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# ‘Un Chien Andalou’ and ‘Soft Construction with Boiled Beans’: The Politics of ‘Dream Logic’

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The silent short film ‘Un Chien Andalou’ or ‘An Andalusian Dog’ (1929) along with the painting ‘Soft Construction with Boiled Beans’ (1936) are the landmarks in the illustration of the movement of surrealism as an alternate political movement contrasting the social debasement of the Europe. ‘Un Chien Andalou’ is directed by the Spanish director Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. It was Buñuel's first film and was initially released with a limited showing at Studio des Ursulines in Paris, but became popular and ran for eight months. The painting ‘Soft Construction with Boiled Beans’ is a painting by Salvador Dalí. Dalí created this piece to represent the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. Both these art works are dream narratives and they produce a challenge to the hegemonic power control of the chosen few.

Dream narratives defy cognitive logic yet can access the ontological parameters to form cohesive political solidarity under the surface of fragmentary existence. Logocentric and mythocentric (plot based) narratives are often dissolved into decentred text, but no text is apolitical and so is art and film. Narratives, whether in fine arts or film require closure and teloscentric coordinates, despite its often apparent non-homogeneous structure. The contextual noumenon<sup>1</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘noumenon’ is generally used in contrast with, or in relation to phenomenon, which refers to anything that can be apprehended by, or is an object of the senses. Much of modern philosophy has generally been skeptical of the possibility of knowledge independent of the senses, and Immanuel Kant gave this point of view its canonical expression: that the noumenal world may exist, but it is completely unknowable through human sensation.

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as discovered by the deconstructionist, is relatively more important than the textual content, which is always already known as a political phenomenon. In my paper I will discuss a short film ‘Un Chien Andalou’ and the Painting ‘Soft Construction with Boiled Beans’, to reveal the political signs in them. They follow dream sequence which is heterogeneous in its content and has their centre dislocated, yet the political tremors located deep inside them cannot be ignored. When Derrida writes:

Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play (‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, 279)

he delimits Ontology, therefore questioning the imprisonment of the essence of the things inside the structure of reason. According to Derrida ‘All texts are mirrors of politically charged signs whose (always already political) meanings (i.e. relations to one another) require addressing, mapping and intervention.’ (*Writing and Difference*, 279). Every art makes foreplay with politics either in their conscious adventures or in their subconscious terrain. Political gaze is very Foucauldian, in relation to both the film ‘Un Chien Andalou’ and the Painting ‘Soft Construction with Boiled Beans’. Foucault’s concept of the panoptic gaze becomes evident in the film, when we see our ‘gaze’<sup>2</sup> substitute the Mareuil’s eye, as her eye is sliced by Bunuel’s razor. Here we are put face to face with the blindness imposed on the followers of Fascism as their gaze is

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2 ‘Gaze’ is a term popularized by Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, that talks about the ‘surveillance’ of the hegemonic powers to control and subjugate the masses, in Foucault’s analysis however power and the one exercising the power has raised pertinent questions.

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substituted by Foucauldian panopticon<sup>3</sup>, (and we are the watchman here) which is brought out by the image of the moon and a cloud passing through it. Mareuil's eye symbolically becomes the moon and the cloud is the razor which destroys the gaze of the moon and the viewers'/spectators' panoptic gaze becomes the be-all and end-all. The Moon is traditionally regarded as a political symbol of communist heterotopia. Foucault defines 'heterotopia' as:

...real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged, and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable. ('Of Other Spaces', 5)

Garcia Lorca used the symbol of moon as 'heterotopia' in his poem 'Veleta':

Pones roja la luna  
y sollozantes  
los álamos cautivos, pero vienes  
¡demasiado tarde!  
¡Ya he enrollado la noche de mi cuento  
en el estante!<sup>4</sup> (Lorca, 4)

The Moon turned red in the moans of sufferings during the Spanish

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3 'Panopticon' is a prison structure designed by Jeremy Bentham where a central tower can at all times monitor the inmates of the cells, and this was used by Foucault to analyse how this invisible control of an institution works.

4 Translated as:  
"You turn the moon red,  
Make captive poplars moan,  
But you've come  
Too late!  
I've already scrolled up the night  
Of my tale on the shelf!"

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Civil war. The Moon is the heterotopia of synthesizing the thesis of Capitalism and the anti-thesis of proletarianism, but that synthesis is interrupted by the 'Terror Rojo', the red terror, as the communist heterotopia, soon turns into a nightmare, as they targeted the clergy. In the course of the Terror, 282 nuns, 13 bishops, 4172 diocesan priests, 2364 monks and friars, among them 259 Claretians, 226 Franciscans, 204 Piarists, 176 Brothers of Mary, 165 Christian Brothers, 155 Augustinians, 132 Dominicans, and 114 Jesuits were killed. In some dioceses, the numbers are overwhelming; in Barbastro 88 percent of the secular clergy were murdered, 66 percent in Lerida, 62 percent in Torrosa and between 20 to 50 percent in more than a dozen other dioceses. There are accounts of Catholic faithful being forced to swallow rosary beads, thrown down mine shafts and priests being forced to dig their own graves before being buried alive. Thus the dark cloud shown in the film is the darkness which blinds the individual gaze into 'collective unconsciousness' of the twentieth century Spain.

Baudrillard claims that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, and that human experience is of a simulation of reality, the film 'Un Chien Andalou' provides an illustration. It provides a collage of fleeting independent images blending together to create a visual political symbol which is a simulation of the real Spanish society, and the audience feels substituting their own reality. We are transferred into a surrealistic world and interpret ours in terms of 'Simulacra' and 'Simulation'. What we see in the film are not merely mediations of reality, nor even deceptive mediations of reality; they simply hide that anything like reality is relevant to our current understanding of our lives. Thus this film re-asserts the methodology of 'a rejection of the idea that art must cling to the representation of an everyday visible reality' (Smith, 400) of dada and surrealism.

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Applying Baudrillard, we can find out that the film masks the absence of a profound reality, because it is a copy with no original. Signs and images claim to represent something real, but no representation is taking place and arbitrary images are merely suggested as things which they have no relationship to. Baudrillard calls this the 'order of sorcery' (*Simulacres et Simulation*, 7), a regime of semantic algebra where all human meaning is conjured artificially to appear as a reference to the (increasingly) hermetic truth. Bunuel and Dalí are intentionally creating a montage of nonsensical dream-like events to take their viewer on a blind adventure. This becomes increasingly difficult as a spectator because there does appear to be a form of logic connecting each sequence.

Another example is the scene where Mareuil's antagonist (Pierre Batcheff) is struggling with the weight of the priests, Ten Commandments, grand pianos and dead donkeys, which suggests symbolically that he is struggling against the 'dead weight of a decaying society chaining the free expression of [his] desire' for Mareuil (Ades, 53). The film is at once challenging the viewer to find meaning in the madness and then condemning him/her for each attempt; once a connection is identified it is cast aside as the film proceeds into new and completely different symbolic terrain. But the political representation of socio-religious turmoil becomes visual in the madness of this struggle. Foucault presents a beautiful summary of this:

It is no longer the end of time and of the world which will show retrospectively that men were mad not to have been prepared for them; it is the tide of madness, its secret invasion that shows that the world is near its final catastrophe; it is man's insanity that invokes and makes necessary the world's end. (*Madness and Civilization*, 14)

The threat of the World Wars, reaction against the Jews and death of

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music in Nazi Germany formulates the architecture of dystopian succubus, which dissolves reasons and logocentric expression; hence we are given the chairs of audience to cast a panoptic gaze at the end of civilization and beginning of insanity. That is why in the scene titled “Eight years later,” which follows the “Once upon a time” (where Mareuil’s eye is severed), Mareuil is depicted exactly the same age as she had been ‘eight years earlier’ and with her eye intact.

Idea of space and time is the branch of philosophy concerned with the issues surrounding the ontology, epistemology, and character of space and time. Time in relation to literature has more philosophical appendages than its relation to physics. The scope of studying the cartography of time and space in ‘Un Chien Andalou’, confronts us with five dimensions, existence in wormhole and alternate timeline; things we associate with physics. Let me first discuss what the five dimensions are: first dimension is a simple line with only the dimension length, with no width or height. The second dimension can be thought of as a plane which has both length and width. The third dimension is the space in which we live. A place which has length, width and height is three dimensional. We, living in three dimensional space can perceive all of the first three dimensions simultaneously. The fourth dimension is time. Just like a person living in three dimensional spaces can perceive all the three dimensions of length, breadth and height simultaneously, a person living in fourth dimension can also perceive all the events of a single timeline simultaneously. The fifth dimension is all possible timelines. If we consider a single timeline to be a series of events that can occur over time, then the fifth dimension is the entire collection of such timelines. That is, all possible timelines that could occur in the universe. If we were to sum this up in one word, then the fifth dimension could be labelled as ‘possibility’. So the film ‘Un Chien

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Andalou' moves in fifth dimension, making the timeline defy chronological authority and sinks into the Kairos world. The film 'does not observe consistency of narrative time, place, character, or semantic universe' (Hedges, 46), appearing as "Once upon a time," "Eight years later," "About three in the morning," "Sixteen years before," and finally "In spring."

Einstein eventually identified the property of spacetime which is responsible for gravity as its curvature. Space and time in Einstein's universe is no longer flat (as implicitly assumed by Newton) but can be pushed and pulled, stretched and warped by matter. Gravity feels strongest where spacetime is most curved, and it vanishes where spacetime is flat. If we consider the relationship between human being, the 'agape' as the gravity that curves the time, the loss of it during the years of World Wars, cause rupture in the 'Kronos' timeline, and thus the titles in the film suggest such wide lapses of time, yet what they separate seems to be no more than minutes.

Furthermore, there is also the problem with the space for instance when Mareuil attempts to flee to an additional room in the home, she enters a room that is exactly the same as the bedroom she has just fled – this second room even has the same bed that she had just laid clothes upon only minutes before, this is an excellent montage of hell which the Jews went through in concentration camps: Auschwitz, Hailfingen, Vaihingen. Despite cartographic globalisation in creation of ghettos: Leopoldstadt and Wien in Austria, Zhetel and Dzyatlava in Belarus, Josefov in Czech Republic and Le Marais in France, like Mareuil, a Jew will not find any difference of demography in any of the ghettos, all of them have same white washed walls, same bed and escaping from one of them, will lead a Jew into another ghetto, no better or worse than previous. So the dilemma of Mareuil is the visual representation of the Nazi political system, the Third Reich.

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The violence imbedded in the dream sequence of the film ‘Un Chien Andalou’ by Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dalí in 1929, depicts the violence of the then socio-political world. Thus Murray Smith claims that ‘films of this time were overtly political, a reaction against society and government, and sought change, such as the Soviet filmmakers who would use montage *to infuse the narrative with a conceptual interplay out of which a revolutionary argument would emerge*’ [Italics added] (398).

This brings me to the next topic of my discussion, as indicated by the title of my paper: a painting by Salvador Dalí, where a woman is disfigured by male violence (See Fig.1.)

Dalí’s sister was tortured and imprisoned by communist soldiers fighting for the Republic. This image brings out the autostrangulation due to violence, a woman’s body torn apart. For Dalí, it is not only her sister who is the victim of the violence of civil war, but Spain herself.



Fig.1. Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War) by Salvador Dalí. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 1936. Oil on canvas.

Let us discuss the political ‘signs’ imbedded in the painting. We can begin with the face: the face of a crone, mother Spain drained of Bergsonian ‘élan vital’, the vital life force. The trauma reflected in the visage of the woman signifies ‘belatedness’ of the actual political event triggered by the communists in Spain. The entire painting is

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multi dimensional exposure to Sigmund Freud's notion of 'Nachträglichkeit'— 'an early Freudian concept developed in his studies on hysteria and one that refers to a non-chronological movement of remembering involving a link between two events; at a critical time of psychological distress previously forgotten memory traces return and are reworked or reinterpreted to match subsequent events, desires, and psychic developments' ('Writing Trauma, Writing Time and Space', 2). In the introduction to her *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Caruth starts her exegesis of a new mode of reading trauma by revisiting Freud's exposition in chapter three of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. In her reformulation of Freud's concept, Caruth emphasizes a belatedness inhering in the traumatic moment itself; the traumatic experience is not fully registered in the first place, but experienced as trauma only belatedly and someplace else when and where it re-surfaces in a fragmented form as traumatic flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and repetitive re-enactments. Dalí provides an illustration of such trauma in this painting, resulting from the violence caused by the communists during this time.

What Dalí has painted in 'Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)' is called 'Terror Rojo' by the historians. The 'leftist' unleashed 'red terror' in Spain in 1930's and massacred thousands of innocent civilians including 6,832 members of the Catholic clergy. The painting leaves no doubt how such acts of mass slaughtering left its impact on the 'face' of Spain. The hand that is brutally clasp the breast is the hand of Civil War in Spain that is draining the very source of nutrition: mother's milk is depleted. The painting reiterates the centrality of the attack specifically on maternal function: the menopausal crone, the milk-drained mother, the unsexed woman. The painting focuses on the cultural fear of maternal nursery – a fear reflected in the common worries about the

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various ills that can happen if colostrum is lost to the civilization.

While critiquing Fanon, Habib rightly sums up Fanon's view on literature in *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present*:

The various tension caused by colonial exploitation-poverty, famine, cultural and psychological emaciation-have their repercussions on the cultural plane. Gradually, the progress of "national consciousness" among the people gives rise to substantial changes in literary styles and themes...It is only when national consciousness reaches a certain stage of maturity that we can speak of a national literature, a literature which takes up and explores themes that are nationalist. This literature, says Fanon, is a "literature of combat" because "it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation", and moulds the national consciousness". Hence literature is not merely a superstructural effect of economic struggle: it is instrumental in shaping the nation's conscious articulation of its own identity and the values at stake in that struggle (Habib, 743).

As is literature so is any piece of art 'it is instrumental in shaping the nation's conscious articulation of its own identity and the values at stake in that struggle' (Habib, 743) and the painting 'Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)' is of no exception.

Thus we can see that both the film 'Un Chien Andalou' and the Painting 'Soft Construction with Boiled Beans', has teloscentric political coordinates to reveal the ontological cartography of dream logic.

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