

Sticking to the “Factual.”

Man Ray’s *Le Retour à la raison* (1923), Marcel Duchamp’s *Anémic cinéma* (1924–26) and Peter Tscherkassky’s *Dream Work* (2001)¹

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In his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin drew an analogy between the Dadaist artwork and the film medium. In terms of their reception, both counteract contemplative immersion and aim at the destruction of the aura. What Benjamin was referring to, was, on the one hand, those often offensive Dadaist activities that were intended to outrage the public, and, on the other, film’s ability to “periodically assail the spectator” (Benjamin 1973, 238), due to the constant and sudden change of shots. However, the shock effect the Dadaists attempted to create in a moral sense could be technically satisfied only by the film projection, which, according to Benjamin, invites *tactile* viewing. In other words, what applies to the Dadaist work of art, which, as Benjamin put it, “became an instrument of ballistics” and “hit the spectator like a bullet” (Benjamin 1973, 238), seems to be even more true for film, which owed its tactile quality no longer to moral effects but to the technical structure of its very apparatus. Benjamin concludes: “the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadaism had, as it were, kept it inside the moral shock effect” (Benjamin 1973, 238).

In view of this structural analogy between the Dadaist work of art and the film projection—strictly speaking between their respective receptions—film would seem to be the quintessential Dada artifact. However, seen historically, there is only a very small number of films which deserve to be called “Dada.” One could even go so far as to say that film proved to be “a less than perfect medium at Dada events” (Elsaesser 1996, 20). There are several reasons that make this technical medium not only “less than perfect” but even incompatible with Dada sensibility. According to Thomas Elsaesser, during the early 1920s—the period when the first Dada films appeared—cinema had already “acquired its own aura: that of glamor and total specular entrancement” (Elsaesser 1996, 17). Hence, it had lost its initial tactility and could not represent any longer a bulwark against

¹ This article is a reduced and updated version of a chapter of my book *Cinéma brut. Eine alternative Genealogie der Filmavantgarde* (2010), entitled “Gegen die ‘Verleugnungsversuche des Tatsächlichen.’ Man Rays *Le Retour à la raison* (1923), Marcel Duchamps *Anémic cinéma* (1926), Peter Tscherkasskys *Dream Work* (2001)”.

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contemplative attention, as Benjamin had argued. Beside the fact that film had become more and more a purely visual (as opposed to tactile) spectacle, the usual viewing conditions in a movie theater, "the dark room, the stable rectangle of the screen, the fixed voyeuristic position of the spectator" (Elsaesser 1996, 20) all conflicted with the Dadaists' sense of immediacy. To maintain the physicality of the first cinema audiences, the Dadaist film projection had to take on the character of a happening, which leads Elsaesser (1996, 19) to conclude that "[n]ot the [f]ilm, [b]ut the [p]erformance is Dada". For the Dadaists, film was an unsatisfying medium because as a technically reproduced artifact that can be screened over and over in the same way, it contradicts the spirit of Dada. Even more significant is the fact, as Elsaesser (1996, 21) explains, that film counteracts Dada's "anti-mimetic concept of realism". By preferring the objects themselves or, more precisely, the "factual" over representation, Dada stood for a completely new understanding of realism in art.

This point is made particularly clear by Wieland Herzfelde's "Introduction to the First International Dada Fair" of 1920, where the author argues that "all [modernist] art movements can be characterized as having, despite their differences, a common tendency to emancipate themselves from reality" (Herzfelde *apud* Elsaesser 1996, 22). As an art of visual impression, Impressionism, for instance, treated objects according to their subjective retinal sensation. Expressionism's dramatic brushwork on the other hand produced an increasing deformation of the world. Abstraction, finally, parted entirely from objective representation and is still understood as the embodiment of anti-mimetic art. It is precisely here that Dada makes its point by proving that the principle of realism can be retained within an anti-mimetic approach (Elsaesser's "anti-mimetic concept of realism"). In Dada's privileged forms of expression such as the readymade, collage, photomontage, MERZ-assemblage, live-performance and, not least, the photogram, a radical return to the object world in its tangible, *tactile* dimension can be discerned. "Dada," Herzfelde (*apud* Elsaesser 1996, 22) perceptively remarked, "is the reaction against all attempts at disavowing the factual".

As an immaterial image of light, film is anything but a commitment to the "factual." It lacks the physicality of a live-performance as well as the materiality of *objets trouvés*, both of which served as sources of Dada artistic production. The making of a film requires a camera, that is, an apparatus placed between the filmmaker's body and the subject and hence counteracts "immediacy," dear to the Dadaists. Nevertheless, Dada did not capitulate to film but made a *compromise*. In accordance with Herzfelde's dictum, there are at least four strategies to reinsert the "factual" into this medium of reproduction, which is, under normal circumstances, rather incapable of grabbing "reality" fresh and raw. These strategies may relate to (1) the screening situation, (2) the film's "effect" on the viewers' body,

(3) the way the artist's body interacts with his medium/material in spatial terms (is it close or distant from it?), or (4) the articulations of the film apparatus itself. The first possibility consisted in giving a special place to the screening by making it part of a live performance (i.e. *Le Retour à la raison* as part of the *Soirée du cœur à barbe* or *Entr'acte* projected as prelude to and intermission of the ballet *Relâche*). The second option was any procedure capable of eliciting a bodily reaction in the spectator (such as protesting), thus undermining the dominance of vision. The third possibility (this time involving the production process) consisted in "outwitting" the recording apparatus. Automatic and/or hand-made procedures of image production (such as the photogram) proved especially useful for this purpose because they do not necessarily depend on a camera. And fourth, by calling to mind the material existence of the cinematic apparatus, that is "the desublimated physical substance of the media *dispositif*," as Pavle Levi (2012, 19) put it.

By reconnecting the *visible* and the *tangible* that film had separated, Man Ray's *Le Retour à la raison* (1923) and Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic cinéma* (1924–26) are prototypes of the Dadaist compromise referred to above. A similar impetus can be found in a more recent example, *Dream Work* (2001), the third part of Peter Tscherkassky's *CinemaScope-Trilogy*, which explicitly refers to the early days of French experimental film. What these three films, despite their differences, have in common is to privilege a certain immediacy (be it during the moment of production or during the moment of reception) and to include an element of tactility, usually absent from cinematic works.

Le Retour à la raison

As Man Ray reports in *Self Portrait*, he discovered cameraless photography—the "rayographic" process—by chance. One night early in 1922, the artist, when working in his Parisian hotel room, had accidentally mixed an unexposed sheet of photosensitive paper with exposed sheets in the developing tray. Waiting in vain for an image to appear, he mechanically placed a small glass funnel, the graduate and the thermometer in the tray on the wetted paper and turned on the light. "Before my eyes," Man Ray (2012, 129) writes, "an image began to form, not quite a simple silhouette of the objects as in a straight photograph, but distorted and refracted by the glass more or less in contact with the paper and standing out against a black background, the part directly exposed to the light". The following day Tristan Tzara took notice of the rayographs, and, according to Man Ray (2012, 129), immediately identified them as "pure Dada creations". What distinguished the rayographs from earlier and similar attempts was their haptic quality, resulting from the fact that a three-dimensional object is never entirely in contact with the photo paper

(in contrast to a two-dimensional object, which sits flat on the surface). The contrasting tonal values produced by this method suggest a sense of depth and serve as an indicator of the “factual,” in Herzfelde’s sense. As their three-dimensionality is not a result of the perspectival code of the camera, they provide a perfect example of Dada’s anti-mimetic concept of realism. Moreover, these photographs—without camera—are, in László Moholy-Nagy’s (2007; Jutz 2012) terms, “productive” and not reproductive. They demonstrate that in order to obtain a photographic image a recording instrument is no longer necessary, and that a medium of reproduction can be used for “productive” purposes as well. As far as the ontological status of the rayograph is concerned, one might even say that it attests to a heightened degree of indexicality, which contributes, in Pavle Levi’s (2012, 7ff) words, to an “unprecedented degree of immediacy: instead of light bouncing off the object and passing through the lens onto a strip of film, the object now directly touches the photosensitive surface”. It is precisely because of this radical return to the real that the rayograph strikes one as a proper Dada artifact.

Le Retour à la raison is the first film using the rayographic process. Man Ray, who until then only had made a few sporadic, unrelated shots with a standard 35mm-movie camera, had little time for experiments, because Tzara had listed him as the producer of a film on the printed announcement of a Dada program entitled *Le Cœur à barbe* (*The Bearded Heart*) to be held the following night (July 6, 1923). Man Ray was afraid of not having enough material for the show, but Tzara suggested the addition of rayographs to the shots already in existence, among them a striped female torso, a rotating paper spiral and an egg crate revolving on a string. Man Ray (2012, 260) gives a detailed account of the making of the rayographs for *Le Retour à la raison*:

Acquiring a roll of a hundred feet of film, I went into my darkroom and cut up the material into short lengths, pinning them down on the work table. On some strips I sprinkled salt and pepper, like a cook preparing a roast, on other strips I threw pins and thumbtacks at random; then turned on the white light for a second or two, as I had done for my still Rayographs. Then I carefully lifted the film off the table, shaking off the debris, and developed it in my tanks. The next morning, when dry, I examined my work; the salt, pins and tacks were perfectly reproduced, white on black ground as in X-ray films, but there was no separation into successive frames as in movie films. I had no idea what this would give on the screen. Also, I knew nothing about film mounting with cement, so I simply glued the strips together, adding the few shots first made with my camera to prolong the projection. The whole would not last more than about three minutes.

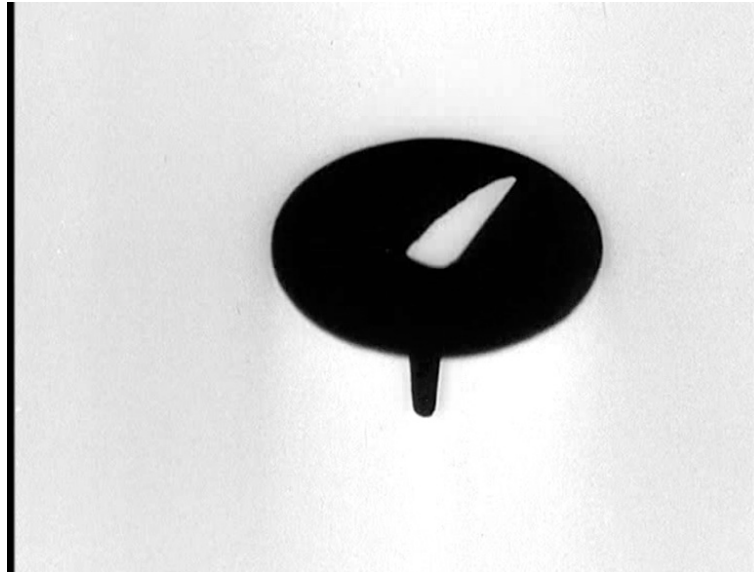


Image 1: *Le Retour à la raison* (Man Ray, 1923) | © Österreichisches Filmmuseum

According to Man Ray (2012, 262), the screening of his film ignited into a true Dada performance, culminating in verbal and even physical confrontations between the sympathizers of the Dadaists and their opponents. It was finally up to the police to put an end to this soirée gone off the rails by emptying the theatre. The making of *Le Retour à la raison* with its direct, hands-on approach, its improper handling of the equipment (due to Man Ray's inexperienced mounting, the film broke twice during its projection), as well as the bodily reactions it provoked among the audience, present once more the Dadaists' engagement with the "factual." Even when a technical medium is involved, as in the case of Man Ray's film, the Dadaists found ways to deal with immediacy, materiality and corporeality, either by allowing the artist's hand (instead of the technical apparatus) to do the work—by activating the vital presence of the spectators' body—or by affirming the physical substance of the film apparatus itself.

Anémic cinéma

Despite his pronounced "antiretinal attitude" (Duchamp *apud* Cabanne 1971, 43), that is, the critique of the optical element in art, what "amused" Marcel Duchamp about movies was precisely their "optical side" (Duchamp *apud* Cabanne 1971, 68), as he admitted in retrospect in an interview from 1967. *Anémic cinéma*, a seven-minute film, realized with the help of Man Ray and the cinematographer Marc Allégret, combines graphics, kinetics and Dada. It consists of ten optical discs, so-called "rotoreliefs," with non-concentric circles drawn on them, which in rotation create the illusion of spiral motion. These rotoreliefs alternate with nine inscribed discs, rotating in the opposite direction (i.e. counter-clockwise), and whose alliterative verbal puns are arranged into spinning spirals. Duchamp's puns,

though sexually suggestive, semantically appear as pure nonsense. As Katrina Martin (1975, 54) explains, "Duchamp follows regular syntax, but the apparent reason for his word choice has more to do with alliteration and consonance than with any clear referential meaning". The pun "Esquivons les ecchymoses des Esquimaux aux mots exquis," for instance, whose literal translation would be "Let us flee from (cleverly and with some disdain) the bruises of the Eskimoes who have exquisite words" (Martin 1975, 58), is—despite a certain sexual connotation to the term "ecchymoses" (bad bruises)—not bound by meaning. Like any Dadaist linguistic artwork, Duchamp's verbal puns refuse to serve communicative purposes. Their primary objective is "a nonsensical, narcissistic enjoyment" (Levi 2012, 18)—what Barbara Rose (1971, 69) would call the "satisfaction of blah-blah". By focusing on their own phonetic substance, they serve as a reminder of the material, corporeal dimension of language. Moreover, in order to grasp the meaning of the words on the rotating discs, the body of the viewer is persistently forced to assume different postures, instead of remaining unmoved in his/her seat. As Duchamp's puns require a physical decipherment, they make the viewer experience reading as a bodily activity.

The image discs appear at first glance to be a sober study of visual effects. In fact, however, their pulsation develops into an absorbent, almost hypnotic power that one can hardly escape. The optically illusory spirals seem to squeeze the viewer into a three-dimensional space of infinite depth. Their rhythmic contractions engage the spectator in a kind of cinematic equivalent of coitus. More precisely, "[t]he fact that the eye reads the optical illusions as both going in and then coming out establishes on an abstract level a literal allusion to the sexual act" (Mussman *apud* Schwarz 1997, 58). *Anémic cinéma* functions like a techno-libidinal machine, fuelled by its pulsations alone; by accentuating a tactile aspect of vision, it becomes a site of resistance against the retinal regime.

Imprinted on the last frames of the film is a fingerprint, which is, together with the handwritten signature "Rose Sélavy," part of the film's copyright notice. It seems as if Duchamp, who, as no one before, had de-individualized art production and exempted it from the mark of the *auteur*, with this signature and fingerprint was setting an example of authorial authenticity. As so often with Duchamp, however, this gesture of signing is done with a wink of the eye. Firstly, we do not know if the fingerprint is genuinely Duchamp's or belongs to one of his associates. And secondly, the artist did not sign with his own name, but with that of his female pseudonym, "Rose Sélavy" (phonetically identical with "Éros c'est la vie"—"Eros is life"). Rather than functioning as identifying marks, fingerprint and signature are once again indicative of the tactile dimension, so central to Duchamp's film. Both are performed manually and emerge from a physical contact; hence they attest to this "return to the

hand,” Duchamp mentioned by referring to the laborious production process of *Anémic cinéma*.³

Duchamp’s fingerprint in *Anémic cinéma* resulted from a purely manual procedure, and had been left directly on the filmstrip by a blackened finger (Didi-Huberman 1999, 195). This act of withdrawing from the technical apparatus stands for the desire to minimize the distance between the world of objects and the world of signs or representations, not unlike the rayographic process Man Ray utilized in *Le Retour à la raison*. Although the method of camera-less—or “direct”—filmmaking, be it by a finger’s imprint or the photo-grammatic process, is not able to abolish completely the distance that irreducibly separates object and sign; it nevertheless brings the object in the closest possible proximity to its representation, because it is the material object itself (and not merely its emanation of light) which touches the filmstrip (Dubois 1983, 87). By establishing a tactile relation between object and material support, photogram and fingerprint demonstrate one possible response to film’s inherent attempts at disavowing the factual and hence can be seen as emblematic of the Dadaist “compromise.”



Image 2: *Anémic cinéma* (M. Duchamp, 1924–1926)
© Succession Marcel Duchamp/Bildrecht, Wien.

³ Describing the technical problems during the making of *Anémic cinéma*, Duchamp (*apud* Cabanne 1971, 68) said: “The work went millimeter by millimeter, because there weren’t any highly perfected machines. There was a little circle, with the millimeters marked off; we filmed image by image. It took two weeks. The equipment wasn’t able to take the scene at any specific speed—it was a mess—and since it was filming rather quickly, it created a curious optical effect. So we were therefore obliged to abandon mechanical means, and make everything ourselves. A return to the hand, so to speak”.

Dream Work

“In appreciation of the cinematic art of Man Ray,” is to be read in the final credits of Peter Tscherkassky’s *Dream Work*. As the filmmaker declares, his film “pays tribute to the beginnings of avant-garde film art, or more precisely the surrealist film” (Tscherkassky *apud* Horwath and Loebenstein 2005, 158). It is interesting to note, that Tscherkassky’s comment unambiguously identifies Man Ray as a surrealist filmmaker, despite the fact that *Dream Work* clearly refers to *Le Retour à la raison*, which is undeniably a Dada film. This ambivalence leads me to conclude, that *Dream Work* is not exclusively committed to the universe of Surrealism, as the film’s dominant reception suggests, but to the universe of Dadaism too, not only to the dream (and its work), but also to the “factual,” as I will argue.

“Dream-work” is Sigmund Freud’s (1965, 311ff.) term for the operations and processes by which latent dream thoughts are transcribed into the manifest, recollected dream-content. Its two main mechanisms are *condensation* and *displacement*, which can be analogically regarded as two quintessential rhetorical figures, *metaphor* and *metonymy*. What condensation and metaphor have in common is that both are founded on *similarity*; they choose among similar elements (semantically, phonologically, visually etc.) from a paradigm (think, for instance, of Duchamp’s alliterative puns). Displacement and metonymy, however, are marked by the function of *contiguity* and choose among contiguously related elements actually present in the syntagmatic chain (for example in the phrase “to drink a glass” the contained is substituted by the container, a spatially related association; likewise, Tscherkassky relating Man Ray to Surrealism indicates that a displacement to an adjacent association has taken place – from Dadaism to Surrealism). However, it is important to note, that, despite this functional analogy, metaphor and metonymy are not the same as condensation and displacement, because “[d]reams are unconscious productions, and poems [or films] are for the most part conscious productions” (Williams 1981, 55).

Dream Work, Tscherkassky’s third part of his *CinemaScope-Trilogy*, utilizes footage from a Hollywood movie, *The Entity* (Sidney J. Furie, 1981), a psychological horror film, in which the female protagonist is pursued by an invisible ghost. *Dream Work* focuses on a number of relatively calm shots from Furie’s film: A woman (Barbara Hershey) enters her house, removes her shoes, falls asleep and starts to dream. What the filmmaker was interested in was not so much the representation of a dream content as such, but to offer the cinematic equivalent of the “mechanics of the dream,” —condensation and displacement—as described by Freud. Tscherkassky reinterprets the two main operations of the dream-work as technical-mechanical processes. “Displacement” denotes the physical transfer of the found footage material into a new context. “Condensation,” however, is the result of the manual procedure of contact printing multiple layers of

filmstrips. Specifically, Tscherkassky's contact printing method proceeds as follows: the original material, film strips of about one meter in length (around 50 frames), are arranged on an equally long strip of unexposed 35mm-stock and then exposed. The light source is either a photo enlarger, whose light cone captures about 18 frames at once, or a laser pointer, which allows for re-copying small details from the original film using the tiny red beam emitted by the pointer. *Dream Work* is thus composed of up to seven layers, which were sandwiched in this way or re-copied in several separate steps (Horwath and Loebenstein 2005, 150ff.). In addition to the found film material from *The Entity*, Tscherkassky placed some of *Le Retour à la raison*'s most famous objects—needles, thumbtacks and coarse salt—on raw film stock and contact-printed them by exposing them to a light source. Whether the found filmstrip—i.e. a “flat object”—, or three-dimensional objects are involved, both methods of contact printing are camera-less devices and hence attest to the rayographic process first explored by Man Ray.



Image 3: *Dream Work* (P. Tscherkassky, 2001) | © Peter Tscherkassky

Dream Work, which begins quietly, turns quickly into a *furioso*, in which the force of the cinematic material is discharged in an orgasmic frenzy. In this extensively condensed montage, the image of the dreaming woman is superimposed upon grabbing male hands and a man's face. These brief shots, each of them consisting of only a few frames, culminate in a painful flicker, resulting from the quick alternation of positive and negative material. It is precisely during this sequence that the silhouette of a huge white thumbtack appears on the screen, taking up and varying the theme of the sexual act. While the thumbtack in *Le Retour à la raison* does not refer to anything but to itself, Tscherkassky's tack turns into a metaphor based on the visual similarities between the thumbtack's thorn with a penis, and its punched part with a vagina, recalling thus a sexual act. While Surrealism often relied on the power of the metaphor, Dadaism preferred “material literalism over metaphoric constructions [...]” (Elsaesser

1996, 22). Tscherkassky's declared aim to interpret Man Ray's objects “as sexual metaphors” (Horwath and Loebenstein 2005, 158), should not obscure the fact that *Dream Work* attests to a strong propensity for the “factual” as well. Though the filmmaker had already used the device of manual contact printing in the two earlier parts of *CinemaScope-Trilogy*, it was only with *Dream Work* that he engaged himself with more haptic, three-dimensional objects, as did Man Ray in *Le Retour à la raison*. The use of nails, tacks and coarse salt grains enhances the physical aspect of the film, further underlined by several shots showing the filmmaker's hands manipulating the film stock. In line with this hands-on production mode is the bodily impact *Dream Work* exercises on the viewer. Its constant flicker turns viewing into a felt experience and seems to echo Duchamp's critique of retinal vision.

A similar kind of material literalism, as evidenced by the photogrammatic process (also known as “concrete photography”), can be found in the soundtrack of *Dream Work*. Here, Tscherkassky's main devices are sound montage and sound animation, both of which are based on optical sound techniques. For his sound montage Tscherkassky used portions of the existing optical sound from *The Entity*, which was copied and collaged in the dark room, and then transformed into the film's soundtrack by the composer Kiawasch Saheb Nassagh. This “found sound” is reminiscent of Dadaist photomontage, in which materials already formed by mechanical processes were treated as raw material (Elsaesser 1996, 23). As regards sound animation, Tscherkassky chose an unusual method, but one that once again pays homage to Man Ray's rayographic process. In one instance prior to contact printing, he sprinkled salt in increasingly thick layers onto the last feet of the filmstrip until the figurative image was blotted out. Naturally, this method also affected the optical soundtrack, so that the sound takes on a scratching and rustling quality, until it finally vanishes altogether. This effacement of image and sound is, for Tscherkassky, akin to falling asleep and dreaming, where reality is slowly withdrawn and delivers the dreamer to the realms of the unconscious.⁴ However, it is also feasible to read this sequence in the light of the Dadaists' literal material realism. Rather than representing a metaphor for the “dust [the] sandman throws in the eyes”⁵, the salt grains can be seen as an indicator of the power of the real, that overrules representation.

Conclusion

What I have described above as the Dadaists' “compromise” includes different strategies, all of which have in common the desire to reinsert the “factual” into the film medium. These strategies of the

⁴ Conversation of the author with Peter Tscherkassky, February 27 2008.

⁵ Ibid.

different filmmakers demonstrate that even film, the medium of reproduction par excellence, is amenable to modifications that make possible the minimalization (but not the abolishment of) the distance between “reality” and its representation. In literature, for instance, the wish to negate the gap that separates things from words can be found in abundance. Among the most intriguing examples is Jonathan Swift’s (or more precisely: Lemuel Gulliver’s) report about the Academy of Lagado’s plan for entirely abolishing all words. “[S]ince Words are only Names for *Things*,” the argument runs, “it would be more convenient for all Men to carry about them, such *Things* as were necessary to express the particular Business they are to discourse on” (Swift 2005, 173). In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* Sigmund Freud (1963, 120) pointed out that children, in focusing upon the sound of a word instead of upon its meaning, are in the habit of treating *words as things*. Jokes as well as sound poems privilege the material sound to its immaterial signification and thus represent a way to “[re]gain possession of the childish source of pleasure” (Freud 1963, 170).

As has been shown, *Le Retour à la raison* and *Anémic cinéma* (like Dadaist works of art in general) aim to privilege the concrete object over the sign—or at least insist on their equivalence. That a similar principle is at work in Tscherkassky’s film becomes only clear when one leaves the manifest level (which in this case correlates with the symbolic interpretation of the images) and arrives at the latent content. From this perspective, it seems worthwhile to follow the chains of thought set down by Tscherkassky’s homage to Man Ray and to read *Dream Work* as symptomatic of a search for the lost world of things and the “factual”. This is not to deny the significance of surrealism for *Dream Work*. Although Dadaism and Surrealism exhibit different attitudes toward the “factual,” they come together in their common desire for *semiotic de-differentiation*, that is, their denial of a difference between object and representation. In order to achieve this goal, however, they follow different paths: Dadaist artworks show a tendency to treat things as signs. Surrealistic artworks proceed rather in the opposite direction: they treat signs as things, as its creative activity deliberately uses the mechanisms of the unconscious.⁶ Both tendencies can, however, be detected in *Dream Work*. Either signs are brought into the closest possible proximity to things, as in the case with the photogram, or things are treated as signs. Tscherkassky’s work with found footage is representative of this second tendency. As a relic, the found-footage film is physically identical to its original material and resembles in this respect the Dadaist *objet trouvé*. The fact that a visual sign can also possess the

⁶ An example of this would be the visual implementation of linguistic expressions in *Un chien andalou* (1929) by Luis Buñuel. The French phrase “avoir des fourmis dans la main” means “hands have fallen asleep” but is visualized as “to have ants in the hand”. The phrase’s literal meaning is thus restored in the film’s image of a palm on which ants are crawling.

properties of a *thing*, in turn, is proved in the flicker effect: the image loses its symbolic character and transforms into a ballistic object of intense tactility.

The direction in which this process of semiotic de-differentiation runs, whether it is from thing to sign or from sign to thing, is less relevant than its underlying principle, which is to undermine the fundamental opposition between the two categories. Like *Le Retour à la raison* and *Anémic cinéma*, *Dream Work* consistently raises the question of a possible tactile quality of vision, but within a changed—digital—media sphere. If Dadaism adhered to the "factual," it did so in rebellion against a concept of modernism that, in the interest of the autonomy of the work of art, had taken leave of the real. Adhering to the objective, however, it opened up the possibility of recharging artistic artifacts with the sensuality of the concrete that only things (as opposed to words) can claim for themselves. Mimetic realism was plunged into a crisis with the advent of photography, and, a half century later, with film; now, in the early 21st century, it is the analogue media itself that appears under attack. Just as Dadaism devoted itself unreservedly to the "factual" in response to the crisis of mimetic representation, Tscherkassky reaches back to the indexical roots of the film medium in light of the threat of its disappearance at the hands of the digital.

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