

Objects Suspended in Light

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As a director, I have the impression that I move between two poles: one crepuscular and nocturnal, and the other diurnal, solar, where I would like to always maintain the documentarist's capacity for direct observation, and in which reverberates a sense of nostalgia for a lost time, that of the cinema's Golden Age.—V́ctor Erice¹

There can only be cinema where there is an authentic journey, experience, and encounter.—V́ctor Erice²

The cinema has given birth to a handful of poets. Those who judge a director's work by its quality, rather than its quantity, would place V́ctor Erice among these few. His films present a world touched by promise and regret; his writings reveal a man who strives to both preserve and extend the language of the cinema.

V́ctor Erice's full-length feature films—*El espíritu de la colmena* (*Spirit of the Beehive*, 1973), *El sur* (*The South*, 1983), and *El sol del membrillo* (*Dream of Light* [a.k.a. *The Quince Tree Sun*, 1992])—present us with a pattern of exploration, trauma, and retreat, followed by healing.³ His films are about survivors—not the mildly bruised survivors of many Hollywood productions, but the more profoundly affected survivors of unplanned events: Franco's regime, the death of an imagined ally, a relentless rain, and the march of years that render futile our designs. For V́ctor Erice, the cinema has the power to be simultaneously “an arrow and a wound”: an arrow to break through illusion, and a wound to reveal to us what we had long thought lost, but which we cannot quite grasp.⁴

SNAPSHOT: THE OUTLINE OF A MAN

In a brief autobiographical sketch, “*A una sombra*” (“To a Shadow”), V́ctor Erice describes his memories of a cardboard box of snapshots he

would gaze at as a child—family snapshots that seemed to hold the key to the mysteries of his past and of the passing of time. These photographic images, familiar and yet worthy of repeated contemplation, induced a ritual of questions and answers that opened up “without his knowing it . . . a part of the light and darkness that life had reserved for him: the first traces of his destiny as a man.”⁵

Born in Carranza (Vizcaya) in 1940, Víctor Erice has spent much of his adult life in Madrid. Before entering the Instituto de Investigaciones Cinematográficas (IIEC), Spain’s official film school, in 1960, he studied economics and political science. His three short films while at the film school were: *En la terraza* (*On the Terrace*, 1961), *Páginas de un diario perdido* (*Pages of a Lost Diary*, 1962), and *Los días perdidos* (*The Lost Days*, 1963).

During this period Erice also collaborated on the scripts of Antonio Eceiza’s *El próximo otoño* (*Next Autumn*, 1963) and Miguel Picazo’s *Oscuros sueños de agosto* (*Dark Dreams of August*, 1967).⁶ During and immediately following his student years, Víctor Erice wrote film criticism for such journals as *Nuestro cine* and *Cuadernos de arte y pensamiento*. In 1969 he directed one segment of the three-episode film *Los desafíos* (*The Challenges*), along with Claudio Guerin Hill and José Luís Egea, which won the Concha de Plata for Best Director (shared by all three directors) in the 1969 San Sebastián Film Festival.⁷

Erice’s feature film debut, *The Spirit of the Beehive*, starring the remarkable child actress Ana Torrent, was well received in Spain and abroad, winning the Silver Hugo at the Chicago Film Festival and the top prize at the San Sebastián Film Festival. It was ten years before the director completed another full-length film, *El sur* (a Spanish/French coproduction), which was intended to be longer than its actual release length. Ten years later came *Dream of Light* (*The Quince Tree Sun*).⁸

Between the making of *El sur* and *Dream of Light* (*The Quince Tree Sun*), Erice worked on an adaptation of *Bene* which, like *El sur*, was a novel by Adelaida García Morales, but he decided to delay that project. He then embarked on a film based on the work of the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Diego de Silva y Velázquez, notably about the painting *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*, 1656). Erice describes this as an idea that had haunted him for several years, but another director managed to finish a film with some overlapping themes first, so Erice put this project aside (although the documentary aspects of the unfinished film on Velázquez provided a kind of bridge to *Dream of Light* [*The Quince Tree Sun*]).⁹ In “From Velázquez’s Mir-

ror to *Dream of Light*,” the Japanese scholar of French cinema, Hasumi Shigehiko, offers us a tantalizing look at this unfinished project (p. 221).¹⁰

Erice has also worked on a scenario of the short story “*La muerte y la brújula*” (“Death and the Compass”) by Argentinian writer Jorge Luís Borges, and we can detect in Erice’s films a shared love with Borges of the labyrinthian.¹¹ Erice was also responsible for the Spanish version of the dubbing and scoring of Bertolucci’s film *The Last Emperor*. In this anthology, the short essay “The Dragon in My Life” is a homage by young Japanese filmmaker Miyaoka Hideyuki to the Spanish director who consented to help him with his video montage *Celebrate Cinema 101* (p. 232). There have been other projects, unfinished for a variety of reasons that were beyond the director’s control. Helena Rotés’s essay on “Reality in Juan Marsé” offers an introduction to a recent scenario by Víctor Erice loosely based on the novel by Catalán writer Juan Marsé entitled *El embrujo de Shanghai* (a title that gives the sense of the “bewitchment” of Shanghai, p. 236). Unfortunately, that project became ensnared in production problems that belie the years devoted to its creation. (See editor’s note, p. 27.)

Although Madrid has been Erice’s home base for years, he has also spent time in a small village in Andalucía, and in his childhood home in the mountains of northern Spain. As he himself asserts, he has lived continuously with the consciousness of a film director, even while engaged in works of criticism, and when working (sometimes anonymously) for other media, such as television. As he indicated in an interview with Tomás Pérez Turrent: “The most important thing is that I never stopped living as a director, at any time, and I suppose that one can feel it in the films that I have finished, that are also the natural consequences of the ones I did not succeed to direct.”¹²

A mystique of the remote artist has developed around Víctor Erice. To meet him, however, is to meet a man who is reserved but not solemn, with a dry sense of humor. This sense of humor appears at moments in his films, like the scene of the Polish workers eating a quince for the first time in *Dream of Light* (*The Quince Tree Sun*), or the “Crazy Bill” sequence in *El sur*.

Comparing Víctor Erice to novelist Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Fernando Savater describes him as possessing the same intensity, which is “that of daily life and magic, a similar need for perfection that on occasions reaches self-annihilation, and an almost sacred tendency toward that which cannot be embraced . . . which is infinite.”¹³

Savater calls both men “excessive, meticulous, glorious” and “slow-paced, magnificent.” He notes how these qualities all result from a certain in-

compatibility with the commercial and with the way many contemporary artists need to present themselves in an attention-getting manner. Savater wisely concludes that, while we might want someone like Víctor Erice to conform more so we could admire his work more frequently, this is an absurd desire because such an attitude would cause him to stop being who he is.

SNAPSHOT: A SIMPLE MOVIE HALL

The cinema Víctor Erice recalls from his childhood was a stark setting for a limitless dream. In his autobiographical essays, we see how the child's delight in the cinema has haunted the adult man through succeeding decades. The makeshift, often austere, movie theatres of his youth were a place where a child in a war-torn country could find a sense of refuge and possibility. In his essay on influential French critic and essayist of the cinema, Serge Daney, Erice describes the cinema of his youth as appearing "in the midst of a bombarded reality . . . improvised theatres anyplace, rickety benches and slats equipped with a ramshackle projector that projected over and over again the same deteriorated film. . . ." ¹⁴ Cinema became not just a way to dream but, simultaneously, a way to forget. In his essay "¿Puedes ver ahora?" ("Can You See Now?" p. 54), Erice calls his experience as a spectator of films the hub of his relationship with the cinema, while directing has assumed a less natural, more extra-ordinary, role in his life. ¹⁵

Erice identifies strongly with his generation of postwar youth born into a society of cataclysmic changes. In his essay "*Escribir el cine, pensar el cine*" ("Writing Cinema, Thinking Cinema"), he calls his generation "real and symbolic orphans" adopted by the cinema and nurtured by it through difficulties. ¹⁶ He notes with some sadness how the cinema is now losing its birthplace—the darkened theater.

THE DIRECTOR AS ESSAYIST

The director's own essays, which span almost forty years, display a style at once careful and lyrical. A common theme running through his writings is an admiration for those few fortunate people who have been able to merge their artistic work with the content of their daily lives. The essays also reveal a fascination with the outsider—like émigré filmmaker Josef von Sternberg

or writer/adventurer T. E. Lawrence—who try to achieve their dreams through a mixture of talent and sheer perseverance. In his essay “*La aventura secreta de Josef von Sternberg*” (“The Secret Adventure of Josef von Sternberg”), Erice cites the role of the dream world in von Sternberg’s films, and draws up one of his beautiful phrases to describe the cinema—“that environment where desire crystallizes.”¹⁷ He does not fail to note, however, how the dizzying ascent of directors like von Sternberg, Orson Welles, Nicholas Ray, and Chaplin through the fast track of the film world is followed by unenviable troubles.¹⁸ In describing the demise of von Sternberg, for example, he writes:

Forger of a fascinating erotic symbol, Sternberg saw himself devoured by his own creation. The great director paid dearly for daring to search for the ideal projection of his individualism in the heart of an industry dominated by the laws of consumerism. . . . His drama, then, is the modern, unusual, and absurd version of a traditional drama: that of the romantic conception of artists in their link to reality.

These tenacious figures, who often found themselves along the margin, “killed by their own disenchantment,” are connected in various ways with an art form, the cinema, which is at once immensely popular and marginalized. Quick to point out the underside of the “American dream,” Erice refers to figures like Chaplin as “survivors,” and he praises Chaplin’s role as a warrior against the tyranny of sound in film. Note, for example, Erice’s description of the *oeuvre* of American director Nicholas Ray: “a poetic myth in which film and life are fraternally united in the end. . . . [From 1963 on] Ray lived to film and filmed to stay alive” (*Como en un espejo* [“As in a Mirror”]).¹⁹

The writings of Erice’s early years as a critic reflect a Spain of scarcity and isolation, with many new films from abroad seen only after they had been smuggled into the country, past the censors. From this incomplete, but intense, viewing of styles that ranged from Italian neorealism to the French New Wave, from the austere beauty of Japanese films by directors like Mizoguchi and Ozu to early Hitchcock and Huston, Erice developed a style as refined as it is penetrating. In the earlier years, he received insights into the art of editing through the revolutionary nature of early Russian cinema. Despite the restrictions on the import of certain foreign films into Spain at that time, he struggled to piece together the essence of those films from the published writings of theorists and from series of film stills printed in books (as described in his essay *La escalinata de Odessa* [“The Odessa Steps”]).²⁰

In her monograph on the director, Carmen Arocena reports the influence of Marxist criticism on his early writings, primarily those for the Spanish film journal *Nuestro cine*. Arocena detects the young director's concern with issues of moral involvement and the cinema (his refusal to "seek refuge in artificial paradises"), and his search for a radical poetic language in film that would temper the emphasis on a "critical and interpretive" realism (p. 65).

More recently, Erice's writings deal less with specific sociopolitical concerns; rather, they reveal a gradual movement toward a revelation of "life as it is living" ("Cinema and Poetry"), and a strong consciousness of the century that has just drawn to a close. Erice is keenly aware that the twentieth century posited the cinema as a language offering a wealth of collective, yet easily duplicated, images. Despite this, he still hopes to find in cinema the possibility of experiencing irreplaceable moments of insight, of having "passed over a threshold" ("Can you see now?"). The later writings reveal a greater reconciliation of form and content, what Arocena calls the presentation of "reality . . . via a poetic line."

In these essays, Erice asks not only how he can best express the images that appear to him, but also, perhaps more fundamentally, he asks, "Who has come before me?" Among these influential figures are the film critic Serge Daney, classical Hollywood directors like Chaplin, von Sternberg, and Welles, and international figures like Rosellini, Pasolini, Resnais, and Mizoguchi. From all of these "mentors" he has learned that the art of writing a scenario for a film is "not to express a truth that was known beforehand, but rather to make it surge up from between the images" ("Alternatives to Modernity"). For example, in an early essay on the Japanese director Mizoguchi Kenji (whom he calls one of the greatest directors of all time), Erice praises Mizoguchi as a poet who knew how to express the contradictions and moral dramas of his generation with great imaginative richness.²¹ He notes how Mizoguchi, standing at a historical crossroads, responded to the "hollow dreams of grandeur" implicit in Japan's imperialistic ventures with the simplicity of the everyday, and with an opposition of love to violence. In Mizoguchi's later films, Erice sees a search for values that would be capable of reconciling the individual with his or her own self. Erice reserves equal praise for another of his predecessors, French director Robert Bresson, whose films he sees as expressing "naked words, essential."²²

Many of Erice's essays contain allusions to the influence of the visual arts on the director's cinematic style. To Erice, painting and cinema are two

different languages with common elements: painting can express or represent time, but cannot contain it. This power to contain time he reserves for his own medium of expression, the cinema, and herein we sense one of the roots of his fascination (*Cine y pintura: Una aproximación* ["Cinema and Painting: An Approximation"]).²³ Erice speaks out against films that stress the picturesque in a gratuitous manner, and that treat painting as a kind of fiction by fragmenting the original and destroying its specificity. In my essay "Interior Gardens: *Dream of Light* and the *Bodegón* Tradition" (p. 192), I note how the films evoke images by such European artists as Zurbarán, Vermeer, Dürer, and Rembrandt—a point that has been discussed as well by Zunzunegui, Leu-trat, and others.²⁴

SNAPSHOT: PAGES OF A DIARY

Erice's student-period films offer critical links to his longer works. These films are generally available for viewing only through the auspices of a film archive; therefore, I will describe them in some detail here.

In the silent film *Páginas de un diario perdido* (*Pages of a Lost Diary*, 1962), we are privileged to a view of a young woman musing in her room: pulling back the curtain to stare out the window, fingering small objects (a doll, a statuette) on the table. After locking her door, she retrieves a novel from her dresser and reads alone at her table. This still interior scene, reminiscent of a painting by Vermeer, is matched by the scene in the adjoining room where, on either side of a large French window, an elderly woman sits, sleeping, and a mature woman sits facing the curtain. The camera moves closer to the two forms ever so slightly and (in a rack-focus shot), we examine first the wrinkles on the older woman's face and her folded hands, and then the mature woman sewing in what remains of the late afternoon light.

When the young woman enters this sitting room, she restlessly picks up a magazine, then takes a photo album out of the cabinet and places it by her grandmother. As the elderly woman awakens and looks at the photos, we see a close-up of an old photo of a lovely young woman. Then the grandmother hands her granddaughter a small photo of a handsome young man from the same album.

Three women in one room, the light fading—three ages, three briefly touching moments in time. As the young woman plays the piano, the middle-aged woman stares absently out the window, and the elderly

woman continues to look through the photo album expressionlessly. The camera pulls back to reveal more of the sitting room, to capture the moment in space as well as time.

The third part of *Pages of a Lost Diary* provides a precursor to a scene in *The Spirit of the Beehive*. The young woman—back in her own room—pets and then torments her cat's neck. When the cat bites her, she stares at herself in the mirror and paints her lips with her own blood. In this young woman we sense unrest, a desire to move beyond the world of the other two women, yet also the ways in which she is outlined by their world. In contrast to the young woman's restless movement through the confined interior spaces, the other two women remain unmoving except for their eyes and hands.

Erice's graduation film, *Los días perdidos* (*The Lost Days*, 1963), shows a strong affiliation with the films of Antonioni. Already apparent is Erice's powerful sense of design—the careful framing and preference for asymmetrical composition—as well as the preference for elliptical storytelling and alternation between first- and third-person narration.

A woman has returned to her hometown to clear away the personal effects of her recently deceased parent. She gazes out the rain-streaked window of the apartment but we are denied a view of what she sees. Our eyes focus on her form—at times shown in full, outlined against the window frame, at times limited to a medium shot of her face pressed against glass.

Later, the woman is joined by a former lover in an exterior location as desolate as their current relationship, which is alive only as memory. The man's clumsy attempt to rekindle the relationship only ends in her rebuking him and fleeing. The exterior setting allows the director an opportunity to present several striking tableaux in which the human form is dwarfed by architecture (either in the process of being built up or torn down) and by other surrounding landscapes.

As the woman enters the impersonal geometric space of a public telephone office to call her husband and son back in Paris, it seems that she has reclaimed her memories and moved on. In this short film, Erice experiments with the resonances of the human voice, and also with the power of the human face. The striking features of the lead actress convey whole stories with only subtle changes—a style of acting the director will continue to favor.

Los desafíos (*The Challenges*, 1969) presents an uneven triptych by three different directors around controversial themes. In parts one (directed by Guerín) and two (directed by Egea), an older Spanish man takes revenge on

a younger American man's affront to his honor. In both cases, the American outsiders are killed, but not before an already shaky balance in the Spanish family has been destroyed. A connecting theme between the first two parts is the clash between the rigid traditional societal mores of the older generation of Spaniards and an American "invasion" of that culture.²⁵

While part three, Víctor Erice's section, reads somewhat like a commentary on the American action film, it offers evidence of the kind of careful, evocative camerawork of his later films. Erice's section presents a more complex examination of the interplay of sexuality, violence, and the mysterious/absurd than is seen in the first two sections, with the American as the experienced killer and three young Spaniards (one man and two young women) as his eventual victims. As in his later films, there is a complex pattern of gazes (in what Kinder calls a "double voyeurism"—looking and being looked at) while the soundtrack fluctuates between jazz motifs, Latin and Arab-style music, and hard rock in the seemingly deserted rural village setting.

An unusual main character, a chimpanzee named Pinky, first "reads" *The Origin of the Species*, and later a copy of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and the Damned* (in English), followed by poems in French by Mallarmé. In the end, after Charlie, the American, sets off a bundle of explosives, it appears that only Pinky has survived. The monkey travels alone down a rock-strewn street in this echoless village. Suddenly there is a rear shot of a group of men, perhaps farmers, on one bank of the river, with the light reflecting off their backs. Smiling, they watch Pinky who returns their stare from the other side. The film ends with a freeze frame, a close-up of the monkey's eyes and wrinkled face. Set against music reminiscent of the Baroque period, this intercutting between the weathered face of the men and the isolation of the equally weathered chimpanzee—free from his increasingly unpredictable human companions—forms an especially striking conclusion.

Víctor Erice described this film, in our conversations together, as a means of entering into the profession, more like the passing of another exam than his own individual creative effort. He hastened to point out that, like all films that are a collection of episodes (or, in his word, "sketches"), such films really center around the producer, not the director. (In the case of *Los desafíos*, one of the producers, the American actor Dean Selmier, was also one of the main characters in each of the three episodes.) He did note, somewhat wryly, that, of all the filmings in his life, this one had been the simplest and most restful!

THE FULL-LENGTH FEATURE FILMS

What are the distinguishing qualities of the three major films by Víctor Erice that offer up new insights with each revisiting? In *Las dudas razonables de Víctor Erice* (“Víctor Erice’s Reasonable Doubts”), Miguel Marías affirms that the films are not

cold, strange, affected, cerebral or twisted, as some qualify them pejoratively . . . but rather open, simple, accessible, warm, emotional, perfectly transparent at the same time inexhaustibly mysterious, understood perfectly the first time they’re seen but in which one continues to discover things—understanding them better on each occasion . . . (p. 264).

Snapshot: A Hexagonal Window (The Spirit of the Beehive)

In an interview with Alain Philippon, Erice explained that *The Spirit of the Beehive* shows “how a child looks at history, without knowing really who Franco was, or the motives of the civil conflict. The only thing that remains for a child is that one should not talk about some things. That was the approach that interested me—the primitive way of seeing reality.”²⁶

In his directing, Víctor Erice claims inspiration from the words of Scandinavian director Carl Dreyer: “I want that the actors be (*Je veux que les acteurs soient*).” Combining professional and nonprofessional actors in a scene is something Erice finds especially stimulating, because it helps the professional actor get through his or her “armor.” The nonprofessional is not really performing, just being, and the professional actor must adjust to this. As Erice noted:

During the shooting of *The Spirit of the Beehive*, I was very anxious for Ana Torrent, because everything on the set was, for her, reality. I said to myself: “Maybe, because of this motion picture, this little girl is going to grow old too fast.” . . . I met Ana Torrent when she was six years old. Once in a while, I still call her. I feel responsible for perhaps having shortened some things from her childhood.²⁷

In “*La guerra detrás de la ventana: Notas de lectura de El espíritu de la colmena*” (“The War behind the Window: Notes on *The Spirit of the Beehive*”), Vicente Molina Foix addresses the way the fictional universe penetrates the world of *all* of the characters in this film—not only that of the two little girls—who live as “presences by means of absences” within a “filtered, cen-

sored light,” like the light reflecting off a honeycomb (p. 107). As the father Fernando tends to his hives, the myopic bees build their hexagonal combs, producing honey with its power to sweeten, sanitize, entrap.

Spanish philosopher and essayist Fernando Savater’s *Riesgos de la iniciación al espíritu* (“The Risks of Initiation into the Spirit”) asks us to look deeper into the nature of the monster’s deformity, since it shows us how the monster’s misfortune does not arise from his evilness, but rather, how he is the voiceless receptacle of the attitude that created him without granting him rights. In Savater’s view, the monster desires respect for his differences, and he desires companionship. “The monster is no more than Order’s monstrosity that segregates him, but it must be presented by the latter as a law-breaker” who will not keep silent, and yet who is denied the words that point toward human brotherhood (p. 84).²⁸ Erice compares the silence of the monster in the cinematic version to the silence that marked the birth of the cinema, before the advent of the sound film.²⁹ In his review of *The Spirit of the Beehive*, Italian novelist Alberto Moravia calls the Republican soldier “a political monster for the Francoist” (*Frankenstein in Castiglia* [“Frankenstein in Castile”] p. 268).

Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* praised the film for its portrayal of the “perilous country of children’s nightmares and fantasies” (p. 82). Citing Piaget’s theory that the past is remembered, not as lived, but rather as one perceives it, Luis O. Arata compares the Ana of *The Spirit of the Beehive* with the Ana of Carlos Saura’s subsequent film *Cría cuervos* (1976, with both roles performed by Ana Torrent) and decides that the Erice film was most successful at capturing the child’s imaginative interaction with her environment (“‘I Am Ana’: The Play of the Imagination in *The Spirit of the Beehive*,” p. 98). Describing several sequences in the film that illustrate “the play of the child’s imagination,” Arata concludes that “what Erice’s film loses in clarity, it gains by the strong imprint that such moments leave in the viewer’s mind”—moments that engage the viewer’s own imagination as well.

Erice makes use of the contrast between labyrinthian village streets and forceful lines that point to the space beyond the village (the railroad tracks, the path of the truck bringing in the “traveling film”). He also incorporates areas that are less well defined, such as the woods, and the edge of the water.³⁰ This quality is developed even further in the longer, unfinished film *El sur*. Citing Gaston Bachelard’s views that “the home is a body of dreams,” Alain Mitjaville addresses the difference between interior space (the home) and exterior space (the cinema “hall,” the abandoned sheep pen) in his essay

“Sur *l’esprit de la ruche*” (“About *The Spirit of the Beehive*,” p. 112).³¹ In the same way, Moravia addresses the austere expanse of the Castilian plain as an actual protagonist in this story.

The Spirit of the Beehive was a film that managed to evade the Francoist censors by confusing them. It follows in the pattern that Hayden White identified as the only appropriate response to the kinds of traumatic events seen in the twentieth century: multidimensional modernist forms of narration, including a kind of fragmented, partially repressed storytelling.³²

Telling a story, however truthful, about such traumatic events might very well provide a kind of “intellectual mastery” of the anxiety which memory of their occurrence may incite in an individual or community. But precisely insofar as the story is identifiable *as a story*, it can provide no lasting “psychic mastery” of such events. . . . Modernist techniques of representation provide the possibility of de-fetishizing both events and the fantasy accounts of them which deny the threat they pose . . . [and] then clear the way for that process of mourning which alone can relieve the “burden of history.”³³

At the close of the film, as Ana faces outward, we cannot help but ask ourselves: Who is this figure, this splinter of the night, standing and gazing out the open window? Perhaps the only answers are those moments when the monsters who rise up before us become part of our own name.

Snapshot: A Tree-lined Path (El sur)

In directing *El sur*, Erice was able to work with the novel by Adelaida García Morales, which was not even completely finished by the time the film project started. As in the later *Dream of Light* (*The Quince Tree Sun*), the film was a collaborative effort between artists.

Early in the film’s creation, arrangements were made to show *El sur* in three parts on television, two years after its appearance in theaters. As the film was being shot, however, new management for television programming did not honor the earlier arrangement. In addition, the producer of *El sur* would not allow the second half of the scenario to be filmed. (Note Ángel Fernández-Santos’s “33 preguntas eruditas sobre El Sur” [“Thirty-three Erudite Questions about *El sur*”] in which he asks penetrating questions about the lacunae in the film’s scenario [p. 136].) As Erice reported:

The last shot of the movie is the last shot which occurs in the North. I asked the young girl to look at the camera to tell the audience (in an in-

tuitive way) the strange feeling that I had about my film's future. Then we shot a few scenes in Madrid and in the neighborhood, and the movie was stopped. . . . The whole team was in the same situation as Estrella: we had packed our suitcases, we had our train tickets to the South when the end of the shooting became known. I have always been troubled by the coincidence between the reality of the shooting and the movie's theme. . . . Perhaps the film has become a 'modern' film, or at least a film presenting some characteristics of modernity (absence, fragmentation, empty space) but it is independent of my will.³⁴

In "*Enfance à contre-jour*" ("Childhood against the Light"), Alain Philippon notes that the very incompleteness of *El sur*, while regrettable, suits the mysterious nature of the fictional journey. Pointing to the "incomplete light" shed on childhood that connects *The Spirit of the Beehive* with *El sur*, Philippon reminds us how the adult Estrella (the offscreen narrator) is aware of the fragility of her memories of the adolescent Estrella painfully emerging from early childhood (p. 133).

In general, the characters in Erice's films do not tend to travel great distances geographically, although they might dream of distances. (Note that even the animals associated with the family in *El sur* bear witness to the distant sea: The house they are renting is called "La gaviota" [The Seagull]; the pet dog is named Sinbad.) One can only imagine that the unfolding of Estrella's journey to the South—had *El sur* been allowed to be completed as the scenario's title implies—would have yielded as many questions as answers.

In the unfinished scenario, Estrella does meet her half brother Octavio in the South. She teaches him how to hold the pendulum (and leaves it with him), thus bringing full circle one stage of the process of maturing and moving on. As Estrella returns north, in this unfilmed section, the screenplay includes the following description of the seemingly miraculous sound of a train on empty tracks:

The sound of the train increases along with that of the music. A countryside seen through a train's window: it's the South that's being left behind. Reflected in the window pane, a girl's face. Estrella . . . She looks at a photo of Agustín as a child that Milagros had given her.³⁵

In his detailed explication of novel and film, Antonio Santos compares the protagonists (named Adriana and Estrella) and notes their common loneliness ("*Piedras vivas, almas muertas: Al otro lado del mapa, El sur*") ["Live Stones, Dead Souls: The Other Side of the Map/*El sur*: Novel and Film"] (p. 151).

Santos points out that one can see a greater tension between mother and daughter in the original novel. Another important transformation is in the occupation of the father's distant lover—from an owner of an antique shop to a movie actress. What remains constant, however, is the transference of magic, and underlying sadness, between father and daughter.

In a talk given in 1993 to a group of young Spanish and Latin American writers in a seminar on literature and compromise organized by the Centro Euro-Latinoamericano de Juventud (CEULAJ) in Mollina (Málaga), Erice specifically addresses the relationship of literature and the cinema ("*Literatura y cinema*" ["Literature and Cinema"]).³⁶ He acknowledges that, in relation to literature, painting, or music, cinema is a newer language, and one that has often been considered an outsider and mistreated by society: "a side-show, a rabble art form without the slightest nobility . . . with even the reputation of being an impure language." Nevertheless, he underlines the links between all of the artistic languages, not least of all in the kinds of difficulties they must surmount. One can even detect a slight twinkle in the eye as he reminds us that, in some cases (as in his own experience with the Frankenstein image) the cinema often "gets there first" for many people.

El sur continues the image seen in the earlier films, that of a character gazing at another through windows. The father, Agustín, (played by noted Italian actor Omero Antonutti) peers at his emotionally estranged daughter through her photograph displayed along with the photos of brides and soldiers in a local photographer's shop window.³⁷ The daughter herself gazes at her own image there. A former lover of the father is shown to us only through her image on the screen in a B-grade film, *Flor en la sombra*, (literally, "flower in the shadow") which happens to come to town. Calling *El sur* a kind of modern "woman's film," Evans and Fiddian compare Agustín watching *Flor en la sombra* to Don Quixote, as a figure unable to distinguish between reality and imagination ("Victor Erice's *El sur*: A Narrative of Star-Cross'd Lovers" [p. 149]).³⁸ As in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, it is a cinematic image, gazed at by the protagonist, that offers the impetus for dramatic change.

The director had planned to model the second part of *El sur* on Jean Renoir's 1950 film *The River*, set in India. He envisioned a complete film with a tone that was less sad, a film that would help chart the road from adolescence to a deeper sense of identity. "Estrella, while discovering the South, should have discovered the childhood and adolescence of her father, her father's loves, totaling the paternal portrait, and so she could exit childhood."³⁹

As Erice wrote of Daniel, one of the protagonists of Marsé's *El embrujo de Shanghai*, one must grow "towards the past" to become the narrator of one's own tale (*Todos los caminos llegan a Shanghai* [All Roads Lead to Shanghai]).⁴⁰

Erice's description of Renoir's motivations, and means of actualizing his goals, for *The River* echo the Spanish director's own working style. In his introduction of the film (which he had personally chosen for a retrospective viewing at the Taormina Festival of Cinema in 1997), Erice described this "coming of age" story as "an extraordinary example of how the cinema has become a means of knowledge, an open window onto the world" ("*Presentación de The River de Jean Renoir*").⁴¹ He is specific about what kind of knowledge he is referring to: "the need to rediscover one's origins, the search for an essential fraternity, something that has been lost in the so-called 'societies of abundance'."

I saw *El sur* for the second time in a special showing for high school students at the Cleveland Cinematheque. This unusually homogenous audience revealed the film to me in new ways. The teenagers found the clichés in the B-grade movie *Flor en la sombra*—the film within a film—hysterically funny, and they laughed in recognition of the awkwardness in the phone conversation between the adolescent Estrella and the boy who claims to care for her, nicknamed "Crazy Bill." They also picked up on the endearing humor in the down-to-earth chattering of the nursemaid from the South, Milagros. At first I was concerned that the film would be too subtle and sophisticated for them, but from the opening sequence in which Estrella first takes the pendulum from its case, a hush settled over this adolescent crowd.

The only moment I resented their reactions was the scene I had been waiting for: the child Estrella bicycles away from the camera down the long, tree-lined path from her house, and the adolescent Estrella returns, bicycling toward us along the same path, followed by the dog Sinbad (now grown larger), as the offscreen narrator announces: "I grew up just like everyone else." The high school audience found this transformation extremely amusing. This magical transition, so unexpected, may be something only those who are past such vulnerable adolescent years can appreciate.

In sequences like the one just mentioned, Erice prefers to work with the camera (in his own words) "like a primitive," setting up shots as carefully as possible while shooting, rather than later in the laboratory. He explained: "Even the crossing over from childhood to adolescence in *El sur*, with the setting of the trees running along the path, has been shot like that, placing in front of the camera (which was ready to shoot the second setting) a picture

of the first setting.”⁴² In “Victor Erice and the Only Time,” Maeda Hideki beautifully describes those dissolves (which he calls “a peculiar will to transcend itself within the camera”) in his Bergsonian evocation of “the only time” (both one and many) in this sequence in which “the tree-lined road in the plain, the traveling of the bicycle, and the camera which perceives these things form three aspects of continuity.” (p. 246)

What is the nature of these dissolves? The wind that lifts the leaves imperceptibly, a palette of light and shadow that breaks up before our eyes. More emphatic transitional moments would offer no new delights. In *El sur* faces dissolve to lakes, to rough-hewn stone walls. The dissolves in Erice’s films are unobtrusive—one image lightly superimposed upon another—but they tear at your heart.

Snapshot: A Bowl of Quince (Dream of Light [The Quince Tree Sun])

Dream of Light (*The Quince Tree Sun*) did not begin as an idea for a movie. Erice spent some time during the summer of 1990 with the painter Antonio López García while he was painting urban landscapes. He also heard the painter recount a dream (the one that Antonio López would subsequently narrate near the close of the film). Erice felt moved to start this new film when the painter invited him to view the start of a new painting project. The director arrived with a small team. “More than the idea of making a movie,” he noted, “there was the will to live a new experience” (Photo 18).⁴³

Who is this prolific painter and sculptor? Antonio López García (b. 1936 in Tomelloso) had shown exceptional talent for art from an early age. After studying with his uncle, the painter Antonio López Torres, he entered the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Madrid while still in his early teens. At first his work displayed some influence from surrealism and classicism, but he has primarily adhered to a realistic style (even at a time when only abstraction was considered popular). Antonio López has continued to explore the parameters of a realism which does not rest in photographic “perfection.” Art critic Robert Hughes, who has called him “the greatest realist artist alive,” wrote:

López’s art is not just about appearance. Its essential subject is time—how to use it, how to slow its passage, how to testify about a fugitive world that changes as he looks.⁴⁴

Antonio López has been honored with retrospective exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in Brussels, the Staempfli and Marlborough Gal-

leries (New York), and at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid. His works are in the permanent collections of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Baltimore Museum of Art; and Detroit Institute of Art, among others. Despite this prominence, his subject matter remains the same. As Antonio Bonet Correa explained in the catalogue of the Reina Sofía exhibition:

When we look at one of his pictures and statues, we marvel at both the plastic qualities and the theme, which in itself is banal or slight at first blush. A plate with the remains of a meal, a skinned rabbit, the back of a man or a woman or the panorama of a city awe us by their indecipherable presence. The silence of the objects and the muteness of the living beings are unsurpassably eloquent.⁴⁵

While filming *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)*, Erice reread essays by film theorist André Bazin, and pondered a statement by Rossellini about how we must have faith in reality. (In “Alternatives to Modernity,” Víctor Erice writes that, after seeing a series of films by Rossellini, he came to understand “why a cinematographic image could only be beautiful by being necessary, that is, by being exact.”) Erice’s concern with respecting reality compelled him to include in the film whoever happened to be in the space of the artist’s studio and courtyard. No one was especially invited to enter the film, and no one who was there was excluded.

This is why the Polish workers appear in the movie: they were there, that is where I met them. I vaguely knew about them before we started shooting, but I did not really know what they were doing. . . . On the first day, the sound engineer told me: “There are terrible sounds in the house. Somebody is hammering non-stop. Why don’t you tell them to go away? They are really bothering us, and they might disturb the dialogue.” But I insisted that it was more important to respect reality, to keep going. . . . That is how we met the Polish workers. They were right away integrated into the film.⁴⁶

Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun) offers a host of “supporting characters” (including the film camera) interacting with the two protagonists of the film—the painter and the tree—extending Antonio López’s world in time, (as William Johnson writes) “both forward and backward.” To the López courtyard come many visitors, including Enrique Gran, Lucio Muñoz, and Julio López Hernández (friends from his Escuela de Bellas Artes days), his daughters, a Chinese visitor and her translator, world events re-

ported by radio, and the camera itself. In a short piece of writing that accompanies the press book on the film, Víctor Erice takes note of the way the camera imposed its own limits while also capturing things that could not be shown in the painting, like the sound and movement around the artist.⁴⁷

The result is a rich tapestry of conversations and everyday events. Erice has come to consider the documentary and the fiction film two forms that could not necessarily be clearly separated. As he wrote in his review of the Antonioni film *Eclipse*, “New problems require new forms.”⁴⁸ A sense of exactness prevailed in *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)*: shooting began on Sept. 29, 1990 and ended on Dec. 10 (eight weeks in total), plus four days in the spring of 1991 when, by chance, Erice found traces of paint on the older quince still visible after six months of rain and snow. The film is divided into four “chapters.” Erice explains his documentary-like aspect in the following way:

[There is] the superficial dimension of the film, the documentary dimension, that is to say what constitutes a testimony on the way the artist Antonio López works. I strive for it so the result of the shooting preserves, in the first place, this objective character, a little bit didactic perhaps, to be able to transcend the subject, once reached, and attain another dimension.⁴⁹

The only divergent point from this strict adherence to a unity of time and space was the (premeditated) filming of Madrid’s “barley-sugar” TV antenna, and other scenes of televisions in private apartments, outside the neighborhood of Antonio López’s studio in Madrid. Erice dubbed the large antenna the “Tree of Electronics” and called the TV sets “false suns.”

The limited setting of the studio and its courtyard in *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)* becomes a microcosm which the viewer “enters,” at first somewhat self-consciously, then in a more relaxed manner. Neither inner nor outer, the Mediterranean courtyard, like the one in the Madrid dwelling where Antonio López has his studio, is visible from the windows of the house but hidden from the demands of the outside gaze. The exuberance of color that marks the Mediterranean natural world in general—green leaves, white stucco, red roof tiles—also forms part of the dynamic of the courtyard garden. Accompanied by the sound of fountains and birds, it is a world to delight the senses.

By the time Antonio López attempted the painting of the quince tree recorded in *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)*, he had completed several

sketches and paintings of the tree, and of other quinces, over the years. In the painter's own words: "Every autumn I stand next to the tree with my fishing rod. And if I do not get a bite, the purpose is to be here."⁵⁰

In his *Film Quarterly* review of the film, William Johnson notes that the film's "(apparent) realism leads not to tidy conclusion but to challenging questions and answers . . . [such as]: Why paint? Why paint like this? Why make a film like this?" [p. 178] The artist is concerned with time on many dimensions, but the tree is indifferent to all of his concerns. There is something quietly heroic about the man's effort. In a dissolve reminiscent of the one in *El sur* in which Estrella "grows up," the image of José Carretero, the young painter at the López studio, painstakingly holding up a leaf of the quince tree with a long pole becomes an image of the older artist, Enrique Gran, in the same pose, performing the same function.

Evoking, like Mitjaville, the writings of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, Francisco Calvo Serraller notes the tension between interior and exterior, between the "space of the intimate and the space of immensity" in Antonio López's art.⁵¹ He writes: "Antonio López has produced his work in a state of permanent doubt, internal or external"⁵² In the portion of the interview with Antonio López that he conducted several years ago, art historian and critic Michael Brenson helps us understand the process involved in the kind of figurative art Antonio López undertakes—the preparation, the need for persistence, the disinterest in the idea of "finishing." In the interview with Brenson, the painter asserts: "The picture is never finished: it always remains open (p. 212)."

Erice interprets the painter's principal themes as "the same as those of the Spanish Baroque, of Velázquez, and the same as the poetry of Quevedo. . . . There is in the Baroque a semblance of sleep in death, the idea of the light that is extinguished, and of death."⁵³ Film scholar Jean-Louis Leutrat comments on the many "deaths" in *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)*—the death-like state in the pose on the painted canvas (with its evocation of the deathbed scene in *Citizen Kane*), the decay of the fruit itself, the warnings of winter in this special "quince tree sun" period, the deaths associated with the political situations reported on the radio, and the symbolic "death" of the painting of the quince tree itself.⁵⁴ There is also death in the film where "childhood is encrusted on the sensibility of the person like the voice of the painter in the dream, like a voice beyond the tomb."⁵⁵ Leutrat finds no pathos in the film, no sense of despair, only a little sadness and a sense of resignation, tainted with humor (as in the "modest Sistine Chapel ceiling" the artist

erects over the rain-soaked tree). Noting the movement of expansion (an opening up to the rest of the world) and retraction (a reflection of the painter on his work) that forms the “breath” of the film, Leutrat acknowledges the demands it places on the viewer. “All the film, in a certain fashion, demands that one move upstream, just as one ascends the course of a river.”⁵⁶ In his *Sight and Sound* review, Phillip Strick links Antonio López in the “death-like” pose for the painting by his wife María Moreno to the other “troubled patriarchs [in Erice’s films] with mysterious and elusive skills” who end up being “men seen through female eyes” (p. 274).

In 1962, Antonio López finished a painting entitled *Death Mask of César Vallejo*, which is a bold portrait of the South American poet, lying prone on a bed, accompanied by the following words of the poet: *Me moriré en París con aguacero un día del cual tengo ya el recuerdo* (I shall die in Paris on a day of heavy rain, of which I already have the memory).⁵⁷ These words in yellow, written carefully in cursive letters across the bottom of the painting, make it seem as if the poet could reach backwards, as well as forwards, to record after death the paradox of a memory of the future. This mixing of an image of death with the final blessing of rain foreshadows the dream sequence in *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)* in which the painter’s recollection of childhood through his dream combines in our minds with the images of rain pouring down on the patient quince tree. A man is depicted as if he were a tree, reclining in space.

The strong features and uncompromising placement of the figure in this early painting bring to mind the words of Antonio López in another part of the interview with Michael Brenson, in which he explains a characteristic of Spanish art in the following manner:

Italy has inherited a prestigious culture and a familiarity with the forms of expressing the human figure which we don’t have here. . . . In Spanish painting, a cloth is a piece of cloth, not a form that moves with gracious rhythm; a plate is a plate; a table is a table; a nude is a naked human figure. . . . This unwillingness to alter reality for esthetic reasons, or the inability to do so, has been a problem for some and a scandal for others.⁵⁸

The first long sequence of *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)*—preparing a canvas, starting to paint—is presented without any dialogue. Words enter only later. In her *New York Times* review, Janet Maslin records her surprise at how suspense is created by watching the artist silently prepare his work space (p. 186). In “Silences: Víctor Erice’s Use of Sound,” Dominique

Russell observes how silence is used in all of Erice's films to add meaning to the elliptical narratives; to comment on the characters' sense of isolation or on their quiet, contemplative state; and to offer a refuge and a means of self-preservation (p. 249). Russell notes how Erice uses ambient sounds to draw attention to silence.

In *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)*, we often find a sequence fading to the white canvas of the screen. At times, as in the voice-over narration of the painter's dream near the end of the film, words are deliberately inserted. Erice gives the following explanation: "I had the impression that something very intimate between the tree and Antonio had escaped the camera. It is for that reason that speech enters the film at certain moments, in full force. . . . Speech enters the film like memory."⁵⁹

Near the end of *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)*, the written title "*primavera*" (spring) appears near the bottom of the screen. We had forgotten that the tree would bloom again, ever more fully. A tree is reflected in a man; a man casts his shadow onto a tree. As Jean Louis Schefer wrote at the conclusion of his essay entitled "On the Object of Figuration": "Pictures maintain a fiction of a place: a window through which a patch of color watches the enigmatic body floating free, away from painting's geometry."⁶⁰

THE SPANISH/HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Despite their international resonance, it would be impossible to imagine Erice's films outside of their Spanish context. Just as directors like Ozu Yasujiro, Zhang Yimou, Carl Dreyer, Sergei Paradjanov, and Abbas Kiarostami invoke the rhythm of a particular place to shape their stories, so does Erice draw on the rhythm of life in Spain at various points in its recent history. Even the unfinished projects were positioned as new presentations of Spanish art and literature. In classifying *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)* as an "international subgenre of documentary that transgresses the borders with fiction," Marsha Kinder refers to the statement by French director Jean Renoir that the deeper one plunges into his or her cultural specificity, the more international will be the appeal of the work ("Documenting the National and Its Subversion in a Democratic Spain" [p. 207]). In his own writings in terms of the films of the late 1950s and '60s emerging from France and Italy, Erice notes a somewhat paradoxical need "to have an international stylistic validity and . . . to be adaptable to a concrete reality, more precisely, a local problematic."⁶¹

This fact is acknowledged by Fernando Savater who writes in the conclusion of his evocative essay on *The Spirit of the Beehive*: “The beehive in which Erice’s spirit struggles is undoubtedly Spain. It would be as absurd to decontextualize the film by forgetting this fact—by degrading it to an intangible allegory—as it would be to subordinate all its meaning to the strange tangle of Spanish history” (p. 96). In the same way, film scholar Leger Grindon has identified films about the past as ways of “grappling with the present” (with the additional possible motives of an escape into nostalgia, an appeal to authority and truth, a veil to hide controversial views, and/or a search for origins).⁶² Evans and Fiddian consider a subtext of *El sur* a kind of warning about the health of a nation (Spain) that fails to confront outdated societal modes. Noting the separation of father and son into “opposite ends of a divided nation,” they also point to the signs in the film of the pressures on women in Spanish society to conform to conventional roles. Citing Wayne Booth’s concept of the “implied author,” Evans and Fiddian state: “the events in Estrella’s life are given a strategic order designed by Erice to make the viewer progress beyond the narrator’s limited field of interests to the contexts of history and ideology” (p. 143). John Pym also connects the psychological disintegration of the father in *El sur* to the health of the country in referring to “that island of the mind on which the history of his country, as well as his own character, has marooned him.” (p. 270)

In “*El discurso familiar en El espíritu de la colmena*” (“Familiar Discourse in *The Spirit of the Beehive: The Parents’ Estrangement*”), Miguel Ángel Lomillos notes how the “closed and obsessive world” of the parents illustrates both a particular historical time (the Spain of 1940) and a generalized “emotional landscape” of isolation and sadness that colors all of the characters of the film, including the representatives of Franco’s regime (p. 118). Russell points to the way silence is an underlying state in the life of the family in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, but how it develops over time in *El sur*. While Lomillos sees image and sound in Erice’s first film as an index of distance and absence, he concludes that, ultimately, a greater emphasis is placed on the need to restore family unity. As Robert A. Rosenstone points out in *Revisiting History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*, it is no coincidence that the “New History film,” which aims to understand the legacy of the past, “tends to grow out of communities that see themselves in desperate need of historical connections . . . [such as] societies recovering from totalitarian regimes or the horrors of war.”⁶³

Molina Foix praises Víctor Erice for avoiding a stereotypically dialectical vision of the post-Civil War period, while at the same time forcing us to see representations of the conflict in another guise. In contrast, in his *Sight and Sound* review entitled “Whispers and Raptures,” Paul Julian Smith warns that both *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *El sur* run the risk of falsely personalizing the real effects of the deadly Francoist regime by focusing on “the problem of the family as asylum from history” (p. 183). Smith, who questions the auteurist mystique that tends to surround Víctor Erice, mildly accuses the film director of being part of a group of Spanish auteurs content with a “nostalgic resource to reassuring popular clichés” in the aestheticization and privatization of political issues. Smith calls *Dream of Light* (*The Quince Tree Sun*) Víctor Erice’s most abstract film, but also, somewhat paradoxically, his most historical. He points to what he calls a “central and fruitful contradiction” in Erice’s cinematic practice:

the attempt to combine the rapture of cinema, experienced as the ecstatic suspension of time before the luminous image, with the revelation of history through the exploration of the way the traumas of Spanish politics have made their presence felt over time (p. 181).

One senses that Víctor Erice was not overwhelmed by the “freedom” inherent in the artistic climate of post-Franco Spain. He continued to show the same sense of restraint, the same integrity of image and performance, that marked his first full-length film. If any change can be noted, it is that, in the journey from the villages of Castile in Erice’s first two films to the new cosmopolitanism and internationalism of the Madrid of the 1990s in his third, there is a certain “opening up” of the image to let in more light.

SNAPSHOT: A BRIDGE

When asked by the French journal *Libération* “Why do you make films?”, Víctor Erice cited Jean Renoir’s statement: “The cinema is made to create a bridge” (“¿Por qué hace Ud. el cine?” [“Why Do You Make Films?”] p. 53).⁶⁴ Erice contrasts the natural and spontaneous relationship with the cinema enjoyed by filmmakers and spectators of Renoir’s time with that of our own in which there is a risk of the disappearance of the cinema, as it has been known, like some kind of animal facing extinction through the mishandling of the environment that surrounds it.

Comparing, somewhat melancholically, cinema as it was—a genuine artistic language—to its current form (which fails to offer the kind of “consolation” that could be found in the earlier experience of the cinema [“Alternatives to Modernity”]), Erice notes that, fortunately, in different corners of the world, a cinema worth contemplating still exists. What divides “then” and “now” is more than just the size of the visual image (the size of the film screen versus the TV screen). One senses that Erice would find little consolation in new technologies that increase the size of the image so that people can watch “entertainment” with more visual clarity in the isolated shelter of their living rooms.

Inspired by “the transparency of our childhood’s classical cinema” (“The Odessa Steps”), Víctor Erice has faced barriers for decades, never turning away to rest in a comfortable theatricality. In Erice’s work, a craving for the fresh image is mixed with the compelling thought of times which were—if not necessarily simpler—more open to possibilities. On the other hand, while the movement forward in his films is almost imperceptible at times, it is always there. As Paul Julian Smith concludes: “Searching for light, hunting for time, Erice pursues that curious combination of movement and stasis (sequence and frame) which is inherent in cinema” (p. 185).

In “Víctor Erice’s Reasonable Doubts,” Miguel Marías praises the film director for questioning cinema’s roles and limits (something he finds rare in today’s film world). With each new film, Marías asserts, Erice has explored new territory “on cinema’s provisional frontier,” each time taking greater risks (p. 260).

Beyond the “mystery-suspense aspects” and “sense of a self-imposed struggle against ungovernable forces” that writers like Strick see in Erice’s films lies a sense of celebration—a celebration of the power of the imagination (something that transcends even the will to survive), a celebration of re-growth. From the children who grow up with incomplete, silenced stories of the past comes an attempt to reclaim memory, in the present. The windows in Erice’s films become progressively more open, until they disappear altogether.

A window is an invitation, a selected view. A figure gazes out a window at an internal landscape which we, as spectators, are privileged to view, for an instant, just as she lifts up a corner of the curtain to look outside. A young woman hides away pages of her diary, then turns to face the mirror . . . An older woman returns to her childhood home, now empty, and gazes out the window at the rain . . . A child stands before a large window opening out onto the night, and faces the unknown. Erice’s films are filled with pages of our diaries we had thought lost.

Father and daughter gaze at each other through a café window, divided not so much by the glass but by the letter that rests on the table between them . . . In a restaurant full of mirrors, the father gazes self-reflexively at what is left of his own image.

A young girl pulls back a curtain, and the camera pans up and over the glass divider as if there were no walls . . . An artist constructs a frame, without glass, through which to contemplate his model in the light.

The dim yellow of the hexagonal windows in *The Spirit of the Beehive* (what Giavarini calls “the honey-gold round light”) has become the vivid yellow of the quinces in *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)*, a yellow that Jean-Louis Leutrat compares to the exact tone sought by Van Gogh, but without the Dutch artist’s “fever and exaltation.”⁶⁵

Like the painter Antonio López, the director sometimes seems to prefer to put a project aside until some time in the future, when the climate becomes less inclement. When asked by Tomás Pérez Turrent if we must wait another ten years to see another Víctor Erice film, the director replied that, while he hoped that this will not be so, he has become aware through *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)* that “direct contact with reality, without any mediation” is crucial for him. “I think the cinema now lives enclosed in a suffocating microcosm, and we must open more than one window to renew the air.”⁶⁶

NOTES

With thanks to Paul Julian Smith for the felicitous phrase “objects suspended in light”, which appears in his review of *Dream of Light (The Quince Tree Sun)*, reprinted in this anthology (p. 180).

After the manuscript of *An Open Window* was completed, the fate of Víctor Erice’s cinematic adaptation of Juan Marsé’s *El embrujo de Shanghai* became clear. In an interview with Mario Campaña, published in the November 1999 issue of the journal *Ajoblanco*, Víctor Erice explained what had led up to the curtailment of this project. (The producer, Andrés Vicente Gómez, has subsequently offered the film to another Spanish director, Fernando Trueba.)

In the interview, Erice notes that the novel interested him because it presented an atmosphere and themes with which he was familiar. He reported that he spent over three years on the screenplay, writing as many as ten versions. Although readers of the screenplay (including Juan Marsé) offered “favorable, even enthusiastic” impressions, the length of the film (three hours) was cause for some concern. Erice defended the need for the longer running time:

This length was not the result of improvisation, but rather was carefully developed, in keeping with one of the main features of Marsé’s story: the reflection of the passing of

time, the traces that it left in the lives of the protagonists. There exist, and will continue to exist in the world, films of comparable length that are distributed through normal channels. I thought, therefore, that it was reasonable to fight to bring the project to fruition.

As he began to prepare the film in 1998, certain patterns that did not correspond to the necessities of the film as it had been conceived began to become clear. These were patterns concerning the artistic design, the work plan, and so on. In the interview, Erice stated that he considered them to be the consequence of “tight-fistedness” and limited vision that “contrasted markedly with the grandiose image that was being projected publicly. . . .”

Suddenly, at the beginning of June 1998, with no warning, the producer suspended the preparations for the film. At the end of December 1998, Erice finished a new version of the screenplay that reduced the length of the film by approximately forty minutes. To his surprise, however, this measure didn’t succeed in modifying the plans for production. “Indeed, what prevailed was the same notable lack of fit between the means and the ends. Fed up, I threw in the towel.” (From “*Memoria y sueño: Entrevista con Víctor Erice*,” in *Ajoblanco* 123 [November 1999]: 28–29. Translation by Linda C. Ehrlich and J. Christopher Eustis.)

For all of us who contributed to this anthology, and who eagerly await the next Erice film, this has been an unfortunate progression of events to witness, even at a distance. I decided to include Helena Rotés’s essay on Juan Marsé, as originally planned, because it helps shed light on the (unfilmed) Erice scenario. Subsequently, there have been reports of another Erice scenario, entitled *Cazadores de sombras*, which could be made into a new film. At this stage, we can only await further word on this new project. *Ed.*

1. Miguel Ángel Lomillos, “Donde todas las historias pueden suceder: entrevista con Víctor Erice” (Where all the stories can happen: interview with Víctor Erice), *Banda Aparte* 9/10 (1997): 86. Translation of this paragraph by Linda C. Ehrlich, with the assistance of Armando Zubizaretta. Unless otherwise indicated, all other translations from the Spanish in this essay are by Guy H. Wood and Julie H. Croy.

2. “Alternativas a la modernidad” (Alternatives to modernity). This essay was based on a talk given by Víctor Erice in Gerona, in the Centro Cultural La Merced, on 10 November, 1994, and published in the *Banda aparte* special edition 9/10 (January 1998): 5–9.

3. After the initial presentation of the titles of films and essays in their original language and English translation, subsequent references are given only in English, for the sake of brevity. (In the case of *El sur*, the original Spanish title is used throughout because the film is most commonly known by this name.) Víctor Erice’s third film *El sol del membrillo* has been variously translated into English as *Dream of Light* and *The Quince Tree Sun*. While the former is more commonly seen, the latter captures more accurately the Spanish nuance; hence the editor’s decision to use both titles throughout.

4. This phrase is from an essay by Víctor Erice, entitled “Cine y poesía” (Cinema and poetry), which was published in the journal *Poesía en el campus* 36 (University of Zaragoza, 1996–97) and reprinted in the *Banda aparte* special edition: 91.

5. Víctor Erice, "A una sombra," *Cinema 2002* 61/62 (March/April 1980): 114. Translation by Linda C. Ehrlich.

6. Antonio Eceiza (b. 1935) wrote film criticism for *Nuestro cine* and *Film Ideal*, and directed four films with the Querejeta production company, including *Las secretas intenciones* (*Secret Intentions*, 1969) with cinematography by Luis Cuadrado and performance by French actor Jean Louis Trintignant. Forced to leave Spain for political reasons from 1973 until the late 1970s, he also made films in Paris and Mexico. More recently, he has made films dealing with the Basque country, including *Días de humo* (*Days of Smoke*, 1989). Miguel Picazo (b. 1927) directed *La tía Tula* (*Aunt Tula*, 1964) and *Extramuros* (*Outside the Walls*, 1985), both featuring actress Aurora Bautista. He has also worked extensively in television.

7. Claudio Guerin (1939–1973), film and theater critic, wrote for *Nuestro cine* and also produced programs on Spanish culture and world dramatic literature for Spanish television. He directed *La casa de las palomas* (1971) and *La campaña del infierno* (1973).

José Luís Egea (b. 1940) studied at the Sorbonne and was a film critic for *Nuestro cine*, *Cuadernos de arte y pensamiento*, and *Acento*. He was co-screenwriter for *El próximo otoño*.

8. *Dream of Light* (*The Quince Tree Sun*) won the Special Jury Prize in the 1992 Cannes Film Festival, and the FIPRESCI Catholic Film Critics' Award the same year.

In a poll of film curators and reviewers from around the United States and Canada, conducted by *Film Comment*, *Dream of Light* (*The Quince Tree Sun*) was listed as ninth on a short list of foreign films that should have North American distributors, but, unfortunately, don't. ("Foreign Affairs: Which foreign films must be seen at all costs?" *Film Comment* [July/August 1997]: 40–41.) This situation was corrected somewhat in 1999 when Facets Multimedia offered a VHS version of the film.

9. Tomás Pérez Turrent, "Entretien avec Víctor Erice: La possibilité de reproduire les apparences," *Positif* (May 1993): 10. Translation by Martine Thibonnier.

10. Japanese names are given in traditional Japanese style, with surname first. Professor Hasumi offers insights in this essay into a remarkable friendship—an account that was confirmed in my talks with both men, on different continents. In coining a phrase that could be translated as "Erice time," Professor Hasumi recalls in his essay a seemingly meandering walk through the old section of Madrid with Víctor Erice, discussing "the power and art of the cinema" in a style both leisurely and profoundly focused.

11. See Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 76–87.

12. Turrent, "Entretien," 10.

13. Fernando Savater, "¡Qué hermosa es!" *Casablanca* 31/32 (July/Aug. 1983): 53–54. Reprinted in *Instrucciones para olvidar el Quijote* (Madrid: Taurus, 1995), 153–56. Translation of this passage by Linda C. Ehrlich, with the assistance of Armando Zubizaretta.

14. Víctor Erice, "Serge Daney," *Archipiélago* 22 (Autumn 1995). Presented first as part of a public homage to Serge Daney on 5 March 1993 at the Filmoteca Española.

15. This was originally presented as a lecture organized by Los Amigos de la Residente de Estudiantes (23 February 1989).

16. This essay was published in the *Banda aparte* special edition: 3–4.

17. In this essay, Erice reports on an encounter with von Sternberg in Mannheim, in which he heard the older director assert, “What is normally understood by reality has never interested me; I’ve shot all my movies in a studio.” “The Secret Adventure of Josef Von Sternberg,” *Nuestro cine* 58 (January 1967).

18. He even notes this pattern of ascent and descent in the fictional character of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s screenwriter, Pat Hobby. Víctor Erice, “Welles 1939: Pat Hobby, Orson Welles y el tranvía de Charles Chaplin,” *Nuestro cine* 39 [1965]. Reprinted in part in the *Banda aparte* special edition: 106.

19. Translation courtesy of the International Film Festival in Rotterdam. An English translation of this essay appeared in their twentieth film festival catalogue, in 1991.

20. Published in Mañuel Hidalgo’s *Pablo G. del Amo, montador de sueños* (Festival de Alcalá de Henares, 1987) and also in *Diario 16* (14 November 1987). A portion of the text is published in the *Banda aparte* special edition: 97–98.

21. From “Itinerario de Kenji Mizoguchi,” *Nuestro cine* 37 (January 1965): 15–28. Translated by Linda C. Ehrlich, with thanks to Jacqueline Nanfito for her suggestions.

22. From Víctor Erice, “A Testimony from a Spanish Bressonian,” in *Robert Bresson*, ed. James Quandt (Toronto: Cinémathèque Ontario, 1998), 544.

23. First presented as a talk to the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid (December 1994), in a colloquium on the theme “The Cinema and the Other Arts.” Printed in part in the *Banda aparte* special edition: 120–21.

24. See Santos Zunzunegui, “Between History and Dream: Víctor Erice’s *El espíritu de la colmena*,” in *Modes of Representation in Spanish Cinema*, ed. Jenaro Talens and Santos Zunzunegui (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 135. Translated by Tom Conley.

25. For a more detailed analysis of this film, see Marsha Kinder, *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 172–83. Kinder identifies connecting themes in the first two stories as “the incestuous coupling of father and daughter (which is associated with Spain’s patriarchal traditions and with the sadistic aesthetic) against the incestuous pairing of mother and son (which is linked to the neurotic rebelliousness of the American counterculture and to masochism as theorized by Deleuze),” 173.

26. Alain Philippon, “Víctor Erice: Le détour par l’enfance,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 405 (March 1988): vi. Translation by Martine Thibonnier.

27. Philippon, “Détour,” vii.

28. For additional reading on the use of the Frankenstein story in a cinematic setting, see James A. W. Hefferman, “Looking at the Monster: *Frankenstein* and Film,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1997): 133–58. Hefferman writes:

By forcing us to face the monster’s physical repulsiveness, which he can never deny or escape and which aborts his every hope of gaining sympathy, film versions of *Frankenstein*

prompt us to rethink his monstrosity in terms of visualization: how do we see the monster, what does he see, and how does he want to be seen?" (136)

Also, Michael Grant, "James Whale's *Frankenstein*: The Horror Film and the Symbolic Biology of the Cinematic Monster," in *Frankenstein, Creation and Monstrosity*, ed. Stephen Bann (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 113–35, and Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, "The Frankenstein Myth in Contemporary Cinema," in *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity and the Criticism of Discourse and Media*, ed. William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary A. Copeland (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 161–82. Rushing and Frentz point out the difference between utopian fiction, which sees the robot positively, as the product of reason, and dystopian fiction, which views it as evil, foreboding, and an expression of our unconscious fears (163).

29. "Literature and Cinema" (*Literatura y cinéma*), Málaga (1963). Reprinted in part in the *Banda aparte* special edition: 117–19.

30. See Jean Poulet, "Espace mental et filmique dans le cinéma espagnol," *Cin'émAction* 75 (April 1995): 204–09.

31. In particular, Mičjaville is referring to Bachelard's book *La poétique de l'espace*, published in 1958 by Presses Universitaires de France. An English translation by Maria Jolas was published by Beacon Press in 1964.

32. See his essay on "The Modernist Event," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (New York: Routledge, 1996), 17–38, and Vivian Sobchack's "Introduction: History Happens," 1–16.

33. White, "Modernist Event," 32.

34. Philippon, "Détour," vii.

35. A portion of the unfiled scenario for the second half of *El sur* appeared in *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 411 (September 1984): 97–101.

36. "Literature and Film" Málaga (24 February 1993). Reprinted in part in the *Banda aparte* special edition: 117–19.

37. Omero Antonutti is also known for his screen appearances in *Padre Padrone* and *The Night of the Shooting Stars* (both by the Taviani brothers), and for his appearances in Rossellini's *Italy, Year Zero* and Fabio Carpi's *Basileus Quartet*. Erice chose this actor to play the father because he wanted someone who was not very well known to Spanish audiences at that time.

38. The parallels they see between *El sur* and the "woman's picture" include: the use of a first-person female narrator, and the placing of the life (especially the struggles) of a woman in the foreground of the narrative. They also point out parallels to the thriller and *film noir* genres, as well as to the general fascination with the *femme fatale* in the classical Hollywood cinema.

Note also the intriguing parallels between *El sur* and Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (a poster for this film is displayed in the Cine Arcadia during Estrella's second visit there). For further discussion, see Malcolm Alan Compitello, "Making *El Sur*," *Revista Hispánica Moderna* (Hispanic Institute, Columbia University, 1993): 84–86.

39. Philippon, "Détour," vii.

40. Víctor Erice, "Todos los caminos llegan a Shanghai," *El País (Babelia revista cultural)* (16 April 1994).

41. Translation by Linda C. Ehrlich, with the assistance of Armando Zubizaretta. In this introduction, Erice also refers to Roberto Rossellini's documentary film, (*Inde, terre mere*, 1957–1959) set in India, which was filmed seven years after Renoir's feature film based on a novel by Rumer Godden.

42. Philippon, "Détour," vii.

43. Turrent, "Entretien," 10.

44. Robert Hughes, "The Truth in the Details," *Time* (21 April 1986): 83.

45. Antonio Bonet Correa, "La leyenda de la realidad," *Exposición antológica Antonio López: Pintura/Escultura/Dibujo* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1993), 32.

46. Turrent, "Entretien," 14–15.

47. "Cómo surgió *El sol del membrillo*," *El sol del membrillo Press Book* (1992).

48. Víctor Erice, "Eclipse en las conciencias," *Nuestro cine* 19 (1963): 8–11.

49. Turrent, "Entretien," 11.

50. Turrent, "Entretien," 12.

51. Francisco Calvo Serraller, "Enlightened Reality: The Paintings and Drawings of Antonio López García," in *Antonio López García*, ed. Michael Brenson, F. Calvo Serraller, and Edward J. Sullivan (New York: Rizzoli International, 1990), 23.

The window has appeared as a relatively frequent theme in the paintings of Antonio López as well. The blue and purple tones in many of the "ventana" paintings of the '70s and early '80s call to mind the light that filters through the windows in *El sur*. The window and quince themes merge in such paintings as *La vitrina* (1970) in which a crystal bowl of quinces are seen through the narrow enclosure of a building's front glass. Through the painter's *ventanas* appear indistinct objects—some leafless trees, distant lights of the city, a highway overpass. The emphasis is more on the frame, the privileged position of this sudden aperture onto the outside world.

52. Serraller, "Enlightened Reality," 23.

53. Laurence Giavarini and Thierry Jousee, "Entretien avec Víctor Erice et Antonio López," *Cahiers du cinéma* (June 1992): 36.

54. Jean-Louis Leutrat, "*Le songe de la lumière: Le pont doré de périr*," *Positif* 387 (May 1993): 6.

55. Leutrat, "*Songe de la lumière*," 7.

56. Leutrat, "*Songe de la lumière*," 7.

57. These are the opening words of the Vallejo poem entitled "Piedra negra sobre una piedra blanca" from the collection *Poemas Póstumos I*, César Vallejo, *Obra poética*, ed. Américo Ferrari (Madrid: CSIC, 1988), 339. The painting is housed in the Cleveland Museum of Art.

58. "An Interview by Michael Brenson with Antonio López García" in *Antonio López García*, ed. Michael Brenson, F. Calvo Serraller, and Edward J. Sullivan (New York: Rizzoli International, 1990), 339.

59. Giavarini and Jousee, "Entretien," 34.

60. Jean Louis Schefer, *The Enigmatic Body: Essays on the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30.
61. Víctor Erice and Cesar S. Fontela, "La discutible verdad del cinema-verité," *Nuestro cine* 10 (April 1962).
62. Leger Grindon, *Shadows on the Past: Studies in the Historical Fiction Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
63. Robert A. Rosenstone ed., *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4–5.
64. As part of a survey of filmmakers from around the world conducted by the journal *Liberation* in 1987.
65. Leutrat, "Songe de la lumière," 8.
66. Turrent, "Entretien," 16.