100 YEARS OF SPANISH CINEMA

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struggle between paired totalitarianism, Stalinism and fascism" ("Lost and Found: Buñuel, *L'Âge d'or* and Surrealism," p. 20). Buñuel's prophetic voice leads us to the next segment of Spanish (film) history – the Civil War that lasted from 1936 to 1939.

1 *Un chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1929)

Context and Critical Commentary

Production credits

Director: Luis Buñuel
Production: Pierre Schilzneck; María Portolés, Luis Buñuel's mother
Cinematography: Albert Duverger
Screenplay: Luis Buñuel; Salvador Dalí
Score: Fragments of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*; popular Argentine tango
Genre: Drama, black and white, original version silent; soundtrack added in 1960
Country: France
Runtime: 17 minutes

Cast

Pierre Batcheff	Bicyclist
Luis Buñuel	Young man with razor
Salvador Dalí	Seminary student
Simone Mareuil	The woman
Fano Mesan	Androgynous woman
Jaume Miravitlles	Seminary student

Synopsis

This fractured, non-linear film begins with the title, "Once upon a time . . ." A young man sharpens his shaving razor on a balcony in the moonlight. A cloud then shades him as he slices a woman's eye with the razor. An intertitle then reads, "Eight years later." A bicyclist has an accident in the street. The young woman from the previous scene helps him up and kisses him. They go up to an apartment and begin a sexual encounter, when an incident on the street outside interrupts them. Someone plays with a severed hand that appears on the floor. Later, a police officer picks up the hand and gives it to a woman, who then puts it in a box. Directly following that incident, the woman is hit by a car. The bicyclist and the young woman continue their amorous pursuits in the apartment. Various typically surrealist dream sequences then occur, including the celebrated scene featuring bulls and pianos, discussed in the scene analysis below. Another intertitle reads, "Around 3 o'clock in the morning . . ." A character then enters the apartment, where he finds the couple and chastises the bicyclist by forcing him to carry books like a student. The books turn into pistols, which then kill the bicyclist. The young woman goes to a beach and there she meets another man. In the final scene another intertitle indicates that it is spring. Finally, the bodies of the young woman and her new companion appear half-buried and devoured by insects.

Critical Commentary

> Un chien andalou *would not exist had surrealism not existed.*[26]

Although more than 70 years have passed since this film's release, Buñuel's images continue to shock the public to this day. With little experience and a very limited budget (half of the money was provided by his mother), Luis Buñuel made his first film, which became a surrealist masterpiece and the movement's cinematic manifesto. Dalí and Buñuel collaborated on the screenplay, written in only six days and based on images from dreams they both had; Buñuel's was a cloud slicing the moon as a knife cuts part of an eye, and Dalí's was a hand full of ants. They consciously decided to avoid representing any ideas or images that could lend themselves to a rational plot explanation. The movie's scenes, surrealist in their representation of the unconscious dream process, were filmed in only two weeks. The release was an absolute public and critical success, motivating Buñuel to begin filming his second surrealist work, the feature-length *L'Âge d'or*, and consecrating him as a surrealist filmmaker par excellence. In 1960 the soundtrack was added to *Un chien andalou* under Buñuel's supervision, putting the final touch on the film that was released more than 30 years earlier, in 1929.

Film Scenes: Close Readings

Scene 1 The sliced eye

The slicing of the woman's eye with a razor that opens *Un chien andalou* could be interpreted as an aperture to the surrealist perspective, suggesting an allegorical reading of the movement's artistic postures. The conventional way of seeing is problematized through the cutting of the eye, which encourages an exploration of the latent contents of the irrational world and the unconscious. The man with the razor is played by Buñuel himself. It is noteworthy that the director actually slices the eye, claiming artistic agency, inserting himself into the action of the film, and visually connecting the director to the intentionality of the gesture. With this radical act Buñuel demonstrates, as Jenaro Talens suggests, that "the question is not so much to show the world but to analyze how this world is looked at (that is, constituted) by the cinematographic apparatus" (Talens, *The Branded Eye: Buñuel's Un chien andalou*, p. xvi). The surprising and visually graphic mutilation of the eye enacts a form of physical aggression not just on the eye, but on the spectator as well. Thus, in the spirit of surrealism, this gesture compels the spectator to be an active subject when faced with a work of art.

Figure 2.1 The sliced eye (*Un chien andalou*, 1929)

Scene 2 Seduction

This scene can be considered a mise-en-scène of desire and its impulses, made visible in the lover's unabashed chasing of the object of his passion – the woman. The seduction also reveals a power struggle. The spectator sees the close-up of the male hands ripping the dress and caressing the parts of a visually fragmented female body: hair, breasts, waist, and buttocks. Furthermore, this scene alternates superimposed takes of a "dressed" body with those of a "naked" body, thus metaphorically advocating the "undressing" of the body from that which constricts and alienates it from its "liberated" state.

This scene also manifests a nearly endless frustration of desire, as the body has to be repeatedly revealed through the removal of yet another layer of clothing. The other interruption, from the disturbance on the street, also points to the structural impossibility of desire's fulfillment. Finally, this scene reflects the tumultuous relationship between surrealism and its representation of women, both venerated and objectified in the surrealist's quest for aesthetic expression. The fragmented female body conceptually sustains the surrealist work of art, where the intersection of art and femininity (often fragmented) is inevitable. There are various instances that present the female body as the site through which an avant-garde revolution of thought is enacted; however, this very transgression objectifies the female body, putting it on the front lines of the surrealist's conceptual and ideological battleground.

Figure 2.2 Seduction (*Un chien andalou*, 1929)

Scene 3 Seduction interrupted: bearing burdens

In this scene, which follows the "Seduction" scene analyzed above, the protagonist, a prisoner of his own desire, displaces his impulse to pursue the woman onto the surprising act of dragging heavy burdens (corks, melons, priests, donkeys, and pianos). Various critical articles have interpreted these images as representations of the burdens of the protagonist's childhood, tradition, religion, and education. According to Phillip Drummond, this interpretation is "too transparent," resulting in "overly literal" readings ("Textual Space in *Un chien andalou*: Donkeys and Pianos"). Instead, analyzing the scene's incongruence offers a more fruitful reading. The scene brings together vital elements of the surrealist project: narrative disruption; the presence of dream matter; the element of surprise in the narration; incongruence; absence of a defining logical thread; and a break with the traditional concept of spatial and temporal borders. In formal terms, the editing also follows surrealist principles: movement, camera angles, and different takes correspond arbitrarily to each other, depriving the viewer of spatial and narrative referents. The formal and thematic incongruence reaches its climax when, in the end of the scene, the "seduced" protagonist escapes through a window that brings her back to the identical spot from where she had fled.[27]

2 *Tierra sin pan* (Luis Buñuel, 1933)

Context and Critical Commentary

Production credits

Director: Luis Buñuel
Production: Luis Buñuel; Ramón Acín
Cinematography: Eli Lotar
Screenplay: Luis Buñuel; Pierre Unik; Julio Acín
Score: Johannes Brahms (Symphony no. 4)
Genre: Documentary drama, black and white, voice-over
Country: Spain
Runtime: 30 minutes

Cast

Anonymous characters from the different rural zones of the region of Las Hurdes, in the autonomous community of Extremadura, western Spain.

Synopsis

An establishing shot shows a map of Europe and then slowly zooms in on Spain and the area of Las Hurdes, while a voice-over indicates that there are some places where civilization is at a standstill. This voice-over narration comments on the images and scenes of daily life in Las Hurdes throughout the documentary. The camera then shows the streets and houses of the town of La Alberca, where the inhabitants congregate in the plaza to celebrate a traditional festival in which some of the townspeople decapitate chickens while riding horseback. Various shots then show the landscape of the towns in the region and single out an old convent. The camera pans over a river stream where it settles on children drinking and washing themselves, a woman washing dishes, pigs splashing, and children soaking stale bread to eat. These same children, dirty and barefoot, then enter a school where they write about respect for private property while the voice-over points out the absurdity of the image. Various sequences then show people sick with some of the abundant illnesses in the area, in addition to people with development disabilities and dwarfism. In a series of images, we see a swarm of bees as it attacks and kills the donkey that is transporting their hive; the misery of the townspeople contrasted with the wealth of the town's churches; a goat falling as it is killed by a gunshot; and the cadaver of an anonymous baby transported several miles away for its burial. Finally, one night an old woman laments in the street that one of its inhabitants has died. The narrator concludes the film by saying that after two months in Las Hurdes the film crew abandoned the region.

Critical commentary

Tierra sin pan, a "cinematographic essay of human geography," as the film's opening credits indicate, was filmed in 1933. It is structured as a film-collage, or a montage of images and narration that reveal the harsh reality and daily

misery of the anonymous inhabitants of Las Hurdes, in Spain's Extremadura region. *Tierra sin pan* is not a purely ethnographic film, but a hybrid work that combines Buñuel's particular, idiosyncratic surrealist montage with testimonial documentary about the lives of the people of Las Hurdes.

The intellectual fascination with the zone of Las Hurdes goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century. From 1904 to 1908, and later in 1926, a cultural magazine entitled *Las Hurdes* was published monthly. The interest in the region culminated in the celebration of a conference for scholars with an interest in Las Hurdes (Congreso de Jurdanófilos), which featured various reformist intellectuals of the time who were involved in a progressive social agenda. But it was in 1922 that the zone came into the public light when the Spanish press widely covered a visit King Alfonso XIII made to the region. Doctor Marañón, a prestigious Spanish doctor and intellectual figure, accompanied the king on his trip and published a memoir of the trip. A film was even made about the royal visit, and although its primary purpose was to promote the figure of the king, it showed scenes of what life was like in Las Hurdes at that time. In 1927 Maurice Legendre, a Frenchman, published his book *Las Hurdes: étude de geographie humaine*, which intrigued intellectuals and scholars of the time. Inspired by this publication, various members of the Parisian October Group, consisting of writers with communist leanings, decided to make a film about Las Hurdes. Writer Yves Allegret and photographer Eli Lotar traveled from France to Las Hurdes to hunt out scene locations. However, when they arrived the authorities detained Allegret and Lotar for their political beliefs, and the two left once they were released. When Allegret returned to Paris, he told Buñuel about their aborted project, prompting Buñuel to make his own film about the remote region in 1933.

Tierra sin pan, noteworthy for its abundant winks to surrealism and the intentionality of its montage, is a complex work of art rather than a simple geographical documentary. Buñuel manipulates and constructs the reality of the film, as in the famous scenes of the shooting of the goat or the killing of the donkey by a swarm of bees. The soundtrack is as manipulated and transgressive. Buñuel juxtaposes the dry, distant voice-over with the dreadful content of what is actually being described; the lack of empathy in the voice clashes with the poverty-stricken milieu and is designed to provoke an emotional reaction in the spectators.

Buñuel himself supervised the recording of the voice-over, whose cold and distant reading sounds as if, instead of describing a trip to misery, it is narrating an excursion to an exotic place, coded in the tone of a documentary travelogue. This Brechtian technique of reinforcing the distance between the image and the narration intensifies the rawness of what we see on screen, and the spectator thus tunes in to the desperation of these anonymous subjects. The film also employs surrealist iconography and cinematic techniques, such as experimentation with close-ups, fades, the evocative juxtaposition of images, and the dislocation of sound from image.

With this film Buñuel denounces the endemic problems of Spanish society – the educational system, the power of the church, the economic crisis – and advocates for the disentitlement of private property belonging to the aristocracy and the Catholic church; the restructuring of the agricultural system; the push for public medicine; and the development of a more solid economic and social infrastructure – the very same issues that the Republican regime in power was facing. Without a doubt, in *Tierra sin pan* Buñuel makes a case for the modernization of Spain, a goal that was also defended by the Republic, and in this way shows the commitment of the Spanish avant-garde and progressive groups to the concrete social reality of the moment. Perhaps for this reason, *Tierra sin pan* was censored during the second, more conservative term of the Republican government under the presidency of Alejandro Lerroux. Buñuel would have to wait until 1936 to show this film in Paris and London, with the narration recorded in both French and English. Consequently, there are different versions of the film: the original in Spanish; the French version, which was sonorized in 1965 under Buñuel's supervision; the English version with some scenes censored; and finally, another Spanish version from 1966, which was dubbed by the actor Francisco Rabal and includes scenes that had been censored in the original version. In this last copy, however, the actor's narration loses the distance and coldness that Buñuel had originally scripted to provoke the viewer. The screening of *Tierra sin pan* was followed by the onset of the Spanish Civil War, and Buñuel's exile to Mexico; 13 years passed before he made another film.

Film Scenes: Close Readings

Scene 1 The Buñuelian composition: the donkey and the goat

In *Tierra sin pan* not only are the images that capture the daily reality of the people of Las Hurdes remarkable, but so are the sequences that Buñuel

intentionally constructed to make them fit with the film's objective: to provoke the spectator with visualizations of misery and hopelessness. This intentionality implies that not only was the film's narration meticulously scripted, but the visual aspects and events that are presented as non-fiction were carefully constructed as well.

The scene of the goat falling down the mountain did not occur as explained by the narrator; Buñuel himself shot the animal, which the viewer can see through the gun smoke that appears on the right side of the screen. Nor is the scene in which a swarm of bees kills a donkey spontaneous. The crew planned two separate shots to film the scene in which vultures pick at the dead donkey, and actually transported the dead animal to their chosen site.

These sequences – the goat falling and the dead donkey, among others – show how in *Tierra sin pan* reality is altered to fit a scripted narrative. These scenes, which are not a simple reproduction of "reality," together with the film's unsettling voice-over, create an exceptional fusion of ethnographic documentary with surrealism. Lastly, this surrealist manipulation of reality is emphasized through the association between the dead donkey of *Tierra sin pan* and the donkey head that sits on top of a piano in Buñuel's surrealist masterpiece, *Un chien andalou*.

Scene 2 The denunciation: "respect other people's property"

In this scene depicting education in Las Hurdes, not only are the visual shots relevant, but the voice-over is as well, as it underscores what we see on screen. After a scene in which children soak their stale bread in a river where pigs are also bathing, the children enter the village's humble school. Dirty and barefoot, they sit at their decrepit desks while the narrator says, "these children, barefoot and with ragged clothes, receive the same schooling as the rest of the children in the world." The message of this line highlights the incongruity between the misery of the children of Las Hurdes and the educational system, which is anachronistic and alienated from the reality and social context in which these children actually live. The shots of their bare and dirty feet are juxtaposed with the close-ups of their faces, serious and prematurely old, while the narrator describes how "these hungry children are taught, as they are everywhere else, that the sum of the angles of a triangle . . ." Then in perfect handwriting a child writes on the chalkboard, "respect other people's property," which is meaningless within the framework of their absolute poverty.

In this sequence Buñuel denounces one of the endemic problems of Spanish society that the Republican regime of the time attempted to resolve: public education. In 1933, the year Buñuel filmed *Tierra sin pan*, the Spanish Republic that was installed two years earlier was living through a moment of crisis and contradiction; despite its progressive inspiration, the regime took a conservative turn with Alejandro Lerroux's period of centre-right rule (1933–5). Perhaps for this reason, in *Tierra sin pan* Buñuel denounced the persistence of the atavistic educational system and old ideological structures, and demonstrated the need for a pedagogical renovation of public education, one of the Republic's main objectives. The writing of the sentence about respecting other people's property is paradoxical in a situation like that of the children of Las Hurdes, where the images on screen lay bare the misery and scarcity they suffer. The empathy that the Hurdanos' poverty evokes from the viewer is heightened by this perfectly written yet absurd sentence. In addition to the outdated educational system, the film critiques Spanish society's other unjust structures or systems, such as the ownership of private property and land being almost exclusively in the hands of the aristocracy and the church. Thus, the ties between the socialist agenda of the times and the film's objectives are explicit; moreover, some members of the film crew, like Pierre Unik or Buñuel himself, were linked to the Communist Party and advocated its political and social ideals. Finally, at the time of its completion, a photo essay of the film was published in the communist-oriented magazine *Octubre*, edited by poet Rafael Alberti.

Scene 3 The convent of Batuecas: the surreal and the subconscious

In this scene we see a wide shot of the abandoned convent of Las Batuecas while the narrator emphasizes that "only one monk, surrounded by various servants, actually lives there." Then the camera juxtaposes multiple close-ups: the church steeple, a servant's body, and the Virgin carved on the front of the building; and shows a panorama of the convent in ruins along with the suggestive penetration of the arc of one of its walls. The scene's Freudian elements and surrealist aesthetic foreground Buñuel's complex scrutiny of religion, power, and sexuality. Buñuel appeals to the subconscious as a means of linking the otherwise disconnected elements of the scene. Thus, the way the scene is edited suggests a critique of the power of the Catholic church, a key element of Buñuel's political and surrealist engagement. Through the

visual parallel between the church steeple, whose phallic symbolism stands out over the flat landscape, and the penetration of the arc as a suggestion of femininity or the female, the filmmaker constructs an unconscious association characteristic of surrealism. Through this symbolic linkage, the film denounces not only the institutional power of the church over the town's inhabitants, but also the outdated persistence of Catholic doctrine with respect to chastity and sexual relations, and the anachronistic iconicity of feminine virginity.

Some of the technical aspects that stand out most in this scene are the fades, the associative juxtaposition of shots, and the collage of images that illustrate Buñuel's surrealist stylistic tendencies. The montage technique utilized in this scene is also reminiscent of Buñuel's avant-garde period, intensified by the presence of his surrealist iconography and subjects: the obsessive focus on death, the fascination with repressed drives and desires, the seductiveness of violence, and the sinister power of the church. All of these elements inscribe the film in the ambiguous, hybrid space between an ethnographic documentary and a disturbing surrealist aesthetic exercise.

Director (Life and Works)

Luis Buñuel (b. Calanda 1900, d. Mexico City 1983)

Luis Buñuel Portolés was born on February 22, 1900, in Calanda (Teruel, Spain). He was the oldest of seven children in a wealthy bourgeois family living in Zaragoza. In 1917 he moved to Madrid to begin his higher education. Buñuel went to the prestigious Residencia de Estudiantes, where he met Salvador Dalí and Federico García Lorca, among other artists and intellectuals who would also become powerful cultural figures in Spain. Forced by his father, Buñuel applied to study agricultural engineering, but was not accepted. Instead, he registered for courses in entomology, and also studied philosophy and literature. Ultimately, he graduated in 1924 with a major in history. His attraction to the sciences, principally entomology, influenced his films, the early surrealist works in particular.

In 1924 Buñuel moved to Paris and enrolled in the Film Academy, which was run by Camilla Bardoux, Alex Allen, and Jean Epstein, for whom he worked as an assistant director. Epstein fired Buñuel in 1927 because he

refused to work with Abel Gance, a well-known director of large-scale productions such as *Napoleón*, whose style Buñuel did not appreciate. In 1928 Buñuel joined the group of Parisian surrealists, whom he met through his circle of friends from the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid. His exploration of surrealist aesthetics and cinema, led to the making of his first film, *Un chien andalou* (1929), co-written with Salvador Dalí. The film received unanticipated public and critical acclaim. The following year Buñuel released *L'Âge d'or*, initially written in collaboration with Dalí, but ultimately finished solely by Buñuel. Because of its anticlericalism and critique of established bourgeois society, the film was censored only a few months after its release.

Buñuel then returned to Spain to make *Las Hurdes* (1932), whose title later became *Tierra sin pan* (*Land Without Bread*). The majority of critics agree that this work could be labeled a "documentary parody" because of its fusion of ethnography and surrealism through a dissociative process of montage, image, and sound that provoke a more intense engagement with the spectator. In this way, Buñuel continued to employ the unconscious associations characteristic of surrealism that he had already used in his two earlier films. The movie was doubly censored in Spain by both the Republican government (1931–6) and the Franco regime (1939–75), which alleged that the images were excessively harsh in their exposition of the abject poverty and misery of the region.

In the mid-1930s Buñuel worked for Ricardo María Urgoiti at Filmófono, where he produced and partially directed four early Spanish sound films: *Don Quintín el amargao* and *La hija de Juan Simón* in 1935 and *¿Quién me quiere a mí?* and *¡Centinela alerta!* in 1936. That same year the Civil War broke out, and Buñuel, a Republican sympathizer, went into exile in the United States, living in Los Angeles and New York from 1938 to 1945. While in the United States, he worked on political documentaries as an adviser and film editor at the Museum of Modern Art in New York as well as for major Hollywood studios, supervising Spanish-language versions of films for MGM and dubbing for Warner Brothers.

In 1946 he moved to Mexico, where he filmed *Gran casino*. He became a Mexican citizen, along with his wife, Jeanne Rucar, and their two children. In this context Buñuel's personal nomadism was transposed to what Marsha Kinder termed a "nomadic discourse" ("The Nomadic Discourse of Luis Buñuel: A Rambling Overview"), potentiated by his exile and displacement. Buñuel's films, reflecting his existence in such diverse and complex cultural milieus, are cinematic and aesthetic hybrids.

In 1950 Buñuel filmed *Los olvidados*, his Mexican masterpiece on poverty-stricken, marginalized street children, and won the award for Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival. It is during this "Mexican phase" that Buñuel gained international recognition for his work. These films, *Nazarín* (1958), *Viridiana* (1961), which obtained the Palme d'Or at Cannes, and *El ángel exterminador* (1962), are characterized by their biting social commentary, and are universally acknowledged as Buñuel's tours de force. It is important to highlight that Buñuel returned to Spain to film *Viridiana*, at which point the Franco regime attempted to use the film and its director, a world-renowned figure and an icon of the Spanish avant-garde, as a self-promoting cultural and political tool. However, *Viridiana*'s transgressive and sacrilegious content earned it the Vatican's condemnation, and the Franco government prohibited the film from being shown in Spanish theaters. It was finally screened in Spain in 1977, two years after the dictator's death.

Buñuel's following films include *Simón del desierto* (1965), *Belle de jour* (1966), *La Vía Láctea* (1969), and *Tristana* (1970). He then made two of his most significant works: *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (1972), which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, and *Cet obscur objet du désir* (1977), his final film. He retired from filmmaking completely and in 1982 published a memoir, *Mi último suspiro* (*My Last Breath*). Luis Buñuel died at his home in Mexico City on July 30, 1983.

3

Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)

1 *Suspiros de España* (Benito Perojo, 1938)
2 *Canciones para después de una guerra* (Basilio Martín Patino, 1971) (documentary footage 1939–54)

Historical and Political Overview of the Period

Social tensions and political instability, in part due to the discontent of conservative sectors and the monarchy, which rejected the Second Republic (1931–6), culminated in a military uprising led by General Francisco Franco on July 17, 1936, against the democratically elected Popular Front government. The Popular Front was an electoral coalition of left-wing political organizations that had won the previous election with the support of the progressive middle class, industrial workers, unionists, peasants, and activists, as well as the regional governments of Catalonia and the Basque provinces. On the opposing side, the church and the landowning and industrial elites backed the military, led by General Francisco Franco. The Falange, the Spanish fascist party, and various right-wing paramilitary groups were also opposed to the Republic. The military conflict intensified into a full-scale, three-year-long civil war that divided the national territory of Spain into two spheres: Republican and Nationalist.

Since the Popular Front government had strongholds and support in the eastern part of Spain, as well as Barcelona and Madrid, the two most important film industry centers remained in Republican hands. The Nationalists were in a much weaker position in the beginning of the war, left with only the crews from two movies that were being filmed on their territory at the time: Fernando Delgado's *El genio alegre* (Córdoba) and Tomás Cola's *Asilio naval* (Cádiz). The Spanish Civil War thus divided both the nation and national cinematography. Nevertheless, the Nationalist disadvantage was soon equalized through the use of the film industry infrastructure of the Axis forces (Germany and Italy) as well as Portugal.