

ARTURO RODRÍGUEZ BORNAETXEA

Sightseeing in Paradise

The text is based on the author's memories of a single viewing of José Val del Omar's film Tira tu reloj al agua, Variaciones sobre una cinegrafía intuida directed, unscripted and edited by Eugeni Bonet.

José Val del Omar (Granada 1904 – Madrid 1982) unleashed his contemporary intuition in various spheres of art, poetry and practices in which these creative experiences become intertwined and confused.

As a result, his work is thematically distinct, technically demanding and serenely complex. Driven by the ideal of attaining that intense instant of the audio-visual maelstrom, his work is dedicated to exploration and research and he has left us a rich legacy of visions, spirits and inventions.

With *Tira tu reloj al agua* [Throw Your Watch To the Water], Eugeni Bonet (Barcelona 1954) offers an approach to that “vortex” (the ruling symbol in Val del Omar's creative theory), through a sensorial whirlwind which is difficult to classify and even more difficult to analyse. Very close to the summit, almost at the centre of the cyclone, we discover some culminating moments of that “vortiginous” intention, thanks to this film made from within the images and given form “outwards”, as if the images (with their own enchantment) were searching for some place in the connected thinking of the two authors: Catalan director, Andalusian film-maker.

All is return, all is beginning, every present intertwined and every super-montage transparent, all suspense

(Voice off)

All nothing | vertex vortex | sweeping whirlwind | unlocked time | spaceless time space | with neither feet nor ground

(inter-titles of the film)

But first I must crave my readers' indulgence if their credulity is at any point offended and ask them to remember the nature of this type of essay, whose sole object is to speak of the art of images, even when these are inexpressible. One cannot expect the same laws of interpretation or analysis to apply as in conventional films, where the structures are known and predictable (because they are generic). One must remember that one is in the halls of an enchanted palace, and that everything is wonderful and fantastic. Or at least, different.

Tira tu reloj al agua is a film of films, a fine piece of assembly, an oeuvre constructed from gems entwined in delicate settings. Silverwork and brass pots and pans on the house fronts. Reflections in the copper, flashes in the water, invented sparkles, brilliances and irradiations achieved through technical experimentation, which appear to be the protagonists until one discovers that they are simply the medium for transmitting a sensitivity in continuous movement, which is ceaseless, like the water which runs constantly in the courtyards of the Alcazaba, always in the background...

“A hybrid film because of its digital creation and because it represents an interpretation of the truncated work of another artist: this is one way of defining the artefact that has occupied me for the last two years”, says Bonet himself.

This film of films is an experiment full of experiments. Small experiments which broaden when they are placed in open dialogue with other complex essays. Essays that confirm that the complexity appears when someone expresses an idea very precisely. This is why the simple is complex; this is why (true) art communicates complexity rather than informing. Because of all this and because of something else which I cannot explain, the enjoyment of this film is a complex experience, before which one must find one's own arguments, since there is no induced information, or expressly indicated path; no secret track turning us into spectators (in the sense of passive devourers of spectacle).

Working from a position of complexity means organising that information, which is arranged with a view to creating a vision of the world which is as multidimensional as possible. And having a multidimensional vision means being aware of the relationship and feedback between the individual and the local and global context. The complexity we are offered by these images situates us in an area where thought and action coincide in the local and the global. On the one hand, we have a dialogical thought, which encourages discussion of the work—a regenerative and evolutionary thought, hologramatic and polyscopic. And, on the other hand, we have a kind of action which is distinguished from the homogenous and expressed in the articulation of the heterogeneous. On the one hand, we have the action of filming thinking about the editing (Val del Omar), and on the other the action of editing without being able to get away from the thought of how these pictures were filmed... (Bonet).

The expression of the images of yesterday, edited today as if they were of tomorrow for their timeless digestion; because there is no time that dominates their duration, there will be no expiry and no extension in this exercise of cinematic divergence.

Cinema must be an illuminated intensity, and this judgement makes my techniques applicable: my lyrical techniques and my techniques of subliminal perception—acoustic, optical and luminous—seeking to get rid of the withered lights of the inert routine, which adheres so closely to cinematographic precepts.

(Voice off of Val del Omar)

Tira tu reloj al agua is also a symphony. When the structure is dissolved in a sensed order, perhaps the best thing is to call it a symphony. The soundtrack has come to be so close to the swarm of pictures that it is no longer possible to separate one from the other. Once again, the project manages to seek out its own executors over time. Through Bonet, Val del Omar encounters in FMOL trio a team of musicians who add sounds to his images, even though on occasions, only silence is capable of enduring their fury.

In preparing the sound material, we sampled everything from Falla to Japanese improvisers; we manipulated discs, from Miles Davis to Enrique Morente; we recorded acousmatic material, water, voices, etc; and we used sound material from Val del Omar's own archive (FMOL trio).

The brittle cry of a gypsy is forcefully projected onto the Arabesques. You can hear the water in the more abstract passages: pumping out mirages; the original sound is respectfully integrated wherever it is most necessary. Different treatments for apparently conflicting passages which, through the effect of the editing and the audio, associate and harmonise a chain of scenes.

Tira tu reloj al agua is made for the senses; it is a composition that is devoted to the audio-visual and it is a “journey through much of life's time”, through lots of little big things... It crosses eras, experiences, memories, it travels alongside the technique and it participates, from the start to the end of its adventure, as a project for a harmonious association between the cinema of the past century and present-day technology.

“I think José Val del Omar, whom I met briefly, was not a strange or avant-garde film-maker. He was nothing less than an amateur. I use this word with the same great respect as Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage and Jean Cocteau, in the meaning of the lover—or as Val del Omar himself suggested, the believer in cinema...” (Eugeni Bonet)

The film is structured into four sections or movements, plus an introductory segment. In these four parts, dissolved in sounds, fades, dissolves and other connective experiments, on-screen texts, intertitles, voices off and even the voice of Val del Omar himself are all in turn dissolved, allowing an exchange of impulses that gives the images a transcendental relief.

Constantly the water. The Alhambra always in the centre. In the background, always Granada. The Arabesque as a cinematographic structure. The film, composed of trceries, foliage, spirals and volutes, projected on screens that are wainscots, socles and friezes. The syntax, underwater; the argument, full of sensations; the conclusions, packed.

This way, please, this way. You probably find the other [courtyard], the one with the lions, prettier, don't you? But I should tell you that this courtyard we're standing in now is the real Arab-Andalusian courtyard. And now, ladies and gentlemen, photo time.

(voice of tourist guide in the film)

Still lifes, television, the series Kung Fu, presenters - male and female - in black and white, closedown, Franco. Modular geometries in the tools of vision. Embossed folklore, vaults from which centuries of splendour fall in silence.

Buses marked “Turismo”, a line of people - movie cameras, “tourists slipping” to the rhythm set by the shutters of their cameras, tourists defeated by the impossibility of achieving the peace of the place they are visiting.

Tira tu reloj al agua has two executors and plenty of culprits, and they come together to frustrate any debate on authorship.

The final part of the film, where Bonet pays tribute to Val del Omar, is intense and serious; it cannot escape the need for a passionate coda to culminate this Mare Magnum of lights, of colours.

I would like to know who I am: awake or asleep, open or closed, bad or good in respect to the creatures that surrounded me and those that still surround me today.

I am a professional of nothing; a poor human animal who uses for his task of communication the contagion of his own blind, disordered, chaotic passion. I was at death's door and I was reborn to the will to live: light, colour, joy, serenity, harmony, unity.

Yes, unity attracted me strongly. I sensed it torn in all its parts, and this secret sought to encourage me to communicate it in the only way in which I had received the information: through shock. Through the spectacle of everyday life.

I am a poor monkey trying not to die.

A thirsty madman, looking for the water of God in all His creatures.
An urban madman, who was never interested in the real estate of Space.
A passionate man, hurling himself into the mute transparent abyss of Great Time.
I sensed a transparent God, silenced time immemorial. With neither matter nor figure. With neither colour nor taste nor boundary

So close as to be untouchable. So absolute as to be invisible.
My God is the firm Firmament, the mute seat of all the trembling that makes the Universe dance.
My God is Time.
(Voice off)

It is a discourse that is difficult to avoid if one wants to discuss this film. These brimming words, which accompany "upward" pictures, overflow into the same spiral that leads to the vortex Val del Omar imagined. In this final coda texts heard in off and manuscript titles are mixed. The end of the film gradually overtakes us with the firmness of its powerful images, backed by a tense and resistant basting. In Bonet's words: "A type of "sustained" conclusion which is extended, postponed, as if to allow time for that dying/germinating or symbolic rebirth, imagined...".

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This text intersperses information on the film available at www.valdelomar.com, with intertitles and texts from the voices off. The text is based on the author's memories of a single viewing of the film (Bilbao, Museo de Bellas Artes, 22 December 2004), within the framework of the "exhibition of audiovisuals" organised by the School of Fine Arts of the University of the Basque Country.