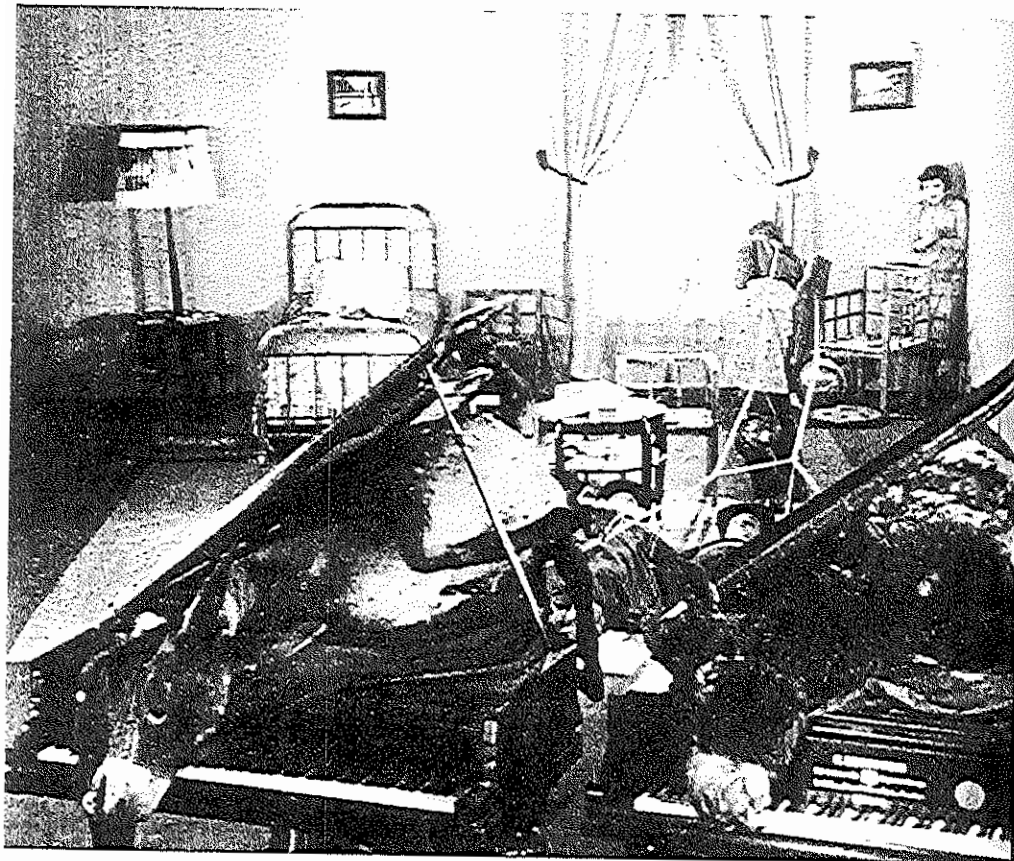


Un chien andalou (1929)



TOM CONLEY

A Rape of the Eye

Few films are so shocking, blinding, or lyrical as *Un chien andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, 1929). Considered frame by frame, shot by shot, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's sixteen-minute film ranks among the most dizzying and riveting films ever made. Viewers are still traumatized by the extreme close-up of a young woman's eye being sliced by a barber's razor drawn across her face by a man's hand. The violence of its beauty owes less to vanguard experimentation than historians associate with the aesthetics of surrealism or masterpieces of independent and experimental cinema than to a classical narrative and cinematic design that lays waste to contemporary bourgeois culture. *Un chien andalou* is a cavalcade of loosely connected shots but also a very tightly woven story about a concomitant rape and seduction of the viewer's vision. Viewers can return to the film not only to experience blinding shock but also to witness a comic, poignant, and compelling story of love.

How the film melds pathos and violence has been the topic of many monographs. *Un chien andalou* is the first film that Buñuel made in a career spanning six decades. His initial experiment with the medium indicates how, like most visionary directors, he was most productive in his earliest cinematic experiments. The film ultimately shows how a piece of juvenilia anticipates and distills the creative labors of a lifetime. Like the other films included in this anthology, *Un chien andalou* seems to belong to a timeless canon of films that have shaped the medium. It is a film that smashes the veneer of politeness and good conduct. It is at once a film that shows how flimsy was the veneer of post-World War I culture, a treatment of the creative possibilities of cinema in the silent era, and an essay about the limits of visibility and visibility.

The context of the birth and making of *Un chien andalou* tells a good deal about its form and the impact it bore on its first viewers. The words that follow will situate the film in Buñuel and Dalí's Paris in the

1920s before engaging a reading of its images in the mode of a *lecture de regard*, that is, a study of what it means to look at the film in accord with the way it continually stares back at us and leaves us—unlike any other film—blinded and seduced by its images.

Context

Buñuel, who is more directly responsible for the creation of the film than Salvador Dalí, was born in Calanda (in the Teruel region of Spain) on February 22, 1900. In his formative years he was trained by Marist priests and excelled in symphonic music before obtaining a degree in humanistic studies in 1917 from the University of Madrid. At that moment, living at its Residencia de Estudiantes, he met Federico García Lorca and Dalí. He gave himself to reading and writing literature and soon completed a collection of poems under the title *Un perro andaluz* (*An Andalusian Dog*). He became a member of a group of poets that would later call themselves the Generación de 1927. In 1925 he moved to Paris, then the artistic capital of the world, to develop his talents in music, theater, and poetry. There he encountered cinema, especially that of Jean Epstein and Fritz Lang, and soon began writing theory and criticism for a French and Iberian public in *Les cahiers d'art* and in *La gaceta literaria*.¹ At the same time, he was employed by the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, an office in the League of Nations, which afforded him an international perspective and led him to work in the direction of cultural anthropology.

He also became involved with the Amsterdam Opera, where a commission allowed him to serve as art director for a performance of a score by Manuel de Falla. Buñuel's scenography was based on a puppet theater that anticipated the use of divided "tracks" of image and sound in film. Singers in the orchestra pit supplied the voices for the marionettes. The gap between mime and voice prepared him for his initial work on cinema under the leadership of Epstein at the Paris Film Academy. Buñuel became Epstein's assistant director (and an extra) for *Mauprat*

¹Agustín Sánchez Vidal's biography *Luis Buñuel: Obra cinematográfica* is a standard point of reference. Buñuel's own memoirs were first published in French as *Mon dernier soupir* (1982), before appearing in Spanish as *Mi último suspiro* (1983) and in English as *My Last Sigh* (1984, 2003).

(1926) and figured in the making of *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928). Buñuel also collaborated in the production of Mario Nalpas and Henri Étievant's *Siren of the Tropics* (1927). The feature starred Josephine Baker. The production opened new doors for the director when he met, first, Pierre Batcheff and Simone Mareuil, the actor and actress who would soon be chosen to be the two leads in *Un chien andalou* and, soon afterward, Albert Duverger, the film's future director of photography.

During this time Buñuel formulated a theory of cinema in his writing. In the images of the poems he had written in Madrid, the writing on film in Paris, and the drafts of early projects, there appear flashes of the wit and invention that inspired *Un chien andalou* and informed the politics and aesthetics of his entire career. Two crucial essays on film theory make clear the importance for Buñuel of the framing of cinematic action and of *découpage*, or segmentation, in editing.² Work for two films (never made) on Francisco de Goya's series of drawings *Los caprichos* is indicative. He was going to make a first film, in six segments, based on Goya's drawings and another, of a biographical slant, on Goya himself. For political reasons, in early 1929 the funding for *Los caprichos* was diverted for the production of *Un chien andalou*: 1927 had been the quadricentennial of the birth of Luis de Góngora, the Baroque poet from Córdoba whose legacy Spanish writers of the vanguard had chosen to contest by way of celebrating Goya.

Goya had died in 1828, a date that Buñuel, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, and Ramón Gómez de la Serna felt far more inclined to commemorate than the birth of Góngora. For them Goya was a far greater and unremitting artist than the Baroque poet who appealed to the bourgeois establishment. The contorted expression of the latter, they contended, belonged to the horrible status quo that had given rise to the senseless butchery of World War I. To commemorate Góngora meant that Goya's devastating images of the Napoleonic invasions would be conveniently forgotten. Valle-Inclán had wished to make a film about the artist but told Buñuel that he would be the better person to do it. In 1928, Buñuel wrote to his friend Pepín Bello, "We have to fight with all the scorn and anger we possess, against all traditional poetry, from

²"Del plano fotogenico," *La gaceta literaria* 7 (1927): 1-7, and "Découpage' o segmentación cinegráfica," *La gaceta literaria* 43 (1928): 1-10, rpt. in Sánchez Vidal 154-57 and 171-74, respectively.

Homer to Goethe, including Góngora—the foulest monster born of a mother—right up to the ruinous debris of today’s poetasters. . . . You will understand the difference that separates you, Dalí and me from all our poetic friends. They are antagonistic worlds, the earth’s pole and the south of Mars; and they all belong to the crater of vilest putrefaction” (qtd. in Aranda 48 and Talens 86).

Poetry and Theory

It was then that Salvador Dalí, whom Buñuel had earlier befriended in Madrid, arrived in Paris. Dalí felt that the project on Goya was overly sentimental and so urged Buñuel to develop other ideas. They toyed with a project that evolved from *El Marista en la ballesta* (The Marist in the Crossbow) to *Défense de se pencher dehor* (Do Not Lean Out of the Window), a work that soon turned into *Défense de se pencher dedans* (Do Not Lean into the Window). Dalí then suggested that they film a work based on *Un perro andaluz*, Buñuel’s recent collection of poems that had been written in Madrid. The idea was timely. The title referred in part to Andalusian artists whom they felt needed to be resurrected for the anti-Góngorian politics of the moment. The work conveyed, too, images that could be reworked and realized in the film. In “No me parece ni bien ni mal” (In My View Neither Good Nor Evil), we read:

*Yo creo que a veces nos contemplan
Por delante por detrás por los costados unos ojos rencorosos de
gallina . . .
Pegajosos como un coito
Como la gelatina que tragan los buitres
Yo creo que he de morir
Con las manos hundidas en el lodo de los caminos*

*[I believe that now and again we are contemplated
From the front from the back from the side by the spiteful eyes of a
hen . . .*

*Slimy as a screw
Like the jelly that the vultures carry off
I believe I will die
With my hands buried in muddied roads.]*

The poem approximates a cinematic point of view that moves all about and around the viewer. The eye of a hen gazes on the speaker. The hen (gallina) resembles the gelatin (gelatina) that will fall from the slashed eye at the beginning of the film. And the figure of the dead speaker, his hands stuck in the mud of a road, anticipates its final shot. The image of the cadaver will be grafted onto a scene inspired by Jean-François Millet’s painting *Angélus*, in which two peasants pray in a fallow field at dusk, the very painting with which Dalí would mobilize his concept of paranoid criticism. In “Pagaro de angustia” (Bird of Anguish), a landscape of love resounds with the music accompanying the death of Tristan and Isolde. The visual and musical image becomes the background for an image of love at the zenith of passion:

*Un plenosauro dormía entre mis ojos
Mientras la música ardía en una lámpara
Y el paisaje sentía una pasión de Tristán e Iseo.*

*Tu cuerpo se ajustaba al mío
Como una mano se ajusta a lo que quiere ocultar. . . .*

*[A plenisaurus was sleeping between my eyes
While the music was burning in a lamp
And the landscape was feeling a passion of Tristan and Isolde.*

*Your body was attached to mine
The way a hand attaches to what it seeks to hide. . . .]*³

The poem hints at how Buñuel will score his film when he uses Wagner’s music to drive the pathos of love and death. The flat tenor of the verse might be said to contain the rhythm of popular music (perhaps the tango) that the director will set in contrast to the operatic material. The poem opens with a perspective that makes uncanny things large

³Translations are mine throughout. The poems are reprinted in Sanchez Vidal 135, 142. Talens notes that the two poems betray Buñuel’s “virulent use of metaphors, his deliberate refusal to embellish images,” and his proclivity for textures that are “rough in their bareness” (88). Talens adds cogently that the subversive quality of Buñuel’s poetry and cinema is found in his realism (*su realismo*) rather than his ostensive surrealism (*surrealismo*).

and small (a dinosaur between the eyes of the speaker). The play on bodies and hands that grasp and wander over each other's skin resembles what the cinema will explore with its close-up lens. The hand that "attaches to what it seeks to hide" anticipates the sequences in which the leading actor and actress contemplate a black hole, in the middle of the palm of the man's hand, swarming with ants. With these images Buñuel and Dalí went to work on *Un chien andalou*. They completed the film early in the summer of 1929. A private screening at the Studio des Ursulines was made in August before the film was first shown in public at the Studio 28 in the autumn of the same year.

Buñuel had begun to formulate a theory and practice of cinema not long before his collaboration with Dalí. In his seminal "'Découpage' o segmentación cinegráfica" Buñuel advocates a cinema built from careful selection and forceful editing of carefully framed shots. He offered to his Spanish readers a working definition of *découpage* by noting that the French term, lacking an equivalent in Castilian, designates the "simultaneous separation and ordering of visual fragments." In order to enhance and broaden the Spanish lexicon of cinema, whose paucity he takes to be a symptom of an "intellectual and industrial insolvency," Buñuel introduces his readers to an international vocabulary that may have been lost on an Iberian public. But in a sudden and dramatic leap he turns *découpage* into an idiom of his own creation. Poetry and theory explode in a flash:

The intuition of the film, the photogenic embryo, forever palpitates in this operation called *découpage*. Segmentation. Creation. Excision of one thing to be converted into another. What was not before now is. [Lo que antes no era ahora es.] Style. The simplest, the most complicated ways of reproducing, of creating. From the amoeba to the symphony. The authentic moment in a film, creation through segmentation. In order to be recreated through cinema this landscape will need to be segmented in 50, 100, and even more pieces. They will all move in succession in a vermicular way, ordering themselves into a colony to compose the whole of the film, a great tapeworm of silence, composed of material segments (*montage*) and of ideal segments (*découpage*). Segmentation of segmentation

Film—mass of shots

Shot—mass of images.

An isolated image represents very little. A simple monad, not yet organized, in which, at the same time, an evolution takes place and is continuous. A direct transcription of the world: a cinematic larva. The image is an active element, a cell of invisible action, but secure, in view of the shot that is the creative element, the individual likely to specify the colony. . . . The lens—"this eye lacking tradition, morality, prejudice, capable nonetheless of interpreting by itself"—sees the world. The filmmaker, in turn, orders it. Machine and man. The purest expression of our epoch, an art of our own, our authentic art of everyday life. (Qtd. in the original Spanish in Sanchez Vidal 172)

The text itself is a loose montage of intuitive sparks and a volley of surreal images containing elements of the style of *Un chien andalou*.

The ideal film scintillates where its embryonic unit, the shot, is seen as a segmentation of visual and verbal fragments—images—that amass and explode. A succession of shots is successful when it transforms what was *not* into what suddenly becomes or is. Far from a Hegelian dynamic or an Eisensteinian type of montage, Buñuel's *segmentación* embraces forms that swarm, as might a colony of bees or a mass of worms—vermin—and that give rise to a "vermiculated" whole. A film begins by being a landscape or topography, a surface seen and felt as a mosaic of an almost infinite mass of segments. The pieces, which are of different proportion, conjoin in a single shot, which in itself amasses groups of others. Segmentation makes possible creative metamorphoses.

For Buñuel, the shot is a larval mass in perpetual metamorphosis. The colony is a totality that attaches to an object and then disperses and moves elsewhere. Under the lens of a microscope, an eye that sometimes resembles the camera, the amoeba is a palpitating blob of protoplasm, a gelatinous mass dotted with mitochondria and dappled with flecks of protein in its eyelike nucleus. A sudden perception of these masses becomes the commanding *event* of a film. Buñuel conflates succession and simultaneity (evolution and continuity) by having images paradoxically commingle and follow each other in succession. Segmentation becomes both a division into parts and a composite sum of visual units. Both the film and its individual shots are a map and a landscape made of infinitesimal spatial units and lines. When they all succeed one another, they extend in the shape of a tapeworm (which resembles a strip of film), and when they are

wrapped over and onto each other, they become "vermicular." The text suddenly makes manifest a poetry of its own, a personal vernacular, that appeals to entomological figures in the description of the sudden and total metamorphoses that take place when images swarm and convert from larval masses to new and unforeseen shapes.

His summary diagram effectively "segments" film and all its components where it relates wholes to parts. It is directly related to a celebrated similitude in the history of geography, in Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* (145 C.E., a manuscript edited and reprinted in many editions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), in which cosmography, the description of the entire world, is related to a portrait of a man's face in profile (the icon for portraiture) just as a city view is to a depiction of an isolated eye or ear. As an entomologist, Buñuel is also a geographer: he locates isolated intensities in close-up and details in relation to greater landscapes that remain forever partial or incomplete.⁴ A film is a map of a cohering group or swarm of images, if not also a picture of many agglomerated shots or local views seen in a single take. Thus, if a shot is to be a visual event, Buñuel implies, a vermicular mass of images must fill the frame. The world would be an embryonic organ, an isolated but autonomous eye or ear that moves, sees, and hears under the creative force of the shot that both distinguishes and confuses the individual creature and its colony. Buñuel suggests that no single shot can ever be subordinated to another. If it were it would lead to a predictable continuity in which, as in any keenly organized narrative, the temporal design would occlude the viewer from seeing an infinite sum of its pieces, in other words, the very crux, cause, and *raison d'être* of the film itself.

Buñuel goes on to note that segmentation is

a labor that requires no labor other than the pen. The whole film, up to its last details, is to be contained in notebooks; interpretation, angles taken, the length of each segment; here a

⁴The opening shots of Buñuel's *Las Hurdes (Land without Bread, 1932)* display, first, clouds on which the credits are placed before the film cuts to four lap dissolves of maps that move from a general view of the European continent to the topography of the interior of western Iberia. In *Un chien andalou* the shot is generally seen in relation to a cityscape in which, until the end of the film, a male and a female seem to be held captive. A broad sense of mental and physical geography prevails in the film.

lap dissolve or a superimposition against a medium or American shot, a long or an Italian shot; there, fixed or moving shot, a pan, or a tracking shot. A miraculous fluency in images that spontaneously and uninterruptedly are classified and ordered everywhere in the shots (to Think, to feel with images). (Qtd. in the original Spanish in Sanchez Vidal 173)

In this passage segmentation is tantamount to writing. To film means, in a broad sense, to write with word pictures and, in the course of writing, to order images by way of decisive selection of shots, including angles, duration, depth of field, movement, cutting, and dissolves. The filmmaker perceives and apprehends the world with images that *are not subjugated to the requirements of narrative*. Crucial to the reflection is the fluency of images that move and especially translate the action and effects of writing into cinema.

Emerging from the reflection is a heightened sense of the ocular power of the medium. The eye of the camera is incarnated in the images. Yet the incarnation depends on spontaneous and immediate ruptures that turn disparate images into swarming shapes in perpetual transformation. The latter offers constantly changing perspectives in an original and originary world of time and space so pliable that spectators not only lose their sense of place and proportion but also discover physical geographies bereft of cardinal bearings.⁵ *Un chien andalou* embodies a "vermicular" fluency of images that Buñuel's writing conveyed to his Spanish readers of 1927.

Analysis

A Nascent Narrative

The running time of *Un chien andalou* is sixteen minutes and fourteen seconds. Title and credits excluded (seven shots with two dissolves), it counts 290 shots. The average duration of each is slightly less than three and a half seconds. What would seem to be a frenetic rhythm is betrayed by an effect of fluid continuity. Shots tend to give way to one

⁵Gilles Deleuze remarks that for Buñuel the "originary world is a beginning of the world, but also an end of the world, and the irresistible slope from the one to the other" (176), a world of incommensurable cruelty, violence, and aura.

another in predictable rhythms. No shot dominates by virtue of either short or long duration with respect to others. A smooth narration leads from a shocking beginning to a conclusion that is both lyrical and morbid. The story itself is the topic of myriad interpretations. The film clearly invites spectators to make the meanings they see in the film a product of their own desire to impose a narrative on the love story that is suggested by its succession of images.

At the same time it bears traces of the classical composition of silent film. Narrative units can be discerned and distinguished by the title, the front credits, and five intertitles. The first intertitle, set between the credits and the first images, tells of what will follow in the style of a fairy tale or a fable (in a script reminiscent of art deco): "Il était une fois . . ." (Once upon a time . . .). The incipit heralds a short sequence (twelve shots, of about forty seconds' duration) in which the man (Buñuel himself) sharpens his razor before slicing the woman's eye. This cuts to a second title (in lowercase Helvetica font), "Huit ans après" (Eight years later). A long sequence ensues (totaling 152 shots lasting slightly over eight and a half minutes) before a third intertitle, in a similar font, reads, "Vers trois heures du matin" (At about three o'clock in the morning). The intertitle interprets and extends a sequence in which the male lead (Pierre Batcheff) hears a sound cue that announces the arrival of a man at the door of the apartment in which he lays bedridden. Thirty-six shots (or almost fifteen seconds) later, a fourth intertitle (of the same font, though slightly larger), states, "Seize ans avant" (Sixteen years before). It is inserted in a sequence in which the young man suddenly faces his double, a man who plays the paternal role of an elder or a teacher distraught by the childishness of a son or a pupil. Twenty-seven shots (a little over a minute) later, the last intertitle—which may not be one—"Au printemps" (In the springtime), has the look of a neon sign by which the famous French department store of that name is known. These words are the beginning of a dissolve into a static image of the man and the woman of the film, buried in sand up to their chests, who mime the pose of the two humble peasants of Millet's *Angélus* before the shot gives way to "Fin" (The End) printed in bold white letters on a black background.

Five temporal signs imply that a story is told in the order of a beginning that is truly a beginning; a middle that begins as a calculated nightmare of visual rape or castration, in which its own nocturnal

time gives way to a diurnal dream of love; recession to another dream of sixteen years before; finally, an end in "springtime." The rhetoric of the writing does not really impose an order so much as mesh with the interrupted but generally cohering continuity of the images. The first section of the film depicts a calculated and almost scientific operation in which the man with the razor surgically cuts (in a literal *découpage*) the eye of the young woman who calmly stares at the camera. What "follows" is an encounter of a man and a woman. He rides a bicycle that seems to be guiding itself toward the apartment building, in the empty streets of a sunlit city, where the woman resides. Dressed in lace and frills and wearing a box with a striped cover, he approaches the apartment where the woman is reading a book that is opened to an image of Vermeer's *Lacemaker* (the one painting by Vermeer in the Louvre), in which the young woman of the painting wears the same clothing as the man. The woman in the apartment anticipates something, hurries to a window, and watches the man come to a slow halt and fall off the teetering bicycle. She rushes to help.

Back in the apartment she wishes to make him incarnate by distributing his clothing on a bed. She then sees the same man, who looks calmly at a hole in his right hand, out of which crawl a group of ants. The man and the woman look at the scene in puzzlement before the film dissolves into an armpit, and the armpit into a sea urchin, and the sea urchin into an iris shot, taken in an upward tilt, of an androgyne in a city street. The person touches a severed hand with a stick as a crowd forms a tight circle about the scene. The man and the woman in the apartment behold the event from a window above. Startled and aroused, the man watches the androgyne, who seems lost in the space of the busy street, be struck and felled by a speeding car. The man's blood pumping, he approaches the woman next to him at the window and chases her about the apartment in a pursuit that follows the rhythms of a tango. She wards him off by raising a tennis racquet (a variant of a Latin cross raised to hold a vampire at bay), before he picks up two cords and, like a beast of burden, pulls a set of tablets, two recumbent Marist priests (one played by Dalí), and a piano on which is slung the carcass of a donkey. She exits by a door. He lets go of the cords and jumps to follow her. His hand gets caught in the jamb after she slams the door shut. His hand now crawls with ants. She turns away and sees the man get embodied into the bed where she had placed his girlish effects.

The sequence that begins "At about three o'clock in the morning" moves from amorous chase and its unfinished business to the confrontation of an elder man and a young man. The young man is admonished by his double, who is dressed in a double-breasted suit, and who lashes a piece of rope and tosses pieces of the young man's clothing out of a window. The latter makes penance by facing a wall until—in the same sequence broken by the intertitle "Sixteen years before"—the elder's mood changes from anger to contrition. A shot of a desk strewn with inked papers gives way to that of the youth turning about in anger, each hand suddenly clasping a revolver. He shoots at the older man with a ferocity reminiscent of a gunfighter in a silent Western. The older man (the father who would be the son) falls, and all of a sudden his dying hands slide down the bare back of the same woman from earlier in the film, now in the pose of an odalisque. She disappears. His body lies facedown in the landscape of a park. Seen in two states at once, he returns with a group of men who carry him—that is, his cadaver—away.

A cut to a doorway, possibly of the apartment in the earlier sequence, shows the female entering and casting her eyes on a death's-head moth that is seen in increasing degrees of close-up. She stares at the lover, the same man who pursued her earlier in the film. He suddenly loses his own lips and mouth as she pouts and applies lipstick to her own. He gets bearded with the hair that seems to disappear from her right armpit. She sticks her tongue out at him in defiance, exits, and suddenly beckons a new lover (who is now Buñuel himself) dressed in knickers and sporting a knit sweater, who stands on a beach. She is reminded of the time of day by seeing the watch on his wrist, then they stroll away, her feet ambling delicately over the sticky surface. They then happen on the box (first seen in the second sequence), which now washes ashore and whose ruined contents they examine before walking away. Then, "In the springtime," they are seen immobilized in the sand of what seems to be a diorama inspired by Millet.

The mix of continuity and discontinuity reveals a miniature epic of a sentimental education. The film begins with an utterly shocking violation, indeed an inaugural castration, before it tells of the growth of two characters who are borne into sexuality, the conflicts of gender, and the symbolic order of the world. Advances and regressions mark the voyage, which leads from birth to vision and from bodily sensation,

after a final projection of two lives that will be lived "happily ever after," to death and stasis. A love story of the first order, *Un chien andalou* rehearses many of the traumatic scenes that define some of the universal difficulties facing everyone who lives and grows into life. The narrative is especially remarkable insofar as the man who slits the woman's eye is also he who wins and walks away with her in an instant that promises to be both baneful and eternally blissful.

A Film about Visibility

At every juncture the film reflects on vision, eros, and cinema. Both the narrative and the order of the images are built from things signaling stakes of visibility. The first sequence (shots 1–12) begins with a close-up of two hands sharpening a barber's razor by the window of an open door.⁶ Both sides of the door are evident because the two eye-like doorknobs protrude outward and inward (shot 1). It appears that a literal *découpage* is being staged. The watch on the man's left wrist suggests that the duration of the shots needs to be accounted for, while the diagonal lines defined by the crossing of the whetstone and the mullion of the window mark an angle, an angularity, hence an angst that comes with the birth of visibility itself. The man who handles the razor is seen on a dark porch, where he almost feverishly puffs on a cigarette. He raises his eyes to the sky (shots 4–9) and perhaps may be looking at the moon, shown in two reverse shots in the segment (shots 8 and 11), or simultaneously contemplating a disruptive association that will come when the film juxtaposes a cloud crossing the moon (anticipating the woman's pupil) to the razor cutting its way across the eye. The hand that holds open the eyelids resembles a giant spider or a five-legged beast (shot 10).⁷ The diagonal stripes of the man's necktie correspond to those of the initial *mise-en-scène*. When the woman's eye is cut, the hatched or serial pattern on the back or dull side of the razor moves across the frame as might a strip of celluloid through a projector or camera.

⁶References to shots and their numbers is based on the ordering system used by Talens. His *découpage* of 358 photograms (122–66) is a valuable point of reference.

⁷It indeed may be the same hand that the young man contemplates (shot 56) when he sees ants crawling out of its black hole, a black hole that suddenly resembles both a stigma and an iris.

A casual viewer notices immediately and spontaneously that the hatching on the blade (shot 12) has as its counterpart the black and white keys of the piano in the sequence in which the lover pulls the heavy heritage of Western culture behind him (shot 148). As Buñuel had stated in a theoretical vein, "Lo que antes no era ahora est" (What was not before now is): over the keys hangs the head of the dead donkey, its eye socket bleeding and bare, enucleated, such that by suggestion the keyboard becomes an oversized razor that cuts across the now-absent eye that was indeed the one sliced at the beginning. The initial blinding was made possible by the substitution of a donkey's eye for the human eye. And an extreme and spontaneous reversal shifts the perspective *across* the film—in the manner of the slash of an imaginary diagonal—reflecting the same lines that are drawn by the ropes over the Marist priests (shots 145 and 149).

One ocular effect bleeds into another. The wheels in the second sequence (shots 24 and 52) can be likened to two eyes, which by analogy assume the form of the doorknobs (shot 11), or the illuminated pattern of whorls in the wrought-iron balustrade behind which the eye-cutter (or director or editor) looks upward, as if to the moon (shot 6). Every close-up that depicts either or both of the characters' eyes gazing at something or someone (shots 78, 106, 176–77, 183, 217, 255) configures a relation of binocularity, whereas other shots carefully put one eye in shadow, so as to underline a monocular or depthless gaze on the surface of the film (shots 90, 114, 147, 162, 179, 252, 259, 282). The framing allows the film's contents to be seen in two different ways at once. One, in depth and volume, would follow the narrative pattern by treating the characters and their actions with the illusion of spatial depth, while the other would require the eye, like that of a person with one eye, as the woman would be after the conclusion of the first sequence, to see the images as a play of tensions that moves over the entire surface of every shot.

A loose montage constructs an unconscious or oneiric cavalcade of ocular forms. One sequence begins (shot 50) when the male character disinterestedly contemplates the hole in his hand. He and the woman look closely at the "vermicular" action of the swarming ants until a montage of lap dissolves registers the hole in the hand as a dark and ostensibly pubic mass of hair in the cavity of an armpit, at which point the armpit turns into the round, pupil-like shape of the sea urchin

(shots 59–60). A dissolve to an iris shot, focalized on the top of a person's head in an extreme tilt, opens its own virtual pupil (shot 62) to catch an image of a hand that hangs in the frame from the upper edge. The hand that is attached to the edge of the frame has been detached from a body, suggesting a connection with the close-ups of the hand seen on the other side of the frame, where the insects are swarming (shots 56 and 58). Two sides of the hand are seen from as many perspectives, one far and the other near.

The sequence in which the androgyne is killed (shots 85–100) underscores a similar ocular effect. The person is surrounded by a crowd that resembles the vascular membrane of a pupil. A binocular, diurnal world—a world in which depth of field and the presence of death are coequal—suddenly erupts in the film when a car, its two headlamps shining, speeds toward the hapless victim. The androgyne's gaze seems unfixed and unaware of the fact that he or she is standing in the middle of traffic on a busy boulevard. Noteworthy, too, is that in the foreplay and mating dance (shots 100–35) erotic figures bear eyelike traits. The woman's gaze prompts his lust. He touches his desired object when his two hands fondle breasts that are clothed and then, suddenly, disrobed (shots 112–13). He looks skyward, blind in orgasm, ecstasy, or death (the script states that blood drips from his lips), as his hands, reminiscent of the pose of the hand that had held open the eyelids of the woman blinded in the first sequence, fondle the breasts that suddenly get reclothed (shots 115–16). A dissolve confuses the bosoms with buttocks as the man puckers his lips (the script describes them being shaped as an anus) to form what might be imagined as a nether or anal eye in the place of the mouth. Further, in the sequence occurring "At about three o'clock in the morning," an unexpected cutaway shot (shot 173) of two arms agitating a cocktail shaker is both a sound cue and a visual reminder of the ocular allusions threaded through the film. The shaker is an "alarm clock" reminding the young man to wake up and live in the world about him, possibly imagined as two hands that extend from as many eye sockets.

A Box of Enigmas

Un chien andalou is rife with enigmas that invite and refuse decipherment. One of these is the box that bears diagonal stripes on its lid. It is first seen on the back of the young man who pedals toward the

woman's apartment (shot 21). After he falls off the bike, she unlocks and finds, under a paper wrapper, a necktie with diagonal stripes (slightly wider than those on the box) and a starched collar (shot 43). Are these the effects of the man, who might be an avatar of Vermeer's *Lacemaker*? Are the stripes the connecting thread, the *fil conducteur*, of the cinematic narrative? The answer would seem to be yes until the box is seen again when the androgyne picks it up from the street and coddles it before being struck by the speeding car (shot 92). It then might be asked, since the box is placed adjacent to the corpse (shot 99), if the androgyne is a double of the lover who is now watching the spectacle with fear and lust. Perhaps: yet when the box washes up on shore, prior to the end, and the woman and her lover, who is dressed in a knit sweater with mottled crosshatching resembling the furry pattern on the death's-head moth just seen (shot 257), examine its contents, no revelation ensues. A piece of flotsam, it is adjacent to the rumpled frills and a piece of rope that have also washed up on the rocky shore. The man kicks the box (shot 287), and then the woman picks up the textile and the rope and hands them to her lover, who casts them away (shot 288).

Are the adolescent loves of time past washed up and dismissed? Has the woman found herself and her destiny? Has she broken the ties that had been connected by the piece of rope, an umbilical cord of times past, to an Oedipal scenario in an earlier life? No answer can be confirmed. One visual fact is clear: in each instance, the hands that touch or clasp the box seem to be bodily parts or animated shapes that would, in the elastic perspective of the film, at once be hands, the paws of beasts, or even the legs of crawling insects.

Conclusion

An Uncanny Title

The beginning of *Un chien andalou* is surely its most memorable sequence, but it is not its single or determining element.⁸ It is already pre-empted by a curious play of visual writing, what, in *The Interpretation of*

⁸In her *Figures of Desire*, Linda Williams remarks that the editing of the opening sequence contains the "whole" of the film in its constituent parts. A gaze on an object leads to a gaze associated with a narrative event. Shots 1-12 unsettle the logic of narrative by emphasizing how the gaze generates subsequent meaning.

Dreams, Freud had called *Bilderschriften*, or picture-writing. The title bears a strong imagistic quality. Buñuel's *Un perro andaluz* (*The Andalusian Dog*) is the title of a group of poems that informed *Un chien andalou* but were not a single or decisive origin. Canines are never seen in the film unless, by the enigma of analogy, they can be imagined in the encounter of the two human beasts. In the ordering of the shots, the title stands on a black background, in a modern-style script that fills the frame (shot 1), a credit follows, "Mise en scène de Louis Buñuel" (Directed by Louis Buñuel) in a typography in a lower point size (shot 2). The third credit, "d'après un scénario de Salvador Dalí et Louis Buñuel" (based on a script by Salvador Dalí and Louis Buñuel; shot 3), dissolves into the names of the leading actor and actress (shot 5), which in turn dissolves into "Prises de vue: Duverger" (Cinematography: Duverger; shot 7); then the film begins. The cutting shows that *Un chien andalou* and the credit titled *Louis Buñuel* (hence a "French" Buñuel) are autonomous segments that bear a strange relation with what follows. Buñuel is the unnamed personage who inaugurates and who virtually concludes the narrative by directing and performing in it.

The title, however, is never accounted for by the images. The history of the context of the film indicates that it can be read in view of a politics where the cause of things Andalusian would run contrary to established norms. When glossed in French and English *un chien andalou* can refer to a creative state of obscurity, "an obscure object of desire," between nocturnal and diurnal reason. In idiomatic French, dusk is described as an atmosphere "between dog and wolf" (*entre chien et loup*). The international character of cinema and of surreal poetics already dictated that the language of film be fluid and without borders, between conscious thought and unconscious force, or even astraddle one nation and another. Can it be glossed as *un chien et un loup*? A dog and a wolf? The two beasts, one domesticated and the other wild, seem dissolved in the title, just as are the names that blend into each other in the sequence of credits. Buñuel and Dalí dissolve into Simone Mareuil and Pierre Batcheff, who then dissolve into Duverger, the director of photography.

The relation between the title and the credits anticipates the rhetoric of segmentation that will make autonomous takes, shots that are pictures unto themselves, often dissolve into each other so frequently that a poem seems to inhere in the alternation of straight cuts with

nineteen dissolves. Many of the latter occur in moments of paroxysm and desire (the man fondling the woman, shots 113–20), or the enactment of ocular and erotic association (shots 58–61). The images accrue violence and force through juxtaposition and parataxis, on the one hand, while on the other, they often seep and meld into each other. The soundtrack that Buñuel added in 1960 underlines the effect. The alternations of tango with the musical score of Wagner's "Death of Isolde" sets whirling rhythm next to lyrical orgasm. The same sense of contrast holds for the angles and points of view chosen to produce a narrative seen through and outside of the eyes of the leading characters. The shots are taken from a variety of positions and at ranges that go from extreme close-up to great depth of field. Perspectives change so frequently that the spectator gazes on both a narrative and a cinematic adventure in Nietzschean perspective, what the philosopher called the art of extending and expanding the ways we see the world, ways that run counter to the morality that a bankrupt bourgeoisie was seen advocating at the time of World War I.

Through the enigma of the title, Buñuel and Dalí show what indeed are the virtues and limits of cinema. They do not merely convey in images an ethos and a practice entirely reflective of surrealist writers and poets. It is a cinema that goes to the technical limits of the medium in speculating on the force that images can obtain when they are cut, reassembled, and segmented. Each image owes its violence and beauty to the tension of framing elements and to the shots that are around and about it. Above all, from the very first shot, emphasis is placed on hands that seem to have an ocular tactility. The hands touch objects in the same way that the camera can rape and caress what it films. Buñuel's hands execute a *découpage*, a segmentation that "vermiculates" and goes from "the amoeba to the symphony" in the space of a little over sixteen minutes. The hands are those of a stylist, a master of a *manner* of cinema, a cinema that shows the viewer how a "desperate, passionate call to crime" is invented and constructed.⁹ Few films have been handled with such creative dexterity.

⁹Thus Buñuel typified the film in the preface to the script he and Dalí published in *La révolution surréaliste* (no. 12) in 1929. The script itself (included in Talens' *découpage*), often at odds with the film, becomes a poem of its own form and a memory aid for the broader lines of the plot and the concatenations of images.

Credits

France, 1929, Studios des Urselines

Director: Luis Buñuel
 Screenplay: Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí
 Cinematography: Albert Duverger
 Editing: Luis Buñuel

CAST:

Man	Pierre Batcheff
Woman	Simone Mareuil
Man with razor	Luis Buñuel
Seminarist	Salvador Dalí

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