

The places of light

On the photography of Alfonso Parra AEC, ADFC for the TV series La ley del corazón
by Jesús Solera

"Light is the most beautiful, the most pleasant and the best among the physical things"
San Buenventura, 1221-1274

La ley del corazón is a series produced by RCN TV, directed by Sergio Osorio and Víctor Mallarino. The series takes place in a prestigious lawyer's office who works on a lot of lawsuits. Throughout legal causes, characters show their emotions, intrigues and love affairs. We can summarize the project with the scores of actors and locations as well as the different planning which practically cover 360 degrees using simultaneously different cameras. In addition, we should be reminded that Yon Franco and Darnal Trujillo understood and carried through perfectly the photographic design of Alfonso Parra with their units.

There is no doubt that Alfonso Parra not only shapes his photography with his personality, but also with his own philosophical approach. Those who know him both personal and professionally identify him in the details, conception and general lighting design of his photography; nevertheless, such conception remains hidden in a modest corner wherein it is not important whom light but the entirely lighted. The light of *La ley del corazón* has something from the local environment, that is, the equatorial light which is 2800 meters high but for someone who is not Colombian, not even American; although we can also find something from the characters, not putting attention to one by one, but to something related to the human being *inwardness*. With regard this last fact, regardless of aesthetic or formal view, I remind his photography for the film *Nubes de verano* (2004), directed by **Felipe Vega** and shut in the Costa Brava (Spain). There, the surrounding Mediterranean light joint together with the emotional comings and goings of a small group: at the present, Alfonso has intensified this lighting path. (We can see on the frames –above- how invasive the light is, however; the strong presence of the Mediterranean light begins to escape from the mere realism, begins to split in two, besides we can still find a certain concession to the common aesthetic which, as we can appreciate later, will be polished until disappearing at his photography)



Nubes de Verano



Nubes de Verano

Such ***inwardness*** of the human being which I have already mentioned is present in *La ley del corazón*, but it is not solved, it shows confused and contradictory, and so, it reveals sincerely as a mystery. Fight and desire, frustration and victory, rivalry and solidarity, hate and fondness are in the human nature which appears in *La ley del corazón*. They show up amalgamated, without transition, chaotic as a tangle mess near impossible to solve. This is the most beautiful: photographer does not try to solve such contradictions, he allows their public exhibition with no obstacle, and we can say that he steps aside as a humble notary who records these facts –he assume with "resignation" that inasmuch as religion, philosophy or psychology could not explain throughout the centuries, neither can photography does-. The frankness how it is shown is fascinating. The photographer's images attract, scare and are intoxicating: human faces which dissolve in shadows or light without a well defined profile; blank look on their faces which go through all of the angles of the scene, both obscures and invaded of light; backgrounds of sky extremely lighted which isolate characters; men and women who are merely shadows, who hide and let guess a world of latent tensions and emotions. On the other hand, all these features are underlined by dialogues and actions.

"The light -Alfonso Parra tells us- which builds the photographic frame of the series is organized at several different levels but closely related among them. On the one hand, there is a lawyer firm, the office, which is like an island; it is the place where the lawyers have their stronghold, their safety, where everything passes practically orderly; it is a place for the routine, where people show with their friends and hide from their enemies; it is a place of meeting and regulated life by office hours, by identical, quotidian and safe room. Such image from the photography view has two versions, one to the daylight and other to the night. To the first one, strong light goes through the windows and fillers from fluorescent light are filtered with Giorggete silks. To the second, we use a soft fluorescent light as filler relying on both prop lamps of the set and Kino tubes filtered with silk for faces close to the cameras.



Law firm office. We can see the chroma background as well as the fluorescent display filtered with bone-coloutred silk.

"Nearly every room has large exterior windows; the image is added at postproduction through ChromaKey technique. I have shot with Canon 17-120 mm lenses inside the office because they provide contrasted images, very sharp, clean and transparent. There are other locations in comparison with the office. I have classified them in different groups which have slightly different photographic processing. I have used ISO 2000 up to 4000 for all of the aspects related to the Justice, court, prison or police premises because they have more contrast. Since the main characters houses show less contrast I have used ISO between 1250 and 2000. Finally, all the remaining locations depend on the chapter issue; so they have more or less contrast and I have used ISO values around 3200, although we have sometime shot to ISO 4000 and 5000 in outdoor locations at night. We have used the lenses zoom Angeniux, Optimo Style 25-250mm and DP 16-42 y 30-80mm."

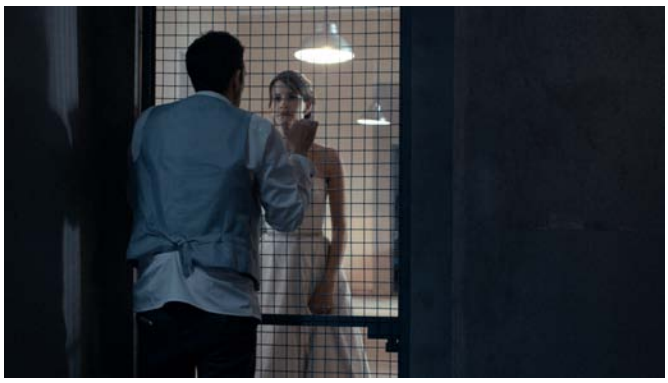
"I wanted images with less sharpness and transparency to outside the firm's office. In other words, images less accurate on outlines (caused by the noise too, with which we have worked on it), but bearing certain elegance. Angeniux has been the key for such result."

On the other hand, I like to work the contrast among different color temperatures as a dialogue between cold and hot. It transforms room into places with ambiguous lights, it is daylight but warm lamps are on, it is night but the cold fluorescent tubes contrast warmer lamps. However, when I say warm I am not thinking in orange-like tones, from which I usually avoid. The tone of the series is slightly cold, in both indoor and outdoor locations, although I try that the skin tones are slightly warmer than the colder surroundings."

THE DUALISM

When I watched the first images of *La ley del corazón* I noticed that the light does not seem invasive, imposed as we can watch with either Mediterranean light, or Castilian sky; on the contrary, it is a light that let space to the characters, although not from their psychology or individuality, but creating a real place as well as emotional, where they interweave human relationships and emotions. There is an unfoldment into the photography. There is *another light* that I dare call *dual* because it is *open* and *accurate* at the same time. It is the two sides of the same coin: human beings (mankind) and location, ephemerals and perennial.

"The true -Alfonso Parra says- is that I do not know very well what the final result of *dualism* is, as you have named it. I was always interested in the idea of the film space as an essential place to show the time, to unveil it. For this reason, I try to create such space with the light. I try to make a space plenty of shapes and volumes where actors are also place by themselves. As a result of this, I believe that they disclose their characters, in turn, they are the unique space together with their surroundings, enhanced by their interpretations. They all place together in the immanent time. It is not the light on the characters rather than the light of the space where are immerse in. The character belongs to the light and it has to disclose there, in such space. How do I make? I use basically directed fuzzy light in several directions, an immersive light of soft shadow, although sometimes with a high contrast too. However, the shadow never became black because the space should have disappeared. In other words, as we used to name earlier, I work with the gamma curve's heel, that is, we have used the lower part of the Sony Slog3 curve.*"*



La ley del corazón. Cell. Public prosecutor's office. Int/Daylight. Mixture of cold and warm lights

Using the own lights from the locations contributes also to such *dualism* with their differences among colors and temperatures. Keeping such differences, together with the noise texture and Luts color, disclose the ambiguity of the spaces, and so the characters emotions: natural daylight through the windows, lamps, recessed light fixtures or streetlight at night. I shape usually these lights with KinoFlo tube of different temperatures which I put here and there. We have sometimes used strong light sources as 12K and 18K HMI, above all to the light through the windows when we were looking for high contrast, as is in the court or corridors of the different public prosecutor's offices and prisons.*"*

THE ORIGINS

It is interesting from a technical view despite of we know where the light source is in every scene, that is, a window, a lamp or a glass partition, how at the same time such light transmits the sensation that it has not source from coming in. This strange contradiction enriches the light itself as well as changes it in order to seem to *the whole*. I have seen Alfonso Parra lighting in other circumstances without a light source, the purpose was just the explanation of the scene from a physical point of view: light was omnipresent, in every single place but as an unknown source light, concealed or unreal; he achieved to carry a mysterious atmosphere, spiritual or magic, not human, atmosphere which wrapped the scene. However, the light splits in two in *La ley del corazón*: the source itself + the omnipresence. It is the moment when I see what I have already mentioned before, the location's light but also the internal light from the human condition; **they are not** *two lights*, It is an unique light unfolded both physically and emotionally. It is a technical miracle that very few Directors of Photography can grasp. The light is not external to the scene, it is not transcendent; it is immanent thereto. It is immanent to the facts and characters, the concrete and the abstract, the human being and his emotions, the light portrays very well the human *heart* with all of its contradictions, its virtues, defects...



La ley del corazón.Funeral parlour. Int/Daylight. Contrast between cold and warm with three light spaces from different source.

"The light in the series -Parra tells us- has a source nevertheless in not one direction but in several ones because I dilute it into the fuzzed light, changing the angles and directions from the sources I use."

THE FACES

The cinematographic photography has disappeared as such, more often than not, converted into a mere aesthetic product with little or nothing involvement-relation with the story and the characters. The proof is that we can transfer-copy the photography (its aesthetic) from a film to another one without consequences or the story changes. However, Alfonso Parra builds bridges between the glorious times of the cinematographic photography and the current times so *digital*. But there is more than this, there is a sound knowledge of the paintings of the Renaissance and impressionism from the artist who first surfaces, if we know to read it, in every scene shot by him. In addition from the cinematographic world, Alfonso Parra has more open sources from which he has learnt, and thus, more enriching; such abilities permit him to walk a step further. (I am going to expose concisely some comparison to illustrate my suggestion).

Next, two details from the Visitation (1528-30) of the painter **Giacomo Pontormo** (1494-1557), the greater exponent of the Italian Mannerism. The faces emerge magically due to the creation of their own dark space; it is not an empty black which transmits fear or tension, as the German expressionism, the **Gordon Willis**' photography in The Godfather or centuries earlier the **Caravaggio**'s painting. The **Pontormo**'s black does not speak by itself; it is a dark from which the figures of the painting emerge fusing into the whole. The soft and bad defined vertical line which separates the light from shadow speak us about a figure who is *here but also there*. There is not concealment in the Alfonso Parra's photography, but appearance of *something* different of which is in the light. As in Pontormo, they are characters who struggle to live among the difficulties what are attached to. This is why they show duplication, not of personality, but belonging to two worlds (let us see how there is also the division light-shadow in the frame's background, how the faces are two worlds in one, seamlessly).

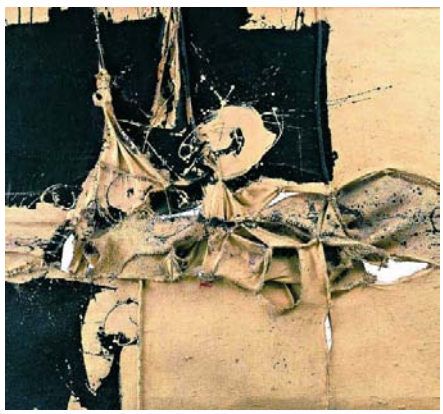


La ley del corazón. Lawyer office. Int/Daylight.



La ley de corazón. María Cristina's apartment. Indoor/Night.

"I like –Parra comments- the vague limit on the transition from the shadow to the light. I try to build a fuzzy edge, a line where we do not know if the face begins or finishes or the other way round. I place the faces in the shadow where we can know intuitively by contrast with other ones who have light. I build the whole with regard to the space as the first circumstance of the visual representation. I follow the Toscana painters handling subtle differences of light among the shapes, I confuse their directions, not always clear or decisive, and so I avoid any solution of spatial discontinuity. I want actors to be the light in the space by themselves. I need to change their outlines in order to transform them in an extension of the location's light. This is why I use practically neither backlights nor lights which shape the face separating it from the location. I can use strong devices of light as 12K and 18K HMI, and then I blur them through different layers of frames. Thus, I shape the light beam's outline until making indiscernible, although in fact they are in. I can blur with three or four frames besides diffusers of different features. Moreover, I usually use the location's light, both natural and artificial, thus I insert a realistic circumstance which seemed to me very convenient. In addition to the light, I handle always the camera with the circuits for details off; I use quite a lot the Classic Soft filters for the faces too.



Manuel Millares



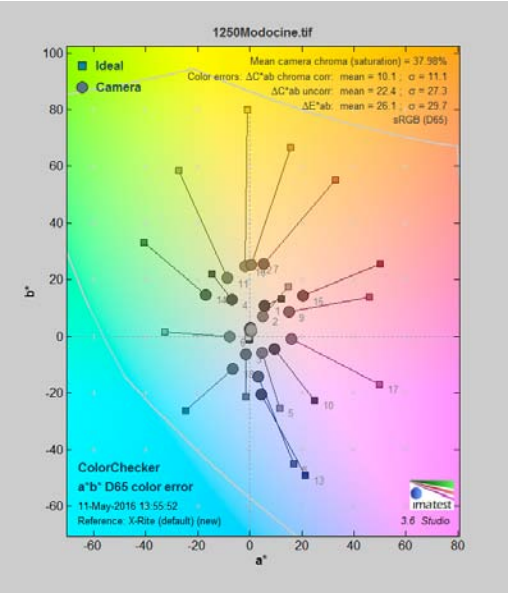
Luis Feito

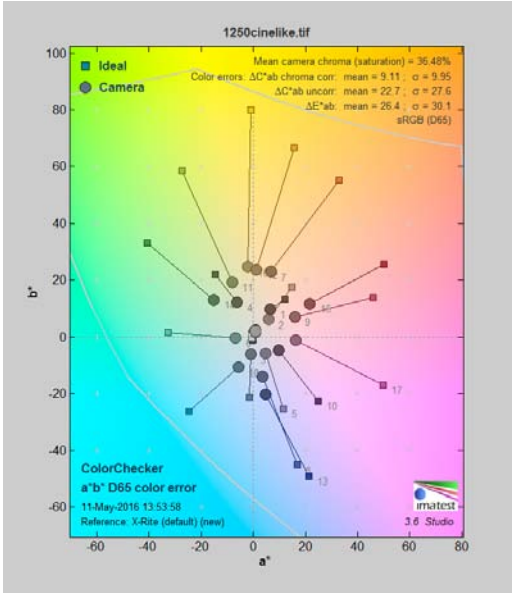
“In any case, I was worried about the texture for the series, the texture which shows the everyday reality of the lawyers who have to confront complex legal cases, often aggressive, with social impact. For this reason, the lenses choice, which I have already pointed out above, was crucial. I wanted moreover to look into the noise and handling it I tried to create the texture, because the common substratum which links both worlds, the office and the world outside, is precisely such “noise”. This why I use high ISO value in the office outside world and I underexpose the image inside.”

“As we used to do in the analogical world, I wanted the noise visible in order to feel the image’s last substratum, its foundation; because I believe that the image is more immersive. What am I talking about? A few years ago, I remember when I watched the pictures of the some members of El Paso group, above all the works of Manolo Millares, Luis Feito or Rafael Canogar; the canvas as well as material paintings were art by themselves, leaving any figurative circumstance. From the figurative point of view, the canvas is the hidden base which must not interfere with the observer’s gaze who is watching the picture, whereas if the canvas is visible as well as the textures and painting materials the observer and the artwork share the same realty, in other words, the observer is immerse in the artwork, in less contemplative, less passive through his gaze. I believe that it is very interesting the comparison: the observer watches the material painting, the frame, so through the noise knows about the “lie”, the trick of the image; on the other hand, he watches the image by itself: the fiction, for him both have the true value alike. He grants authenticness to which he watches as “false”, as representation. I believe such is the noise role. However, it was difficult how we had to work with, we wanted noise was not an obstacle, a perceived error, but a texture. Watching the electronic noise usually is very uncomfortable due to both its sharpness and uniformity in its visual aspect and movement. In order to modify it I have introduce LUTS which change its visual appearance, above all at the color, and then I have used the FilmLight plug-in of correction of noise at postproduction which allows removing focus selectively. I believe that is a subtle treatment, in addition, I guess that no one is aware of it nevertheless it is present, and it is a substantial part of the photographic treatment. We have done a lot of test and analysis of the noise with the F55 camera to take the decision about how to work with it.”

“We have used the Custom mode with the S-3log3-CineLike curve to handle the camera noise. This color space is much more limited than the Sgamut-Cine one. We have used the first one because testing the second one we have checked that after converting such space into 709 the difference with the CineLike was hardly visible. We have also see that it was hardly difference of color with different ISO values, as well as to the IE value of ISO 1250 the noise in Cine and Custom are alike. In fact, the camera behaviour regarding the noise has been very good”.

“Next, some test that we have done to analysis and color of the noise".





CineSlog3-Sgamut3 mode converted into SRGB (709) *Custom Slog3-CineLike mode. ISO1250*

"There is a bit difference between the 27 and 16 samples of the Macbeth chart at Cine mode. The 16 is more green-like as well as it is the 27 too. It allows to me working with the two camera modes, and then I last at Rec 709. As a consequence of this, I have used the Cine mode at 1250 in the lawyer's office underexposing around 2/3 stops, which were recovered at colorization to watch much better the noise".

"As we have already pointed out, the noise at both the Cine and Custom modes is similar regarding the ISO 1250 reference value. When we have worked at Custom mode we have change the recorded noise with the camera. Next, we can see given by Imatest at both RGB and Y".

THE NOISE TO TH MIDDLE GRAY AT % REGARDING THE WHITE AND BLACK VALUS OF THE ACBETH CHART. Sample 4 of the chart. Slog3-CineLike

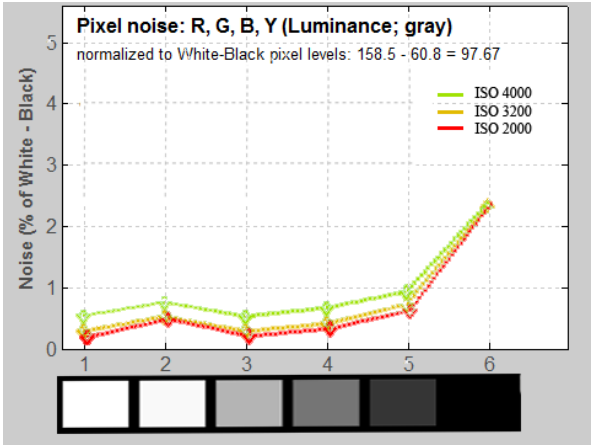
Valor ISO	R	G	B	Y
2000	0.56	0.54	0.64	0.49
4000	0.59	0.54	0.73	0.49
5000	0.61	0.54	0.73	0.49
6400	0.60	0.56	0.71	0.51
8000	0.65	0.58	0.81	0.54
10000	0.70	0.62	0.98	0.59

THE NOISE AVERAGE OF THE 2 THROUGH 5 ZONES AT % REGARDING THE WHITE AND BLACK VALUS OF THE ACBETH CHART. Sample 2-5 of the chart. Slog3-CineLike

Valor ISO	R	G	B	Y
2000	0.71	0.67	0.87	0.63
4000	0.75	0.68	1.02	0.65
5000	0.78	0.73	1.15	0.69
6400	0.76	0.71	1.17	0.68
8000	0.87	0.78	1.47	0.75
10000	0.97	0.88	1.98	0.87

"Let see the left table. The Y value to the noise shows 0.49% to the whole brightness values of the chart (100%), it is constant to the 18% middle gray up to the ISO 5000 value despite of the blue channel is increasing; and so, it has a substantial impact in the noise increasing too. It means visually that the middle tones gain in brightness increasing the ISO without a significant increasing of their noise".

"Let see the right table. We show the noise level not regarding the 18% gray but the average of the high lights and dark shadows. Now we can see how Y increases the level noise inasmuch the three channels increase too, above the blue one. We can see visually that despite of increasing of noise when we go ISO 2000 through ISO 4000, we can easily handle it, above all if we are looking the texture to which we have already referred earlier.



"We can see in a different way bellow on the graph. We have put in comparison the three ISO values at Y which we have used for all the natural outdoor locations. We can see that the difference of noise between ISO 2000 and ISO 3200 is very small, but a bit larger to ISO 4000".

"We can see one of the video tests at https://vimeo.com/159347281

"We show as an example the next frame to ISO 4000.



Original from the camera with Denoiser



"Negative" LUT





Final image corrected with "positive" LUT

"We have handled the ImpulZ LUTs of Central Color Grading. We have used two of them, the first simulates the scanned material at Cineon format of the negative emulsion of Kodak VISION3 500T 5219 (NEG); the second simulates the projection positive of Kodak Premier 2393 D55. We have made some adaptations with LUTCal to moderate the shadow zone of the 2393, however we have kept the deepness of the black which is generated by the "positive" LUT. Such LUTs create already changing into the noise texture which we have got during shooting. Finally, in order to polish the noise we have slightly corrected with Denoiser of BaseLight, which allow us to adjust the noise accurately; for example, we have modified the noise in a different way to the skins than the dark backgrounds".



Original Gamma S-log3 curve. *Lut* ImpulZ *Kodak vision 5294* *Lut* ImpulZ *Kodak Premier 2393*



Curva de gamma S-log3.Original *Lut Kodak VISION3 500T 5219 (NEG)* *Lut Kodak Premier 2393 D55*

"It should be pointed out that we have applied Denoiser to the original material before applying the LUTs. The final result is that we can feel the grain which adds certain realistic feeling caused by unveiling the frame. Such LUTs change clearly the original color captured by the camera; for example, green looses practically its yellow component, thus trees, lawns and countryside show the tone green desaturate, slightly cyan, dark, closer to the concrete, closer to the tones related to the cities, where gray rules. The series is clearly urban, and I have also wanted the "no color" of the cities to carry to out of it, to the countryside. Such "no color" shows through steel-like tones, slightly cold of the office' walls, it shows also through green without yellow from outdoor locations as well as the large city's asphalt".

Somehow the texture of the noise that Alfonso Parra points out reminds me of the texture which we can see in the frescoes, a mixture of lime, sand and pigments which together with water provides for particular tones of the faces.



Let us choose a detail from *La Madonna del Parto* (*Madonna of Parturition)* by **Piero della Francesca** (1416-1492). The face and the figure emerges from the light of the background, without shadow or with it but invented by the painter, because the background is uniform regarding the light. We can even see a "reproduction" of a grid.



Alfonso Parra AEC, ADF





It is more frequent the light than the shadow in the **Piero**'s work. Let us see another detail from the fresco *La leggenda della vera croce (The Legend of the True Cross)* in Arezzo. We can see how the light play recurs over the faces with a luminous background.









Let us put another frame from *La ley del corazón* in comparison with another Tuscan *painter of light* less known, **Domenico Veneziano** (1400-1461). What can we say before the radiant brightness of the detail from *La Madonna de Settignano;* the light floods, caresses the face in such way that it is close to be plain.




La ley del corazón. House room. INT/Daylight

THE GAZES

I would like to briefly mention the glazes in the close-up. The glazes occupy every angle of the scene in the close-up, they are present in every corner looking for what is not clear, perhaps certainties. They are lifeless *glazes*, absent, on which the surrounding dimly light or the veiled one direct into the interior of the own character; glazes which tell more about who is watching than what is watching. In addition, they confer deepness on the surrounding dimly light; causing that it is neither plain nor dull, what is coherent with the previous explanations. They transmit insecurity, uncertainty, lassitude, melancholy and fear. The same feelings of doubt what **Pontormo** transmitted into us closing a Renaissance plenty of securities and certainties, of faith in mankind. There is a parallelism of the world today: in spite of Technology and Science it is not the reason which leads us, neither Mathematics nor Logic, but Law of Heart, in other words, the unpredictable microcosms of passions, ambitions, hate and love. I would say that it is not needed to listen to the dialogues at the first scenes to intuit what is behind such faces. Do their gazes direct us into what they watch, into who they watch, into the surrounding darkness? Do they want to emerge from the shadow? Where is the light coming from? Is the solitude immanent to the character? How does the light influence, if it does, increasing the confusion of the gazes, the lack of stability, the feeling of looking without seeing, the feeling that their thoughts are in other world?



La ley del corazón. Lawyers' office INT/Night





Pontormo, Annunciation, church of Santa Felicita, Florence, Italy. The light cuts the face longitudinally as well as diagonally, conversely, the frame from *La ley del Corazón.* The glazing is uncertain, turning inward on both. Bellow the horizontal line, frontal ¾. There is another example on the left.



It should be pointed out – Parra comments- the actor' ability to create emotions through their gazes; in many cases, above all with some actresses, the light circumstance, how emanates from their faces, creates a temporary feeling, I dare say that t is hanging between the absence and presence in the frame.

THE FIGURES







There are a lot of large windows in the series: in offices, hotels and flats. Many times, they make faces totally obscure, we can just intuit the expressions, skins or the figure herself. We can see how the cold light fells on the executives who are beside the windows on the top image. Even the background looks like vertically cut with a knife, between light and shadow. The light draws the character, not the color, not the profiles.





La ley del corazón. Doctor Nina's office. INT/Daylight

Let us put attention on *The Legend of the True Cross* fresco by **Piero della Francesca,** *The Dream of Constantine*, Arezzo, Italy. Let us see the effect caused by different gradations and angles of the light, reversing shadow and light (on the fresco sides, the two soldiers stands guard, we do not know the light source). Alfonso Parra has managed the same effect which is often repeated in the series. Let us see other examples.



La ley del corazón. Office. INT/Daylight



La ley del corazón. Office. INT/Daylight

I wanted the office –Parra observes- to make significant regarding the rest of the outside work. This is why mi intention was that the light through the windows were intense to mark the characters; what is outside regarding what is inside; it has to be marked clearly, almost unreal. For this reason I placed 4300ºK HMI 2.5KW on the top, diffused by Opal frames and silk. In addition, since the HMI light is cold regarding the camera because it shot to 4300ºK of color temperature, the figures outlines show a line of light "purer".



La ley del corazón. Ext/atardecer

The Alfonso Parra's photography in *La ley del corazón* builds bridges between the most hidden inside of human being and what is showed, between what is said and what is hidden –not necessarily terrifying, bitter or negative-. We can intuit dissolved between shadow and light what is on the face and in the body of the character. He shows a great technical knowledge because he works always on the limit extremely subtle of what is hard to pin down, between *showing* which is *not possible to show* or watching nothing. The photography takes a risk

going “black”, in other words, not being understood since we are familiar to the photography which “enlightens” even the obviousness. The next frame is a clear example; more words are not longer needed.



La ley del corazón. Nicolás’ apartment. INT/Daylight

In this scene –Parra comments- I was worried about more the figure than the face, more the space and its dimensions than the detail of its contents. Both characters like a relationship what does not exist for many and various reasons, but they look for each other when they miss them. It was essential to me working with both figures at shadow, marking hardly the bright of actress’ hair with a light from the top which beautifies her (I made it with a diffused FlatHeat). However, the space not only disappears regarding such lighting, but also it shows the actors’ emotions by itself, what joins them together and what separates them. A dim light is in everywhere.

THE COMPOSITION AND THE LIGHT



La ley del corazón. Meeting room. INT/Daylight



La ley del corazón. Meeting room. INT/Daylight

Let us see a classic composition in these frames which is influenced directly by the panoramic cinematography of the fifties and sixties, both *western* and *war films*. There is a search of depth through the perspective and diagonal that the heads do, due to the focus which is losing sharpness as it is away, and, obviously, because the faces sizes are decreasing. We should hope certain gradation of the light, certain progressive decreasing to the depth, nevertheless the light is uniform on all of the characters, it does not collaborate to build the depth, it does not change from face to face either, neither creating a physical space nor giving more or less significance or even providing psychology. When I watched these frames as well as many others, such detail surprised me immediately. The photographer has to explain himself, I in turn see that the light joints the characters together, does not separate them, it close them in the same mood environment or microcosm, far away from the physical space. The light is for everyone alike, the light equals

everyone: different feelings, different ambitions and desires, but at the end alike.

"My intention –Parra says- in such scenes was not to create the depth with a particular light regarding the hierarchy, psychology or identity of every single character, but all of them were lighted uniformly, thus the characters show themselves in the space."

If we want usually create depth for such kind of scenes, the diagonals, focus and light collaborate to build the space. These resources were also used in painting, let us see on the right a painting by Vázquez Díaz (1882-1969); it is clear the light source, the window. The light illuminates in a different way every single monk, thus ever monk has his own space, and simultaneously the space is created. The light tells us who is the most important among them (at least during the reading previous eating): The monk on the right is the only one who his face is totally lit, the light guides us to him. There is a spatial use of as well as realistic one of the light. Alfonso Parra skips such unwritten rules which are pragmatic.



"I believe actually –Alfonso says- in a physical representation of the world, nevertheless such space is measured, it is a representation by itself, not only the background or location for an event; on account of this, the space is neither separated from the actors nor they are separated from it, they are unified, or at least it was my intention. Such representation of the space does not lose depth because the light is entirely over the figures, not so much over their outlines or silhouettes. Since the light is centred in and from the space the figures emerge entirely inside the space which is totally illuminated, in which we cannot separate background and shape but with subtle changes of light. We can say that we cannot lose depth if we have a holistic vision of the scene.

In order to get the faces equally lighted, I use generally very soft light from sources as fluorescent light or using diffusion filters over both the light sources and camera".

THE BRILLIANT BODIES



The bodies bright in both **Piero della Francesca**'s The Baptism of Christ and **Pontormo**'s tondo, without the violence and contrast of **Caravaggio**, to whom the bodies prevail over the shadow, not emerge from it with its own light; there is no doubt but certainty. The bodies bright with their own light, even under an illuminated surrounding, not only the Christ during his baptism, but also, and above all, the man who is undressing on the right background in the **Piero della Francesca**'s fresco; despite of the surrounding light the man has (it seems so) his own light. The Christ's light is or can be from divine source, however the light from the man is from human origin, it is his own circumstance which *lights*. Such background, close to be telluric, is related to the figures and characters that Alfonso Parra lights.





"I get –Parra says- to create the impression that the bodies shine by themselves, I try to avoid most of the time lighting with an obvious light direction, I avoid hard shadows, or simply I erase them with such

light".



La ley del corazón. Nicolas's flat. Int/Night









Let us compare black colors from the **Gordon Willis** or **Caravaggio** with the Alfonso Parra's ones. The two first artists show a dramatic sight and tenebrism, their blacks are opaque, without transition, are aggressive, hard, they have neither enigma nor mystery; we can almost say that the blacks *are pregnant* of a *definite meaning*, *clear*, but with an empty appearance, they are plain regarding both interpretation and visual reading; however the Alfonso Parra's blacks in *La ley del corazón* are open and bottomless as the soul. It is very important the figures which stand out in the two paintings, they are unique, dominant. The *figure-shadow* forms a unity in the scenes.

They are showing the transition over the time from the shadow to the light, they are asking for something that the shadow is not able to offer. However Alfonso Parra achieves it in a simple shot, then the shadow talks and the character emerges with a timeless transition from the shadow,

he is in a continuous outcrop, a perennating emersion. **Carravaggio** draws the instant, we could say that he takes a picture of it, he freezes the time. The **Piero**'s light reflects the timeless. The Alfonso Parra's photography is related to the time by itself, it has its own movement -since it is basically cinematographic- although it is not needed showing it *over the time*: despite of their shadows are *static*, show movement which transmit to us the deepest excitements of both the human heart as well as characters.



La Ley del corazón. Cell Int/Night



Ley del corazón. House's living room. Int/Daylight

"I work –Parra mentions- with static-dynamic shadows because they are not settled by black or white. As I have already pointed out I work on the *toe* of the gamma Slog3 curve, in the range of gray more or less obscure in *La ley del corazón*; although, as an example, I have worked more on its curve shoulder in the earlier serie Pambele.

I am able to see up to 7 stops below the middle gray with such curve, and I usually work between -3 and -7 regarding the shadows, nevertheless I never conceal black because I do not put visual end to the black range on such extremes. Then, I manage the black value in postproduction which remains deep, **diluted**. Sergio Preciado, Reinaldo Perdomo, colorists from RCN, and I have corrected the series with BaseLight which is an excellent color correction system, above all on such part of the curve that I have already mentioned".





The **Luis Cuadrado**'s photography does not show any transition in *El espíritu de la colmena;* the light is deep and dim over the character, avoiding the hard contrast showed in both *The Godfather* and **Caravaggio**. However, there is neither the *shadow reading* nor *transition in movement* (the shadow seems to us more suggestive because there is not such contrast with an intense light, not by itself); there is not outlined but a sharp profile, moreover there is a unique and clear light source as well as an aesthetic part which are absent in Alfonso Parra (typical in his photography as I am going to develop next). Both the shadows and veiled lights of Alfonso Parra show the present and absent life.

Alfonso Parra began the unfolding and research in the shadows with *Nubes de verano, and* goes back to it with *VIPS* (2012), shot in Italy and directed by **Jesús Solera**. He shows a clear drift toward a natural light but at the same time distant, **dual**. He is looking for something beyond the realism and psychology of the character, he is moving away from the most immediate aesthetic..



VIPS. Enzo. Int/Día



VIPS. Bruna. Int/Día

"In an article published in Cameraman, issue #9, -Alfonso Parra says- I thought about the difference between the realism and naturalism; I believe that I am closer to the last one in such way as the images look natural but not realistic. I transfer the reference to the reality through certain aesthetic connotations to the spectator who is educated in all of the visual structures. In other words, I work a natural light which looks real, but, in fact, is not; and as a result the light is out of the purely aesthetic".

Alfonso Parra is able to work with a great subtlety the *light over shadow* as many of DoPs have made. He is able to work with more or less contrast, larger or lesser shadow reading, but also he is able to work masterfully the *light over light* in a "boast" which remains to me, as I have already said above, the **Piero de la Francesca**'s frescoes, the other magician of the light. To Alfonso Parra is neither more important the colors nor contrasts, but the light thorough its infinite transitions which lead us from the deepest black to veiled white. His light hits as the impressionist paint brush, without looking for the definition, the clean or sharp profile which is often out of reach of the human eye. Let us see the lack of definition in the impressionist painting caused by the "excess" of light, which is its only target.



On the Right, *La Liseuse* , **A. Renoir** and *Buscando mariscos (Hunting Shellfish, Beach in Valencia)*, **J. Sorolla**.

Such lack of the detail definition and search of transitions, such lack of bright, of flash which are often merely a aesthetic concession, is voluntarily absent in the Alfonso Parra's photography. He does concede nothing to nobody if it is not related to the light, he just owes it. As example, let us see in the frame from *Reliquias* (2009) directed by **Toño López** how he does concede nothing to the aesthetic, nevertheless he gives everything to the *pure essence* of the light.



The world is a *continuum* which, with no doubt, we can perceive because the light "lights up" but neither defines nor separates sufficiently the shadow. It is close to be a chaos, beautifully sublime, but a chaos in which the photography is not able to put in order.



THE OBJECTS

I am sure that Alfonso Parra identifies with the **San Buenaventura**'s quotation which opens the article. However, he has no objection when he has to deal with the quotidian life, the light is also the protagonist to a glass of water, it sublimates the object what remains to us the extraordinary artist of the worldly, painter from Madrid, **Luis Meléndez** (1716-1780), who was able to sublimate a partridge bird or pumpkin with the light which flies over caressing the objects. It seems to us that the Alfonso Parra's photography moves towards such direction, towards the acquiescence closeness to the reality of the objects, giving them another improved existence, at least more ethereal caused by the lightness.

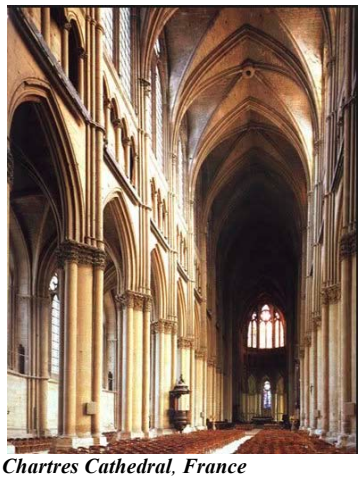
"To me–Parra mentions-, every single object is a form, volume and mass. It has to disclose space and time, feelings, the silence or absence"




La ley del corazón. Hospital. Int/Night

THE PLACE AND THE SPACE

Architecture is similar to the cinematography except in the time handling. It works also with forms, space, and generally, with the functional light which is subject to both of them. In this regard, it is noted that light was, and just the light, what erected the great European cathedrals. They are charged with the responsibility in the sacrifice of their external beauty in order to expand the light into their insides. In spite of being astonishing, odd and unbalanced regarding outward aspect caused by their chaotic way of building (above all when their wall collapsed and desperately were added pell-mell flying buttress here and there), their insides are only great space of light.



Chartres Cathedral, France



León Cathedral. Nave. Spain



Riola Parish Church, Italy

There is a similar situation regarding the Finland architect **Alvar Alto**. He had the courage to link an extensive part of his works to the light; every building was born from the light, researching how its diffusion and movement was: the remainder was secondary and at the service of it (we can say ironically a world upside down) Its works regarding the outward aspect are always odd, chaotic and heavy (whatever the architects enthusiastic of rationalism say). Although such circumstance does not revile the architect because he was not looking for a external beauty,

but an upper one: the beauty of the light inside the building. It is enough indeed going in one of his buildings, then we can feel the building's power, are captivated by it and we can understand why is the reason for the exterior forms which looked arbitrary. As an example, let us see the Riola Parish Church in Italy. There is a similar situation with the Alfonso Parra's photography; after the initial refusal of his photography caused by a lack of understanding, of external aesthetic charm or because we do not find what one was waiting for, it follows the admiration if we leave aside the prejudices and allow him to lead us to the inside.

As the ancient builders of cathedrals, Alfonso Parra uses the light to build and create the *space-time* of the scene. As a select few masters of the light throughout History of Art, whatever they were working in, he prioritizes the light over any other element which is present in the scene or over any device which helps in creating it. The light is the absolute protagonist and main reason, it is the master, the remainder is built with regard to it and depending on it

"I was always captivated –Alfonso Parra says- by the gothic cathedrals. I like to walk inside feeling how the light envelopes the stone. Néstor Almendros pointed out that he did not use the imagination but the observation. I like to watch the locations and how the light is there, no matter whether it is natural or artificial; what the light talk about the people who live in regarding the outdoor location; and I do the same in the set; when it is ready I walk alone thorough its spaces thinking in the characters who live in, looking for relations with the real spaces I know which can help me as a reference, the I begin to design the type lights, their places and the remaining process".

THE LAST

The DoPs at black and white can be basically classified in two groups: those who worked the contrast light and shade, and those worked on the transition from white to black through an infinite range of gray. **Gregg Toland**, **Robert Krasker,** *The third man*, or **Karl Freund** whether we date back to the *German expressionism* (which left a trace on the *American noir movies* of the forties and fifties of the last century) belong to the first category. After arriving the color some directors carried on lighting as they used to do at black and white, in other words, without the color helping, (among them, and above all, those who belong to the second category), as a result of this they were regard with contempt. However, from my view, they were who knew essentially to see, work and keep *the light* with the greatest purity. Somehow, I believe that I have found some of all of these in Alfonso Parra. He has pictorial education as well as cinematographic one; and he relies on in the painters of the light (Tuscans, Italians, impressionists) to make the most of the light (his gradation **at** shadow or light are purely *light*), the color depends on it, and as a consequence the color seems an emanation from and for the light. We have to remind that all of the living creatures do not see the colors in the same way, and there are many examples in which not even the human beings see it (color-blind, autistic, visual impairment, etc). In addition, colors have several meaning regarding different cultures, colors change and become "another one" regarding the planet and time zone; however the light is always the same. The light is essentially itself, as the human soul: it is infuriated or in love, it hates and suffers, it boasts and envies, nevertheless it is itself; the heart, as the wind over the sea, it transforms it but does not change it. Such background constant is reflected by the Alfonso Parra's photography in *La ley del corazón*.

V. Storaro said that we have "to write with the light". I express some doubts about we can write with the light, perhaps we can describe, show, find …, anyway, none of those attitudes seems to be the desire of the Alfonso Parra. He goes in a near unexplored field almost without compass –for this reason he learns from the old masters, no matter of which field of human creation they are-. He is personally tuned in the light, which has not a **functional** value to him, but a key and absolute role. He allows that the light moves, evolutes, and then he recreates its movements to transmit the continuous revealing of itself. In contrast with other DoPs that "use" the light or show it *from outside*, Alfonso Parra integrates into the light and from there he watches how it is. I believe that the great difference which characterizes him is such *inner perspective*, his positioning in working with the light. He allows going without aesthetic or conceptual limits, the only requirement as starting point is simply "the light" and maybe we are surprised by such nudity.

Finally, I would like to add that his photography is *the Shot's one*, term which is close to fall in disuse to the cinematographic lexicon. The Alfonso Parra's photography needs the *cinematographic shot* in order to spread and grow, and meanwhile is growing it has to be created in front of the watcher's eyes. Thus, the light needs also both the patience and cultivation of the spectator who likes not the image but the *cinema*, as it was understood at its beginning, and then, in the timing and space of the shot, without the urgency due to the contemporary montage, the close up and the hysterical camera, we can see how the light is drawing and we can rejoice, not to say, enjoy it. See the readers for yourself the next images in detail and jump to their own conclusions.



La ley del corazón. Lawyers' office Indoor location/Daylight



Amiens Cathedral, France



La ley del corazón. Public prosecutor's office. Int/Daylight



VIPS. ANNA. Library. Indoor location/Daylight



La ley del corazón. Elias' house. Indoor location/Daylight



La ley del corazón. María Eugenia's house. Int/Daylight

"I believe- Parra says- that it is not the technical means, as it commonly accepted, the key to make a cinematographic photography, but the building of the space-time in every shot. Regardless of whether we shot with photographic emulsion or at digital, the most important is the conception of a point of view which involves both essential aspects of the cinema, the space and the time, it is what really constitutes the praised cinematographic look.."

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Lenses: Canon 17-120mm. Angeniuex Optimo Style zooms 25-250mm 16-42mm and 30-80mm
Postproduction: Baselight



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