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# DALÍ, SURREALISM AND CINEMA

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# Salvador Dalí, The Youngest, Most Sacred Monster of the Cinema in His Time

Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) once remarked, 'The day that people seriously turn their attention to my work, they will see that my painting is like an iceberg where only a tenth of its volume is visible.'[1] The Catalan artist was referring to the profundity of the ideas that went into his fantastic seascapes populated by 'soft watches', though the word 'painting' might easily have been replaced with 'movies'. Dalí loved movies. He enjoyed watching the old silent comedies starring Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, the great Italian and French films by Federico Fellini and Marcel Pagnol, and the animated films produced by Walt Disney – he used to project them for friends at his home in Port Lligat. His artwork also referenced cinema celebrities: Shirley Temple, Marilyn Monroe, Mae West and Sir Laurence Olivier all became 'dream subjects' in Dalí's masterfully-rendered canvases. But the films Dalí conceived *himself* have rarely been given proper consideration. They've remained beneath the surface of that Dalínian iceberg.

Some will probably know the 1929 short he made with Luis Buñuel, *Un Chien Andalou* (*The Andalusian Dog*) – its opening, in which a razor-blade slashes a young woman's eyeball, has become one of the most celebrated sequences in cinema history – and perhaps also the dream sequence from Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945), but these are only the most famous examples; the majority of his ideas never materialised. Though less arcane than they once were, most of Dalí's scripts are still

observed that in the cinematic close-up an object is given over to the world of the fantastic – 'On the screen objects that were a few moments ago sticks of furniture of books of cloakroom tickets are transformed to the point where they take on menacing or enigmatic meanings'[9] – Dalí immediately recognised the potential the close-up offered for distorting reality. Later in 1927, in the December issue of *La Gaceta Literaria*, Dalí authored another article, 'Film-arte, film-antiartístico' ('Artistic Film, Anti-Artistic Film'), in which he observed that, thanks to the faculties of close-up, a lump of sugar could loom on the screen as large as a city, while Vermeer's painting *The Lacemaker* (1669–1670) – a relatively small canvas – could become grandiose.

I introduce these ideas here because they recur over and over again in Dalí's dealings with film. His fascination with the close-up as a means of looking at objects anew was introduced in the 1920s, but it would arguably not fully come into its own until 1975, when his film *Impressions of Upper Mongolia – Homage to Raymond Roussel* launched all its action from the microscopic scratches on a ballpoint pen. His contemporaneous interest in the capabilities of photography to capture a subject 'naturally' but through simple effects transform it into something altogether unexpected was another aspect that would take precedence in his work in forthcoming years, particularly in the development of 'critical paranoia'. Of course influences introduced after the 1920s had their impact on Dalí's vision of the cinema, too – most profoundly, Surrealism. But through it all, he never gave up on the ideas he forged in the 1920s – that is, those views that very nearly led him to pursue film and photography in favour of painting.



# 'C'EST UN FILM SURRÉALISTE!'

While *Un Chien Andalou* is now widely considered the quintessential Surrealist motion picture – in 1929, Buñuel even went so far as to declare in the pages of the Surrealist periodical *La Révolution surréaliste* that '*Un Chien Andalou* would not exist if Surrealism did not exist'[1] – in the years leading to its inception Dalí was, as we have seen, *resistant* to Surrealism (in 1927 the art critic Sebastià Gasch labelled Dalí 'the archetypal anti-Surrealist', adding, 'Nobody loathes Surrealism as thoroughly as Dalí'![2]). *Un Chien Andalou* is arguably Surrealist in many ways, but in exploring its irrational storyline it is good to keep in mind that it was also heavily indebted to the 'anti-art film' Dalí ideologically developed in the late 1920s, spurred by Buñuel and Lorca, Joan Miró's 'assassination of painting' and his own growing dissatisfaction with the Catalan avant-garde; much later this 'anti-art' attitude would inform *The Wheelbarrow of Flesh* (1948–1954) and *The Prodigious Story of the Lacemaker and the Rhinoceros* (1954-1962), both of which Dalí would describe as completely contrary to artistic, experimental film.

## *UN CHIEN ANDALOU*, 1929

In the opening to his 1964 self-promotional journal, *Diary of a Genius*, Dalí expressed the benefits he perceived to wearing shoes that were too tight: 'The painful pressure they exert on my feet enhances my oratorical capacities to the utmost.'[3] One wonders, then, about the state of his feet in 1928, when – according to his account, anyway – he

penned the then-untitled script for what would become his most celebrated contribution to the cinema, *Un Chien Andalou* (*The Andalusian Dog*) (1929); he had just purchased a new pair of shoes, he later recalled, and he wrote a very short scenario on the shoebox lid that 'went completely counter to the contemporary cinema.'[4]

Around the same time, a 28-year-old Luis Buñuel, one of Dalí's closest friends and soon to become one of the twentieth century's most celebrated directors, was preparing a film titled *Caprichos*, based on a series of short stories by the Spanish writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Buñuel envisioned a man reading a newspaper from which Gómez de la Serna's short stories would appear animated in different sections. Buñuel's mother had already agreed to loan the 60,000 francs needed to finance the picture, but Gómez de la Serna had yet to come up with the promised screenplay. Dalí wasn't impressed with the idea at all, which he subsequently described as 'extremely mediocre' and avant-garde 'in an incredibly naïve sort of way';[5] he, on the other hand, had his shoebox scenario, which, he declared immodestly, 'had the touch of genius'![6]

Buñuel was impressed, recognising in Dalí's scenario some affinities with Surrealism, the intellectual movement with which Buñuel had recently made contact in Paris. The term *surréalisme* was coined by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917 and was thence taken up in 1924 by a group of politically-minded intellectuals in Paris led by the poet André Breton (1896–1966). Surrealism sought to unleash the potential of the unbridled mind – a mission reflected in the definition of Surrealism put forth in the *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924): 'Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, or in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought.' This endeavour initially limited the Movement to the realm of writing – unsurprising given that its founders were all chiefly poets; in these embryonic years, painting and other visual arts were not considered sufficiently 'automatic' to authentically fulfil the Surrealists' aims of tapping the subconscious. This prejudice ultimately gave way, however, as artists such as André





Masson, Joan Miró and Man Ray persuasively applied the Surrealists' ideology to their visual work.

As the Surrealists' scepticism over painting waned, they became increasingly enthusiastic over the prospects of film, which had already proven a popular vehicle for the Dadaists (of which Breton had also been a member). The reasons were clear:

> The only truly modern art form, it was unhampered by tradition; its immediacy and emotive power offered fertile ground for the surrealist metaphor; its condemnation by the establishment as immoral and corrupting clearly enhanced its potential for social revolt and the expression of sexual fantasy; its perceived similarities to the state of dreaming seemed ready-made for the surrealists' own exploration of dreams and subconscious desires.'[7]

The Surrealists were zealous movie spectators: Breton and his friend Jacques Vaché would often wander from one theatre to the next, buying tickets for anything that was showing and then exiting the film half-way through, 'relishing the visual collage thus put together in their heads as if it were a single film.'[8] For the Surrealists, cinema was an intermediary state between life and dream – not a means to escape reality but to intensify it: The Surrealist Philippe Soupault recalled, 'One can think that, from the birth of Surrealism, we sought to discover, thanks to the cinema, the means for expressing the immense power of the dream.'[9]

But despite the Surrealists' enthusiasm for others' films, they were having difficulty conceiving 'automatic' films of their own; those made by Man Ray and Antonin Artaud failed to live up to the Group's aspirations. They needed a catalyst, not only to launch Surrealism into the realm of cinema but also to expand its international scope. The climate was opportune for Buñuel, who had come to Paris in 1925 with the idea of becoming a diplomat; when this fell through, he secured an apprenticeship with the renowned French director Jean Epstein, notably serving as assistant director on Epstein's acclaimed adaptation of Edgar

Allan Poe's *La Chute de la maison Usher* (1928). He began frequenting the Café Cyrano in the Place Blanche where the Surrealists routinely held meetings, and by January 1929 he was a full-fledged member of the Group. Now Dalí's script was his opportunity to truly bring Surrealism to the silver screen.

Buñuel spoke to Dalí about his shoebox script and made plans to travel to Figueres in February 1929 to work over the scenario. 'The aim is to produce something absolutely new in the history of the cinema', Buñuel told the newspaper reporter Josep Puig Pujades, who disseminated news of the film in *La Veu de l'Empordà.* 'We hope to make visible certain subconscious states which we believe can only be expressed by the cinema.'[10] Writing took only six days and was, according to both, a quick and joyful collaboration, while their attempt to expel reason in favour of whatever wild fantasies came into their heads was readily comparable to the automatic writing the Surrealists championed. Buñuel recalled:

> We wrote with minds open to the first ideas that came into them and at the same time systematically rejecting everything that arose from our culture and education. They had to be images that would surprise us and that we would both accept without discussion. Nothing else. For example: The woman seizes a racket to defend herself from the man who is about to attack her. And then he looks for something to counterattack with and (now I'm speaking to Dalí) 'What does he see?' 'A flying toad.' 'No good.' 'A bottle of brandy.' 'No good.' 'Well, he sees two ropes.' 'Good, but what's on the end of the ropes?' 'The chap pulls on them and falls because he's dragging something very heavy.' 'Well, it's good he falls down,' 'Attached to them are two dried gourds.' 'What else?' 'Two Marist brothers.' 'That's it! Two Marists. And then?' 'A cannon.' 'No good' 'Let's have a luxury armchair.' 'No, a grand piano.' 'Very good, and on top of the grand piano a donkey – no, two donkeys.' 'Wonderful.' Well, maybe we just drew our irrational representations with no explication…[11]





In the end, it is impossible to know just who was responsible for what images in the film, though the collaborative effort of the two suggests that this was anyway meant to be a moot point (and might have stayed so had Dalí and Buñuel not experienced a falling out after *L'Âge d'Or* [1930], leading each to claim the best parts of the film for himself and blame the rest on the other!). It is also unclear to what extent Dalí had already conceived the film's storyline on the shoebox – indeed, no trace of this first script has actually surfaced, leading some to doubt its existence and the validity of Dalí's claim to have written the first scenario at all. Buñuel later described the film's origin as the product of two dreams – his about slicing an eye with a razor, and Dalí's about a hand festering with ants.

In April 1929, Dalí convinced his father to give him the money to travel to Paris to assist Buñuel in realising their film. Buñuel hired a studio at Billancourt, a cameraman and two professional actors, Simone Mareuil, and the French silent movie star Pierre Batcheff. Shooting took two weeks, though Dalí was apparently present on the set for only one of the last days, when he spent most of his time preparing the two donkeys that would figure into one of the most memorable scenes.

*Un Chien Andalou* catapulted to become the most famous short ever made. As American film critic Roger Ebert notes, '[A]nyone halfway interested in the cinema sees it sooner or later, usually several times',[12] and in July 2006, *Radio Times* ranked it amongst the top 25 must-see movies for aspiring cinema buffs. It has become the stuff of pop culture, too: During his 1976 tour, rock star David Bowie screened *Un Chien Andalou* as his opening act (much to the audience's bafflement), and it later inspired the Pixies' 1989 song *Debaser* ('Got me a movie/ I want you to know/ slicing up eyeballs/ I want you to know/ girlie so groovy/ I want you to know/ don't know about you/ but I am un chien andalusia').

So, after all this pomp and praise, what is *Un Chien Andalou* about? That's a difficult question, as the film eschews any lucid storyline. It opens with the idyllic fairytale cliché, 'Once upon a time'. Against the background staccatos of an Argentinean tango, Buñuel is seen method-

ically sharpening a razorblade as he puffs at his cigar. He tests the blade on his thumb, then steps onto his balcony. When a thin cloud cuts across the full moon overhead, he returns inside and slits open Simone Mareuil's left eye – in fact a calf's eye, though the effect is startlingly effective.

The attack against the eye – possibly inspired by Benjamin Péret's 1928 poem *Les arômes de l'amour* ('What greater pleasure / than to make love / the body wrapped in cries / the eyes shut by razors')[13] – never fails to solicit gasps of horror from audiences, even today. Perhaps one imagines one's own eyeball sliced open with horrific exactitude, or perhaps it is the unexpected impact the scene has without any development whatsoever. We are given no time to prepare: We don't know anything about this woman's past nor about what might have led Buñuel to dissect her eye, particularly in light of her *non sequitur* placidity.

Opening scene of *Un Chien Andalou*, 1929. Directed by Luis Buñuel; Produced by Luis Buñuel. ©Video Yesteryear / Photofest.





Further, nothing develops from this grotesque mutilation. The spectator cannot help fashioning a chronological continuity between the slashed eye and what follows, but this is a fallacy – indeed, her ostensibly unprovoked attacker never appears in the film again, and the next episode – introduced, 'Eight years later' – finds the heroine's eye inexplicably intact. Almost as if it's a different film, the script turns to Batcheff riding a bicycle down a Paris street. He is dressed in a dark suit, over which he wears feminine frilly cuffs and a skirt, a collar and a hat with large white wings that blow backwards as he rides; he has a strange box tied around his neck, which reappears throughout the film. Cut to Mareuil, who is sitting in her third-floor flat reading a book. Apparently struck by a sound outside, she throws down the book – which falls open to an illustration of Jan Vermeer's painting, *The Lacemaker* – and goes to the window just in time to see Batcheff arrive and, without the least resistance, fall off his bicycle into the gutter.

Mareuil runs down to meet him. She kisses him passionately, then brings his garments upstairs (what has happened to him remains a mystery) and lays them out on her bed in the form of a body. She then sits down a concentrates on the clothes as if she expects something to manifest: The trick is effective and the man appears, though not on the bed but on the other side of the room. He is completely absorbed by a hole in the centre of his outstretched right hand that is leaking a colony of ants. From this, the scene dissolves into a hairy armpit, a spiny sea urchin, and a severed hand resting strangely on the ground amidst a bustling crowd viewed from above that gives it no notice, save a woman with a close-cropped hairstyle who pokes the hand curiously with a stick. A policeman approaches, puts the hand in the box formerly carried by Batcheff, and gives it to the woman; she clutches it closely to her breast in the middle of the road, seemingly uncertain of where to turn next, until she is struck dead by a passing automobile.

Batcheff and Mareuil have observed all this from their flat window. Strangely aroused, Batcheff begins chasing Mareuil around the room. As he caresses her, another sequence of dissolves is set in motion as her

breasts become her buttocks, both clothed and bare. Batcheff's eyes roll back into his head as if experiencing some sort of seizure or perhaps even a profound ecstasy; his mouth trickles blood and is transformed into an anus. Mareuil breaks away and attempts to fend off her assailant with a tennis racket. As Batcheff makes his way towards Mareuil, he takes up two ropes, each of which is tied to a cork followed by a melon, a Catholic priest and a grand piano containing the cadaver of a putrescent donkey, which Dalí took special care to prepare by removing the eyes and cutting back the lips so that the teeth would reflect the same whiteness as the piano keys. The woman rushes into the adjoining room but, as she closes the door, the man sticks his ant-infested hand through the frame. Suddenly the two are in the same room again: The man is lying quietly in bed.

The next caption reads 'About three o'clock in the morning', perpetu-

Pierre Batcheff pulls two pianos, each containing a deceased donkey. *Un Chien Andalou*, 1929. Directed by Luis Buñuel; Produced by Luis Buñuel. ©Kino / Photofest.





ating the false chronology. An impatient stranger – also played by Batcheff and thus suggesting the heroic double to the frilly-frocked cyclist, or perhaps an older version of the character raging war against a less mature self – breaks into the room and throws the cyclist's belongings out the window before ordering the cyclist to go stand in the corner. Another caption appears – 'Sixteen years earlier' – but the scene returns to the two men, unchanged. The heroic Batcheff takes a pair of books from a school desk and hands them to the cyclist to hold in his outstretched arms like a crucifix to continue the punishment, but the books suddenly turn into pistols and the heroic Batcheff is shot dead by his *doppelgänger*. As the heroic Batcheff collapses face-down, a dissolve sends him to a sunny park; his hand grazes the naked back of a young woman sitting beside him. A small crowd gathers, and a group of male park-keepers carry him off in a funerary procession.

The camera returns to Mareuil sitting alone in her flat. She stares at a death's head hawkmoth – a species of moth native to the Mediterranean and Middle East and a notorious symbol of bad luck thanks to the shape of a skull that appears on its thorax – on the opposite wall. Again, 'evil Batcheff' appears. He puts his hand to his face and, upon removing it, reveals an absent mouth, to which she responds by adorning her own mouth with lipstick. Batcheff's mouth thence sprouts hair – apparently somehow stolen from Mareuil's underarms. Exasperated, she sticks out her tongue, throws on a shawl and marches out through the door, which opens onto a windy beach. A new lover is there waiting for her. He motions at his watch, and Mareuil rushes towards him happily. It seems the new couple with live 'happily ever after', complementing the film's opening, 'once upon a time', but the final shot turns their fate sour: Following the caption, 'In the spring', the woman is shown buried up to her chest in sand. She is blinded, her clothes are tattered, and she is burned by the sun and plagued by insects; a man is there with her too, though it is unclear whether it is Batcheff or her mysterious lover. The film ends.

*Un Chien Andalou* indubitably offers much for would-be interpreters,

though it is unclear whether meaning itself might be the film's greatest 'red herring'. Buñuel offered, '*Nothing* in the film *symbolises anything*', adding that '[t]he only method of investigation of the symbols would be, perhaps, psychoanalysis'[14] – recalling that Breton later considered Dalí one of the most erudite Surrealists when it came to Freud. Psychoanalysis is indeed the lens most have applied towards understanding *Un Chien Andalou*, though many others have approached it from alternative directions as well. I will not add my own interpretation to this already hefty bibliography but to highlight Roger Ebert's observation that one struggles in vain to create a story out of *Un Chien Andalou* where one simply might not be present:

> Countless analysts have applied Freudian, Marxist, and Jungian formulas to the film. Buñuel laughed at them all. Still, to look at the film is to learn how thoroughly we have been taught by other films to find meaning even when it isn't there. Buñuel told an actress to look out the window at "anything — a military parade, perhaps." In fact, the next shot shows the transvestite falling dead off the bicycle. We naturally assume the actress is looking at the body on the sidewalk. It is alien to everything we know about the movies to conclude that the window shot and the sidewalk shot simply happen to follow one another without any connection. In the same way, we assume that the man pulls the pianos (with the priests, dead donkeys, etc) across the room because his sexual advance has been rebuffed by the woman with the tennis racket. But Buñuel might argue the events have no connection — the man's advance is rejected, and then, in an absolutely unrelated action, he picks up the ropes and starts to pull the pianos.[15]

This view that the scenes may only *happen* to suggest cause and effect is very Surrealist, indeed. It's the enduring enigma of *Un Chien Andalou*: Is there meaning in the film's ostensible – and purported – meaninglessness? Even its title is an enigma: In an early letter to his friend José 'Pepín' Bello, Buñuel wrote that this 'stupendous scenario, quite without





precedent in the history of cinema' was to be titled *La Marista de la Ballesta* ('*The Marist Sister with the Crossbow*') – a name that was quickly scrapped in favour of *Dangereux de se pencher en dedans* ('*Dangerous to Lean Inside*'), a joke based on the notices beneath windows in French train compartments ('*Dangereux de se pencher en dehors*' ['*Dangerous to lean outside*']). Dalí and Buñuel would eventually settle on *Un Chien Andalou*, a title the two invented – reportedly to much laughter – for a book of poems Buñuel was planning to publish that conspicuously contained no 'Andalusian dog'.[16] The book never made it to press, and the title was given to the film instead, which, again, had no dog.

Buñuel justified that *Un Chien Andalou* was a title without meaning for a film without meaning, but Dalí and Buñuel's former friend from the 'Resi', Federico Garcia Lorca, thought otherwise. Lorca was indignant that the title and main character of the picture were veiled, derogatory references to him. Southerners at the *Residencia* were sometimes referred to jokingly as 'Andalusian dogs', and Lorca was the most famous Andalusian poet of the day. Ian Gibson also points out that certain scenes in *Un Chien Andalou* can be traced to Lorca's writing: The image of the protagonist falling off his bicycle, for example, Gibson identifies as a reference to Lorca's 1925 dialogue, 'Buster Keaton's Outing'.[17]

Buñuel famously reported that at the first screening of *Un Chien Andalou*, he carried stones in his pockets to hurl just in case the audience revolted; happily, this was not to be the case. Indeed, *Un Chien Andalou* was critically applauded and enjoyed a long run at Montmartre's Studio 28. But this popularity was a less a gift than a challenge: Whilst the film ushered in Dalí and Buñuel's acceptance into the Surrealist group, it also meant that they would have to push the envelope further if they truly sought to shock their audience. *Un Chien Andalou* had not scandalised the bourgeoisie like Dalí and Buñuel hoped it might: Next time, they would pull out all the stops.

## *L'Age D'Or*, 1930

Following the surprising critical success of *Un Chien Andalou*, Dalí and Buñuel were encouraged to make a sequel – this time a longer picture that might capitalise on new technology and contain sound. Like its predecessor, this new film also went through some title changes: It was provisionally to be called *La Bête andalouse* (*The Andalusian Beast*), which it retained throughout shooting. Thereafter it changed to *¡abajo la Constitution!* ('*Down with the Constitution!*') and eventually to *L'Âge d'Or* (*The Golden Age*).

*Un Chien Andalou* was financed by Buñuel's mother; its sequel, however, would enjoy an unexpected patron: the wealthy nobleman Vicomte Charles de Noailles. Charles and his wife, Marie-Laure – a descendant of the Marquis de Sade – were interested in Surrealism and had already purchased paintings at Dalí's first solo exhibition in Paris at the Galerie Goemans. They were film enthusiasts, too, and had installed a private cinema in their mansion on the Place des Etats-Unis in Paris where they screened *Un Chien Andalou* for select audiences before its run at Studio 28, as well as Man Ray's *Les Mystères de château de dé*, which they financed. Charles was keen to endorse a full-length Surrealist movie with sound as a birthday present for Marie-Laure, and, when May Ray declined, he sought out Buñuel and Dalí.

Dalí's world had changed significantly since *Un Chien Andalou* in that he was now inseparable from one Helena Dimitrievna Diakonova – 'Gala', the wife of the poet Paul Éluard. Gala had become ensconced in the Surrealist movement through her husband and had already been the inspiration for many of its artists and writers when she met Dalí in 1929 on a visit to Catalunya; an affair quickly developed, and when Paul returned to Paris, Gala stayed behind with Dalí. When the invitation came from Charles de Noailles in November 1929 to make a full-length sequel to *Un Chien Andalou*, then, Dalí was simply too occupied with Gala and certain financial struggles to participate fully, so control of the project fell to Buñuel.





It is here where stories begin to differ: According to Buñuel, Dalí only sent him a few ideas for *L'Âge d'Or*, all of which were refused except for an image of a man walking in a park with a rock on his head.[18] Dalí meanwhile claimed that his participation – at least in the film's conception – was far greater (at least until 1942, when he essentially disowned the film in *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, saying that all the film's sacrileges were Buñuel's ideas alone);[19] he sent Buñuel several angry letters in the early 1930s asserting that, if it weren't for him, neither *Un Chien Andalou* nor *L'Âge d'Or* would have come to fruition.

In light of Dalí's later unsavoury politics and commercial ventures, authorities were all too happy to accept Buñuel's account and give full credit for *L'Âge d'Or* to him alone – some even denied Dalí had played any pivotal role in *Un Chien Andalou*.[20] More recent scholarship, however, particularly by Spanish scholars led by the historian Agustín Sánchez Vidal, has given light to a more accurate version of the events. During the week of 29 Novemeber-6 December 1929, when Dalí and Buñuel were together in Cadaqués, many of the details for *L'Âge d'Or* were indeed worked out collaboratively, though Buñuel's mounting jealousy over Gala's distracting relationship with Dalí meant the duo was at great pains to rekindle the chemistry they had achieved writing *Un Chien Andalou*. When Dalí wrote Buñuel with subsequent ideas between January and March 1930 from the Hôtel du Château at Carry-le-Rouet, a small spa near Marseille where he was staying with Gala, it is clear that he was completely apprised of the sequences: He suggested showing the man walking towards the camera with his fly undone, for example. Other ideas were modified by Buñuel in the finished film: Dalí had recommended that there be a love scene in a garden in which the man, kissing the woman's fingertips, bites off one of her fingernails – an effect he suggested could be achieved using a paper nail affixed to a false hand; 'this element of horror *I think terrific*, much stronger than the severed eye', he wrote.[21] Buñuel had *the woman* passionately bite *the man's* hand, and later filmed an actual mutilated hand missing all its fingers. Dalí also suggested that they recuperate donkeys and pianos

and include the cinema's first image of a vagina, which, he wrote, might be superimposed onto a woman's mouth – the next step from Pierre Batcheff's mouth transforming into underarm hair in *Un Chien Andalou*, one supposes; Buñuel wasn't interested.

One of the more innovative ideas to come from Dalí's brainstorming sessions for *L'Âge d'Or* was his description of 'tactile cinema'. In Dalí's theatre, each member of the audience would have a roller attached to the chair in front that would be synchronised with the film so that one could literally 'touch' objects presented on the screen (for example, hair implants might correspond to the vagina scene; rubber breasts might appear during a scene where a character's breasts are caressed; hot water could spray on the audience's hands during a scene when a bidet is running). The final effect might have been somewhat akin to late night screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, when enthusiastic audience members wear newspaper hats during rain scenes – but inside Dalí's theatre, it would actually have rained!

From these examples, it can be concluded that Dalí's participation in the conception of *L'Âge d'Or* was far greater than Buñuel – or even he – later admitted. At the same time, it is sure that the final product can reasonably be credited more to Buñuel: Dalí was altogether absent during actual filming, which began on 3 March 1930 at Billancourt. On 31 March, Buñuel recorded the spoken scenes in the Tobis studios, and on 2 April used their lorry to film the spoken scenes in the street; from 5-9 April, he shot the exterior scenes at Cap de Creus, just outside Cadaqués (and in Dalí's absence, as Dalí had by this time been expelled from his family home for his painting *Sometimes I Spit with Pleasure on the Portrait of My Mother*, a blasphemous work that his father took as an insult to his deceased wife, Dalí's mother; his father had reportedly threatened to have him arrested if he ever returned to Cadaqués). On 22 April editing began, and the silent version was finished by 24 May. The soundtrack was added the following month, with the finished picture ready for screening by 1 July.

The 350,000 franc budget with which the film had begun had, in the





end, inflated to about 750,000 – about 12 times the budget of *Un Chien Andalou*. Happily, though, Charles de Noailles' generosity had allowed Buñuel to realise nearly every scene he desired. The film opens with a scientific documentary on scorpions. Then, following the caption '*Quelques heures aprés*' – 'A few hours later', recuperating the false chronology established by *Un Chien Andalou* – the scene changes to an armed bandit watching a group of archbishops nestled amongst the rocks of Cap de Creus. The bandit runs to tell his friends about the nearby 'Majorcans' – apparently the archbishops. After walking for what seems an eternity through the mineral landscape, the bandit arrives at the cabin, where – to the background music of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony – he finds his cohorts, led by a devious-looking character played by Max Ernst, in a strange state of depressive boredom and fatigue. Hearing the news that the Majorcans are near, they take up their weapons and leave, with the exception of the youngest, Peman, who says he cannot go: He's done for, he explains, adding incoherently that the others have accordions, hippopotamuses, wrenches, mountain goats and paintbrushes. The band sets off, but, one after the other, everyone collapses from exhaustion.

Meanwhile a great sea-borne concourse arrives. All make their way through the rocky alcoves to the Bishops, but they are now only skeletons scattered amongst the rocks. A cornerstone founding Imperial Rome has been placed on the spot where their remains rest. As a moustachioed diplomat begins to make the announcement, the crowd is distracted by a couple – the film's protagonists, we discover – in an amorous fray amongst the rocks. They are pulled apart, and each is dragged away; the unnamed man (played by Gaston Modot) manages to kick a small white dog and crush a beetle underfoot as he is apprehended, demonstrating his cruelty.

The film turns to images of modern Rome: aerial shots of the Vatican, sequences of demolished buildings, a shot of a man kicking a violin down the street, and another of a man walking with a large stone on his head – the sole scene Buñuel had credited to Dalí. Modot is still being

The skeletal remains of the 'Majorcans' on the rocks of Cap de Creus. *L'Âge d'Or*, 1930. Directed by Luis Buñuel; Produced by Vicomte Charles de Noailles. ©Photofest, Inc.

led by two men through the busy city streets. Everything he passes provides him sexual stimulation – it would be hard to find a more morally corrupt individual. Then he produces some paperwork for his captors: It seems he is a special delegate for the International Goodwill Society! He is released, though his temperament remains the same: As he hails a taxi, he delivers a severe kick to a passing blind man. From this moment on, all his efforts are directed towards finding his lost love (Lya Lys).

Shift to a party hosted by the 'Marquis of X' – father to the female protagonist – at his Roman estate. A number of curious spectacles occur here: The Marquis is seen covered with flies, a horse-drawn carriage is rolled through the ballroom, and a fire breaks out in the kitchen causing the maid to collapse (though no one takes notice). Modot arrives and spots his love, though they are kept apart by the other guests. When the





Marchioness spills a drink on Modot's tuxedo, he attacks her and is thrown out of the party. Modot and Lys meet in the garden where the Modot begins to ravage her, but they are interrupted by a porter telling Modot that the Minister of the Interior is on the phone for him. Modot goes to the telephone, where the Minister accuses him of abandoning his task: thousands of elderly people and innocent children have perished as a result of his carelessness. Modot greets this accusation with insults and, refusing to listen anymore, returns to his beloved. As they embrace, an orchestra plays the theme from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. At the music's climax, the conductor stops the orchestra and, holding his head, locates the couple in the garden. Lys runs to him, kissing him passionately. Modot mournfully races to her bedroom and, in a fit of rage, defenestrates a flaming pine tree, an archbishop, a giraffe and several handfuls of feathers.

The love story between Modot and Lys ends there, but the remaining final scene is by far the most jarring: The viewer is transported to the secluded Château of Selligny, where, in the spirit of the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* – a nod to Marie-Laure de Noailles' lascivious relative – a group of aristocrats has gathered for a murderous orgy. The surviving men leave by the snow-covered drawbridge, led by the 'Count of Blangis', who is clearly Jesus Christ. A woman caked in blood falls from the doorway, but the Count escorts her back inside and, following a scream, emerges again, clean-shaven. The final image shows the scalps of the deceased women hanging grotesquely from the Cross.

The 63-minute picture premiered on 22 October at the Cinéma du Panthéon before an exclusive audience; the 300+ guest list included everyone that was anyone in Paris' artistic circles: Picasso, Jean Cocteau, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Gertrude Stein, André Malreaux, Georges Bataille, Pierre Batcheff, Le Corbusier, etc, though the reception was 'icy'. 'Many of the guests quit the auditorium in great haste and hardly even bothered to say goodbye to their hosts.'[22]

The first public screening was at Studio 28 – much to Buñuel's disappointment, as he had unrealistically hoped *L'Âge d'Or* might show on the

big commercial screens on the Champs Elysées. Jean Mauclair, the owner of Studio 28, invested large sums of money equipping the theatre for a sound film and, to encourage interest, organised an exhibition of Surrealist artworks in the foyer that included Dalí, Miró, Tanguy, Ernst, May Ray and Jean Arp. Screenings began on 28 November, by which time Buñuel was in Hollywood; in his absence, Dalí wrote a programme leaflet in which he claimed sole responsibility for the screenplay, though Breton pushed him to write that it had been written with Buñuel.[23]

Six days into the run, on 3 December, the cinema was attacked by militants from two right-wing extremist groups, the *Ligue des Patriotes* (the League of Patriots) and the *Ligue Anti-Juive* (the Anti-Semitic League), who shouted, 'We'll show you that there are still Christians in France!' and 'Death to Jews!' before throwing ink on the screen, filling the space with smoke bombs and destroying most of the artworks on exhibition – in all, causing about 80,000 francs' worth of damage.[24] A week later, the censorship board banned the film for 50 years.

Charles de Noailles bore most of the responsibility for the disaster in the eyes of the press – he was expelled from the Jockey Club and even threatened with excommunication. Studio 28 was also scolded, as was Dalí for writing the programme leaflet; ironically, Buñuel's part as director went largely unmentioned. Dalí later recounted:

> As we had anticipated, Buñuel had betrayed me by selecting to express himself images that reduced the Himalaya of my ideas to little folded paper dolls. *L'Âge d'Or* had become an anticlerical, irreligious picture. Buñuel had taken over the most primitive meanings of my way-out ideas, transforming them into associations of stuttering images without any of the violent poesy that is the salt of my genius. All that came to the surface here and here out of my butchered scenario were a few sequences he had been unable not to bring off, since my staging directions had been so detailed. And they were enough to gain him a personal triumph. With admirable opportunism, Buñuel left Paris for Hollywood on the eve of the Paris premiere. Three days later, Studio 28, in which *L'Age d'Or* was shown, was a wrecking site.[25]





Charles de Noailles might have expected such a film from Dalí and Buñuel: After all, the Vicomte owned one of Dalí's most celebrated scatological paintings, *The Lugubrious Game* (1929). In the wake of the protests and censorship over *L'Âge d'Or*, however, he sent Buñuel a telegram asking that all circulating copies of the film be collected, adding that he would prefer that his name no longer be mentioned in connection with it; Buñuel responded with a polite note of compliance, and Charles never financed another film (as a result of the *L'Âge d'Or* scandal, the other 1930 film the Vicomte had supported, Cocteau's *Le sang d'un poète*, was suppressed for two years).

The Surrealists were meanwhile galvanised by the scandal, which they interpreted as indicative of the rise of fascism in France. *L'Âge d'Or* became emblematic of the Group's revolutionary credentials; as Robert Short writes, 'If *Un Chien Andalou* stands as the supreme record of Surrealism's adventures into the realm of the subconscious, then *L'Âge d'Or* is perhaps the most trenchant and implacable expression of its revolutionary intent.'[26] On the heels of the riot at Studio 28, the Surrealists published a four-page brochure, 'L'Affaire de "L'Âge d'Or"', signed by 16 members, in which they declared the scandal to be a demonstration that Surrealism was revolutionary and altogether incompatible with the accepted morals of bourgeois society. At a time when the Surrealists were taking a stance against Fascism in Europe by reconciling its intentions with the politics of the French Communist Party – even changing the name of its publication from *La Révolution Surréaliste* (*The Surrealist Revolution*) to *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (*Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution*) – *L'Âge d'Or* was proof the Surrealists were politically engaged and against all that was held dear by the conservative Right.

Although Dalí signed 'L'Affaire de "L'Âge d'Or"', he later criticised the film's anticlericalism as part of his campaign to present himself as

fervently anti-communistic in the wake of Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War and his own meteoric rise to fame in America where Communist sympathies were increasingly viewed with suspicion. Whilst Dalí had his fair share of run-ins with the French Communist Party in the early 1930s, it should not be forgotten that at one time he indeed professed support for the radical Left: In his youth, he sided with the Bolsheviks in the Russian revolution and was the only resident of Figueres who subscribed to the French Communist newspaper *L'Humanité*; the same year he and Buñuel produced *Un Chien Andalou*, he wrote in his 28 June article 'Documental-Paris' that 'the Surrealist movement has always been, politically, an unconditional supporter and has always been for a long time incorporated in the Communist Party'[27], and in 1930, the same year *L'Âge d'Or* was made, he gave a lecture at the Anteneo in Barcelona that denounced family, religion and fatherland – that is, the platform of the conservatives. Whether he later wanted to admit it, Dalí at one time shared the Surrealists' revolutionary commitment, and the evidences of it in *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Âge d'Or* did not emanate from Buñuel alone.

Of the three copies of *L'Âge d'Or* that were made, two were impounded by the police in Paris, while a third made its way to London where it was shown by Nancy Cunard. Charles de Noailles eventually recovered the negative and apparently kept it locked away with seven keys as a penance for financing such a blasphemous motion picture; in 1989, his heirs donated the negative to the Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne in Paris.

## *FIVE MINUTES ON THE SUBJECT OF SURREALISM*, c. 1930–32

Having now become an official Surrealist – and a scandalising one at that – Dalí considered himself one of the Movement's foremost filmmakers and soon set to work planning a film documentary on Surrealism. The original shooting script (in French) is now preserved at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh and, unlike many of his





other unrealised scripts from the period, was published prior to his centenary in 2004, by Dawn Ades in *Studio International* in 1982.[28] Ades situates the undated scenario to 1930–1932 based on Dalí's citation of his painting *Sleeping Woman, Horse, Lion* (1930) and his reference to a 'paranoiac' method as opposed to 'paranoiac-critical', as his technique would come to be known in 1933. Ian Gibson meanwhile reasons that the script might possibly predate *L'Âge d'Or*, as it quotes from the murder scene in *Un Chien Andalou* but makes no reference to Dalí's other film with Buñuel.[29]

The script's unofficial title, *Five Minutes on the Subject of Surrealism* (*Cinq minutes a propos du SURREALISME*), comes from the opening credits that present several questions the film aims to address: What is Surrealism? Who are the Surrealists? 'Surrealism can be practiced by everyone', Dalí writes. 'Pay attention to the poisonous and *deadly* images of *Surrealism*.' Although Dalí's written scenario is quite unorthodox in form – employing differently sized and styled fonts that strike a contemporary viewer as resembling a ransom note more than a film script – it is otherwise very clear in its division of narration, image and, when appropriate, sound. Dalí offers a surprisingly approachable entrance to Surrealist thought, beginning with the Movement's roots in Freudian psychoanalysis. He describes the division of the conscious and subconscious in the most basic of terms, as antagonistic forces as different as cold and hot, black and white. 'The human spirit could be compared to a tree', he writes in the film's narration, with the roots of the subconscious nourishing the leaves and fruit that emerge 'in the light of the conscious'. These roots, Dalí explains, develop according to the 'pleasure principal' – Freud's term for the Id's need for immediate gratification; when these roots emerge on the surface, however, they must follow the 'reality principal', the guiding force of the Ego that negotiates the Id's desires with the realities of the world. All this Dalí planned to illustrate with an animated drawing of a tree – suggesting already his predilection for cartoon animation.

Then Dalí introduces the Surrealists, whom he scripts as marching