

Iván Zulueta's *Arrebato*: A Journey Towards Ecstasy

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Abstract

This article analyzes the Spanish film *Arrebato* [Rapture], directed by the Basque filmmaker Iván Zulueta. I argue that this film is a reflection about the ecstatic dimension of human beings, and about cinema as a way of having access to it. While other academic works address this subject peripherally and focus their attention on other issues such as vampirism, addictions, Peter Pan syndrome, and self-destructive impulses, I examine two important notions that appear multiple times during the film: the rapture, and the pause. Both concepts are related to an ecstatic state that the three main characters are constantly trying to achieve. Not surprisingly, provoking ecstasy through cinema will require accessing to the pause, to the atemporal instant, with the precise frequency of the obturator.

Key Words: Rapture, Ecstasy, Pause, Film, Zulueta

The Spanish film *Arrebato* (1979), directed by Iván Zulueta during the political transition that started after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, offers many layers of interpretation. Existing criticism has focused on a variety of subjects such as vampirism (Costa 2005; Epps 2013; Gómez Tarín 2001; Pedraza 2005), Peter Pan's complex (Costa 2005; Gorostiza 2005; de Felipe 2005), or substance abuse (Gómez Tarín 2001; Hernández Ruiz 2005), to mention just a few. Though valid and interesting, such approaches tend to displace the focus on what I believe it is the main goal of this film: to provide a reflection on the human quest for ecstatic experiences, and on the role cinema can play in that endeavor. To demonstrate the critical importance of this subject in *Arrebato*, in this article I examine the role and meaning of two concepts, "pause" and "rapture", which are ubiquitous in the film.

I will establish a dialogue between the film and different authors and critics such as Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Friedrich Nietzsche and, particularly, Georges Bataille. I discuss in detail Bataille's considerations on ecstasy and the notions of "continuity/discontinuity" and of "sovereign moment," which he understands as instant in which the individuals are able to relish the present time and escape any utilitarian calculation. Walter Benjamin's concept of Profane Illumination, as well as the notion of "lines of flight", and the ideas on "movements of deterritorialization and destratification" developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's are also used in my interpretation of Zulueta's enigmatic film.

When in an interview included in Jesús Mora's documentary *Arrebatos* (1998), Marta Fernández Muro –the actress who interprets Pedro's cousin in the film– believes necessary to clarify that this film is about the action of going to the other side, rather than drugs or vampires, she is already manifesting that the importance that ecstatic experiences have in this film has not been highlighted enough. Pedro P., one of the three main characters of *Arrebato*, expresses a similar idea in the film when he explains what to expect working with cinema: "el espejo se abrirá y veremos ... El ... lo Otro" (00:58:45 – 00:58:56). Fernández Muro's expression "going to the other side," as well as Pedro's image of climbing through a mirror (or a screen) into a different reality, are reminiscent of the journey that takes place in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) –a sequel to *Alice in Wonderland* (1865)–, or of the doors of perception that William Blake opens in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1794). Several Eastern philosophical and religious traditions also use similar metaphorical references in their descriptions of ecstatic transport.¹ In any event, Zulueta's film is not approaching the question of ecstasy from Eastern or Western religious perspectives. There is no quest for God but for intense experiences capable of counterbalancing the alienated existence of regular individuals in a modern society. It is for this reason that the main characters' craving for rapture cannot be equated to that of classical Spanish mystics like San Juan de la Cruz or Santa Teresa de Jesús. Rather, Pedro, José and Ana search for what Walter Benjamin defines as "profane illumination": a type of experience that leads towards a revelation, a vision, or an intuition able to transcend the conventional plane of reality, but that is immanent and freed of religious dogmas. The scholar Richard Wolin summarizes Benjamin's "profane illumination" characteristics in the following terms:

Like religious illumination, profane illumination captures the powers of spiritual intoxication in order to produce a "revelation", a vision or insight which transcends the prosaic state of empirical reality; yet it produces this vision in an immanent manner, while remaining within the bounds of possible experience, and without recourse to otherworldly dogmas. (132)

1. Luis González-Reimann explains that in the early Buddhist Sutta Nipāta text from the pali canon, an individual that has spiritually awoken (therefore a Buddha), is described as somebody that has reached the other side, the other margin of the river (204).

Benjamin himself distinguishes religious from profane illuminations by differentiating the ways in which trance is achieved. If religious mysticism employs ascetic practices and contemplation, Benjamin considers art, sex, and narcotics as facilitators of profane experiences of illumination.² Those same facilitators – art (in the form of film), sex, and narcotics – are the means employed by the main characters of *Arrebato* in their quest for non-ordinary states of consciousness.

In Zulueta's film, the clearest sign of this fascination with ecstatic experiences is the title itself. "Arrebato" means "Rapture" in English, a word that is synonymous with concepts such as "trance" or "ecstasy". These equivalent terms presuppose an idea of displacement, of leaving behind the world we are familiar with. Ecstasy, for example, derives from a Greek expression meaning "standing outside oneself." Instead of understanding this as alienation or escapism, many spiritual traditions have understood ecstasy as an act of parting ways with one's previous identities. The etymological definition also implies a sensation of excess that the ecstatic subject experiences and that leads to the dissolution of the limits of individuality and ordinary spatial-temporal categories. In Zulueta's film, the B-movie director José Sirgado (Eusebio Poncela) and his ex-girlfriend Ana (Cecilia Roth) look to achieve rapture through drugs and sex, while Pedro P. (Will More), an amateur filmmaker and the third main character of the film, worried about the drawbacks of his friends' ecstatic methods, is looking for an alternative resource.³ Sensing the possibilities that cinema allows for breaking the conventions of human perception, Pedro embarks on a search for the cinematic mechanisms that can lead to ecstasy, convincing José to explore these possibilities with him.⁴

What to Do with "the Pause"

Set in the 70's, *Arrebato* begins with José finishing the montage of his last film, a B-movie about vampires. When he goes home after his editing session, he finds out that Ana, his ex-girlfriend, has settled herself in his apartment and is looking to rekindle their relationship. He also finds that he has received a mysterious package from Pedro, containing a Super-8 reel, an audiocassette, and the key to Pedro's apartment in Madrid. Under the effects of the heroin given to him by Ana, José starts listening to Pedro's message on the audiocassette. In a flashback, he remembers their first encounter. José had met Pedro a year before, during a weekend at a house he intended to use for his next production. Discovering that José was a professional filmmaker, Pedro stopped by José's guestroom to ask him "qué hacer con la pausa," as well as to request his help "para filmar al ritmo preciso" (00:32:19 – 00:32:29). As José did not seem to understand what Pedro meant by "the pause," the latter decided to prepare a practical demonstration. Still in the guestroom, Pedro asks José what his favorite trading card collection was when he was a child. José answers that it was "King Solomon's Mines". Afterward, Pedro guides his new friend towards his own room where, among other toys, there are the trading card José had just mentioned. Francisco Javier Gómez Tarín pays special attention to the apparently transitional scene of the corridor that connects both rooms. In his opinion, the short walk of the characters through the corridor towards the light of Pedro's room functions as a metaphor for the initiation journey on which José is about to embark:

La cámara permanece al fondo del pasillo, mostrando a José Sirgado en su avance hacia la luz (de espaldas a la cámara). Esta posición no responde al punto de vista de Sirgado sino a un narrador omnisciente que viene a subrayar el viaje iniciático del personaje: un viaje que ha comenzado con las drogas en su experiencia vital y que el cine va a materializar posteriormente haciéndolo suyo ("Es al cine al que le gusto yo"). (43)

2. In "Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), Benjamin not only distinguishes religious from profane illumination, but also disassociates the latter from the experience produced by narcotics. For him, narcotics give a glimpse of the state of consciousness brought by a profane illumination, but their effects are not the same. In "On Hashish", he states that "the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson" (132-33).

3. In *Guía para ver y analizar: Arrebato* (2001), Francisco Javier Gómez Tarín argues that Pedro P. is Sirgado's alter ego as well as that of Zulueta's. One could add that both Pedro and José Sirgado are reflections of Zulueta's authorial footprint. The two characters reflect two sides of the director's two conflicting personalities. On the one hand, as réalisateur, cinema is a modus vivendi that has led him into the web of heroin addiction. As auteur, on the other hand, Zulueta searches for fulfilment through artistic creation.

4. For Pedro, cinema allows for the manipulation of the images. Their sequencing, the duration of exposure, the acceleration of rhythm and the use of focus allow us to see images that the naked eye cannot perceive. Additionally, Pedro believes that the camera can change our state of consciousness, allowing us to see the world from a totally different perspective.

In "El pastiche y su límite en el discurso audiovisual español de los ochenta," Vicente Sánchez Biosca also uses the concept of "initiation" to explain the narrative articulated in *Arrebato*. It is a process, he explains, that doesn't demand to look more but "profundizar la mirada o, incluso mejor, desprenderla de la razón" (475). Consequently, this scholar argues that Pedro deploys a perfectly planned strategy of initiation: "todo el relato de Pedro parece responder - como su mismo lenguaje refleja - a una enigmática estrategia de iniciación minuciosamente calculada, pero cuyas claves permanecen desconocidas incluso para él" (Sánchez Biosca 475). Pedro knows what he wants, but he does not know where his pursuit will take him. His unpredictable journey is made bearable with some company.

The climactic moment of that sequence of initiation arrives when the amateur filmmaker asks the movie director how long he had spent staring at the trading cards when he was a child. Without waiting for an answer, Pedro replies to his own question: "Años, siglos, toda una mañana. Imposible saberlo. Estabas en plena fuga, éxtasis, colgado, en plena pausa. Arrebatado" (00:37:00 – 00:37:16). Pedro elicited José's childhood sensations to show him that "the pause" is a safe-conduct to ecstasy, a timeless moment in which mentally rational processes of judgment, conceptualization, classification (in other words, the internal dialog of the subject) are put on hold.

In *Inner experience*, Georges Bataille argues that "words" (concepts, ideas and value judgments that inhabit our consciousness) as well as the tendency of the rational mind to conceptualize everything, preclude us from accessing an essential dimension of our own self that ecstatic moments have the ability to reveal. This human realm that, according to this author, escapes conceptual scrutiny may only be accessed in extraordinary circumstances:

Even though words drain almost all of our life from us –of this life there almost isn't a single twig that hasn't been seized, dragged, piled up by this restless, busy crowd of ants (the words)– it remains in us a silent, elusive, ungraspable part. In the region of words, of discourse, this part is unknown. It also usually eludes us. Only under certain conditions can we attain it or use it. (21)

As the French author explains, the "circumstances" or "conditions" that are capable of interrupting the flow of thoughts are created when one experiences episodes of "laughter, ecstasy, [or] terrified approach to death" (*Inner* 45). These experiences lead the subjects to extreme, boundless, sovereign moments, free of any utilitarian dimension. Interestingly, Bataille recognizes that his goal of halting the subject's internal dialogue is reminiscent of millenary traditions and methods, such as yoga or transcendental meditation. These Eastern disciplines share the belief that human beings remain entrapped by their identification with the incessant flow of thoughts in their minds. However, between one thought and the next, yogic traditions draw attention to an empty space that concentration techniques seek to expand to suspend mental dialogue.⁵

The Interstice

To better understand what Pedro means by the notion of "pause", it can be useful to establish an analogy between the chain of thoughts of the rational mind referred by yogic traditions, and the materiality of the celluloid and its exposed frames. If there is a space between one thought and another that breaks the apparent continuity of a flow of thoughts, there is also an interstitial space between frames, despite the apparent continuity in which images in motion are shown when they are projected in a specific cadence.⁶ In *The Emergence of Cinematic*

5. In *A New Earth*, the German philosopher Eckhart Tolle also refers to the space between thoughts but he identifies another interstice too. The one between the perception from our senses and the subsequent thought that classifies it: "In the first moment of seeing something or hearing a sound - and more so if it is unfamiliar - before the mind names or interprets what you see or hear, there is usually a gap of alert attention in which the perception occurs. That is the inner space. Its duration differs from person to person. It is easy to miss because in many people those spaces are extremely short, perhaps only a second or less" (253). After the perception and before the words have trapped and interpreted the perception there is a gap in which only exists awareness without any mediation from the rationality.

6. The interstitial spaces of the celluloid are those unexposed segments or intervals between frames. They are the result of the interruption of the exposure when the obturator is covering the lens.

Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive, Mary Anne Doane highlights the lack of information of these spaces by stating that “much of the movement or the time allegedly recorded by the camera is simply not there, lost in the interstices between frames” (172).

And if Doane highlights the absence as the starting point for recognizing that the sense of continuity of cinematic images is pure illusion, in “The Space of the Vampire: Materiality and Disappearance in the Films of Iván Zulueta,” Brad Epps stresses that in cinema

continuity and plenitude are illusory, part and parcel of a powerfully persistent myth of the persistence of Vision, with its ghost- or after-images, whose perceived clarity and sharpness—crucial to dominant realist practice—are the effects of an unperceived blinking, blotting, and blocking. (581).

Cinema cameras capture 24 images per second, a frequency that allows the human eye to perceive (based on the phenomenon of retinal persistence) a continuum of what is actually a group of static and consecutive images. Thus, what the camera offers cannot be understood as a direct sequence of the reality, but a re-construction and representation of that reality, based on discontinuous segments.⁷ The interstice or separation between frames is always there as evidence of the impossibility of the camera to capture a continuous and complete flow of reality and serves as testimony that cinematic images are, above all, the result of a mere optical illusion.⁸ Frames and interstices reflect two different types of temporality both converging in the filmstrip. Frames, reproducing the succession of moments captured, are distributed sequentially in a timeline. The interstice, on the other hand, reveals itself as a timeless instant, as a moment that reclaims its independence with respect to those moments that precede and follow it.

In *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889) Henri Bergson had already distinguished two temporalities. The first one is conceived in spatial terms and, therefore, it was quantifiable and capable of being broken down in intervals. The second one exists as a flow, as pure duration, and is only perceived through intuitive experiences and linked with the vital impulse of any organism. In their chapter “Ucro-topías”, Josetxo Cerdán and Miguel Fernández Labayén observe that, coexisting in Zulueta’s film, are two temporalities similar to those pointed out by Bergson: one external and objective, and another one internal and subjective.

La tensión se establece entre un tiempo externo, que se puede medir en términos matemáticos, y un tiempo interno, de experiencia subjetiva: la tragedia de los personajes de *Arrebato* es la de querer instalarse en el segundo (el arrebato), a través de la necesaria concurrencia del primero (el ritmo). (Cerdán and Fernández Labayén 284)

In this quotation, Cerdán and Fernández Labayén also suggest that both temporalities converge at certain points in the film. The example they offer to make their point is Pedro’s trip to Madrid by train. In that scene, Pedro’s voiceover narrates the following:

Ya en el viaje en tren me invadió una euforia loca. Segovia-Madrid resultó Venus-Plutón. Las velocidades se sumaban, restaban, multiplicaban. Tantos ritmos, todos distintos nunca vistos por mí, sí presentidos. Eran los de siempre en realidad, sólo que a favor, no en contra. El caso es que ahora los sentía, ocurrían. En todo descubría tesoros y con cualquier cosa me agarraba un éxtasis, o al menos, a mi no me cabía la menor duda. (01:09:03 – 01:09:40)

7. If one considers that humans blink an average of one time each four seconds, it seems clear that human vision doesn’t offer us a continuum of reality either.

8. In 1878, Eadweard Muybridge, one of the precursors of cinematography, designed a synchronized 12-camera system that took snapshots intended to capture the images of a horse galloping. Viewed at a specific velocity, these snapshots are not a group of static images but an animal galloping in motion.

Pedro notes that those rhythms he perceives “were, actually, there all along,” but now are being experienced in a completely different way. When Pedro asks José what to do with the pause and how to catch the proper rhythm, it is all about time. He identifies the pause with the ecstatic moment, and the rhythm with the frequency that one has to tune into to reach the rapture. With the cinematic eye of his camera, he tries to capture not the chronological time, but the one that is, in fact, capable of subverting the linear succession of measurable intervals of time. In his “Method of Meditation”, Bataille explains that only when one is placed in this autonomous instant it is possible to bypass the conventional representation of reality: “[i]n the plenitude of rapture, when nothing counted but the instant itself, I escaped the common rules” (*Inner* 202). Similarly, Pedro wants to reveal the specific time (or, even better, timeless moments) involved in experiences such as those of ecstasy, rapture or trance and, accordingly, Vicente J. Benet reminds us that rapture implies the suspension of time, and not in just any moment but in a significant one: “La característica del arrebato es la detención, pero no en un instante cualquiera, sino en el momento clave de la epifanía, del acceso a la revelación” (Benet 309).

These common rules are precisely the conventions of human perception that Pedro tries to break with his camera. Considering the pause as the gap that makes it possible to access a timeless experience, Pedro echoes another idea from Bataille: because of its difficulty, the sovereign operation can only be reached in a “slippage”, through an almost accidental and unexpected event.⁹ Pedro chooses the cinematic medium, convinced that the perceptive abilities of the camera are superior to those of the human eye, a factor that should help capturing and retaining that evasive moment. In his essay “From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye” (1929), a classic figure of cinema such as Dziga Vertov had already supported this idea when he was referring to the capacity of the “cinema-eye” to register life in sequences of time or by speeds unattainable to human beings on their own: “Kino-eye means the conquest of time (the visual linkage of phenomena separated in time). Kino-eye is the possibility of seeing life processes in any temporal order or at any speed inaccessible to the human eye” (88). Vertov, the director of *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), considers that the numerous techniques that can be employed by a movie camera allow for a greater capacity to capture reality. As de Felipe puts it, these

inofensivas “máquinas de vision” [...] ampliaron hasta límites insospechados el horizonte de nuestra experiencia del mundo mediante la congelación, la aceleración o la ralentización de lo visible por encima de los atrofiados límites de nuestros sentidos (y de nuestra cordura) (217).

The Intervalometer

In *Arrebato*, Pedro is the most inclined character to experiment with cinematographic techniques such as those mentioned by de Felipe. One is the “time-lapse,” which allows the filmmaker (by adjusting the exposure rate between frames with an intervalometer) to register events that require a substantial quantity of time to happen and are thus imperceptible to the human eye.¹⁰ Just Another scene where the director uses acceleration is when José watches TV images during a non-conventional state of consciousness.

Pedro’s fascination with the intervalometer seems to corroborate Jean Epstein’s idea that cinema’s primal objective is to rethink time. It is not a coincidence that the enigmatic character of *Arrebato* searches for the proper filming cadence to capture what is missing from a conventional viewpoint. Vicente J. Benet, in his chapter “La Materia del Instante,” further argues that Pedro believes the intervalometer puts him closer to capturing the pause because it renders human intervention unnecessary:

9. Specifically, Bataille states in *Inner Experience* that “[f]rom the start, the sovereign operation presents a difficulty so great that one must seek it in a slippage” (197).

10. An example of an event that the human eye is unable to capture is the blooming of a flower. The intervalometer is an instrument that allows to control the shooting times necessary to capture this kind of events.

“Se fija la esperanza de que, en la absoluta desmaterialización, separando totalmente el cuerpo humano del aparato, la propia cámara será capaz de encontrar ese instante” (Benet 310).

According to Pedro, automating the process would not only prevent distortions produced by human beings when they try to interpret reality, but it would also bring them closer to a sort of defamiliarization effect. This effect is what José Sirgado experiences by watching the reels that Pedro sends to him. In them images are intertwined in an apparent random form, exposed to different cadences, or even manipulated to highlight their corporeity by adding scratches in the celluloid, making the grain visible and through through a technique of posterization.¹¹ As Matt Losada notes in his article “Iván Zulueta’s Cinephilia of Ecstasy and Experiment”, these techniques reveal the director’s intention to induce trance-like states in the audience:

With the effects produced by the looping psychedelic noise-track, associative montage with visual rhymes and matches, vertiginous fast zooms through images of pop culture icons, and, of course, the ever-flowing silly putty, this is the closest Zulueta comes to creating a filmic vehicle of rapture. (Losada n.p.).

Consequently, Zulueta would not only be interested in narrating the psychedelic story of three characters in search of transcendence, but also in offering the audience filmic mechanisms to reproduce those very same ecstatic states.

Pedro is looking for a way to overcome the arbitrary and elusive nature of the pause by creating cinematic productions capable of recalling the rapture at his discretion. But even with the intervalometer triggering the shutter automatically, Pedro cannot avoid losing what happens during the blinks. What is relevant here, as Cerdán and Fernández Labayen point out, is what happens during the moment in which the rhythm is interrupted: “Con el sonido monocorde del temporizador, como el del metrónomo que utilizan los músicos, lo verdaderamente relevante pasa a ser lo que ocurre en ese momento de suspensión del ritmo, entre golpe y golpe” (Cerdán and Fernández Labayen 285). Pedro’s attempts to capture the pause with the intervalometer put him on track toward his ultimate goal, but it is still not enough to catch the ecstatic moment. Not surprisingly, as Begoña Siles Ojeda highlights in her article “Arrebato: un éxtasis siniestro,” Pedro becomes gradually horrified of his own amateur movies because they “carecen de la esencia de un elemento estético: el ritmo preciso, la pausa” (9). Although his Super 8 productions offer a glimpse of it, they are unable to capture the perfect instant that Pedro is desperately seeking. Ultimately, the only way to complete that task would require the use of a camera without a shutter (or an eye without lids), which would be physically impossible. As de Felipe notes, Zulueta expects that “el abismo le devuelva una mirada libre de todo parpadeo” (de Felipe 218). As we will show later, Pedro realizes that the solution to his problem consists not of being an agent that reveals the hidden reality with the camera but rather a subject that becomes captured autonomously by the camera.

Rapture as Deterritorialization

In the previously commented scene in which Pedro tries to explain the pause to José, the amateur filmmaker adds that this interstitial moment is “el talón de Aquiles, es el punto de fuga, nuestra única oportunidad” (00:32:48 – 00:32:57). Pedro’s words are reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of “vanishing point,” and “lines of flight,” as well as “movements of deterritorialization and destratification,” developed in works such as *Anti-Oedipus; Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). For these authors, there is a tendency to articulate, stratify, territorialize and assemble in specific structures all

11. The posterization technique consists in manipulating images by reproducing only a small number of their different tones.

that exists. One particular consequence is that subjects identify themselves with organized and “solidified” modes of being that trap them and limit their chances of experiencing life. Yet the mere existence of the process of stratification, assembly, and organization/condensation enables its counterpart – namely, lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization or destratification, and, eventually, bodies without organs (BwO, in its abbreviation).¹² Reaching a full existence requires an escape from the crystalized (territorialized) perspectives and definitions of reality. Instead of embracing formulas that have become normative, human beings should take the risk of creating original paths and lines of escape, which, for these two theorists, would be a means “to blow apart strata, cut roots, and make new connections” (*Thousand* 15). In their *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari mention precisely this possibility of escaping by means of a vanishing point or *point de fuite*, from codes, signifiers, and structures that keep individuals subjected: “at least something arose whose force fractured the codes, undid the signifiers, passed under the structures, set the flows in motion, and effected breaks at the limits of desire: a breakthrough” (369). Deleuze and Guattari’s breakthrough is equivalent to Pedro’s pause: the way to new paths in which the modes of being are not crystalized or mediated. Pedro and José’s willingness to experience life from a completely different plane of reality must be understood as an attempt to trace these lines of deterritorialization, to search for the point of escape from descriptions of the world that, having lost their evocative power as metaphors, become a “truth” that cannot be questioned any longer.¹³

Pedro, José, and Ana are devoted to the search for intense, boundless, or even excessive moments, able to redeem an empty and meaningless existence.¹⁴ While cinema (as an artistic expression) may be the privileged method of attaining that objective in *Arrebato*, the characters also explore three additional methods of “deterritorialization” and rapture: regressing to the past, sex, and drugs.

Recovering the Past

Pedro takes José and Ana back to their childhood to determine if they are “ecstatic creatures” like himself. As previously shown, José fully displays his capacity for rapture while viewing King Solomon’s trading cards. Ana’s case is more complex because, as Pedro himself acknowledges, she is “a hard nut to crack”. Pedro challenges her to lose herself while contemplating two toys: a scale model scene from the Pied Piper of Hamelin and a Betty Boop doll, like the one she had as a child. Although she requires using drugs to be raptured by these toys, Ana passes the test and demonstrates that she is still able to reach ecstasy.

In “Ucro-topías”, Cerdán and Fernández Labayén state (in opposition to the importance assigned to the Peter Pan syndrome by other critics) that the pause does not reflect the common desire for recovering a lost childhood and the avoidance of adulthood. For these latter authors, the pause that characters search for is not the result of recovering a “historic” or biographical past, but a return to “un pasado mítico, atemporal (al cual se llega mediante el olvido del pasado inmediato, el presente y el futuro)” (287). Zulueta’s rapture would be related to “la memoria (el recuerdo) y el olvido” (286). Without denying the ecstatic capacities of the past, I believe that the pause in *Arrebato* has more to do with a timeless present than with a process exclusively related to the past (mythical or not). Pedro does not want to conquer the pause by returning to the past, because that implies losing the present. Rather, this returning is just a useful mechanism for evaluating the ecstatic disposition of an individual.¹⁵ Pedro’s statement that one cannot live in the past (“Nada de recuerdos. Al contrario. Tendrá que ser aquí y ahora”) is evidence of his interest in finding an ecstatic method that allows the individual to stay in the here and now (00:37:35 – 00:37:41).

12. Deleuze and Guattari borrow this expression from Antonin Artaud, who uses it to oppose “body” to “organs” and “organism.” Artaud considers that the structuration and organization of our own self leads to automatization and, therefore, to a limitation of our freedom. Interestingly, becoming a BwO could be equated to an ecstatic experience. Thanks to the ecstatic experience, subjects are able to perceive themselves outside of their limits, in a plane of pure intensity that flows freely. Similarly, the experience of becoming a BwO implies replacing fixed identities by a subjectivity that flows permanently, like a port through which circulate multiple intensities, sensations, and desires.

13. Nietzsche’s essay “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” (1873) refers to a metaphoric description of the world that, due to convenience and the power of habit, becomes “truth”.

14. In *Inner Experience*, Bataille also refers to the excessive character of those supreme instants that he calls “sovereign moments.” Everything in them, he says, is “too much”: “this, nevertheless, is the instant ... this, presently, neither my absence nor me, neither death nor light -and my absence and me, death and light—a light laugh rises in me like the sea, it fills the absence immensely, All that is –IS TOO MUCH” (201).

15. Returning to the childhood implies reconnecting with a previous version of oneself that was allegedly more natural and less affected by the social rules that individuals tend to internalize during the adulthood. These characteristics would, therefore, make the individual more open to ecstasy.

In addition to (filmic) art and regression, sex and drugs are the other two ecstatic paths to which *Arrebato*'s characters resort. On the one hand, during the sexual encounter, lovers fuse their bodies overcoming individual boundaries, and become channels throughout which the desire circulates. Sex, in this sense, becomes an effective way to privilege sensation and experimentation over representation and rationalization. On the other hand, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, intoxicants have the ability to offer pre-significant alternatives to highly stratified semiotic (*Thousand* 138). For these theorists, inebriating substances push subjects to experiment on their own, to find their own answers instead of resorting to prefabricated solutions and, ultimately, to challenge what it is taken for granted without question or objection (139). But these two temporary methods of rapture come with strings attached, and Pedro makes clear to José that he is not very fond of them.

First, sexual ecstasy is constrained by several circumstances. According to Bataille, if eroticism is mainly physical, “[i]t holds on to the separateness of the individual in a rather selfish and cynical fashion” (*Erotism* 19). If it includes affection, lovers are still not able to escape discontinuity because what they have now is just an egotism of two: “Only the beloved, so it seems to the lover [...] can in this world bring about what our human limitations deny, a total blending of two beings, a continuity between two discontinuous creatures” (*Erotism* 20). In *Arrebato*, a pattern of abuse, emotional dependence, and suffering – instead of one of joy and rapture – emerges in José and Ana’s relationship. Meanwhile, the intoxicating substances used by the characters of the film manifest their constraints in the form of tolerance and addiction. In the first section of *Artificial Paradises* (1860), entitled “The Poem of Hashish,” Charles Baudelaire describes a state of unusual beatitude and happiness which allows for the sharpening of thought and the delight of senses and spirit. The spontaneous and fleeting nature of this state drives human beings to try to replicate and to retain the sensations generated by it. Baudelaire found that humanity’s fascination with intoxicating substances could be understood as a means to recreate such a paradise. In his words, humanity “has sought to find in the physical sciences, in pharmaceuticals, in the harshest liquors, in the subtlest scents, in all places, and at all times, the means to flee his wretched dwelling, if only for a moment” (32). Hungry for the infinite, many people try to recreate that spontaneous moment of grace by chemistry. But this is a way that Baudelaire discourages as artificial and addictive.

Fascination with intoxicating substances in Zulueta’s film reflects the social reality of the period in which *Arrebato* was produced. Luis Antonio de Villena, in the newspaper’s article “Memoria de Iván Zulueta,” notes that the movie was filmed at a time when heroin was not considered a low-class drug but a substance used by bohemians, intellectuals, and artists:

Hay que recordar que la terrible heroína (el “caballo”) no era todavía el arrastrado “jaco” de la delincuencia, la marginación o las sórdidas barriadas extrarradiales, no. La heroína era aún (lo fue poco tiempo) la droga intelectual del límite, del borde abismático, cantada por el gurú yonqui William Burroughs y por la canción de Lou Reed. (Villena n.p.)

To some extent, *Arrebato* could also be considered an autobiographical film since Zulueta had already started using heroin at that time. In an interview with Andrés Duque for the documentary *Iván Z* (2004), Zulueta confirms this fact and defines that substance as “the last frontier of all drugs” (00:37:30 – 00:37:34). *Arrebato* also echoes the social reality of those times, in which a whole generation tried to live by

pushing their limits in order to detach themselves from what Javier Hernández Ruiz in “Psicotrópicos del deseo: Sexo, drogas y rock ‘n’ roll en el cine de la transición” qualifies as unbearable everyday nature of Francoism and its setting of repression and nonsense (49). It could be said that Zulueta’s proposal is not only a reflection of that “unbearable everyday” under Francoism, but also a defiant reaction against the values of a regime whose institutions did not die with the dictator. While the approach to sexuality in the film challenges the morality of nacional-catolicismo, the importance of intoxicant substances and the natural way in which these are addressed in the film highlights *Arrebato*’s willingness to question social values. It is worth remembering that drugs are not only prosecuted because of the risks they pose for the individual, but because of the risks they present for the system: intoxicants threaten the productive activities that sustain the society.

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Maybe because of that, the importance of drugs in this film is not merely reflected narratively, but also formally. A good example of this is the sequence in which José is preparing a dose of heroin with a syringe, which portrays, in Gómez Tarín’s opinion, a “sucesión de eventos rituales de la inyección de la droga” (34). The three main characters relate to drugs differently. In his first solo encounter with José, Pedro admits using “unos polvos de esos que me rebajan el ritmo” (Zulueta 00:34:21 – 00:34:27). These substances can slow the stressful rhythm of one’s daily life, but also bring one to a state of consciousness linked to adulthood, which lacks the magical capacity to place the person in an atemporal moment. In fact, Pedro advises Sirgado against abusing these substances: “Tú deberías tener más cuidado, te veo mayor” (00:34:37 – 00:34:43).

Dionysian Excess

Nevertheless, José Sirgado has fallen into heroin’s spiral and has dragged Ana with him. In a flashback to the beginning of their relationship, one can witness how José Sirgado initiates Ana into drug use by inviting her to snort a line of heroin while giving her a contradictory warning: “Mira, hay polvos y polvos, pero, de los polvos que no son los polvos, estos polvos son los más polvos” (00:42:49 – 00:43:03) and “No conviene pasarse, si te pasas, no vale” (00:43:44 – 00:43:52). They end up abusing heroin, and while José is able to control his addiction, Ana cannot. She even complains when they do not have heroin during José’s second trip to Pedro’s aunt’s house in the countryside. Pedro’s voiceover says that she is “una muchacha un tanto

excesiva, capaz de colgarse de lo que sea en quince días” (00:46:48 – 00:46:52).

Both masculine characters in *Arrebato* hold Ana responsible for her inability to see the difference between ecstatic journeys with and without return tickets. Gómez Tarín argues that Ana’s surrender is intolerable to Sirgado because it is complete and without conditions. The critic considers that José experiences quotidian life as insipid and unstimulating: “Ana no puede formar parte de ese paisaje porque se trata de un personaje que todavía posee la fuerza del arrebato, la necesaria inocencia (regreso al pasado con la muñeca), y, sobre todo, la facultad de apasionarse” (103). Gómez Tarín’s perspective that drugs, like sex, are still able to provoke the same intensity in Ana that she experienced in the past is very plausible. Nevertheless, it is necessary to add that any surrender to the point of putting one’s life at risk, like the path that she has formed toward her own destruction, prevents the attainment of ecstasy. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche warns of the irreparable consequences caused by the force of Dionysian activities. To prevent madness or self-annihilation, the ecstatic experience must be negotiated with form, the Apollonian component. Art is the best outcome when Dionysian and Apollonian forces combine. Perhaps because of that, the seventh art emerges as an alternative for Pedro.

That doesn’t mean necessarily that Pedro’s quest for the rapture is not as bold and overwhelming as Ana’s. Not surprisingly, Marta explains to José that for her cousin Pedro cinema is a source of hallucination: “para mi primo el Cine es jalucine!” (Zulueta 00:19:47 – 00:19:52). As Vicente J. Benet puts it, by using the camera, Pedro obtains a representation of reality that becomes “alucinante, desbocada, vertiginosa” (310). Moreover, mentioning Arthur Rimbaud’s clairvoyance, José Enrique Monterde states that cinema invites the audience into a sort of hallucinogenic journey that will lead them to reveal what is behind the appearances.¹⁶ In *Arrebato*, cinema materializes an alternative way to deal with the world. A way in which the audience becomes one with the flow of images or, in other words, a way in which cinema implies “dejarse llevar, arrebatar, por el fluir de las imágenes” (Monterde 257). Although not only the audience is meant to let go by the flow of images. Pedro, and José after him, will also be invited to do so.

As Pedro himself explains in the audiocassette sent to José, when his trips around the world filming the rhythms of life are not able to summon rapture anymore, he abandons cinema and starts a conventional life in Madrid. Pedro qualifies that new life as alienating and admits bottoming out shortly after. The emptiness of his life becomes so unbearable that one day he goes to sleep hoping not to wake up anymore. This abandonment sparks a spontaneous rapturous state and triggers the unexpected event that will bring back him to cinema: when Pedro wakes up, he discovers that the camera, by its own will, has started to film him while he was asleep. It is the beginning of a new stage in Pedro’s long relationship with cinema, but inverted: he will no longer be the subject but the object of the lens. In Zulueta’s words, this is the starting point of “un extraño ritual de entrega y fagocitosis, en el que la imagen acaba interviniendo de forma insospechada” (qtd in Gómez Tarín 119). Equally intriguing is the presence of a red frame in the first reel filmed by the camera’s will. Pedro believes that this void frame hides something revealing that happened while he was asleep. The presence of red frames, that will increase in subsequent reels, challenges any attempt to formulate an intelligible representation of reality and evidences the progressive physical consumption of Pedro perpetrated by the camera. Furthermore, a last tape that remains undeveloped in the camera’s magazine has registered the day in which the camera (acting like a vampire) consumes Pedro completely, and sends him into a parallel

16. Arthur Rimbaud identified himself as a sort of clairvoyant capable to look beyond the superficial appearance of existence to discover a reality beyond the ordinary range of human senses.

reality. It will be José himself who will have to go to Pedro's apartment and develop the film to see what happened. While watching Pedro's last reel, José discovers that the red frames took over the whole tape, except for one single exposed frame that comes to life independently of the projector's beam. In it, Pedro invites José to join him in this new filmic dimension, pressing him to lie on his apartment's bed and let the camera also capture and send him to the realm of the celluloid. José struggles between his desire to reach the other side of reality and the consequences of such action. Despite his doubts and suspicions, a part of him has already reached that dimension, as evidenced by the superposition of his face with Pedro's in the filmic projection he assists. The camera, controlled by the timer, takes snapshots of José, while he blindfolds himself. Abandoning all that one identifies with implies a painful process reminiscent of death. The camera ends acting like a rifle and the shutter resembles the shots of a firing squad when it captures José and his body disappears from this plane of reality¹⁷. Pedro and José didn't understand Ana's excessive surrender to rapture but, in the end, they seem to take similar measures to assure an unlimited ecstatic experience.

Bataille argues that, at the beginning of time, human beings enjoyed living in communion with the rest of existence or, as he puts it, having a consciousness of continuity. Unfortunately, the arrival of civilization changed that, replacing their interconnected consciousness by one of discontinuity. Since then, human beings, isolated and enclosed in their individuality, only dream of returning to that happy stage. There are three methods to do so: eroticism, the sacred, or death. Only the last one cancels discontinuity permanently, but it fails to fix the problem because it implies the suppression of the subject that should enjoy the recovered continuity. If Pedro and José's final jump to the other side of the mirror involves their physical disappearance, then their search for a definitive way to recover continuity would be in vain. But if that jump is not physical, if it represents the permanent adoption of a non-conventional state of consciousness that allows the subject to see the world from a new and revealing perspective, then perhaps Zulueta's characters have found a lasting formula to return to continuity without dying in the process.

Throughout this article I have tried to demonstrate that the pursuit of ecstatic experiences is the main focus of *Arrebato*. This quest is not only the express intention of the three protagonists, but can also be inferred from the director's personal inquisitiveness. Zulueta himself experiments with the ecstatic methods represented in *Arrebato* in an effort to facilitate a route map for the audience – a map that consecrates not regression, drugs, or sex but cinema, and art in general, as the best path to rapture.

17. A link can be established with the idea of the camera-as-rifle with a scene from Dziga Vertov's *A Man and a movie camera* where the film camera aimed at planes resembles an anti-aircraft gun. The association between movie cameras and weapons is more common than could be expected, as proved by the rifle of Étienne Jules Marey, a French photographer and doctor interested in recording movement who invented, among other things, a photographic rifle capable to take up to twelve frames with a speed of 1/700s. Pilar Pedraza, in "Arrebato: la cámara vampira", associates Marey's rifle with the mentioned scene in *Arrebato*: "José Sirgado no acaba succionado por la cámara como su doble Pedro sino ametrallado por ella, fusilado. El resultado, sin embargo, es el mismo. Ser fusilado por el fusil de Marey con los ojos vendados envía a Sirgado al mismo universo virtual en el que ya reside Pedro. Puede que suponga un castigo, una depuración antes del paso, pues aunque José Sirgado diga que el cine le ha escogido a él, no lo cree" (Pedraza 149-50).

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