Masculinity in the Shadow of the Slashed Eye: Surrealist Film Criticism at the Crossroads

In 1986 Linda Williams reviewed the critical discourses which had been applied to the films of Buñuel. Using the metaphor of the torn dress which the unknown woman begins to sew up towards the end of *Cet obscur objet du désir*, she herself ended with an elegant critique of her own Lacanian-inspired discourse, emphasising the folly of attempting to ‘sew up’ a film discourse which apparently relies so much on undecidability. At the risk of appearing myself to want to sew up a discourse which is fractured, lacerated, I shall repeat her critical gesture ten years on, applying it to surrealist film generally. I shall first give a brief history of surrealist film. The main part of this essay will review her review, reiterating some of the points she made to see whether there have been any significant advances in surrealist film criticism in the decade since her essay.

The point of the title of this essay is multiple: surrealist film, both historically and theoretically, occurs at crossroads. The first set of crossroads is historical: it is the intersection between avant-garde and impressionist films of the 1920s and the poetic realist films of the 1930s, combined with a second intersection, namely the transition between silent films and sound films, which, as I shall explain in my brief history, is important for an understanding of the paucity of surrealist film production. As will now be clear, for the purposes of this essay, I shall be limiting surrealist film to the period stretching from the 1920s to the early 1930s, and surrealist film criticism to films produced in that period, even though it can be argued, as do Hammond and Kyrou, for example, that surrealist film should be considered as a general category which extends well beyond this period.

There is a second set of crossroads, which is theoretical in nature, and which form the substance of this essay. When the critical discourses surrounding surrealist film are considered, it can be seen that the films are caught between a discourse which does not distance itself from its object, and one which does, although it is the second which has by and large become dominant since the late 1970s. Within the more distanced critical discourse of the 1980s and 1990s, there is a further intersection, that between two currently dominant modes of film criticism: Lacanian-inspired spectatorship theory, espoused by Williams and developed latterly along feminist lines by Flitterman-Lewis, and the return to history or historical poetics, epitomised for the period which concerns us here by Richard Abel’s work.

I have schematised these various intersections in the tables below. The second table on the theoretical intersection needs some explanation. To the left of the table I have listed the principal film theories since Bazin and the *Cahiers du Cinema*, together with their approximate starting date. Two points need to be made in relation to the obvious over-simplification that any tabulation of this kind entails. The first relates to the notion of the ‘beginning’ of a theory. The dates I have given indicate when the theories became established as important critical paradigms within film studies, rather than their first manifestation. For example, Edgar Morin wrote his book on stars in 1960, but it was not until the late 1970s that star studies began to develop as an important thread of film studies. Similarly, the historical study of film pre-dates historical poetics, but this has become one of the two most important critical paradigms (one measure of which is the ability of the paradigm to engage in
self-reflection) only since the mid-1980s. A second point is that in many cases the theoretical paradigms overlap considerably in real terms. Just because film theorists shift from one paradigm to another does not mean that academic film critics follow suit. For example, psychoanalytical paradigms form part of a developing continuum, where critics may employ feminist paradigms to discuss individual films, even though film theorists have spent the last ten years discussing the paradigms’ inadequacies. The phenomenon of overlap can also be seen in the surrealist film critics, listed on the right of the table. Surrealist proselytisers, as I have called them, were employing critical tools in the mid-1970s which film theorists had long been questioning. This, however, is not unusual in film criticism; similar lag-times can be seen in the use of theoretical paradigms in the criticism devoted to aspects of various national cinemas other than Hollywood.

### Table 1. The historical intersection

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<tr>
<th>Period</th>
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<td>surrealist transition</td>
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### Table 2. The theoretical intersection

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<th>Start date</th>
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<td>1981 Neale</td>
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Before exploring these different theoretical paradigms, I shall give a brief history of surrealism. The surrealists embraced the new medium of film enthusiastically. In his famous 1951 article, ‘Comme dans un bois’, Breton recounts how he and Vaché would go from one cinema to the other indiscriminately, thus creating a collage of cinematic experiences whose end was a productive disorientation. The surrealists wrote enthusiastically about films, particularly films focusing on love, and with a strong preference for horror films (*Nosferatu le vampire*), and comedies (Chaplin, Keaton), the attraction of the latter being their subversive reversal of values. The surrealists themselves made very few films; indeed, several films often classed as surrealist were made by ex-members or proselytisers of the Dada group, e.g. René Clair and Francis Picabia’s *Entr’acte* (1924), Marcel Duchamp’s *Anemic Cinema* (1926), or the films made by Hans Richter 1927-29. Surrealist films are frequently confined to the shorts of Man Ray 1923-29, which include *Emak Bakia*; *La Coquille et le clergyman* (Artaud/Dulac, 1927); *L’Etoile de mer* (Man Ray on a poem by Robert Desnos, 1928); Buñuel and Dalí’s *Un chien andalou* (1929), and Buñuel’s *L’Age d’or* (1930). Critics who can be classed as surrealist proselytisers in the taxonomy I adopted above, such as Gould, Kyrour, Hammond and Matthews, have made strong cases for later films, whether by surrealists or not.

Surrealists and surrealist proselytisers ended up creating more film-scripts than films during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Enthusiasm for the medium diminished rapidly after the coming of sound, and the surrealist attitude to film after that period is usually summed up in Breton’s lapidary judgement in 1951, that he could not ‘refrain from a certain nostalgia for the idea of what the cinema might have become, and to allow that the sordidness of the epoch, together with certain conditions -- worse than the others -- of its ‘exploitation’, were enough to clip its wings as soon as it flew the nest’ (in Hammond, p.45). The reasons normally advanced for the paucity of surrealist film production are, following Breton, the commercial nature of film production, with the corollary of high production costs, particularly once sound was introduced, and the surrealists’ passive attitude to films, which they saw as pre-existing elements in the greater design of a collage experience aiming for ‘super-disorientation’ (Breton in Hammond, p.44).

The 1920s saw an efflorescence of discourses on film, to which several surrealists and surrealist proselytisers contributed (e.g. Artaud, Desnos, Fondane). These have been anthologised by Abel (1988). I shall disregard them since they do not constitute what I would like to term critical discourses on specific surrealist films. These began at the same time as the beginnings of modern film theory, which can be said to have started with the *politique des auteurs* of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the mid-1950s.

**Surrealist proselytisers: 1950-late 1970s**

Amongst surrealist proselytisers, we can distinguish two positions. The earlier position is the least critical. Ado Kyrour, a member of movement, wrote his *Le Surréalisme au cinéma* in 1953. Kyrour’s few comments on *Un chien andalou* are caught up in sectarian views as he tries to separate Buñuel’s input from Dalí’s: ‘I am convinced that Buñuel and Dalí were aiming at different things. Buñuel sought to catch a glimpse of that incandescent world in which dream and reality mingle in a magnificent gesture of liberation; Dalí hoped to shock the bourgeoisie’ (p.19). Kyrour’s partisan approach was shared by Matthews, the foremost academic working in surrealism in the 1970s, and whose *Surrealism and Film* appeared in 1971. This approach adopted the surrealist aesthetic as a guide, and used it to judge films which could be seen as surrealist beyond the very few produced by the surrealists themselves. An example of the circular nature of this type of criticism can be found in Matthews’s conclusion, where he says that ‘when a surrealist shoots a movie, his dearest hope is to provide a succession of cinematic images, free from dependence
on theatrical plot, stimulating the imagination to explore in directions that surrealism teaches him to regard as promising’ (p.176), i.e. the films examined are surrealist because they match the aims of the surrealists. At least Matthews concentrated on surrealists making film, stretching from Buñuel to the 50s and 60s generation (Benayoun, Brunius, Goldfayn, Heisler, Mariën). Gould, on the other hand, writing in 1976, has more to say about the supposed surrealist content of films by Fuller, Hitchcock, Sternberg, and even Disney, than about surrealist films proper.

The second, later approach in this period, coincided with the beginnings of post-Bazinian film theory of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It still adopted the surrealist viewpoint, but it introduced a distance from its object by the agency of the anthology. Hammond especially (1978) and the Virmaux (1976) enthusiastically chronicled surrealist film history, adopting as their theoretical tools, like Kyrou and Matthews, the search for a coincidence between surrealist aesthetics and surrealist film production, and emphasising, like Kyrou and Matthews, the surrealist spirit in films not usually thought of as part of the movement. The difference in their approach was that having produced an historical context, they let the anthologised pieces speak for themselves. In the case of Hammond, whose tone is like a mixture of Kyrou’s and Matthews’s, the effect is peculiarly schizophrenic, in that the historical distance established by the anthologising seems to be at odds with the proselytising historical context which prefaces the anthology.

Critical theory developed rapidly in Parisian circles just before and in the wake of 1968, and it soon became clear that an academic critic could not avoid the new critical paradigms. Where film theory is concerned, the paradigms were first a semiotic-structuralist approach, almost immediately displaced by a psychoanalytical approach. The only surrealist film to be examined by critics of these persuasions during the 1970s, or before where the psychoanalytical approach is concerned, was Un chien andalou.

**Early psychoanalytical theory: late 1960s**

Commentators, encouraged no doubt by Buñuel’s statement in 1947 that ‘the only method of investigation of the symbols would be, perhaps, psychoanalysis’ (Buñuel, p.153), began applying psychoanalytical frameworks as early as 1949 (see Piazza, Mondragon). These remained largely unknown, as Renaud pointed out in his own psychoanalytical reading of 1963 (p.149), and it is only with Durgnat’s book on Buñuel in 1968 that a psychoanalytical reading gained a wide audience. Durgnat, like Mondragon and Renaud before him (both of whom he quotes), assumed that a psychoanalytical interpretation of Un chien andalou should tell an allegorical master narrative, filling the gap left by the evident fractures of the film. The fact that the psychoanalytical interpretations by Mondragon, Renaud and Durgnat are all slightly different does not appear to be a problem for Durgnat, who points out that ‘in the indiscriminate, global terms of the unconscious, each formulation is an aspect of another, each applies to a different sphere of experience, a fundamental pattern of repression, rage and panic’ (p.38). What the three readings have in common is that they all recount the sexual development of a single hypothetical protagonist. The shortest of these is Mondragon’s, and since it has not to my knowledge been translated, I reproduce it here (the account contains inaccuracies):

> Once upon a time there was a small child who was born (corresponding shot: the razor stropped on leather); when the pregnancy was reaching its end (full moon), he was born (c.f. the slit eye). Then he grew up, learnt how to walk (which Buñuel illustrates with the character on a bicycle wearing a bib); but his steps are unsteady, he falls and needs his mother to get up again. Although he loves his mother, he also loves himself, seeking pleasure from his own body (c.f. the hands with holes where ants are swarming) and finds amongst his companions someone whom he can love (i.e. the androgyn
filmed in the road). Then he turns to the Mother, trying to grab her. Stopped by his super-ego, he drags his past behind him (gourds or ancestral traditions; monks or the constraints of catholic morality; a piano, or immutable harmonies, and finally donkeys or stupidity). He reverts to infantile regressions when he remembers his schoolbooks; he rebels against himself and attempts to kill the ego which condemns him to remain a child. Nobody helps him (the characters in the park do not move, indifferent to the body being taken away). One day, a woman comes to see him: he does not know how to handle her, and makes fun of her (the lipstick). Another man calls her; annoyed, she throws herself into his arms (cited in Renaud, pp.149-50).

The problem with this kind of approach was highlighted by the next major type of critical approach, the semiotic. Drummond pointed out how the ‘whole film has still to be rescued from the ravages of a primitive psychoanalysis bent on the unearthing of a straightforward psychosexual allegory at the “core” of Un chien andalou’ (p.91).

**Semiotic criticism: mid-1970s**

Under the impact of critical theory arising in the wake of May 1968, semiotic criticism, inherited from Metz in his mid-1960s structuralist phase, and based on a disinterested and sceptical analysis of the object, resisted judgement or the ascription of meaning, particularly a meaning generated by the surrealist movement itself, confining its analysis to aspects of disruption. Drummond’s painstaking formalist description of Un chien andalou appeared in Screen in 1977, and was intended to be the first part of a longer study which never appeared. Drummond’s approach is to review and to confront the various critical views of the film, showing how inadequate and contradictory most of them are, often bearing very little relation to, indeed often wilfully distorting what can be seen on the screen. This approach was not developed, mainly because film theory moved very quickly in the 1970s to new paradigms.

**Lacanian psychoanalytical criticism: 1970s-present**

During the early 1970s Metz moved away from semiotic and structuralist approaches to a Lacanian-inspired psychoanalytical approach which was considerably more rigorous than the early psychoanalytical approaches. Whereas Mondragon, for example, had posited a unified subject as the origin of meaning (Un chien andalou being the dream of a unified subject, or the thematised development of that subject), Metz’s approach examined film as a vehicle for the positioning of the spectator, attempting to answer the question not ‘what does this film mean?’ but ‘in what position does this film place the spectator?’ This theoretical approach, often called spectatorship theory, has been the dominant critical paradigm ever since the early 1970s, although it has seen various permutations, the major one being feminist film theory (see Jay for an intellectual history of this paradigm). Among the various critics Drummond patiently and ruthlessly dismantled in 1977 was Linda Williams’s study of Un chien andalou’s prologue, which had appeared in Screen in the winter of 1976. Williams developed her approach in a major work in 1981, inaugurating a new trend in surrealist film criticism, inspired by the psychoanalytic Metz of the mid-1970s and Baudry. Durgnat, keen to use Buñuel’s own suggestion that psychoanalysis might be the only productive way to analyse Un chien andalou, had used psychoanalysis uncritically, applying it to tell a ‘story’ which the film is bent on undermining. Williams’s approach was to conceive of the film’s disruptions not as something to be resolved, but as the whole point of the film. As she said, ‘unconscious desire, if it is to be present in film in the way in which it is present in dreams, cannot also be “represented” there as a subject: it must be perceived, as the unconscious desires of dreams are perceived, through the transgressions of a more familiar discourse’ (Williams (1981), p.28).
Feminist criticism: 1975-present
What Williams’s 1981 book did not do was to engage in feminist criticism; nor was she able to review feminist critiques of Buñuel’s films in her review of Buñuel criticism in the 1986 issue of *Dada/Surrealism*. Since then, as now, there has not been any substantial feminist work on Buñuel’s films. In that same issue of *Dada/Surrealism*, however, Flitterman-Lewis, one of the founding members of the key feminist film journal *Camera Obscura* in 1974, published a major article on *La Coquille et le clergymen*, reworked from her thesis of 1982, and eventually to find its way into the first part of an important feminist-inspired work on French women directors in 1990, which devoted several chapters to the work of Dulac. Dulac’s work, according to Flitterman-Lewis, ‘can be said to represent the feminist project of conceptualizing different ways of articulating women’s relation to language and the body’ (p.131). The way Dulac does this in *La Coquille et le clergymen*, according to Flitterman-Lewis, is by ‘activating the female image as representation itself, for it is here that the female body—and the very processes of desire that constitute it as “feminine”’—undergo a sustained investigation throughout the film’ (p.134). That investigation occurs in two distinct ways. The first is by the representation of the woman’s body itself on screen. Thus the close-ups and the (at least for the time) very daring use of naked breasts bring the spectator ‘closer to a reinforcing physicality, aligning femininity with the body, while at the same time creating a breach between the image and its referent. It thus obliges us to read the image as a sign circulating in the textual space of the film’ (p.136). The second way is by the various narrative disruptions, which Flitterman-Lewis, following Williams, considers to ‘suggest something of the dynamism of the unconscious forces and in so doing (to) elicit possible alternative constructions of the “feminine”’ (p.137).

Historical poetics: 1985-present
At the same time as theorists in the mid- to late 1980s were coming to terms with the inadequacy of spectatorship theory to resolve a woman spectator’s relationship to what is happening on screen, a shift towards history had started with an emphasis on reception and audience, parallel to the new interest in star studies, both of which involved reliance on archival and field work. The historical approach, bound up with an empirical, cognitivist approach, is best represented by the work of David Bordwell and Janet Staiger, both of whom, along with Richard Abel, are on the editorial board of the American journal *Film History*. Bordwell, Staiger and others were involved in a key critical debate in the pages of *Screen* during the 1980s (see Jenkins); the importance of the historical approach can be measured by the publication in the middle of the decade of a work which analyses the historical approach itself (see Allen & Gomery). Bordwell’s position is ‘post-theory’, to quote the title of a recent book. He is concerned, as Jenkins points out, to promote ‘historical specificity over abstract theory’ (p.104), and is particularly virulent in his critique of what he calls Grand Theory, or the psychoanalytical interpretative discourses which prevailed until recently in film studies, his major critiques of them being in two recent volumes, *Making Meaning* and *Post-Theory*.

Where surrealist film is concerned, this return to history, which might have seemed unproblematic in the wake of the anthologies by Hammond and the Virmaux, has in a sense cut surrealism down to historical size. Abel’s work on surrealist films themselves in *The First Wave* (1984; he devotes some space to *Un chien andalou* and *La Coquille et le clergymen*) does little more than recycle the views of critics such as Williams. It is the context in which he places these films which matters, however. In *The First Wave*, he places surrealism in the context of French cinema culture, where it figures but briefly even in its category of avant-garde film. In the later massive two-volume ‘archeological’ project of the history of early *French Film Theory and Criticism* (the term is Abel’s; see Abel (1988) vol.2, p.xiv),
Abel, like Hammond and the Virmaux, anthologises. Unlike them, however, the anthology is not surrealist-specific. Surrealism is again a small player in the critical debates of the 1920s and 1930s, placed firmly within the context of a developing set of arguments about the nature of film, which, put briefly and rather schematically, is the old chestnut of realism versus fantasy, the surrealists falling firmly into the second camp. Previous readings of surrealism and film which focused principally on the surrealists themselves, and not much on the contexts of film production in the 1920s, led to what now seems like a peculiar distortion: either surreal film was proclaimed a disappointment, following late Breton; or the surrealist spirit was retro-nostalgically distinguished in non-surrealist films, matching the early enthusiasms of Breton. Neither of these positions seems particularly apt in the light of Abel’s work, which places the surrealists firmly within a dynamic context of theoretical reflection on the value of the medium by the Parisian intelligentsia, of whom the surrealists were only a small part. A similar approach has been adopted as the framework of Fotiade’s recent article in Screen, where she points out that ‘the surrealist exploration of dreams, of visual and imaginary processes in the cinema, uncovers an ambivalent relationship to competing avant-garde theories and practices of the 1920s and 1930s, such as the abstract and Impressionist cinema’ (p.395).

There is a second point raised by Abel’s work. The nostrum on surrealism and film is that the surrealists were passive in relation to the medium, using it, much like a drug, as a form of dépaysement, or disorientation. Abel’s work helps us understand that although this is true, it is only true to the extent that there is very little surrealist film production. There is, however, apart from the many unfilmed scenarios, a considerable body of work reflecting actively on the medium, written both by surrealists and non-surrealists. The shift in emphasis which is now necessary in the light of Abel’s work is considerable for scholars of surrealist films, since it places more emphasis on film studies than it does on surrealism, echoing the shift in more general surrealist studies which began with the examination of the Parisian avant-garde when Jean-Michel Place began to publish their journals in facsimile editions in the mid-1970s (curiously, in 1996 Place took over as the publisher of Positif, the film journal which had surrealist sympathies during the 1950s; see Hammond, pp.14-15 for an evaluation of the surrealist thinking on the journal’s policies). The new emphasis on film studies does not necessarily deny the impact of the early surrealist films, few though they may be. It does suggest, however, a more realistic view of the context of intellectual history than the ‘surrealist film in a vacuum’ which underlay the critical work of the 1950-mid-1970s period in particular.

Masculinity: 1980-present

I began with Williams’s review of 1986, in which she suggested that feminist or deconstructionist critiques of Buñuel had yet to be evolved. In fact, Flitterman-Lewis’s critique of the Artaud/Dulac intersection has been the only major development in surrealist film criticism in the last decade, if one accepts the historical definition of surrealist film as those films produced in the period 1920-early 1930s (the recent volume on Jan Švankmajer, edited by Hames, although an important contribution to the Czech animator’s work, does not seem to me to change the nature of the current theoretical paradigms). On the whole, surrealist film critics have been careful to document their research historically, as can be seen in Flitterman-Lewis’s work on La Coquille et le clergyman; indeed, her article in Dada/Surrealism rubs shoulders with an article by Abel on surrealist film scenarios. On the assumption that surrealist film critics follow where film theorists dare to tread, there does not therefore seem to be a need to historicise surrealist film, grounding it in careful archival work, since this has already been done.

On the other hand, we might expect a turn towards masculinity by surrealist film critics, since this last avatar of psychoanalytical film criticism has gradually come
to prominence, parallel to the rise of gender studies during the 1980s. Work on masculinity began with Neale’s critique of Mulvey in 1981; indeed, his article is the opening chapter of a recent compilation of essays on American cinema (see Cohan and Hark). Another recent work has developed the area of masculinity and masochism, with a particular emphasis on the films of Fassbinder (see Silverman). Where surrealism is concerned, we might expect a critique of masculinity in Buñuel’s specifically surreal films, perhaps dwelling on the masochistic positioning of the male protagonists in *Un chien andalou* and *L’Age d’Or*. This approach has in fact been developed by Evans in his 1995 book on Buñuel, although he focuses principally on the Mexican Buñuel and *Cet obscur object du désir*. In his view, Buñuel’s males are ‘simultaneously the victims and aggressors of desire (...) blinded not only by their own gestures of self-mortification, but also by a failure to interrogate the causes and motivations of their repetitive and ultimately self-destructive passions’ (p.97). Evans’s choice of *Cet obscur objet du désir* clearly helps him to focus on male masochism, since Mathieu’s attraction and submission to Conchita ‘is in part a representation of male desire no longer simply disavowing difference. It is the dramatization of a masochistic fantasy forcing men to address questions of femininity, to submit to certain processes of feminization’ (pp.132-33). Even if Batcheff and Modot’s position in relation to Mareuil and Lys respectively in the two early films is less clear cut than this comment on the later films might imply, there is evidently scope for an analysis of the figurations of male desire as masochism in them.

This could be linked to an analysis of the moustached Modot in *L’Age d’Or*, poacher of desire turned into the gamekeeper of Renoir’s *La Règle du jeu* some ten years later. It might also dwell on the self-parody of Pierre Batcheff in *Un chien andalou*, ‘the French James Dean of the 1920s’, according to Drummond (p.78). *Un chien andalou* (December 1929) would have associated Batcheff with his role as a Russian officer in Raymond Bernard’s enormously successful historical spectacular *Joueur d’échecs* (1927) or as Albert de Morcerf in Nalpas’s *Monte-Cristo* (June 1929; this also had on its cast Gaston Modot as Fernand Mondego), and more particularly as the lawyer Frémisson in Clair’s comedy based on a Labiche play, *Les Deux timides*, which opened in April 1929. Abel suggests that Batcheff’s acting ‘is clearly modelled on Chaplin’ (Abel (1984), p.231). When we remember that it is likely that the piano scene in *Un chien andalou* is a replay of Keaton’s piano gag in *One Week* (see Drummond, p.79), the film appears curiously unstable, fissured by references to the romantic stereotype of the lover which is constantly undermined by the frankly comic. Instability, I would contend, is not so much a figuration of desire, as Williams’s argued ten years ago, than a symptom of masculinity in crisis. The males of the three main surrealist films (*La Coquille et le clergymen*, *Un chien andalou*, and *L’Age d’Or*) are discomfited, undone, almost helpless in the face of the necessary repression of their overwhelming desire.

However, it could be argued that, particularly in the case of Buñuel, what we remember the films for is less their elements of comedy and parody, than their extreme violence. The slashed eye of *Un chien andalou* functions in this conception as an apparently radical gesture of revolt, whose provocation forms part of the surrealists’ aesthetic anarchism around 1928-1930. It is not for nothing that the second manifesto and the shooting script of the film both appeared in the final issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1929, both vehicling a total rejection of society’s materialism, as can be seen from the two extracts below:

**Surrealism was not afraid to make for itself a tenet of total revolt, complete insubordination, or sabotage according to rule, and why it still expects nothing save from violence. The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd. Anyone who, at least once in his life, has not dreamed of thus**
putting an end to the petty system of debasement and cretinization in effect has a well-defined place in that crowd, with his belly at barrel level (Breton (1929), p.2).

This scenario (...) expresses without reservation of any kind my complete adherence to the thought and activity of the surrealists. *Un chien Andalou* would not have existed if surrealism had not existed. "A successful film" is what the majority of people who saw it thought. But what can I do about people who are crazy for anything going on even if the novelty outrages their inmost convictions, or a venal or insincere press, or about that pack of imbeciles who found beauty or poetry in what is, in essence, nothing less than a passionate appeal to murder (Buñuel & Dalí, p.34).

The violence which these two extracts evidence does not seem to have much to do with despair, discomfiture or impotence, let alone masochism. And yet, there is, I would contend, a link to be made with the social context of surrealism in 1929. The second manifesto chronicles Breton's disappointments. Surrealism was besieged by competing avant-garde groups, rejected by the PCF, betrayed, as Breton saw it, by surrealists who felt the need to earn their living by being journalists. The second manifesto calls ostentatiously for surrealism's retreat from such worldly matters, an 'occultation', an almost mystical retreat from the exoteric to esoteric, as indeed was to occur in a much more literal sense with the emphasis on myth in the mid-1930s and the attraction to the occult in the 1950s. In the same year as Breton bad-temperedly 'retreated', spectators were confronted by the drama of constantly frustrated male desire in *Un chien andalou*, a desire undermined by parody and excess, and coupled with self-mutilation: the fall from the bicycle, the hole in the hand as the stigma of desire, the killing of the double, the blasphemously drooling Christ of the bleeding eyes who fondles Mareuil's breasts and buttocks, the buried failure of the epilogue.

In this optic, male masochism seems just as likely an interpretation of the paradox of a violently public occultation of surrealism as any attempt to justify it as a radical aesthetic. This is particularly the case in our sceptical, postmodernist fin de siècle, where gender appears increasingly an accident, a joke played by a silent God, as aleatory as the dress codes which *Un chien andalou* playfully questions. An emphasis on this playfulness at least has the merit of making us consider laughter as an appropriate response, even if the laughter might be forced. Laughter can thus act as a palliative to the melancholic nostrum concerning *Un chien andalou*, that the castrating shock of the slashed eye forces the male gaze to confront itself in a violent moment of visual apocalypse.

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October 1996  
5323 words
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The best bibliography on surrealism and film is Kuenzli’s in *Dada/Surrealism* 15, ‘Dada and Surrealist Film’ (1986), pp.220-54. The following bibliography lists only those works referred to above. Translations are our own unless otherwise indicated in this bibliography. I would like to thank Robert Short (University of East Anglia) for help in locating early psychoanalytical readings of *Un chien andalou*.

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