

**OXYMORONIC GAMES IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE,
THE PROLOGUE TO *UN CHIEN ANDALOU* AS PRECURSOR
TO THE CONTEMPORARY POETICS OF
ANTIVISUALITY AND BLINDNESS**

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In 1986, taking off from several texts by Bataille, specifically his essays on Lascaux and Manet as well some of his articles from *Documents* (those on Picasso, Van Gogh and the eye – *Un chien andalou*), Rosalind Krauss published an article titled "Antivision" (1986) in which she updated several of the more original concepts of Bataille's thinking, among which, besides formlessness, acéphale and self-mutilation, are found the ideas of obscurity and blindness. For Krauss, who some years later contributed with extraordinary critical fortune with her fundamental work *The unconscious optics* (1999), Bataille's great contribution consists of, with his novel conceptual arsenal, questioning from the start the ocularcentrism dominant in Western civilization (Jay 2003), and, along the way, achieving modernity's overcoming of visibility itself. Thus, in modern painting, to consider one example, from Van Gogh, Picasso and the surrealists on, the notion of *progress* no longer makes sense since what is witnessed is a *regress* to humanity's origins where the child, the primitive, and the mad become models for new gazes, and, thus, they become installed within artistic rhetoric through the dislocation of forms, the destructive spirit, otherness, and the descent into monstrosity, and as a consequence of all of it comes the negation of the body, as well as the gaze, as a model for equilibrium. All this translates -and this is Krauss' main point- into a growing tendency to renounce visibility as the most precious gift and to turn to interventions and acts which negate its very essence and even its existence. It is what has been called, according to Paul Virilio, "the blindness process," which for Hernández-Navarro is manifest in four current tendencies of art: *emptying* of the gaze or the nothing to see (Malevich or the minimalists); *amputation* of the gaze or hiding from the viewer's view what there is to see (Duchamp in *Étant Donnés*, for example, or some works by Daniel Buren or Vito Acconci); *dematerialization* (Duchamp in *Aire de Paris* [1919], conceptual art in

general, or the works of Yves Klein); and *disappearance* or the expression of nothingness through nothingness (body art, land-art, or the "invisible monuments invisibles" of Jochen Gerz [2003, 2005]).

For Hernández-Navarro, such tendencies would constitute an art of resistance since "la negación de la mirada, del ver, es una de las pocas escapatorias que quedan al estado de saturación del ojo" ["the negation of the gaze, of seeing, is one of the few escapes left to the state of saturation by the eye"] of the hypervisual society in which we live; it would be, consequently, "cegar para ver de nuevo" ["blinding in order to see anew"] (2003). On the other hand, that art, at the same time it negates itself, also makes use of and appropriates to itself audiovisual media, perhaps as a last hope for survival, which supposes a vindication and an insertion into the entire tradition of the animated image from its cinematographic origins to the latest advances in digital image technology.

The whole problematic that is discovered in the light of Krauss' article and reveals possible orientations of coetaneous artistic practices is logically absent from a monograph from the same year of 1986 under the title of *El ojo tachado* (*The scratched out eye*), which Jenaro Talens dedicates to *Un chien andalou*. Basing himself above all on some previous literary texts from Buñuel himself and on the contributions of Linda Williams (1981), Talens carries out a disciplinary reading of the film which leads him to a consideration of the Tristan and Isolda myth and the subversive character of love, and even to question its role within Bretonian surrealism. Instead, he tends to situate the film more in the coetaneous literary vanguard headed by Ramón and in the wave of heterodox individualities like Leiris, Artaud or Bataille. On the other hand, though Talens ascribes all protagonism to Buñuel in detriment to Dalí, more important now than it may have seemed then, and ends with a quote from Bataille taken from his theory on religion, he still does not perceive some changes that begin to be produced: the inclusion of film within artistic tradition, as a more evolved step from painting and photography as well as the rise of interdisciplinary studies and intertextual analyses. That new direction in film studies is what postulated the increased role of Dalí in the film as well as his inclusion within the vanguard with the same standing of painting, sculpture or *collage* within surrealism. In another vein, while in his prologue Talens rightly points to the shot of the cut eye ("scratched out" for him) as a metaphor for a new way of looking at, he fails to recognize what for us is essential: with that act Buñuel

and Dalí realize the founding act of the *poetics of blindness* which has Bataille as its first theoretician, and which Rosalind Krauss and Paul Virilio intelligently systematize within contemporary critical thought; it is, as we will see, a poetics directed more towards internal darkness than towards external light.

It is from this double perspective -the mutilation of the eye, on the one hand, and the consideration of film within the history of art, on the other- from which our analysis is relevant and necessary today since it attempts to expand and enrich views like that of Talens and numerous later studies; our analysis is from the unusual perspective which Bataille and Krauss provide within a new referential framework which opens discourse about *Un chien andalou* up to Spanish literary and pictorial tradition and to coetaneous art.

Un chien andalou: shot 124 of the *découpage*.

Although the shots have been described all too much, it is necessary for us to do a personal reading of the shots which are the object of our analysis. Traditionally, the prologue, which consists of, as is well known, of twelve shots, has been divided into three units or blocks: the first, according to Williams (64), would be comprised of shots 1-4, or those which correspond to the sharpening of the blade; the second, shots 5-6, the exit to the balcony and the first gaze; and the third, shots 7-12, or the remaining gazes at the moon and clouds as well as the cutting of the eye. Williams bases this division on the logic and the symmetry of the editing of the gazes which the protagonist (Buñuel) directs towards the objects he sees, and which constitute a metaphor for a surrealist film: *object viewed (blade)+man's gaze (Buñuel)* in the first unit versus *man's gaze (Buñuel)+object viewed (moon, clouds)* in the third. However, in our opinion, such an interpretation is erroneous, not in the number of units or blocks, but in their distribution. Basing ourselves on shots 121-127 of the *découpage*, not taken into account by Williams, we believe that shot 5 -the gaze towards the blade to see if it is sharpened- is the culmination of the *object (blade)+man's gaze (Buñuel)* interplay and the prelude to the next block of *man's gazes (Buñuel)+object (moon, clouds)*, because of which we believe it ought to be included in the first unit. In the same vein, from our point of view the second unit would be composed of shots 6-9, which form a homogenous block made up of the

protagonist's three gazes to the heavens, just like we are told in shot 124 of the *découpage*, a shot to which we will return later. Lastly, the third unit would be a kind of colophon of the sequence, the final culmination of the "inverted" crossing of gazes *object+man* and *man+object*, the real cut which would be given by the explosive eclosion of the tight shot of the eye. Thus, in our opinion, the correct reading of the sequence would be as follows.¹ The first block, *The sharpening of the blade*, consists of five shots, and it takes place inside the house beside the paned door: a man smoking -Luis Buñuel himself, the author of the film-, looking down, sharpens a barber's blade supporting the sharpening strop on the door handle (shots 1 to 3a),



shot 1



shot 2



shot 3a



shot 3b

he tests the sharpness on the thumbnail of his left hand (shot 3b), he looks at the blade again (shots 4 and 5a),

¹ I am ignoring considerations of film language and the incongruencies of *raccord* since they were well analyzed by Talens, Williams and other scholars.



shot 4



shot 5a

and he exits to the balcony. (shot 5b)



shot 5b

We call the second block, which takes place on the balcony of the same house, *Gazes to the heavens*: the man, who carries the blade in his left hand (shot 6a)



shot 6a

directs his eyes three times towards the heavens. The first time (shots 6b and 6c)



shot 6b



shot 6c

it is a none too ascendant panoramic gaze; in the second, he now looks up as if in ecstasy (shot 7) and sees the full moon which three blade-shaped clouds appear to approach (shot 8);



shot 7



shot 8

in the third, again seen is the same motif an instant later (shot 9), but –we are now in the third block which we call *The sectioning of the eye*– interposed is the face of a young woman around whose left eye are the

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fingers of a man wearing a tie which seem to open her pupil (shot 10a) and immediately prepares to section her eye in half with the blade (10b);



shot 9



shot 10a



shot 10b

next, one of the blade-shaped clouds seems to cut across the moon (shot 11), and we see (shot 12) how the blade cuts the eye in half and ocular liquid begins to flow.



shot 11



shot 12

It is for that reason, if we accept this new reading, the meaning necessarily has to be different. We base our reading on shots 121-127 of the original manuscript of the *découpage* (Buñuel 1996) which, as is known, is the last thing that was written and then filmed; those indications, except for a very few yet meaningful exceptions, were followed in the filming. With attention to them and comparing them with the final product, we can claim that Buñuel-Dalí's first intention was very different from the one outlined by Williams: in our opinion, assuming blindness as a means of knowing and keeping in mind the role of a prologue in any text as well as the role it assumes in Buñuel's films, what is put forth is an *allegory of artistic inspiration through an inversion in the naturalist model of representation*. This proposition gives greater importance to Dalí's role in invention and planning.

The text of the directions for shot 124 of the cited *découpage*, part of whose details were suppressed in filming, gives us the key: the suppression gives new meaning to the prologue. It reads:

Respira con deleite y dirige la mirada al cielo. Sonríe ligeramente. **Mira a su derecha.** Después mira de nuevo al cielo, **como si hubiera una relación entre lo que ve en lo alto y lo que ve a su derecha. En un gesto de pintor,** extiende hacia la derecha el brazo que empuña la navaja y ésta queda fuera de campo. Mira de nuevo hacia el cielo como si viera allí su modelo y estira el brazo (Buñuel 1996: 212. Our emphasis).²

In the film, in effect, suppressed is "he looks to the right," where it is assumed that the young woman who later appears is; a suppression which we understand as fundamental since, having been kept in, would have established, then, the "relationship" between *what he sees to the right* and *what he sees above*; and actualizing this image as a "model," we would have a more traditionally classic type of representation of imitating the external

² He breathes with delight and directs his gaze towards the heavens. He smiles slightly. **He looks to the right.** Then, he looks again to the heavens, **as if there were a relationship between what he sees above and what he sees to his right. With the gesture of a painter,** he extends his right arm which holds the blade, and the blade stays off camera. He looks again towards the heavens as if he saw his model there, and he stretches his arm.

world, which, as we will see, is not the case since without establishing a logical connection between the two objects (moon and young woman), there cannot exist a cause/effect relationship between the "model" of what he sees above (the moon and the advancing clouds) and what he sees to the right (the young woman); in that way, conventional story order is suppressed since the young woman *just appears there* without us knowing how, a clear indication of the existence of a new intention, or at least of a break in the continuity of the narrative. Besides, the first intention of establishing a relationship between the model seen above and what is seen to the right equally seems confirmed by that "gesture of a painter" which would have to make the character extend his arm, with the blade in hand to the right, a gesture which is also suppressed. And, precisely for that reason it contributes even more to accentuating the break in the causality of the normal visual order since he "really" only sees what there is in the heavens, that is to say the moon and the clouds, with the appearance of the young woman remaining limited to a different, unreal space. There can be no doubt, in principle, about the imprint of Dalí's pictorial vision, and that, in spite of the suppression of those stage directions from the filming,³ perhaps as excessively evident or too related to the traditional system of representation, the pictorial references survive in the final product, if only somewhat diluted with respect to the original intent and with another different, no longer purely narrative, meaning.

Doubling of the "I", self-representation and self-portrait

The first thing that stands out in the prologue, and represents a break with the dominant order of film from the period, even if it shows a close connection to the dual function of director-actor of comic film (Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd above all), is that the *director* himself is presented to the viewer, introducing him, through a few keys, to what he is going to later see. To do that, following the self-portrait tradition in painting, the director presents himself through the magic resource which film affords allowing the

³ There is another suppression which accentuates that break with causality in favor of the absurd and the accidental. We refer to the literary script's direction that the man exits to the balcony because he sees something through the glass that gets his attention. However, in filming, the man never looks through the glass, but rather seems to exit because of some unconscious impulse.

camera to act simultaneously as an autonomous eye, differed from the director-author himself, and as the spectator eye. In another way, there exist, in the great majority of cases, the eyes of the painter looking directly at the spectator in order to establish a communicative link with him, an act that remains thus forever in the iconographic tradition of painting and photography, but it is not like this for film, for which self-representation was automatically excluded; all of which is to say that if the possibility didn't exist, how to create the precedent? It was necessary to create an allusive, elliptical form which would allow the author-actor's direct gaze at the spectator in an imperceptible and indirect way: not directing himself directly at him, but rather towards an "other" which could re-duplicate the "I" and, at the same time, be outside of the one looking at and communicating with the spectator. In this case, the camera stands for that "other I" which views the author from outside according to his own directives, serving at times as the mirror does for the painter, since, in contrast to the painter, the director cannot work with a brush on canvas but rather his creative action is metaphorically differed to other objects which act for him: here, the young woman looks at us, her eye associated with the moon. In this way, the self-representation ritual is played out, but without forcing the formal syntax of classic film: the shot-reverse shot dialectic.

But, we still do not find ourselves in that state but rather in the preceding one where the director-author's attitude will be the determinant for accentuating the intention to defer his gaze. In effect (shots 2 and 4), in a close-up we see him first direct his gaze downward, where the blade is; and even when the blade occupies the whole space (shots 1 and 3), the camera takes a subjective shot. It is because of the displacement of the gaze that we are fully immersed in one of the most typical surrealist, in painting as well as in poetry, attitudes, and which has to do with the concept of inspiration. We refer to the conversation with the author as viewer of his own work, trying to distance himself as much as possible through "un automatismo psíquico CONSCIENTE" ["a CONSCIOUS psychic automatism"] (Buñuel 1947. Capital letters are in the original.), free from any rational, aesthetic, or moral control, a fact which, therefore, supposes a questioning of the traditional conception of authorship and an attention placed more on the process of "illumination" than on the final product.

That progressive view which Buñuel-director gets as a spectator of himself through externalization of one of his eyes, and, which certainly

supposes a feeling of estrangement, fully coincides with Bataille's theory of the body and of the gaze, one of whose most outstanding elements is the consideration of the eye as a place for the "other," that is to say, of those parts of the body considered as bad, formless, ugly, low, in which horror and the monstrous are concentrated. For him, the eye exercises a strange power of seduction, since -he says- "nada es más atractivo en los cuerpos de los animales y de los hombres" ["nothing is more attractive in the bodies of animals and man"] (2003: 37), and, through its very open and closed form depending on states of sleep or vigil, it is associated with *the cutting*, that being the cause which may have provoked so many sharp and contradictory reactions, one of which is Buñuel and Dalí's in *Un chien andalou*, where they show "hasta qué punto el horror se vuelve fascinante" ["to what point horror becomes fascinating"], and how "por sí solo es lo bastante brutal para romper lo asfixiante" ["by itself it is brutal enough to break the asphyxiating"] (2003: 38). But, it acquires also, on the scale of maximum horror, the *eye of the conscious*. Bataille alludes to a poem Victor Hugo titled precisely "La conscience," in which Cain cannot, in spite of the many, strong barriers he builds, escape the persecution of the divine eye; also, in a drawing, Grandville, published in *Magazine Pittoresque*, titled "Crime et châtement," a live eye follows a criminal until, taking on the form of a fish, it devours him. Here, the eye, the protagonist of a nightmare, symbol of divine omnipresence or justice, icon of vigilance, no longer forming part of the body, has become independent, and, in its self-sufficiency, it can carry out the greatest of horrors which the disjointed "other" can inflict on the "I": gain consciousness of his own fragmentation since "el sujeto nunca podrá tener una imagen íntegra de sí mismo, de su cuerpo, y aunque su mirada percibe la integridad corporal del otro" ["the subject will never be able to have an integral image of himself, of his body, even if his gaze perceives the bodily integrity of the other"] (Navarro 105). Therefore, Buñuel, in film, in a spatial-temporal representational system based on successive shots, as he represents himself as author-director in this sequence, has no choice but to use conventions inherited from the pictorial tradition of the self-portrait, since film lacked precedents for this. That tradition, which includes notable cases only to cite a few from Vermeer to Cézanne passing through Velázquez and Courbet and including Dalí himself, and which displays a series of thematic variants (*allegory of painting, the painter and his model, the painter's studio*), whose common denominator is the painter painting,

includes in its basic iconographic scheme, along with the image of the painter, each and every one of the principle attributes of his art: the easel with the painting being painted, the palette of colors, and the bunch of brushes held in the left hand and the brush with which he is painting in the right hand. In every case (for example, *Las Meninas* by Velázquez, *Auto-retrato* by Goya in the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Dalí in his *Dalí de espaldas pintando a Gala de espaldas*, Cézanne in his *Self-portrait with palette* in the Bührle collection in Zurich) what stands out is the seriousness of the painter's face, a product not only of the fixedness of the very image projected in the mirror which serves as reference, but also of the transcendent, almost divine, value which it holds for the painter to fix his image of himself forever.

For its part, in our prologue, in spite of the disparity between pictorial and cinematographic language, the expression of Buñuel-actor is, as is indicated in shot 122 of the *découpage*, very similar; specifically, it reads "de *abandono completo* a la tarea insignificante que está realizando" ["complete immersed <abandoned to> in the insignificant task at hand"] (Buñuel 1996: 212. Our cursive), that is, using a term common to mystical theology with which it is customary to denote the ideal state of the soul prior to God's acting in it so it can become impregnated with his divine spirit. It is a case, then, of an attitude which is the prior, *sine qua non* condition for "contemplation" to exist (Molinos 1982), an act through which the soul unites with God, achieving ecstasy in supreme union. But, before reaching that state, the soul, abandoned in God, must move to absolute "annihilation" of all senses by following the "obscure eye of faith" (Molinos 215). We do not mean by this that there exists a cause/effect relationship or a conscious use of tools belonging to the mystical process on the part of Buñuel and Dalí, but it is evident that, if we accept what is written in the *découpage* within surrealist poetics as a consequence of a spontaneous mechanism of the subconscious,⁴ the use of such a term reminds us, at the time of the pre-

⁴ "Se aceptaban como válidas -afirma Buñuel- únicamente aquellas representaciones que, conmoviéndoles profundamente, no tenían explicación racional posible. La motivación de las imágenes fue o se pretendió que lo fuera, puramente irracional: son tan misteriosas e inexplicables para el autor como para el espectador" ["Accepted as valid -says Buñuel- only were those representations which, moving them deeply, had no possible rational explanation. The motivation of the images was or purported to be what it was, purely irrational: they are as mysterious and inexplicable to the author as to the viewer".] (Buñuel 1947)

visualization of the sequence as well as in its definitive form (since we really see Buñuel “abandoned” to the task, so common for a barber, of sharpening the blade), to the cuasi-religious ritual, equally mechanical and repetitive, practiced by painters prior to the act of executing the act of painting, that is: the preparation of the canvas on the stretcher, the placement on the easel, the placement of the colors on the palettes, the choosing of brushes, the placement of color on the brushes, the drawing of the first outlines, etc. However, the clear difference between Buñuel-barber and a realist painter, instead of using a brush and palette, what he has in his hands is a blade razor and the leather sharpening strop, differing equipment chosen purposefully to fit the surrealist conception of the image as

una creación del espíritu... que no puede nacer de una comparación, sino del acercamiento de dos realidades más o menos lejanas [y que] cuanto más lejanas y justas... más fuerte será la imagen, más fuerza emotiva y más realidad poética tendrá (Rubio 1994: 102).⁵

We must agree that, *a priori*, the choice of a barber’s *blade* possesses that sense of distance in relationship to the brush which foreshadows the image of greater strength, which for Breton “es aquella que contiene el más alto grado de arbitrariedad, aquella que más tiempo tardamos en traducir al lenguaje práctico” [“that which contains the highest degree of arbitrariness, that which takes us the longest to translate into practical terms”] (Rubio 1994: 108), and is what in our case is the shot of the eye being cut.

Gazes to the heavens, poetic inspiration, illumination

This is the central nucleus of the prologue, corresponding to shot 124 of the *découpage* and filmed in shots 6 through 9 of the film, where its whole metaphorical sense and, thus, its pictorial and poetic dimension are made explicit. We have seen the differences existing between what was planned and what was filmed, in terms of how Buñuel’s movements lack a cause/effect relationship, but what is maintained and leaves no room for

⁵ “a creation of the spirit...that cannot be born of a comparison, but rather of the combination of two more or less distanced realities [and which] the more distanced and just, the stronger the image will be, the more emotional force, the more poetic reality it will have.”

doubt are the three gazes he directs towards the heavens, gazes which confer all the meaning to the sequence since that way of lifting the gaze to heaven is common -we would almost say archetypal- within the classic iconographic tradition of representing the inspiration of the poet as well as "the painter painting his model." So, for example, Poussin between 1629 and 1631 painted an Apollonian series of three painting -whose centerpiece is *Parnassus* (Museo del Prado)- dedicated to the theme of "the inspiration of the poet": in one (Louvre), the poet, with pen and book, along side Apollo and the muse Calliope, lifts his eyes to heaven awaiting inspiration while some cherubs wearing crowns of laurel fly around; in the third (Hannover), with the same characters, the poet lying before Apollo, lifts his gaze toward him, and Apollo offers him a drink of the ambrosia of the gods (González 2001). On the other hand, it is common also in Renaissance and baroque painting for the painter to do a self-portrait, assuming the role of Saint Luke, painting the Virgin, as in a drawing by Vasari (Museo del Prado), or after having painted a Crucifixion, as in a painting by Zurbaran (1635-1640, Museo del Prado), in which the gaze towards the heavens is one of extreme rapture and emotion, as if the painter were a kind of medium inspired by the divine. We see, therefore, that Buñuel's gazes towards the heaven are not far from the iconographic tradition of inspiration in poetry and painting, and that they are not out of step with that state of deliverance in which the artist is transported beyond the mind to receive the inspiration of the gods, a fact which in his case is corroborated by two punctual actions with very precise meanings within this series of shots: on the one hand, the gazes are directed towards the moon, the traditional home of the Mother Goddess or Muse (Graves 1984), an obvious antonomastic symbol for the feminine beginning and for the fecundity of nature; on the other, it can be clearly appreciated, the mechanics of breathing, that Buñuel inhales ("inspira") the air deeply (shot 7), before contemplating the moon and the wispy clouds moving in its direction (shot 8), and then he exhales ("expira") (shot 9) also ostensibly without ceasing to expel smoke from the cigarette he is smoking (Herrera 2006), a mechanical physiological reflex action related to the divine "breezes" and "airs" which it was supposed the poet was inhaling to be in tune with the gods.

Bataille, in his essay on Van Gogh, sets as the basis of his whole poetics of blindness, and associates the "impulse for displacement" present in all of his work with the influence which any light source exercised over

him, especially the sun, and from there his obsession with sunflowers. That relationship, he continues, would be analogous to the one which in ancient times men held with the gods, a relationship, one of whose sacrificial manifestations would be the *mutilation* of bodily organs. To support his argument Bataille adduces two real cases: that of tapestry designer and painter Gaston F., who, under the effects of alcohol “empezó a mirar fijamente al sol y recibió de sus rayos la orden imperiosa de arrancarse un dedo” [“began to look fixedly at the sun and received from its rays the powerful command to tear off a finger”] (Bataille 2003: 74); and that of a servant who “declaró haber oído la voz de Dios y poco después había visto a un hombre de fuego [que le decía]: ‘Dame tus orejas, ábrete la cabeza’” [“declared she had heard the voice of God and later she had seen a man on fire (who was telling her): ‘Give me your ears, open your head’”] (Bataille 2003: 81) and afterwards she completely tore out her left eye. In his memoirs, Buñuel remembers an event which occurred the same day as his father’s death which clearly reminds us of the scene from the film:

Todos se acostaron y yo me quedé solo velándolo. Un primo nuestro, José Amorós, llegaba de Barcelona en el tren de la una de la madrugada. **Yo había bebido mucho coñac** y, sentado al lado de la cama, me parecía ver respirar a mi padre. **Salí al balcón a fumar un cigarrillo**, mientras esperaba que llegara el coche que había ido a la estación a recoger a mi primo -estábamos en mayo y el aire olía a acacias en flor- cuando, de repente, oí un ruido en el comedor, como de una silla que golpeará la pared. **Volví la cabeza y vi a mi padre de pie, con gesto amenazador y las manos extendidas hacia mí.** Aquella alucinación -la única que he tenido en mi vida- duró unos diez segundos y se desvaneció...

El entierro fue al día siguiente. Al otro día, dormí en la cama en que había muerto mi padre. Por precaución, puse su revólver - muy bonito, con sus iniciales en oro y nácar- debajo de la almohada, para disparar sobre el espectro si se presentaba. Pero no volvió...⁶

⁶ Everyone went to bed, and I stayed up. One of our cousins, José Amorós, was arriving by train from Barcelona at one in the morning. **I had drunk a lot of cognac** and, seated beside the bed, I thought I saw my father breathe. **I went on to the balcony to smoke a cigarette**, while I awaited the arrival of the car that had gone to the station to pick up my cousin -it was May and the air smelled of acacias in bloom- when, suddenly, I heard a noise in the dining room, like a chair banging against the

(Buñuel 2005: 87-88).

We are presented here with a process analogous to those referred to by Bataille, but in reverse since the sun has been substituted by the moon and day for night, with the corresponding *inversion* of meanings: if looking at the sun produces blindness and self-mutilation, looking at the moon will be (oxymoron) gaining lucidity and mutilating the "other." On the other hand, such an episode also is related to, through the influence of alcohol, the concept of antiquity's poetic inspiration, well represented in *The Inspiration of the Poet* (Hannover) by Poussin. We refer here to the ambrosia which Apollo is offering to the poet to drink, a drink which introduces the Bacchic element, without which ever since Plato (*Ion*, 533e-534b) it was believed the poet cannot be "possessed" by the god. It is in that state, similar to drunkenness, when, enraptured and in ecstasy, the poet intones his songs, acting as an intermediary between the divinity and his audience. It is evident that, as a consequence of their reading of Freud, the surrealists seek inspiration in "psychic automatism" -to say it in the words of Breton, later repeated by Buñuel- which means internalizing the process and "descending" to the deepest depths of the soul, thus overcoming the "ascent" towards a higher transcendent entity that was the predominant conception to that time in classical-romantic tradition. Those two moments, ascending/descending, are clearly represented in this part of the sequence when (shot 7) he inhales ("inspira") the smoke of the cigarette through his nose and he sees (shot 8) the clouds approaching the moon (ascending relationship) in order to later (shot 9) exhale ("exhalar") the smoke through his mouth and (shot 10) for the young woman to appear (descending plane), an appearance which supposes entering another space, no longer logical nor imitative and no longer the consequence of an external model but rather the product of an internal model as it was understood by Breton: "La obra plástica, para responder a la necesidad de revisión absoluta de los valores reales en la que hoy todas las esperanzas concuerdan, se referirá a un *modelo puramente*

wall. **I turned my head and saw my father standing, with a threatening gesture and his hands extended towards me.** That hallucination -the only one I have had in my life- lasted ten seconds and vanished.

The burial was the next day. The following day I slept in the bed in which my father had died. As a precaution, I placed his revolver -very pretty, with his initials in gold and mother-of-pearl- under the pillow, to shoot the ghost in case it returned. But, it didn't return...

interior, o no será” [“The work of art, in order to respond to the need for an absolute revision of the real values upon which all hopes nowadays agree, will refer to a *purely internal model* or it will not exist”] (Breton 1987: 64). That is to say, with the entrance in play of this concept, any intervention of higher or divine character into artistic creation is annulled, and, therefore, annulled is any system of representation based on the similarity of the model and the resultant work. From now on, the representation of nature, to put it also in authoritative words (from Breton and Eluard), only will be attractive “en función de su poder de oscurecimiento” [“as a function of its ability to obscure”] (Breton 1987: 92); that is to say, as a function of its returning to the primitive origins of art, that utilization of “striae” of knowledge where, undoing it, the usual process is altered.

However, -again the oxymoron applies- in the same measure as obscurity is sought in the internal model, the surrealist image, according to Breton, is also a consequence of “una luz especial” [“a special light”] which is the fruit of the fortuitous combination of two terms (Rubio 1994: 105), an *illumination* which curiously coincides with the second stage, *iluminatio*, of Christian mysticism, consisting of closing the eyes and allowing the soul, set free, to become impregnated with divine light in order to achieve a definitive union with God. It is, therefore, in the prologue and through the gazes towards the moon where we believe the surrealist conception of image is clearly manifest as an inversion of mystic illumination,⁷ since blindness and self-mutilating acts are not produced through the direct viewing of the sun, as was the case in the schizoid gazes of Van Gogh, Gaston F. or the servant, but rather through the viewing of the moon, a reflecting body which has no light of its own, and is not only a synonym of shadows, night, and death, but

⁷ In this sense there would be another indication in shot 124: when it says the Buñuel character “inhales with delight,” a term also very appropriate to mysticism, a term which means according to the *Diccionario de Autoridades* (RAE, 1984, 2: 58), “delight, pleasure, recreation, special pleasure, contentment,” but it is also used in mystical speech to indicate a maximum, even sensual, pleasure which overcomes the mystic as he is impregnated with God following the loving encounter of his soul with Him. So, for example, the previously cited Molinos, speaking of the degree of idleness which differentiates the enlightened mystics, quotes sentences of Ludovico Blosio in which he rails against those who seek perfection “with vicious and clumsy sensuality,” forgetting all other spiritual works and exercises, only paying attention to the loving union with God. These people –he continues- *do not delight in God*, but in themselves, and they are clumsy slaves to Satan” (*Molinos*, 227). Nevertheless, this term is equally related, again according to the *Diccionario de Autoridades*—which adduces a quote from Lope de Vega in *La Dorotea*—to role of the poet, one of whose goals, besides teaching is that of delighting.

also of the feminine principle, of the passive recipient of solar light. It is for that reason we find it credible to believe that Buñuel, the visionary director-actor, remembering the autobiographical event of his father's death and attracted by the powerful influence of the moon, represents himself in a paradoxical state of *lucidity* in order to thus "project" his vision -hallucination- in a destructive, *mutilating* action -execution- consistent with the tool he has in his hand.

The blade cuts the eye, the execution.

In effect, as we have seen already, Buñuel and Dalí, inverting the triggering agent from the sun to the moon, prevent the action from any longer being, following the logic of the schizoid gaze and its implied sacrificial spirit, self-mutilating, but rather it must be executed on an "other," bringing about a transference of the corresponding madness towards what the moon symbolizes, that is, towards obscurity, blindness, death, the feminine elements metaphorically represented in the young woman and in her eye (shot 10a) which is immediately sliced (shot 10b). This is a process descending towards the imaginary space, inside of one's self, in which such an image -an unreal apparition- colliding with the real previous vision (shot 11: clouds slicing the moon) sets off the *illuminating spark* capable of generating the new image (shot 12), because the two conducive elements which collide, to use the words of Breton, produce more beauty the greater the "diferencia de potencia" ["difference in their power"] (Cit. by Rubio 1994: 105) between them: in this case, the association of clouds/blade in their *executing/slicing* acts on the moon/eye.

In fact, no other meaning than "execution" -literally and figuratively speaking with respect to that third phase of artistic creation- can be applied, in our opinion, to the horizontal cutting of the eye (shot 12), exercised on it as material support for creative action (like canvas for the painter) and through it on the young woman, muse or goddess, to whom it belongs, and from whom it has been plucked by a specific action of "cutting," in all possible senses of the concept: that is, in the physical and sensory sense of "cutting" something in two, and in the concrete sense of what that shot refers to as "break" in the semiotic organization of the sequence and in relation to the rest of the film. This is a double meaning which corresponds to the paradoxical conception of the eye, according to Bataille, as the place

of the "other" in the "I" and to its formal association with "cutting," as if its very form, open and closed depending on the state of sleep or vigil -of death or life- reminded us of its very capacity for self-annihilation and self-blinding. It is an oxymoron which, in our opinion, underlies the executing action of the blade on the eye, since it is a fact that the blade, in the same way it *materially and really* "opens" the eye in order to make possible a metaphorical inward seeing, it also *symbolically* "closes" it in order to annul the possibility of really seeing the external world.

With this rhetorical gambit, based on the opposition of "conductive elements" related to the dichotomies of light/obscurity, life/death, and the I/the other, what is alluded to is the mystery of poetic illumination belonging to surrealism and implicit in the sequence, but without forgetting the more specifically Spanish tradition -mysticism- of the poetics of blindness. So Buñuel-director would achieve, with this gambit (only comparable to that of Velázquez in *Las Meninas*), an integral image of himself through the move from his eye to the camera lens, because of which it could be said that it is his own eye which, sliced from his body, looks at him. And, at the same time, that lens represents the eye of the viewer (also himself as viewer of his own work), and we can affirm that it is to both -the Buñuel-director who sees himself on screen and to Buñuel-viewer who views the film, and by derivation views the viewers- to whom the "other" Buñuel, the actor – through the gazes at the moon and the system of symbolic equivalences between the moon and the young woman- slices, cuts, metaphorically mutilates the eye, blinding one and the other. (Bataille would say that literally the viewers have been "grabbed by the neck" (37), an expression that reminds us of the sequence of the beheading of chickens in *Las Hurdes*, in which Buñuel would use a similar gambit of gazes (Herrera 2008).

Film as annihilation of the gaze

For all of this, the great challenge for Buñuel and Dali would consist of how to be faithful to their "barbaric" spirit (which is how Bataille classified surrealist painters) without falling into contradiction with the principles of the movement in the use of artistic techniques -film and painting- which through their "formation" stills responded to models of representation of the external world. Just as Max Ernst and Man Ray already had done in their respective areas a few –very few- years before, it was question of incorporating oneiric,

automatic, accidental, absurd -should we say visual and conceptual oxymorons- and, in general, poetic (in some cases musical) processes to the new medium. And, at that time, the maximum of expressive purity and poetic dimension in film was the "grand shot" (commonly known as "close-up"). In fact, the close-up is essentially understood as a "cut" in the logical sequence of the narration, a paralysis of the movement, to such a point as to achieve, in the opinion of Jean Epstein, Buñuel's mentor, the rule for surrealist objects because of the isolation and displacement it suffers being extracted from its habitual and logical home (the so called "process of decontextualization" studied in relation to the *collage*) (Epstein 1957). Because of that, thanks to that illogical, unreal function of intrusion into the narrative order organized according to the pattern of the whole view of the scene, such images, magnified by their projection on the screen, are a "shock" to the viewer, and, even more if, as in this case, it is a question of an eye that is looking at us face-to-face ("an eye that occupies the whole screen -Epstein would say- soon is revealed as a monster") (1957: 178); exactly: it is a question of a gigantic eye -for that reason, monstrous-capable, through its very unbelievability and otherness, of annihilating us, similar in its fictionally criminal spirit to the barrel of the revolver which, in the hands of actor George Barnes, is pointed towards us and fires, in that legendary shot from *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)) by Edwin S. Porter. In effect, it is film which seeks to annihilate⁸ the gaze in its "desperate call to crime," which imposes blindness as a way of seeing and as an "instrument of poetry," through the triple sense concentrated in this photogram: if syntactically as a close-up and symbolically as it opens and closes the possibility of seeing, its inclusion at the end of the prologue supposes, without a doubt, the closing of this segment of the film and, at the same time, the opening, as a summary, to the story ("Once upon a time...") that is about to be told. It is a triple dimension that is made coherent with the triple protagonism (director-actor-spectator) of the author and the three steps he takes in the creative act (preparation-inspiration-execution) in order to invert the until then prevailing process of pictorial representation and to lead us -as

⁸ The concept of "annihilation" also has mystical references since the "criminal" proposition of the prologue has much to do with the conceit of "dying in order to know, to comprehend, to understand" which is found, for example, in Miguel de Molinos' proposition 13, in the sense of leaving the soul free of any previous knowledge (302).

well as himself- through that new, cutting-edge instrument, film, to a new, illuminating way of seeing, of representing reality.

And so it is, once blindness is established, what comes after, the rest of the film, the story which is told, is as if all of it were contained in the ocular liquid that flows from the eye in that slicing shot bursting forth, flowing subtly in its viscosity, to a Wagnerian or tango rhythm towards that fixed final shot, the epilogue, where the two lovers, half buried, appear with empty eye sockets...

**Translated by
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