A Serious Experiment: *Land Without Bread*, 1933

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Introduction

Buñuel's third film *Land Without Bread* (1933 and not, as commonly thought, 1932) may be regarded as one of the most important experiments of all his work and a decisive one in documentary cinema at the beginning of the sound era, as well as in documentary film development as a whole.

The film has been radically altered since its first release. A major change was the addition of a pro-Republican epilogue in both the French and English versions at the end of 1936, something that, while not affecting its intensity, nevertheless gave it an extra dimension. The effects of censorship in 1936–7 had more serious consequences. The changes made to the footage have been restored in the new French and English versions, but the alterations to the soundtrack remain a major problem.

Briefly, the story of the film's treatment is this: both the English and French versions underwent censorship. Because of protests from the area of Upper Savoy (France), indicated in the map at the beginning as an area containing other European 'Hurdes', the map disappeared in both versions. So too did the scene of the marriage rituals in La Alberca. Although they remain in some copies, these absences profoundly alter the film.

During the war the negatives were lost in France. In the 1960s, the film distributor Braunberger advised Buñuel to resurrect the film, as the censored scenes had been recovered. But it would mean a new soundtrack, as a complete version of the original was unavailable. A new version was made in 1965, which is when the new voice-over was added. On this occasion, one supposes that Buñuel agreed. But since 1995–6 new versions have appeared that completely nullify Buñuel's original intentions. The oratorical tone of the voice-over is even more compassionate and at some points the Brahms music has been omitted.

Few copies remain that retain the film's essential identity: the visual–aural counterpoint. If the film fails to shock today it is because in the copies currently available, at least in Spain, the narrator's voice assumes the fraudulent tone of compassion, something that characterises neither the French version of 1936 (for which actor Abel Jacquin stepped into the role), nor the English version of 1937 that reproduces the American newsreel tone of *The March of Time.*

As far as the film's title is concerned it is safe to say that in all drafts, both Spanish and French, stored in the Buñuel Archive (Filmoteca Española, Madrid), the film is entitled *Tierra sin pan*, and this is how it was released in both English and French, *Las Hurdes* being a title only used, informally, by Buñuel himself.

My discussion here focuses on the following characteristics of the film:

- As a surrealist documentary that explores the relationship between cinema and history's radical changes. It carries out this experiment through a multi-layered and unnerving use of sound, the juxtaposition of narrative forms already learnt from the written press, travelogues and new pedagogic methods, as well as through a subversive use of photographed and filmed documents understood as a basis for contemporary propaganda for the masses. It is at a revolutionary moment and with a revolutionary crew that Buñuel films in Las Hurdes, a place already exploited at the time by still photography and the press.
- Its specific lessons in sound and documentary *mise en scène*. These are experiments that situate *Land Without Bread* as one of the key texts of film and television history. If the event doesn't happen naturally, it must be provoked. Besides, the film warns us, the spoken word can be more powerful than visual imagery. Acknowledging the film's experimental use of sound and its treatment of the death of the goat, many later films have gestured to *Land Without Bread*'s dual nature as conscious revelation (*cinéma du réel*) and subconscious icon (propagandistic image).

Pedagogy in sound

Through an introductory written text the film proclaims its nature as a 'cinematic essay in human geography' at the beginning of the 1930s. A map of Europe points out other 'Hurdes' on the continent, and then draws the viewer's attention to the location of las Hurdes on the Iberian Peninsula, very near to Salamanca, the home of Spain's first university.[1] A shot of a village street initiates the story. We are in La Alberca. The commentator speaks in the first person plural, in the name of the film's crew who, through La Alberca, will enter the valley of Las Batuecas, a place with strong echoes of prehistoric culture and long submission to the Catholic Church. Through this valley we will arrive at Las Hurdes.

But before this we pause at La Alberca and visit a local *fiesta* with strong feudal and sexual overtones. Men who have married that year must compete with one another on horseback to cut off the heads of as many roosters as marriages that have taken place. The live roosters are hung upside down. Each rider must cut a rooster's neck and may not give up until he has done so. La Alberca's main street is decorated, and the participants, mainly males, take part with glee and much wine. The riders are dressed in traditional costume and the camera dwells time and again on their attacks on the roosters' necks and heads, while a woman observes the proceedings with a wild look in her eyes.

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From the onset we hear Brahms's Fourth Symphony and the voice-over speaks with a register similar to that of cinematic newsreels of the time: indifferently, frivolously and at a rapid pace. The spectator is witness to a relentless array of images and sounds: the dense commentary, read at an exhausting pace in a cold and distant voice, is underlined by the austere and 'cultured' music of Brahms while the images appear in short, sharp shots at an equally frantic pace. It is a device used throughout the film, a work devoid of even a moment's silence.

In the valley of Las Batuecas, the second stop on the journey, our attention is continually drawn to the presence of Catholic architecture in the territory's convents and churches. Only one monk remains: an elliptical allusion to the limitations on the church's property that were imposed, not by the Republic, but by earlier liberal governments in the nineteenth century. From here we enter Las Hurdes through a wide shot of the mountains that will again be used to close the film.[2] We are guided by the suffocating visual–sound composition to one of its villages, where narrative detachment is overcome by despair. First we focus on the school, 'a white, recently constructed building'. Later on we move into the streets, where children and adults resemble the living dead. From here the film guides us through the core activities of human experience: food, work, education and the rituals that mark our collective culture in hunger, sickness and death. It lingers on the school, types of work and death rituals. An old woman's prayer for the dead, set against a panoramic shot of the mountains of Las Hurdes, closes the film. The voice-over brusquely bids farewell in the name of the crew. The End.

The death of the goat

Some of the film's incidents – such as those concerning different types of work, the collective rituals of death and the presence of animals in everyday life – parallel autobiographical stories from Buñuel's childhood in Calanda, referred to in the first chapter of his memoirs (1982a).[3]

Here a goat acts as the metaphor and as the leitmotif of the film's strategy of communication. The story highlights the impossible living conditions in Las Hurdes. Even goats throw themselves off mountaintops. The camera follows a goat that (as we see later in a discussion of the cut footage) was savagely pursued by the crew. Buñuel ended up by shooting the goat himself, which falls from a position where we can see the smoke from his revolver in the middle right-hand side of the screen – a decision that reflects Buñuel's radical style in *mise en scène* composition.

The visual evidence of the goat's death and the overall decisions concerning the visual–sound montage make *Land Without Bread* a film that is always viewed in the present, a strategy that allows it to make its direct impact upon the spectator while retaining its historic value. It is as if everything it wants to abolish continues just the same, even now and, if not in present-day Las Hurdes, in other parts of the world. In his lecture at Columbia University (Ibarz, 1999b, p. 235) Buñuel referred to this condition as 'relentless pain'.

A mythic story

Land Without Bread is shaped by press photography of Las Hurdes published in 1922, by press articles published in 1929 (Arcelu and Benítez-Casaux, 1987) by scholarly research (Legendre, 1927), and by travelogues, newsreels and avant-garde cinema. Its power derives from its documentary nature as much as from the timelessness of Flaherty, the political agendas of Ivens or Storck and above all the poetic and erotic drives of Vigo.

This film's construction is extremely elaborate and obvious, and is related to popular narrative forms, particularly oral folk tales, that maintain tension through exaggeration, contradiction and reiteration, to arrive at a story that can be termed 'mythic'. It has similarities with Flaherty's first films and his 'out of time' camera that narrates the past more than the present.

It is an oral work about a people who keep no written record of their history, whose songs, although composed, are not heard. Buñuel altered the sociological aspect and one could say that he made the film *a tiros* (with a gun), to use an expression that an old woman made to the poet, journalist and co-writer of the commentary, Pierre Unik. Someone, she said, should get them out of Las Hurdes *a tiros*. '*À coups de pistolet*', wrote Unik in his articles for *Vu* in 1935.[4]

These gunshots (in the scenes of the goat and donkey) are physical as well as metaphorical. Today, seeing is no longer believing, a truism Buñuel anticipated in the 1930s.

The place of words

The voice is dominant in the narrative, often contradicting the images, as in the case of the sick young girl in the street, or the baby in the house. Shots and themes are linked together at great speed: the voice-over nearly always speaks with neutrality, but sometimes with annoyance or astonishment. It concludes a scene abruptly, with indifference, and then continues.

The importance of this radical use of sound has been stressed in critical commentary, above all, in relation to the Brahms music, but it is worth emphasising again. The surrealists' use of imagery and text, in the interests of creating shock, as may be seen, for instance, in the paintings of Ernst or Magritte, has its magnified reflection in Buñuel's film. Sometimes what the narrator says fails to correspond to what the images portray; at other times, we credit what he says, not what we see, in the same way that a photo caption dictates how we read a visual image.

Neither the sick girl nor the baby is dead: the narrator tells us they are but the images contradict him. The deliberate ambiguity of the documentary pact with the spectator is here exposed, relying on communicative strategies that would subsequently become common practice in publicity, propaganda and television. In this sense, *Land Without Bread* is a forerunner.

If in the scene of the death of the goat Buñuel did not dispense with the shot that shows smoke coming from the gun that killed the animal, thus drawing attention to the ambiguity of documentary, similarly, with the voice-over, he underlines the pitfalls in the use of sound. It is the answer to the challenge Buñuel faced after his first two films. In deciding to shoot a documentary, Buñuel's guiding principle was not to look for 'exotic' places that would be unknown to the spectator. He did not set out on a search for the Other/Different, as did the makers of travelogues or documentaries in the style of *Nanook* (1922). Buñuel went in search of the Other/Same.

But not the Other/Same of the kind sought in two other key documentary themes of the time: the cities of Vertov, Ruttmann or Vigo, or the labour of the working classes of Ivens, Grierson or Strand. He went in search of an Other/Same excluded from progress, the images of which were already engraved in the spectator's minds thanks to photography and other mass media, and by the historic visit to Las Hurdes by King Alfonso XIII in 1922 and its subsequent impact on the media (Ibarz, 1999a, pp. 33–9). Here lies the originality of the project.

He filmed from within the very heart of the countryside – from the viewpoint of his own childhood in Calanda – in order to achieve the sort of image Walter Benjamin demanded in his analysis of the surrealist image: an image that can no longer be 'measured contemplatively' (Benjamin, 1980, p. 53), and instead becomes a moral metaphor and a new type of political action.

The place of memory

We are in the spring of 1933, a few weeks after the electoral victory of Hitler and when the Liberal-Socialist Spanish Republic was living its most insurrectionary moment. The anarchists of the CNT (National Workers' Confederation) were being imprisoned, stripped of their rights of association. Among them is Ramón Acín, the producer, who after the filming is accused of subversion for his participation in numerous political and cultural activities. The socialists confront a government that in part represents them and that at the same time, incited by the anarchists, pushes them to radical revolution. It is a time of great social upheaval that in the months ahead leads to the formation of a fascist movement that becomes the Spanish Falange. 32

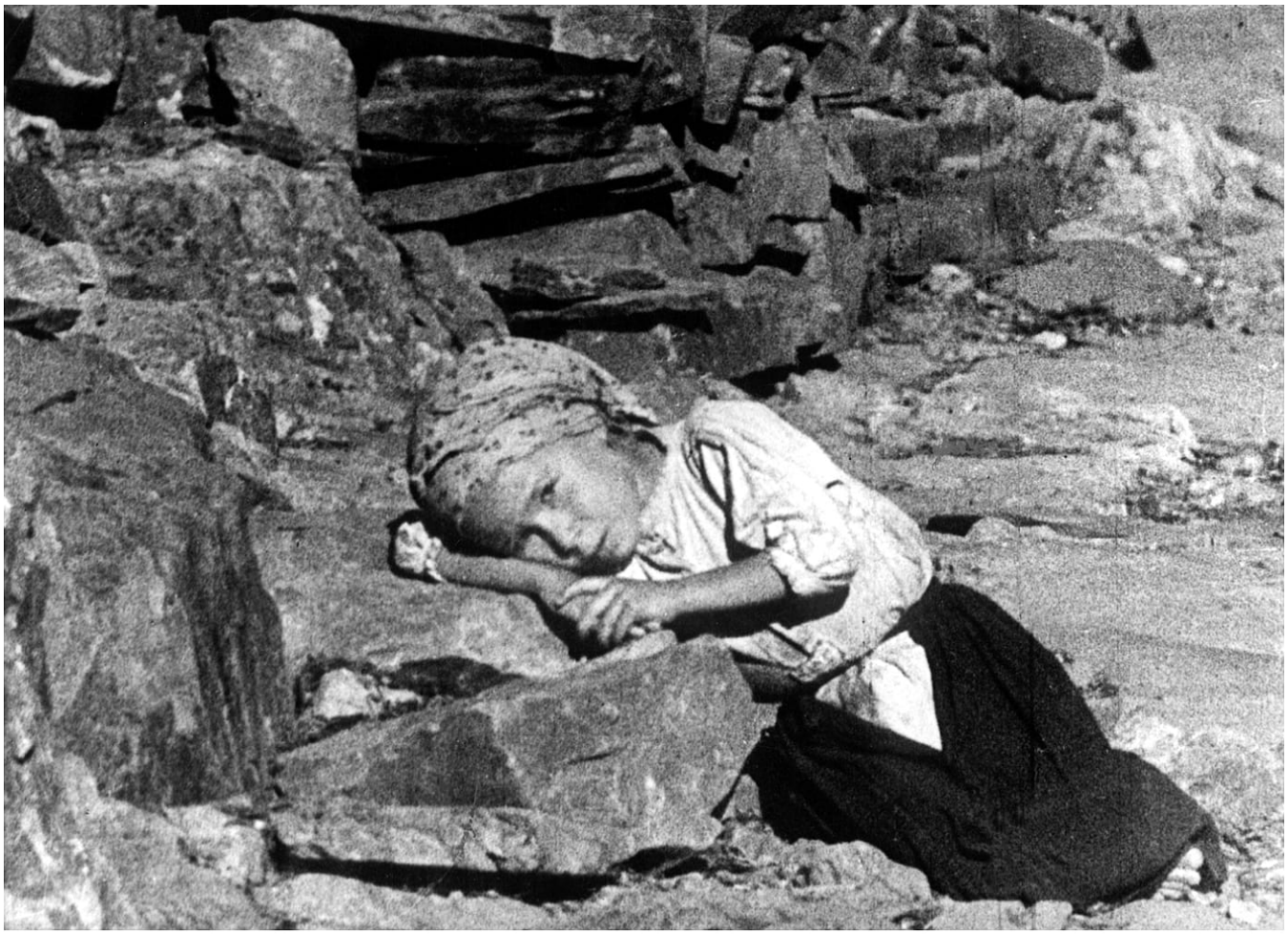
But luck was on Buñuel's side, in the form of a lottery won by Ramón Acín in December 1932. Thanks to this stroke of luck Buñuel saw an opportunity to make the film and assembled a remarkable crew appropriate for these historic times.

As well as Acín, he called up as assistant director Rafael Sánchez Ventura, another Spanish anarchist who was no stranger to Spanish cultural and political controversies. Both Sánchez and Acín formed part of the Surrealist Group of Zaragoza (Aranda, 1981, p. 126). Buñuel added two more members of the Parisian movement: the camera operator Eli Lotar and the photographer Pierre Unik.

The choice of crew, as surprising as everything else about this film, prefigures the film's future course of events. In life, as in the cinema. Before, during and after filming, and on into the present. Avant-garde movements express trauma (White, 1996, p. 32) and, one might add, often seem capable of mixing the causes of illness and cure. Today Las Hurdes owes much to the lasting effects of Buñuel's film, to the point where it may even now be seen (a view that would not displease Grierson) as a revolutionary film that has left its mark on that land and its people. Also unforgettable was the co-operation between members of the crew, whose inevitably different attitudes and opinions would divide them during the war and subsequent dictatorship.

Acín came up with the 20,000 pesetas necessary to launch the project. He had his own reasons. He was starting out in film-making, having already put on magic lantern shows, and written a script for a surrealist film that never went into production (Ibarz, 1999a, pp. 50–60). A known anarchist and Bohemian, he was assassinated in Huesca, Northern Spain, in early August 1936, and could thus be plausibly considered the 'García Lorca of Aragón' (Torres Planells, 1998, pp. 35–41). He was most at home in the fine arts, deeply interested in popular culture and visual anthropology and attracted to Las Hurdes because of its representation of Spain at its most difficult and extreme. He went there with two intentions: to prepare the film, and to introduce Freinet methodology into some of its schools.[5]

The school is the only specific attack on the Republic that remained in the film (heavily altered by Buñuel between 1933 and 1936), an attack that was prompted by the view of both Buñuel and Acín that the Republican school curriculum was wholly inappropriate. This is implicit upon arrival at Las Hurdes ('the white building, *of recent construction*, is the school,' says the voice-over [my emphasis]) and explicit in the classroom scene. At that time the Republic did keep one of its political promises: the building of schools and the reform of teacher training.[6]



A child without bread in *Las Hurdes*

The children enter and go to their desks. The voice-over comments: 'Here hungry children are taught the same as children everywhere, that the sum of three angles of a triangle equals the sum of two right angles.' Naturally! Why wouldn't they be taught this basic fact? It's only normal. Maybe it is, says the film, but in Las Hurdes this kind of education has no place or purpose. Here, as Freinet would say, they need to learn about themselves and their way of life. The film also shows the astonished faces of two children when one of them writes on the blackboard a rule from a book shown to them by their teacher: 'Respect other people's property.' But everything in Las Hurdes – the incessant commentary tells us – belongs to somebody else. The beehives are the property of another village, employment opportunities, food, hygiene and health may be found in other parts of Spain, but here, only the land is theirs – because nobody else wants to cultivate it.

The film focuses on the subversive pedagogic restlessness of the time and thus sheds new light on Buñuel's cinema. It is an aspect that has been largely overlooked in studies of his films. It has not gone unnoticed by Godard, though, whose works *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1998) and *Origine du siècle xxi* (2000) include a brief overview of the first sequence of *Land Without Bread*, where two young girls in close-up remain silent and with a wild and questioning look.

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The place of propaganda

The film's history mirrors that of the Second Spanish Republic. When it was ready for release, the Republic had already fallen into the hands of the anti-Republican right that banned it. At the end of 1934, Buñuel decided in the text of the commentary (Buñuel, n.d., p. 5) to date the film 1932. It was not released until late 1936 in Paris and early 1937 in Rotterdam, London and a couple of cities in Belgium, hitting the cinema club circuit and then later becoming popular on the back of a general surge of interest in social documentaries. It was previewed with an epilogue in favour of the Republic.

Land Without Bread became a propaganda film for the Spanish Republic, one that nevertheless deconstructs the very mechanisms of propaganda. It is narrated in the first person plural. It is a work that does not avoid acknowledging that its main subject is its crew. It says so again and again. The use of sound, as already argued by Ado Kyrou (1962, pp. 62–8), creates a strong sense of unease in the viewer.[7] His observations on the use of sound need to be emphasised: words are denser than images, and dangerous when launched onto the masses, as is all too clear nowadays in television. We believe what they tell us. This is – precisely in the year 1933 – the key mechanism of audiovisual propaganda, from Goebbels to Roosevelt and Franco.

In its international relations from the end of 1936, the Spanish Republic eliminated all references to anarchism. It is not known whether or not Buñuel was too concerned about including in his film the epilogue in favour of the Republic. The fact is that he agreed to the epilogue and removed Ramón Acín's name from the credits.[8] It is highly plausible that he knew the epilogue would barely alter the uncompromising nature of the film, something recognised over and over again, whether by students, documentary historians or museums.

Subversion of information codes

Although later on some of its original points of reference changed through Buñuel's own political evolution and the censorship the film suffered, Surrealism and a sense of libertarian communism make *Land Without Bread* an aesthetic artefact that rises to some of the challenges of the time: the agrarian reforms of the Spanish Republic, Hitler's Europe, the political and cinematic demands of the avant-garde across Europe, the new wave of cinematic activism, and the long and arduous economic crisis of the 1930s.

After the difficulties of his first two films, he was finally able to shoot again. Much of the film's credit goes to the crew. Without the talents of Acín and Sánchez Ventura and their sensitive treatment of their under-privileged subjects the film would not exist. Nor would it without the talent of cameraman Eli Lotar (once criticised for being the photographer of unpleasant subjects), who had tried unsuccessfully a year earlier to film in Las Hurdes with Yves Allégret. Lotar brought the same qualities he deployed in Joris Ivens's film *Zuyderzee* (1929). The poet Unik was Buñuel's link with the Parisian surrealists, and Lotar had contacts on the European avant-garde film circuit.

But despite the politically committed nature of the crew – that mixture of anarchist-surrealists and surrealist-communists – *Land Without Bread* operates under its own surrealist and libertarian cinematic order.

The visual–sound composition of the film is in effect a way of complicating the informative political codes of a budding society of mass communication that was promoted as much by the graphic press as by cinematic newsreels. Buñuel obeyed the strong sense of pedagogic duty of the avant-garde movement, and injected a dose of political will power.

The tone is similar to *Un chien andalou* (1929) and *L'Âge d'or* (1930). The first of Buñuel's collaborations with Dalí confronts the viewer with the repressive ideological framework of the individual bourgeois unconscious, and affronts the collective unconscious of the dominant classes. These films have already been commented on from an anthropological viewpoint. In *Land Without Bread*, without Dalí, Buñuel goes one step further and develops a formula (a landmark in documentary film-making) that above all challenges the social unconscious: that which binds people together in a hostile land. Like its predecessors, particularly *L'Âge d'or*, it is conceived as a commentary on and provocation to its generic equivalents: the 'urban symphony', newsreels, travelogues, scientific films and the ethnographic ideas of the Parisian surrealists.

It is interesting to note that while Buñuel was in Las Hurdes confronting the collective, Dalí was pushing on with his exasperating criticism of the surrealist crisis in Paris, which culminated in his naming it 'the surrealism of Hitler' in 1934 (Éluard, 1984, p. 198). Buñuel kept a close watch on Dalí and the transformation of the Parisian surrealists, as he did on the spread of fascism in Europe and the alternatives the Left proposed in confronting the advance of Stalinism. But his attention was focused mainly on Spain. Buñuel's militancy in the emergent Communist Party in 1932 has not been fully demonstrated. If he had been a committed communist at this time, the choice, for *Land Without Bread*, of a mixed anarchist-communist crew would only show that there were no sectarian prejudices on the part of Buñuel or the members of the crew. Buñuel had total control over the film. The script and the editing were his work. The commentary, although written by Unik with a substantial input of ideas by Acín, is very different from the pieces Unik did for *Vu.* In these, Unik was concerned with a Marxist analysis of the social inequalities between the people of Las Hurdes, while the film's commentary presents them not in Marxist terms but as a social collective. Unik and Lotar were communists and Acín and Sánchez Ventura were libertarians, but their militancy and differences did not prevent them from working together. Thus, *Land Without Bread* is a touching, intimate experience of what history tends to bury: collective co-operation. In the words of Godard (1995, p. 69) the film is a 'moving experience in the interior of history'.

Change of date and commentary

Buñuel's decision to change the date of the film to 1932, even though he shot and edited it in 1933, requires commentary.[9] Dating it 1932 ensured that the film became a sharp critique of the liberal-socialist Republic, which governed from April 1931 to November

1933, when the anti-Republican Right won the elections and the film was banned. It should be emphasised that this ban took place in the pre-fascist phase of the Republic. But the change of date enabled Buñuel to leave it up to the spectator to reach conclusions about the historical sequence.

Between 1933 and 1936 Buñuel experienced one of his most acute political crises. *Land Without Bread* is the testimony. Between 1934 and 1936, when together with Unik he wrote the French commentary (probably to read it to André Gide to whom they would also show the film in Paris in 1936), he changed the text several times, reducing its most specific references. The changes made the work more abstract, and finally, gave it a timeless quality. This has contributed to its stasis and durability, its modern Goyaesque character.

The soundtrack could have been added when Buñuel joined Filmófono, one of the first production companies to use sound in 1934, but it was not until the spring of 1936, when the Popular Front won the elections, that there was some campaigning for the film's release. It was shown only once, at the Cine-Studio Imagen in Madrid. In any case, at the end of 1936, when the film premiered in Paris, Buñuel was in a different political frame of mind to that of 1932–3 when the film was made.

Perhaps because of this Buñuel – towards the end of his life – made his most personal statement about the film, a work from which he had always distanced himself: 'Nothing is gratuitous in *Las Hurdes*. It is perhaps the least gratuitous work I have made' (Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, 1993, p. 37).

About the unused footage

The unused footage is of notable interest and has been insufficiently studied. It is stored in the Cinémathèque de Toulouse, where it was deposited by Marcel Oms after being found by Buñuel's family in the early 1960s. It runs for thirty-seven minutes and offers valuable insight into the aims of *Land Without Bread*.

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The people of Las Hurdes were directed at every given moment, posing in front of Lotar's camera in a way that repeatedly confirms the co-operative spirit of the film. Used to the camera's gaze – having been photographed since the beginning of the century – they willingly agreed to work with Buñuel and his crew. Lotar also filmed some beautiful panoramic shots of the intricate Hurdean landscape, with its trees moving in the wind, images that, had Buñuel decided not to omit them, would have given his harsh portrait of the area a certain vitality.

The sense of the collective in the film (the school, the agricultural workers, the child's funeral) was aimed at highlighting the very lack of the collective life in question. When the inhabitants look at one another, the shot is cut and they are left as individuals, in front of the camera, looking at the spectator.

The camera lingers on two occasions: the death of the goat and the ritual of the cocks in La Alberca. In the case of the goat, the unused footage lasts more than four minutes. Here one observes Buñuel (with a revolver) and the assistant director Sánchez Ventura inciting the goats to jump off the side of the cliff until the gun finally makes one of them do so.

The smoke from the fired gun that Buñuel finally decided to leave in one of the shots acts as a central metaphor for this mythic tale about revolution: the filmed violence is a metaphor for real violence, for political violence. This is, after all, a film made *a tiros* (at gunpoint). It is as if Buñuel wanted to leave the remark made by the old woman – possibly the same one that closes the film with her prayer for the dead – as an appeal to the Hurdeans to leave their homes in search of a better life.

The unused footage in La Alberca lasts more than six minutes. In this sequence, the inhabitants do not pose in front of the camera; instead, Lotar films them following the *fiesta*. In the final editing process, however, Buñuel eliminates the collective to concentrate on the symbolism of the marriage ritual and its unmistakably erotic-social overtones. Lotar's first shots of the phallic-like neck of the cock – strung up and featherless, until severed by a hand – do not appear in the final cut and are testimony to the radicalism with which Buñuel came to *Las Hurdes.* It is radicalism in the service of Surrealism, an essential combination as outlined in the pages of *Documents* (1929–30) by Bataille and Leiris. Buñuel softened it in this visual montage, opting instead for radicalism in sound.

The film in Spain

Tierra sin pan was one of those films that repeatedly made the rounds of the cinema club circuits during the Spanish dictatorship (Gubern, 1999, pp. 9–11). These were anti-Franco cinema venues where the Republican epilogue failed to cause a stir. It was not known that it had been added during the war and nobody seriously questioned why the Republic had prohibited it. It seemed to form part of the film and did not detract from its radicalism. And although later discussions alluded to the final rays of hope that Franco's victory extinguished, at the end of the film everyone was so perturbed by what they had seen that attention was rarely paid to the epilogue. 38

Never released commercially in Spain, the film belongs in specialist cinemas, television and museums. But it is also in some ways, in his own country, Buñuel's most 'jinxed' film. Revolutionary and reformative, the Hurdean symphony that Buñuel composed when his counterparts were making documentaries about urban spaces, the working class or the exotic, continues to disturb.[10]

Cavalcanti, Buñuel, Rouch

The key influences on *Land Without Bread* begin at the transition from silent to sound cinema. Many film-makers – from Lubitsch to Hitchcock – transported their experiments in sound and image from Europe to Hollywood. In exile, they managed to popularise the

accomplishments of the avant-garde from the old continent. Others, like Alberto Cavalcanti, following his relocation to London, applied their experiments to documentary film-making. Bill Nichols (1991; 2001) has analysed the oratory, poetry and rhetoric of documentaries in the 1920s and 30s. Somewhat sternly, he rebuked an ageing John Grierson for his 'repression' of the 'spirit of constructivism of the avant-garde' (Nichols, 2001, p. 90) that films like *Land Without Bread* represent. But delving even further than Nichols's discussion of sound experimentation, we see similarities between Buñuel, Cavalcanti and the British school.

In 1926 Cavalcanti filmed *Rien que les heures* in Paris, a film much admired and commented on by Buñuel (1927). His book of press clippings, now in the Buñuel Archive, in Madrid, contains some of Cavalcanti's articles. Buñuel closely followed the work of this Brazilian who had emigrated to Europe. In London, together with John Grierson, Cavalcanti later laid the foundation for modern documentary sound that, in the state-run studios of the GPO, would acquire a MacLuhanian tone, even though the Grierson school is characterised by experimentation more than by dynamism. In 1933, the year Buñuel shot and edited *Land Without Bread* using a preconceived soundtrack as a base, Cavalcanti was advocating the same in London. In this they coincided.

Buñuel never made another documentary. However, following his Hurdean experience, the documentary mode remained a feature of subsequent work, deeply influenced throughout by the visual and aural experiments of *Land Without Bread* as well as by those of his previous two films. Like Cavalcanti, he continued to work towards allowing for the release of the voices of the ordinary citizen, poetry, music – and even the State. Sonority, then, becomes a powerful link between reality and its documentary representation, a link that Rouch would also later exploit. [39]

After everything that had happened in Europe and Japan, Jean Rouch followed Buñuel's and Cavalcanti's examples in his African films, most notably *Moi, un noir* (1958). Cameras still had not been synchronised, but Rouch had already decided to make a film *with* his main characters, not *about* them, which is why he says in the prologue 'je leur passe la parole'. Just as Buñuel had killed the goat, so Rouch provoked situations in the film (1995). He too rose to the challenge of sound. The monologues and dialogues could only be put together in the editing room, dubbed over the image. The characters' spoken words were reactions to the sight of their own images on screen. This is a fundamental lesson in sound, inspired by the Soviets and developed by Buñuel and a Grierson-influenced Cavalcanti. Today this is a key element of the representation of reality. When it fails, it sharply exposes the mechanisms of modern propaganda. Much of the continuing impact of *Land Without Bread* is owed to this, as may be seen in its creative effects on the political documentary, most notably in contemporary Latin America.

I would like to conclude with a reflection on Buñuel's relationship to *Land Without Bread*. It is probably the film where he exercised greatest control. All key decisions were his. He wrote the script, the commentary (his input was greater than Unik's), and carried out the sound and image editing process, aided by the Republican Spanish ambassador in Paris at

the studios of Pierre Braunberger (whom he had previously helped out with a camera and some metres of film). He went into exile with a copy of the film. It opened the doors to the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) for him and gained him esteem in the eyes of Flaherty, who was inspired by it to shoot *The Land* (1942), another banned film.

Buñuel lived through the changes in the film, including the Republican epilogue. He wrote and rewrote the commentary according to the moment and his political persuasions between 1933 and 1936. He accepted the fact that a new soundtrack had to be made in 1965 (when he was again filming in Spain) and kept the unused material. There is really nothing gratuitous in *Land Without Bread*; it was adapted time and time again for specific reasons, but still retained what mattered most: the articulation of the compelling reasons why people become trapped by the things they love, as well as a testimony to the barbarity that lives side by side with the camera.

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Notes

[1] From the very beginning, Miguel de Unamuno is one of the most implicit references of the film. He had already reported on his travels through Hurdean lands in 1913 in Madrid's press. The articles were collected in book form in 1922, coinciding with the trip made by King Alfonso XIII to Las Hurdes (Unamuno, 1988). Unamuno was then perhaps the most significant personality of Spain's political regeneration. He had greatly contributed as a sounding board for republican ideas that finally became a political reality in 1931. *Land Without Bread* would carry out its Hurdean voyage in reverse order to Unamuno's. The film starts where Unamuno ended his journey, in La Alberca, and ends in the mountains of Las Hurdes, its poorest area, where Unamuno never went (Ibarz, 1999a, pp. 22–6).

[2] This frame is exactly the same as the photo from the beginning of the twentieth century by Maurice Legendre (1927, appendix) to whom Buñuel always expressed his gratitude.

[3] The relationship is even more evident in the preceding text of this first chapter, titled *Recuerdos medievales del Alto Aragón* published first in 1976 (Buñuel, 1982b, pp. 237–44).

[4] Pierre Unik published two reports on *Las Hurdes*, not in *Vogue*, as Buñuel stated in his memoirs, but in *Vu*. His text, with photographs by Eli Lotar, was not published until 1935, in the January and March issues (Unik, 1935). They were published in a shortened version, according to a letter that Unik wrote to Buñuel a few weeks later, that is now stored in the Filmoteca in Madrid. Some of the pages of the Unik–Lotar reportage can be consulted in Ibarz (1999a, pp. 75–81).

[5] Three villages in lower Las Hurdes were having a Freinetian experience. The children made the books: *Vida hurdana*. *Lo que escriben los niños*. The books are preserved at the Néstor Almendros' Archive, at the Fundació Soler i Godes at the Universitat Jaume I in Castelló (Spain). Some of the images can be seen in Ibarz (1999b, p. 113).

[6] Criticism was also aimed at the forced 'Pedagogic Missions' of the Republic, that brought theatre, books, photography and even cinema to the most remote places.

[7] In his critique of 1937, Basil Wright (1971, p. 146) doubted that the music and sound montage was Buñuel's work.

[8] Buñuel always tried to make amends for Ramón Acín's absence in the credits. He is the only one he continually cites in every single text or interview that refers to the film and its crew, the conference at the University of Columbia already mentioned being an example. In the 1960s, when he returned to Spain to film *Viridiana,* he paid Acín's daughters various sums for the film's rights.

[9] The date of the film has been established from documents found in *L'Âge d'or* (1993).

[10] Both the epilogue and the international premiere of the film during the war had a great influence on the area, especially with regard to the reforestation projects and other changes that Franco imposed on las Hurdes in 1940. From then on, although it has

adversely marked its history, the people of las Hurdes have benefited from the film, in the form of numerous reforms and privileges that they have received from European and Spanish governments both then and now.