" The nature goddess Cybele required that her followers castrate themselves, and the sequence of Kiki carrying the knife up the stairs cements the allusion.[46] But she is *also* Lady Liberty, for later she wears a recognizable Phrygian cap (14:41-14:48), a conventional signifier of the pursuit of liberty. Known as the *bonnet rouge* when worn by France's Marianne, it serves as a national symbol of the French Republic. When worn by America's Columbia (a national symbol of the United States that later morphed into Liberty herself), it serves the same purpose. The film's conflation of these signifiers of liberty with a castration threat means that sexual activity undertaken in the context of political struggle (Vilnius and Malabar), freed from the restrictive need merely to repopulate France, is not a Freudian something that men should fear. It is a political something that men should *embrace* because there will always be another moment of virility (hyacinth) and because the free play of images—sexually punning signifiers cycling through each one another—is itself a sign of revolutionary freedom.

Both *Anémic cinema* and *L'Etoile de mer* alternate between mimesis and non-mimesis, between diegesis and unfettered semiotic play. They are "*belle*" (beautiful) because the play leads away from the pleasure of unpacking prescriptive readings to the Barthesian *jouissance* of antiauthoritarian freedom. In the words of one commentator, "*Plaisir* results, then, from the operation of the structures of signification through which the subject knows himself or herself; *jouissance* fractures these structures."[47] What better visual sign of "beautiful" fracturing than a shattering mirror?

The complex conflation of motifs in *L'Etoile de mer* means that revolutionary freedom exists in the play of the mind, with which Duchamp would no doubt agree, and not in mimetic descriptions of external reality. Desnos's and Man Ray's use of mimesis describes an internal reality, thus conforming with a key component of surrealist theory. Criticism that limits itself to playing "spot-the-Freudianism" in the face of complex and contradictory texts oversimplifies and truncates critical discourse on Surrealism, for there is no acknowledgement that castration anxiety is only in the mind, based on an incomplete understanding of the biomechanical reality of recurrent sexual excitation.

Despite *L'Etoile de mer*'s apparent differences from Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*, the former film also articulates the latter's tricky equilibrium between cinematic self-reflexiveness and sexualized intertextuality. Man Ray's gelatinous lack of focus often works to obscure Desnos's imagery. However, certain moments in the film snap into sharp focus to draw our attention to something. This alternating pacing functions in much the same way as *Anémic Cinéma*, where we alternately attend to Duchamp's puns as meanings or as graphic shapes. The rotating forms are similarly "*à l'envers*" (inside out), for we can see them as convexities or concavities. *L'Etoile de mer* reimagines those ambiguities without reducing mimesis, and the convexities and concavities exhibit psychoanalytical equivocality, like the alternating figures used in the psychology of perception.[48] Hyacinths, which return year after year, signify that post-coital detumescence is always temporary and virility returns. Along with the pacing of the film, this symbolism introduces a kind of semiotic "throbbing," a disappearance and reappearance of meaning—assuming in a loosely Lacanian way the identification of significance with phallic virility.[49] Desnos and Man Ray fully understood and digested Duchamp's ideas and took them a step further into a more explicitly surrealist context.

1 Excerpts of this essay are reworked in Chapter Five of Robert J. Belton, *Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo" and the Hermeneutic Spiral* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 75-79.
2 Katrina Martin, "Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*." *Studio International* (January–February 1975): 60.
3 R. Bruce Elder, *DADA, Surrealism, and the Cinematic Effect* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2013), 160; and Bart Testa, "Optical Experiments and *Anémic Cinéma*," *DADA Companion*, http://www.dada-companion.com/duchamp/films.php.
4 Kim Knowles, *A Cinematic Artist: The Films of Man Ray* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 169.
5 Inez Hedges, "Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's Manuscript Scenario for *L'Etoile de mer*," *Dada/Surrealism* 15 (1986): 207.
6 Lauren Rabinovitz, "Independent Journeyman: Man Ray, Dada and Surrealist Filmmaker," *Southwest Review* 64 (1979): 371.
7 Inez Hedges, "Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's *L'Etoile de mer*," *Dada/Surrealism* 15 (1986): 102.
8 Knowles, 113–14.
9 André Breton, "L'Entrée des mediums," *Littérature* 6 (1922), in *The Lost Steps: Les Pas perdus*, Trans. Mark Polizzotti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 93.
10 Knowles, 181.
11 Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4-5.
12 Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 53–105.
13 Knowles, 158.
14 P. Adams Sitney, "Image and Title in Avant-Garde Cinema," *October* 11 (Winter 1979): 100-1.
15 In addition to the ones mentioned here, there are others yet to be explored, including probable allusions to Giorgio de Chirico at 09:10 and 11:02; the sexual significance of the contrast between phallic architecture at 04:23 and non-phallic architecture at 13:31; the reference to *La Santé* (13:23) as

a home for hysterics, whose "wandering" wombs signaled sexuality outside of reproduction [Robert Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 240–42], and so on.

16 Hedges, "Constellated Visions," 105.

17 James Magrini, "'Surrealism' and the Omnipotence of Cinema," *Senses of Cinema* 44 (2007), http://sensesofcinema.com/2007/feature-articles/surrealism-cinema/

18 Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb*, 205-6.

19 André Masson, "Le Peintre et ses fantasmes," in *Le Rebelle du surréalisme: Écrits*, ed. Françoise Will-Levaillant (Paris: Hermann, 1976), 31. The frontispiece is reproduced at http://referentiel.nouvelobs.com/file/13722076.jpg.

20 Surrealist anti-clericalism was emphatically announced in *La Révolution surréaliste* 3 (April 1925), the cover of which read, "End of the Christian Era."

21 Max Ernst, *The Hundred Headless Woman (La Femme sans têtes)*, trans. Dorothea Tanning (New York: Braziller, 1981), 263, 287.

22 Marie-Monique Huss, "Pronatalism in the Inter-War Period in France," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25.1 (January 1990): 46, 48.

23 Norman Gambill, "The Movies of Man Ray," in *Man Ray: Objects and Photographs* (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1980), 35; Steven Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1980), 136; Alan Thiher, *The Cinematic Muse: Critical Studies in the History of French Cinema* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1979), 40.

24 Job Kwakman, "Keurbijbel Uit 1738 (met Psalmen Uit 1774) & Prentbijbel Uit 1847 Met 1000 Houtsneden," *Catawiki*, http://veiling.catawiki.nl/kavels/209587-bijbel-lot-met-2-verschillende-bijbels-1738-1847.

25 H. Y. Mohan Ram, "On the English edition of Van Rheede's *Hortus Malabaricus* by K. S. Manilal (2003)," *Current Science* 89.10 (2005): 1673.

26 Ullattil Manmadhan, "The Rani of Cochin, Van Rheede and *Hortus Malbaricus*," *Historic Alleys Blog*, April, 2009, http://historicalleys.blogspot.ca/2009/04/rani-of-cochin-van-reede-and-hortus.html.

27 Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 16.

28 Alfred Erich Senn, *The Great Powers, Lithuania, and the Vilna Question: 1920–1928* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 210.

29 The musical selections (attributed to Desnos), however, clearly suggest a symbolic association of "the relationship between and and woman with revolutionary struggle and social reform" (Knowles, 184).

30 Hedges, "Scenario," 217. The interposition of the three stars is perhaps of more than passing interest, since General Żeligowski was made a three-star general in 1923. More far-fetched is the fact that the semi-official emblem of the League of Nations, which was frequently involved in Polish-Lithuanian negotiations, would eventually feature two five-pointed stars within a pentagon representing the five continents. The latter, however, only became official in 1939.

31 Hedges, "Scenario," 216.

32 See, for instance, Fedda Weidema, "The Pullman Rides Again: Dutch Railway Posters," *Retours: Railway History, Design and Photgraphy*, 8; http://retours.eu/en/02-posters-weidema-pullman/#8.

33 Sitney, 108.

34 André Breton, *Nadja* (1928), trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove, 1960), 160; and Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924) in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 38.

35 Rufus C. Camphausen, *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Wisdom: A Reference Guide to the Symbolism, Techniques, Rituals, Sacred Texts, Psychology, Anatomy, and History of Sexuality* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1991), 124.

36 Sitney, 108.
37 Ibid., 109.
38 Martin, 60. An earlier variation has been translated as, "You should put the hilt of the foil in the quilt of the goil" (Elmer Peterson, in Breton, "L'Entrée," 88, n. 3).
39 Sitney, 109, appears to think there is a subtle shift from "*in* glass" to "*of* glass," but I don't see it.
40 Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb*, 205.
41 Jean-Michel Jakobowicz, *Le Grand livre des gros mots* (Paris: Leduc, 2012), 30.
42 Some see this as a sheet of glass between the camera and the woman (e.g., Hedges, "Constellated Visions," 106; and Knowles, 169); while others see a mirror (e.g., Sitney, 111).
43 Craig Adcock, "Duchamp's Eroticism: A Mathematical Analysis," *Dada/Surrealism* 16 (1987): 160.
44 Desnos's handwriting only calls for a final superimposed shot of the starfish, while Man Ray added the word "explosion." See Hedges, "Scenario," 218.
45 Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1988), 4.
46 Sitney, 109; Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb,* 203–5.
47 Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 261.
48 Athanasios Raftopoulos, "Ambiguous Figures and Representationalism," *Synthese* 181.3 (2011): 498.
49 Derek Hook, "Lacan, the Meaning of the Phallus and the 'Sexed' Subject," in Tamara Shefer et al., eds., *The Gender of Psychology* (Lansdowne, South Africa: Juta Academic Publishing, 2006), 78.