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L'AGE D'OR

BUNUEL: AGE D'OR¹

"If it were possible for me , I would make films which apart from entertaining the audience. would convey to them the absolute certainty that they do not live in the best of all possible worlds..."²

If we are to take everything living dies for internal reasons... then we shall be compelled to say that 'the aim of all life is death'...³

Buñuel: a cockroach in cinema; entomology out of control.

The shot analysis of ***L'Age d 'or*** and the introduction that precedes it were written over 40 years ago, i.e. when the exhibition of the film was still banned and many important documents about its production and the scandal that followed its exhibition in Paris in 1930, had not been published. The shot analysis (part II) is based on a 16mm copy purchased on the black market in London, made

¹ PART II, IS THE SHOT ANALYSIS, PRECEDED BY AN INTRODUCTION; PART III CONSISTS IN PART III THE FRAME ENLARGEMENTS.OF THE ENTIRE FILM.

² Buñuel cited by Francisco Aranda, *Luis Buñuel. A Critical Biography* (Da Capo Paperback, 1985), 185. This is exactly what he did.

³ S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Bantam Books, 1972), 70.

from the 35mm print which Henri Langlois had sent by for a screening, I believe in 1969⁴, and the découpage published in the no. 27-28 of *L'Avant-Scène Cinéma* in 1963.

I originally intended to update the introduction but the research published in the last 30 years about ***L'Age d'or*** and Buñuel's work, convinced me that it would be pointless if not impossible. The critical assessment of Buñuel's pre-60's films since his death in 1983, has changed. Many of his films which were not available—especially those made in Spain or those from the Mexican period have been rediscovered and taken seriously. The neglect of these films was to a large extent due to Buñuel's low opinion of his work at the time, because they were cheap commercial productions and because of his desire to keep a low profile.⁵

THE SCANDALS

Until fairly recently, Buñuel was considered a Surrealist filmmaker, the only one to be precise, if one applies Breton's criteria in the first manifesto, although it never was intended to include film. His association with the

⁴ The film was restored in 1993 by the *Musée d'Art Moderne* from an original print given to them by the de Noailles, the producers.

⁵ Actually, this is an oversimplification. and he had to deal with different problems with each film determined by the conditions imposed by the producer or the political climate, and it is not until the so-called French period, essentially, after ***Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*** that he enjoyed almost full freedom, like the one he had in making ***L'Age d'or*** or ***Land without Bread***.

Surrealist group⁶ is well-known but the specific circumstances far from clear, because of Buñuel's own vague or contradictory comments.⁷ The correspondence with the producer of *L'Age d'or* describes abundantly the consequences of the public exhibition of the film.⁸ And it is not surprising that Breton and the Surrealist group did not hesitate to support Buñuel for ideological and political reasons. However, one should keep in mind that the publication of the second Surrealist Manifesto marked the formal rift within the movement which had begun some time after 1929 and which became a major dispute with Bataille's pamphlet, "Un cadavre," one month after the publication of the last issue the *Revolution Surréaliste* which included the first version of the *Second Manifesto* (1930).⁹

⁶ For a recent examination of Buñuel's association with Surrealism see Paul Hammond, "Lost and found: Buñuel, *L'Age d'or* and Surrealism," in Luis Buñuel. *New Readings*, edited by Peter William Evans and Isabel Santaolalla ((London: BFI Publishing, 2004), 13-27.

⁷ See among other references: *Mon Dernier soupir (My last Sigh)*. Sections of the French version have not been translated into the English edition.

⁸ Bouhours, J.-M., and . Schoeller, eds. *L'Age d'or. Correspondance Luis Buñuel Charles de Nouilles. Lettres et documents 1929-1976. Cahiers du Musée Nations d'Art Moderne. Hors série/Archives*, 1993.

⁹ For a very detailed analysis of this pamphlet, see F. Alibrit (http://f.aribit.free.fr/notes_de_lecture/breton_bataille_autopsie_du_cadavre.pdf). Breton's biographer, Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the mind.. The Life of André Breton* (Strauss, Farrar and Giroux, 1995) provides extensive details about Breton's relationship to Communism, beginning with the post-Dada days, and of course 'L'Affaire Aragon' and Buñuel. The section dealing with the formation of the AEAR, includes discussion of the final phase of the conflict. Another source of information is Marguerite Bonnet's exhaustive notes in the second volume of her edition of Breton's *OEuvres Complètes* (Gallimard, Pléiade, 1992).

Following this publication, the movement was clearly divided into two groups, one supporting Breton and one supporting Bataille, which included Buñuel.

In 1930, Buñuel was invited to Hollywood with LYA LYS by the MGM representative who did not understand anything of ***L'Age d'or*** (or perhaps because of it) to observe their production techniques. Back in Paris a few months later, he promptly began working on a short documentary, ***Terre sans pain***—not completed until 1937 — a working version of which was immediately banned by the Spanish government. In 1932, Buñuel published a letter addressed to Breton in which he expressed his disagreement with the political orientation of the Surrealist movement regarding the *Soviet Union*, thus endorsing Aragon's position.¹⁰ For some reason, aside from his work on ***Land without Bread***, Buñuel's political activities between 1930 and 1934 remain somewhat vague. He certainly devoted all his attention to the making of *Terre sans pain*. Once he had managed to borrow enough money to start filming.¹¹ Whether it was a genuine ethnographic experiment is questionable. Some anthropologists go so far as calling it a propaganda film as Buñuel, who again had full control over the production, did not conceal his intervention in the making of the film to

¹⁰ *Positif*, published a copy of the letter in their special issue on Buñuel (May 2000); Gubern and Paul Hammond included it with a translation in *The Red Front of Art* (University of California Press, 2000), 107f.

¹¹ Conley and Ibarz's articles throw an interesting light on the complexity of the project.

portray the life of the poor people in this village in the darkest possible terms. But, one must also recognize that such a village did not exist. It was a clever montage intended to denounce the government's responsibility for the prevailing poverty in Spain. As Merce Ibarz has shown, it was also a very experimental film with respect to the soundtrack.

Needless to say, In 1934, Buñuel was unemployable, a situation that lasted for a couple decades and forced him to take purely commercial jobs, either as producer or anonymous director in Spain and then Mexico, after a brief stay in the United States. While Buñuel tends to downplay the quality of his work during that period, since he had such limited creative input, recent critical work by Spanish and Mexican scholars, and to be fair, British critics like Peter William Evans, has revealed the importance of the films he made until ***Los Olivados***. Gubern and Hammond's detailed and exhaustive research in *The Red Front of Art* (UC Press, 2012), and Marsha Kinder's *Blood Cinema. The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (UC Press, 1993), reveal another side of Buñuel's work which has been overshadowed by his fame following the screening of his films in Cannes¹². The films produced in France by Silberman and co-written with Jean-Claude Carrière have distorted his overall profile. Not that they are insignificant but, at first sight, more distant from his earlier films. In this context, I should

¹² It was the producer of ***Los Olivados*** who decided to send the film to Cannes 1951 where he won a prize for best Director

mention the polarization of the critical work these films have elicited between the Spanish work emphasizing the importance of Buñuel's cultural background versus the more abstract analyses of French critics. Yet, in spite of major differences between the Surrealist films like ***L'Age d'or*** and ***The Phantom of Liberty***, his last film, Buñuel's "style" and the subject of his film, as diverse as they are, remain constant and dedicated to a radical critique of contemporary culture, although it is not by any means straightforward.

At this point, I would like to return briefly to the "Affaire Aragon", back to 1932, a key moment in Buñuel's political evolution, although the word evolution is a slight misrepresentation since long before Buñuel came to Paris and was accepted by the Surrealist group after he and Dalí completed ***Un Chien Andalou***, he had been active as a student with the Catalan anarchist and communist groups. In 1929, one of his biographers described him as a dangerous individual.¹³

*L'affaire Aragon*¹⁴ which brought to a head a long simmering conflict within the Surrealist group¹⁵ was

¹³ Peter Baxter. Amusingly, although naturally mild mannered—he had been trained as a boxer — he did have pugnacious impulses. But the Surrealists were careful to keep him out of their more violent antics, because being a foreigner, he risked being jailed.

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of the evolution of the Affair, see C.G. Geoghegan's "Surrealism and Communism: The Hesitations of Aragon from Kharkov to the 'Affaire Front Rouge,'" *Journal of European studies*, viii (1978)12-35. Also, Gubern and Hammond, "De 'L'Union libre' au 'Front rouge,'" in *Positif*, (April 2001), 63-67.

¹⁵ And especially between Breton and Aragon.

occasioned by the publication of Aragon's poème '*Front Rouge*,' in the first issue of *Littérature de la Révolution Mondiale* (Moscow) on July 1, 1931. Alexandre, Breton, Char, Crevel, Éluard, Malkine, Massot, Péret, Sadoul, Tanguy, Thirion, Unik signed a pamphlet defending Aragon¹⁶. Aragon and Elsa Triolet had gone to Moscow to attend meetings of *The Second International*. The poem was written during their stay but became known in France only a year later when politics, and more specifically the place of propaganda in creative writing Breton rejected much of the position developed by the Komintern and decisions from the *Congress of the Second International*; Aragon supported them but was not quite ready to abandon the Surrealists's recently updated views in the *Second Manifesto*. But it had become clear that it wasn't possible to be a Surrealist and a Committed communist at the same time, especially given the tension between the PCF and the Soviets. Buñuel's critics have been puzzled by his often repeated denial of any membership in the Communist party, something that he shared with Aragon, who, on the whole, was more forthright about his Communist sympathies¹⁷.

L'Affaire Aragon

¹⁶ The original pamphlet and one responding to it are available online under *Affaire Aragon* .

¹⁷ Paul Hammond states in "Buñuel bows out," *Rouge*

It is difficult to get a clear sense of the dispute which involved several organizations in the process of changing their positions—mostly the Surrealists group supporting Breton, the French Communist party (the PCF) and in Karkov, between 1930, when Aragon and Elsa Triolet travelled to the Soviet Union, and 1932, which represents the date of the final break up between Aragon and Breton. While Buñuel was not directly involved in the dispute, it is not surprising that, at the time when he himself was finishing a documentary which is in effect a form of propaganda, he felt compelled to write a letter to Breton. 'There was no formal splitting', Aranda told me [Paul Hammond], 'but from 32 to 38 he was very pro-Communist, although he has sworn (to) me he never belonged to the *Spanish C P* (but his mother had told me the contrary).' (1) At the time I took Buñuel's – and his biographer's – word for it: to have admitted that the director may have been a PCE [Spanish Communist Party] member – given what the Stalinists did in Spain during the Civil War – would have undermined my faith in his more or less abiding allegiance to Surrealism. In London in 1978 we few dogged believers in the ongoing viability of the Surrealist project needed all the culture-heroes we could get: the Hayward Gallery had just mounted its sepulchral *Dada & Surrealism Reviewed* exhibition, and Thatcher the Putrefact was about to come to power ...". And Hammond eventually concludes "it seems to me likely that Buñuel's *official* membership of the PCE extended from sometime in the year between April

1931 and May 1932 up until December 1938 at the latest.”¹⁸

While Gubern and Hammond’s conclusion that Buñuel had been a member of the French Communist party is important for my argument insofar as it confirms what seems to be the subtext of his films, from beginning to end. His letter¹⁹ to Breton of May 6, 1932 dates very precisely the moment of his split with the Surrealist group. We should keep in mind that at the time he was still working on ***Land without Bread***.

There is another document which is relevant, regarding Buñuel’s political activity during this period, namely, an insulting letter from Dali (March 1932), which according to Gubern and Hammond in their *Positif* article correcting Thiriard’s presentation of the letter from Buñuel to Breton — unearthed by Hammond from the Aragon file in the ***Bibliothèque Nationale***— and published in the May issue 2000 of *Positif*. According to them, it is Dali’s letter that would have motivated Buñuel to cut a new version of ***L’Age d’or*** to be shown to workers, i.e. without the erotic sequences, in particular, and everything that is an

¹⁸ Gubern and Hammond, “Buñuel bows out,” *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹⁹ The letter was published in *Positif*’s May 2000 issue , no. 471, pp. 64-65 as part of Louis Thiriard’s report about the “colloque Pordenone.” It is reproduced with an English translation in Ramòn Gubern’s and Paul Hammond’s Luis Buñuel: *The Red Years, 1929-1939* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2012) , 110-111.

expression of a surrealist sensibility, hence incomprehensible to workers.²⁰

However, according to a letter from Buñuel to de Noailles, the idea may have come from the ‘distributor’ Braunberger. Not to mention that it could be an attempt to circumvent the censor. But also the fact that Buñuel and de Noailles were stunned by the reception of the film. According to Michel Bouhours’s note to the letter (March 23, 1932), the version of the film entitled “*In the icy waters of selfish calculation*,” remains “introuvable” and seems to have only been seen by Edmond Gréville.²¹ What upset not only Dali but Breton, Unik and others, about this version of the film, if it does exist, shows Buñuel’s attempt to satisfy the PCF and giving the film a clearly Marxist interpretation and the betrayal of Surrealism’s struggle.²² Of course no one had seen the film; all were reacting to the title borrowed from Marx Manifesto.

11

to conclude, this digression should point out that the development of *L’Affaire Aragon*, early 1932, coincides with the creation of the AEAR, the beginning of a Stalinist cinema, which contributed to the conflict between the

²⁰ This argument obviously originate with the PCF. Why should Buñuel agree with it is anybody’s guess.

²¹ Bouhours, *Ibid.*, p.153f.

²² In his reply to Buñuel, de Noailles agrees to the project as long as it is clear that this is a different film from *L’Age d’or* and that it includes 3 specific cuts, of shots which offended Catholic audiences.

Surrealists and the PCF; in a way, not only ***Land without Bread*** but the revised version of ***L'Age d'or***, bear the signs of this shift of perspective. Which is confirmed by Buñuel's involvement with the production of Spanish films in the mid-thirties.

Gubern's and Hammond's *Buñuel: The Red Years, 1929-1939*.²³ have documented in detail his activities in Spain until the beginning of WWII, and, member of not of the PCE, there is no doubt possible about his political leaning, beginning with his work with Filmofono. Always a stickler for economy and efficiency, Buñuel not only imported Soviet films to be distributed in Spain but used them as a model for the commercial Spanish films he helped produce. Not only did he severely limit the budget of these films, but the number of shots and probably the time needed to shoot and edit them.

Actually this pragmatic approach to production also applied to the making of his own films. Interestingly, while pretending a mediocre interest in film technique before *Le Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'or*, as he was learning film technique and worked as an assistant to Epstein, he nevertheless learned as much as possible about camera work and editing, always eager to try new techniques and technology whenever possible; and if one seeks constants in his approach to film in his 35 completed projects, this cautious and precise use of technique is far more

²³ University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.

prevalent than most of the many subjects that recur over a period of some 50 years. Why? His innate sense of economy and care in using other people's money is not the answer. I'll return to this issue in a moment.

At this point, if one attempts to find constants in this highly diverse body of work, it is not in the subjects that one will find them. As is well known, Buñuel principal targets of his satire did not vary much: the representatives of power, the Church, government, Western culture, and the bourgeoisie in general, although it may take different forms. This was already the material of ***L'Age d'or***. However when one looks ***at The Phantom of Liberty***, the connection may not seem so obvious. His "style" of filming doesn't differ that much: efficient, precise and transparent. Already, one of his assistants²⁴ noted in the early '30s, ironic as this may strike us, that he intended ***L'Age d'or*** to look, constructed, like a classical narrative film. And in spite of contrary opinions, I maintain, as the shot analysis reveals, that all the so called editing mistakes are deliberate not left, out carelessness or ignorance, but as part of a pattern of disruptions possibly intended as a critique of the Art films and avant-garde films of the 20s but also as a form of contempt for the well made film²⁵. His distaste for film technique did not prevent him from understanding well its function. We should also

²⁴ Claude Heyman in an interview published *Image et Son*.

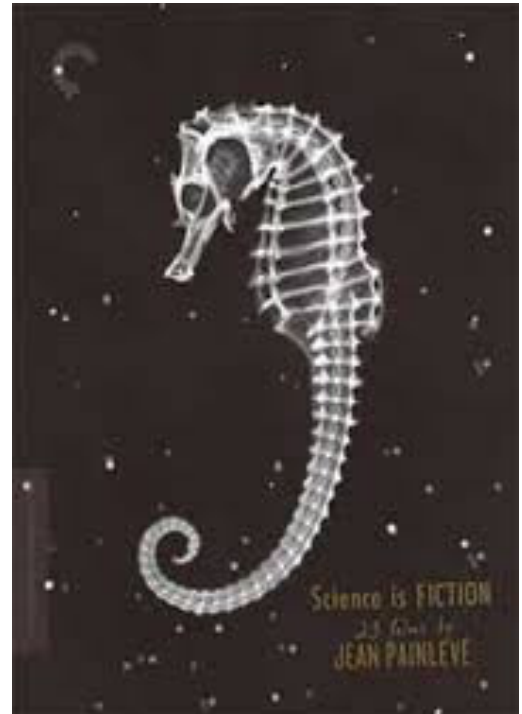
²⁵ Disruption at the level of editing disappeared in his later films, as far as I know as he realized that smooth, professional editing could provide and enhance a more powerful form of disruption.

remember that his 'cinophilic' culture was very good and that he not only wrote and published film reviews but organized screenings. And, it enabled him to write critical and theoretical essays on film.

The directors he admired were not L'Herbier, Gance or even Epstein (although he owes him more than he admitted), but Cavalcanti, Keaton, von Stroheim and Fritz Lang, I should not forget to mention, someone much admired by the Surrealists: Painlevé²⁶.



²⁶ It is not clear when Buñuel met Painlevé, but he was in Paris when the latter's first film was shown.



Admired for the imaginative and poetic side of his work, it is rather his scientific approach to his subject, mostly sea animals, that distinguishes Painlevé films. Interestingly, this related to one of Buñuel's earliest interests: entomology²⁷.

²⁷ For a comprehensive survey of Buñuel's and entomology see for ex:

*“Buñuel, like an entomologist, has studied what we call love in order to expose beneath the ideology, the mythology, the platitudes and phraseologies of the complete and bloody machinery of sex.”*²⁸ For some reason, Miller’s remark was not fully appreciated until Buñuel intellectual formation began to be taken seriously by French and American scholars, as more documents, became available in English²⁹. In 1930, Miller had no way of predicting that it was not only the machinery of sex that interested Buñuel but all facets of human activities, a study which he pursued in all his films. His fascination with insects, arachnids and assorted creatures never was a secret— not to mention is collection of pets he kept as a child, including an enormous rat— but it was looked upon as an idiosyncrasy, a childhood passion which reappeared from time to time throughout his career, to which one should add sheeps or bears, that appear out of nowhere in the middle of a segment. But we know now that Buñuel’s interest in entomology or to use Caillois’s term, *Anthropological biology*³⁰, was neither a hobby nor a

²⁸ Henry Miller’s essay about *L’Age d’or*, written in 1930 is reproduced in Joan Mellen’s *The World of Luis Buñuel* (Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 166-179.

²⁹ Much remains to be done. His studies at the University showed that this interest in entomology was more than a childhood hobby. Favre remained one of his favorite books.

³⁰ Roger Caillois published an article on the *Praying Mantis* in *Minotaurs* in 1934. Donna Roberts mentions that according to Laurent Jenny and Odile Feline, it is Dali who first acquainted Caillois with the Surrealists’ interest in the praying mantis.”CAA conference papers, *Academia Edu*, p. 17. Paul Begin asserts that Buñuel’s interest in “*Comparative Biology*” is due to the influence of R.Caillois. However, it is unlikely that Caillois became familiar with the Surrealists obsession with insects at that time, as he proofread Dali’s text in 1933.

sadistic impulse but the driving force which with various degrees of visibility sustained his career. But it is ***Land without Bread***, more systematically than ***L'Age d'or*** that reveals Buñuel's intent.

Much work has been done recently on this film, long neglected. I include a digression here mainly to point to the importance his political position during that period.³¹

While it is true that he had full control the production this film, Mercé Ibarz's conclusion that he was using film as a critique of the artistic pretense of avant-garde cinema, i.e. "the First Avant-Garde," is debatable. What strikes me as most important from her extensive work (including reconstruction) on the film is Buñuel's desire to develop a "scientific" approach to his anthropological project, especially the revolutionary use of sound to understate the power of visual representation. Using Ibarz's extensive work, and a number of studies of Buñuel and the Surrealists' interest in entomology and "Comparative Biology," Paul Begin reaches the following conclusion. "By substituting an entomological perspective for an anthropological approach, man's instinctual nature is allowed to surface from beneath the rubble of culture. It

³¹ Although, as Merce Ibarz has shown, its experimental soundtrack is also noteworthy. And again more recently, Buñuel's innovative soundtracks have also been the subject of study. More than ***Un Chien Andalou***, which after all was a silent film, Buñuel's provocative use of sound was already much in evidence in ***L'Age d'or***, in see *infra part II*. Needless to say, giving the political climate during that period in Europe and in the United States, and after two major confrontations with censors, Buñuel's equivocations about his political affiliation is perfectly understandable.

is an aspect of Buñuel's early films that is part and parcel of his views on 'anti-artistic' films which in filmic term produces a leveling effect among biological species to ultimately affirms the humanistic aims of Surrealism." Begin's argument is that Buñuel developed this anti-artistic attitude—creating an "objective ideogram". As this with this scientific approach— was a way of preventing being recuperated by the esthetic trends of the avant-garde³². This is ironic as it seems to me that this leveling effect, at least for Buñuel, can be seen as the opposite, i.e. reducing the humanistic elements to instinctual ones once the humanistic props of culture and civilization collapse; ***The Exterminating Angel***, illustrates this very well.

And it would not be very difficult to find the same pull toward regression in all his films.³³ Finally, I should also mention Donna Roberts's on the broader issue of "Surrealism and Natural History."³⁴ Tracing the impact of Darwin's theory of evolution and the popularity of the

³²"Entomology and Anthropology in the films of Luis Buñuel," *Screen* (2007)48 (4), 425-442.

³³ And it might be amusing, to say the least, to determine where Surrealism's "unbound Desire" leads. Freud wasn't lost on them.

³⁴ "Surrealism and Natural History. Instincts, Involution, and Atavistic Reverie in the work of Roger Caillois and Salvador Dali," *Academia. Edu*, 2012.

Natural Sciences at the end of the 19th c. and early 20th c. to Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, she concludes "Within, the insect-filled fantasies, however lies a logic that derives from the Nature Sciences, its orthodoxies as much as its popular and creative trajectories" (18).

Leaving aside the much studied issue of Buñuel's association with the Surrealist group³⁵, and the Surrealistic tone of his early films, his approach to film, and his familiarity with the medium needs to be reexamined. The fact that he acknowledged a lack of professional expertise doesn't mean that he was either naive or ignorant; his early writings on film prove it, and so do the various testimonies of his assistants and producers who admired his professional work habits, from scriptwriting to filming or editing and working with actors. He was pragmatic and thrifty, precise not to say meticulous, and rarely changed the script once it was completed³⁶ or when he was shooting.

Francesco Aranda long ago documented his involvement with film in Spain, and then later on in Paris, first with various jobs, before making ***Un Chien Andalou***, then later reviewing and programming films. Much of this has been confirmed in various interviews

³⁵ For a relatively recent reexamination of this issue see Paul Hammond, "Lost and Found: Buñuel, L'Age d'or and Surrealism," in *Luis Buñuel. New Readings, Ibid.*, 13-26.

³⁶ This has been the subject of many comments. He himself argues, in his essay on *découpage* "the process of segmentation precedes all the others. Its work requires nothing more than the work of the pen. The whole film...is contained on sheets of paper: the interpretation, the camera angles.." In *An Unspeakable Betrayal. Ibid.*, 133

—many of which are still not available in translation. Fritz Lang 's early films motivated him to become a filmmaker. He admired von Stoheims Greed, Keaton, Murnau and other German Expressionist films. In spite of his criticism of Jean Epstein for whom he volunteered to work on a couple films, it is evident that he learned much from him. But it seems it is Cavalcanti's ***Rien que les heures*** (1926) which may provide the best clue to his approach to film at the time.³⁷ Cavalcanti became very interested in sound and got involved with the Grierson's *Documentary movement* who didn't seem to know how to deal with him.³⁸

Buñuel. wrote a review of ***Rien que les heures*** in 1937 which doesn't give much of a clue. But it is something. What is critical for him in the film is not the experimental part (Cavalcanti was always interested in experiments³⁹) but the fact was not driven by a narrative but gave precedence to the visual and the point of view was "detached," what a few years later Buñuel would call "scientific". This is also the years when he became friend with Painlevé who was, in a very unconventional way,

³⁷ Mercè Ibarz mentions that he admired Cavalcanti, read his writings and collected them in a book of press clippings now in the Buñuel Archives in Madrid.

³⁸ See A summary of Cavalcanti's ideas about sound in in a lecture given in Brussel in 1938, reprinted in *Filme e Realidade* (*Film and Reality*, 1938). See also the text about Sound in Film, available on line

seeking to describe the underwater fauna for scientific study, with photographs and then film.⁴⁰

So, over ten years, Buñuel's approach to film did not change. Gubern and Hammond, note in their study of his involvement with Filmòfono: "An ample consensus exists about Buñuel organizational and money-saving skills, virtues he'd already demonstrated during the production of ***L'Age d'or***."⁴¹ His determined effort to remain as anonymous as possible doesn't make it easy to establish what his responsibilities were for each film, they produce from advisor to producer. Rich of his experience in Hollywood,⁴² he strengthened the moribund Spanish film production. "Buñuel organized the team and its production methods in a highly disciplined with daily work schedule of eight hours, a detailed shooting script, and rehearsals

⁴⁰ Another very popular Filmmaker, especially with the Surrealist group, that should be mentioned is Louis Feuillade. It seems evident that Buñuel would have been impressed with his film technique, quite the opposite of Epstein. Thus far, no text by Buñuel seems to have surfaced. Michale Richardson, in *Surrealism and Cinema* (Bloombury Academic, 2006), suggests that it may have influenced ***The Exterminating Angel***. That hypothesis is not veery convincing. If Buñuel borrows anything from Feuillade, it is more likely to be the quality of the photography.

⁴¹ Gubern and Hammond, *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴² He certainly took advantage of his "free" time, beside taking starlets for rides. He recounts in *My Last Sigh*, the story of predicting the von Sternberg ending to the Marlena Dietrich film he was making when Buñuel was there, bored, of course. he even took the time to develop. "synoptic table of the American cinema. There were several movable columns set up on a large piece of pasteboard the first for 'ambience' (Parisian, western, gangster, war, tropical, comic, medieval, etc) the second for 'epochs', the third for 'main actors', and so on. Altogether there were four or five categories with a tab for maneuverability. What I wanted was to show that the American cinema was composed along precise and standardized lines that, thanks to my system, anyone could predict of a film simply ly lining ups given setting setting with a particular era, ambience, and character. It also gave particularly exact information about the fates of heroines." *My Last Sigh*, *Ibid*, p.132.

prior to filming, with the right to a maximum of two takes.” (205)⁴³ That period was the happiest in his life, he told Pepin Bello; he made a lot of money, so much so that he even gave some to the PCE. If, as Baxter put it, in 1930, Buñuel was a dangerous man, he was even more dangerous in 1939⁴⁴.

At this point, I want to make it clear that Buñuel pursued his “scientific” approach to film, adapting it to circumstances, political and otherwise, not as a way to mock or demystify avant-garde films but as an expression of his active ideological struggle against the dominant culture.

Soon enough, the War forced him to flee, first to United States, where he stayed for couple years in Hollywood, unemployed for a couple years, and then at MOMA in NY, until again he had to leave a job he liked, thanks to Dali’s stupidity. He ended in Mexico where he spent the rest of his life, without a job, again for several years. Friends of his eventually helped him get back into the film business.

⁴³ Aranda already mentioned that he “put into practice his incredibly cheap methods (the complete sets with one only possible angle...a rigorous timetable,” everyone ready to work when he arrived”.

⁴⁴ Apparently, a new DVD of his French films will soon be available. And a new generation will be able to appreciate just how dangerous Buñuel can be.

And again it was anonymity with a minimal involvement in directing⁴⁵, until ***Los Olivados***.

“When he went to Mexico in 1946, nursing his wounds after the disastrous experience in Hollywood, it looked on the surface as if his career had hit rock bottom. He had no illusion about what LatinAmerica had to offer.”⁴⁶ Using Carl Mow’s study of the Mexican films of the period, Stephen Hart remarks that while not spectacular, the Mexican film industry was actually commercially successful⁴⁷. This explains why ***Los Olivados*** created such an uproar, not unlike the reception of ***Los Hurdes***, “this is not Mexico!,” with some critics and journalists asking for Buñuel’s expulsion from Mexico. Why? because again, this film simply did not fit in the current Mexican film production, lacking the usual clichés of its type of melodrama and of course the stars who had become the driving force of the Mexican film industry. In the context of that production, Buñuel’s film was a *disruption* and a provocation. By using the term disruption, I anticipate my conclusion. Anyone who has seen the earlier films knows that disruption is the central device that defines Buñuel’s films: disruption in every conceivable way, within the shot, in the

⁴⁵ This obviously is an oversimplification, but until a more detailed study of the films from this period, there is no definitive way to conclude. Altogether, with a couple films before ***Los Olivados*** up to ***Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*** (1963), Buñuel made roughly sixteen films, counting those made in Spain and one in the US.

⁴⁶ Stephen Hart, “Buñuel’s Box of Subaltern Tricks: Technique in ***Los Olivados***,” in *Luis Buñuel. New Readings. Ibid.*, p.65.

⁴⁷ Thanks to the policies of Migual Alemàn, following the Hollywood model, it developed its own genres of melodrama and musicals, which were very popular.

editing technique, the treatment of his subjects and its narrative progression; and here in Mexico, in relation to established genres and conventions. D B C Pierre's review in a relatively recent issue of *The Guardian* reasserts the importance of the film today.⁴⁸

Surrealist director Luis Buñuel was the instrument it took to publicly articulate the truth about poverty in that city, that absence of love. When he came to live in Mexico City in the late 1940s, it was nearly 20 years since he had filmed his scathing Land Without Bread, amid what he saw as the peasantry's filth and stupidity in his native Spain. It was as if the energy behind his art - already frustrated by years in exile, even after an extravagant start alongside Salvador Dalí - took the collision with Mexico's Federal District as a challenge to his very ethos. The result was an explosion captured in a masterpiece of cinema - Los Olvidados ("The Young and the Damned" or, literally, "The Forgotten"). Los Olvidados took barely three weeks to make in 1950 on a shoestring budget, but hit the world screen like a fist through plate glass. Mexican officials of the day were rabid, critics stunned, and the work won Buñuel the prize for best director at Cannes the following year.

“During the three years I was without work (1947-1949) I was able to explore Mexico City from one end to the other; and I was very struck by the wretchedness in which many of its inhabitants lived. I decided to base **Los Olivados** on the life of abandoned children; and in researching the film I patiently consulted the archives of a reformatory. My story is entirely based on real cases. I tried to expose the wretched condition of the poor in real terms, because I loathe the films that make the poor romantic and sweet. **Los Olivados** is, perhaps, my favorite film⁴⁹. If I had had all the facilities I wanted, it could have been a masterpiece.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *The Guardian*, Feb. 17, 2007.

⁴⁹ Ch. 18 of **My Last Sigh** is devoted to the film and its reception.

⁵⁰ From an interview cited by F. Aranda, *Ibid.* 137.

Aranda continues, citing another interview with *Les Cahiers du cinéma*⁵¹. “**Los Olivados** was made with relative freedom,” in 21 days on a low budget. But he adds that Dancigers⁵², the producer, asked him to take out a lot of things which he wanted to put in the film.

André Bazin immediately asked what kind of things. “Crazy,” mad elements into the most realistic scene, “a huge eleven story building in process of construction in the background” of the scene when Jaibo beats up and kill the other boy, or a hundred-piece orchestra, almost as a flash shot.⁵³ Anyone familiar with Buñuel’s will recognize a device frequent in his films: *disruption*. Buñuel is not quite able to explain why he has this urge to insert these “poetic” moments. But it is certainly a device which is central to surrealist works⁵⁴, from automatic writing to de Chirico’s paintings. Not to mention Duchamp’s readymades, for ex., or Ernst frottages. And we need only to remember the skillful use of editing in ***Un Chien***

⁵¹ no. 37 (July 1954), 44-48.

⁵² He made a lot of money and Dancigers who had just seen *Showshine* suggested I make a film about the orphans of Mexico City.

⁵³ *Les Cahiers du cinéma*,

⁵⁴ André Breton made it very explicit in his definition of the image in “The First Manifesto of Surrealism,” see *infra*, p.

Andalou. It is interesting that he considered this “poetic” use of disruption as an intrinsic part of the film. It would appear that unlike its use in the earlier films, **L’Age d’or** especially, where disruption occurs within shots and segments, in **Los Olivados**, it would have consisted of segments inserted in the narrative flow. But I shall return to this issue.

The fact that it was de Sica’s film that gave Danciger the idea of making a film about slum children in Mexico, immediately prompted questions about Buñuel’s debt to Italian Neorealism. I should add that Buñuel liked de Sica’s film but didn’t think much of Italian Realism. In an interview often cited, de Sica is quoted as saying that he hated **Los Olivados** and didn’t understand why Buñuel made such a film since he hadn’t personally endured the kind of misery the film describes. It is true, Tsinka

(University of Essex) shows⁵⁵, there are elements which are similar, especially locations

⁵⁵ "Elements of a neorealistic style in **Los Olvidados** (1950)", p7f

9. Let's pass in the details...

10. Places [?] 'The sets, of course, were readily available in the hovels and derelict sites of Mexico city itself.' (Edwards 1983, p.89)

[?] 'Buñuel, co-screenwriter Luis Alcoriza, and production designer Edward Fitzgerald spent six months doing field research inside the Mexico City slums where the movie's action was to take place. They attempted to be particularly realist in their physical depiction of the environment – the interiors of shacks and shanties, the existence of animals, the number of people in each house, and so on. Buñuel and his team were concerned with being true to the "reality" that they found.' (Acevedo-Munoz 2003, p.68) [?] 'The film combines authentic outdoor settings and stylized studio interiors.' (Gutiérrez-Albilla 2008, p.26)

11. Actors [?] 'With the exception of Estella India (Marta) a well-known Mexican actress, Buñuel's cast was relatively unknown, although some had acting experience.' (Edwards 1983, p.89)

12. The leading roles in the plot [?] Buñuel in an interview to Nuevo Cine: 'I decided to base Los olvidados on the lives of abandoned children [...].' (Edwards 1983, p.89) [?] 'Los olvidados is populated by a cast of characters that represents the poorest of any society in situations that bring out only the worst in them [...].' (Acevedo-Munoz 2003, p.68)

13. The film's topic and the heroes [?] 'For me **Los olvidados** is [...] a film with a social argument. To be true to myself I had to make a film of a social type.' (Edwards 1983, p.90) [?] 'Los olvidados, like the Spanish picaresque novel, and the post-war film masterpieces of Italian neorealism, has often been recognized and interpreted as a social critique. With its realistic depiction of overcrowded slum shanties, domestic abuse, incest, child abuse, crime and punishment, poverty, and the ineptness of public social services, it is an indictment of contemporary urban society.' (Acevedo-Munoz 2003, p.67) [?] De Sica interpreted the film as an "offensive" comment to the society. (Hart 2004, p.69) [?] '[...] the film can legitimately be described as sociological study.' (Hart 2004, p.71)

So, it cannot be denied, there are many elements in **Los Olvidados** that characterize neorealist films: the characters, the location, the type of documentary like “style” and so on:

Tsirkas continues: “The impact of neo-realism on Los olvidados cannot be dismissed as easily as Buñuel would like.” (Evans 1995, p.78) [?] ‘Buñuel [...] took what he could use from the neorealists and molded it to his own ends. (Jones 2005, p.25) [?] ‘There was also the arrabalera, or urban melodrama (the genre that most closely fits Los Olvidados), though these were less popular among audiences, perhaps because of their pessimistic tone.’ (Polizzoti 2006, p.25). [?] ‘[...] Buñuel drew on Italian neorealism to achieve this aesthetic and epistemological break with the visual and moral conventions of classical Mexican and Hollywood cinema.’ (Gutiérrez-Albilla 2008, p.21).”

This conclusion based on a collage of received opinions about the film is highly debatable. A film assembled from these bits and pieces could not produce a neorealist film, and especially something resembling **Los Olvidados**.

The film was badly received in Mexico, but it was well received in France—he did win the director prize in Cannes. But his friends were upset or moved, as some found it unbearable. As Franju put it, it is a brutal film but not a violent film. Perhaps we should take a clue from some French New Wave directors who were very influenced by neo-realism, starting with Rossellini: J-L.

Godard, for ex. : morality, if one can conclude from the many directors who were influenced by it. Or to put it in Buñuel's terms: distance established by a "scientific" i.e. **entomological** perspective. This "scientific" point of view, which he sought to achieve since he began to make films is one of the most important —and consistent—feature of Buñuel's technique. And it is not produced by the subject matter, but the choice of cinematographer (Duverger), editing and later on, the counterpoint of sound. And we only have to think of the contemporary filmic references to put it in context: Feuillade, Keaton, Painlevé, von Stroheim, Lang, Cavalcanti, especially.

Ironically, it is probably for the same reason that the Communist party didn't want to have anything to do with it, that is until Pudovkin praised it. But the same thing has been said about ***Los Hurdes***.

We should also remember that this is not the film Buñuel wanted to make. Not only does it lack the "crazy" inserts he had to eliminate, against his wishes, it looked too pretty! The cameraman was Figueroa⁵⁶ one of the most respected cameramen in the Mexican film industry because he was fast and commercial, says Buñuel when asked why he used him in this type of film. The *Cahiers* people were the first to remark about the lushness of the

⁵⁶ Buñuel often spoke about his relationship to Figueroa. Figueroa would prepare a beautiful shot, splendid landscape, magnificent colors etc. Buñuel would then tell him to move the camera to focus a few goats grazing nearby.

blacks and whites compared to other films he had shot during that period in Mexico.

There is however something else which links Buñuel's distant, or detached, point of view to ***Los Hurdes***: the entomological intent of his earlier films and which of course is less in evidence in his more "commercial" work. That too is different from Italian Neo-Realism. Again, Buñuel's approach seeks to be "*scientific*" in the way he treated this subject, like all the others. Preaching and a moral point of view has no place in Buñuel's films, but of course, regardless of their intent, their brutality enhances a situation in such a way that it exposes its political context and offers a radical critique of contemporary culture.

In any case, his success in Cannes⁵⁷ may have changed his career, giving him access to a new public, and better financing, but it did not change his point of view. Only the subject of his study changed. And what better subject was there than his favorite *bête noire*: the bourgeoisie. It did not change his political affiliation either; why should it! It really did not make any difference if he was actually a card carrying member of any political party. Like for many intellectuals and artists at the time, sometimes it was convenient or safer to carry a card.

⁵⁷ Where his producer sent it in 1951 against his wishes.

NO EXIT

It is somewhat arbitrary to differentiate with precision major phases of his film production since his financial sources varied a great deal, but to simplify, I will pick the making of ***Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*** (1963) or ***The Exterminating Angel*** (1962)⁵⁸, two very different films, equally brutal, the former more polished and well made, although according to Buñuel he did not have the actors he would have liked for the second but he did have complete freedom after making ***Viridiana***.. To my mind, it is ***Exterminating Angel*** which marks a radical and more aggressive rupture with Buñuel's previous practice in its structure and subject as again *Disruption* is the central ordering principle, although, this time, it really orders the film's narrative: ***The Phantom of Liberty*** is even more radical. I should add that ***Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*** may appear more classical probably because Buñuel is carefully trying to be faithful to the novel on which it is based. Which doesn't mean that it is any less brutal than most of his other films. Even if the actors are better.

The Exterminating Angel is based on a script Buñuel bought originally from José Bergamin who modified the script for a short to be made by Carlos Velo in 1952. In

⁵⁸ One does wonder what he would have been able to add with better actors.:murder and sexual orgy are certainly suggested. Cannibalism? In any case, Freud's shadow is not far behind this well shot film.

addition to blatant repetitions, which Buñuel loved, its story is also an unambiguous example of the kind of leveling Paul Begin talks about (see supra) although not in the sense he means it as, in this case confronted with a “no exit”⁵⁹situation: *“camping like ship-wrecked travelers in their one room, the guests soon begin to suffer from thirst and hunger. Some fall ill; one dies; and two young lovers commit suicide. The rest degenerate to the most primitive passions and superstitions as all the restraints of education and social training collapse*⁶⁰. The return to our animality, represented by the orgy scene, not uncommon in a Buñuel film, is not the kind of “Social biology” the Surrealists envisioned, Bataille excepted, but Buñuelian entomology, it is.

The professional look of the film has often been noticed (even if the actors are not those he would have liked) That too is related to disruption, as to be most effective, the disruption must be prepared by unobtrusive filming and editing. Mrs. Taranger⁶¹ must be given credit in her meticulous analysis of ***The Phantom of Liberty***, for stressing the importance of the well made films, because of Buñuel’s emphasis on *découpage* and his careful editing which in effect intensified the impact of disruptions.

⁵⁹ Sartre’s play may also have been a source of the story.

⁶⁰ This is Aranda’s rendering from some unidentified source but similar to Buñuel’s account of the filming. (*My Last Sigh* , *Ibid.*, 238-240.) A situation which he sums up as: “That kind dilemma, the impossibility of satisfying a simple desire, often occurs in my movies,” begins with ***L’Age d’or***, of course.

⁶¹ Marie-Claude Taranger, *Le Jeu et la loi* (Vincennes, Presses Universitaires, 1995).



In *The Exterminating Angel*, disruptions are the more surprising because the film's "style" doesn't prepare the audience to abnormal developments. I do not mean, the sheep, or the bear that appear from nowhere, but the invisible, irrational, obstacle that prevents the members of the dinner party to perform "simple acts" like leaving a room, unexplained repetitions, which created an even greater disruption for the spectators attempting to figure out what was happening⁶².

The guests eventually are able to leave the room and the house. But this magical exit is deceptive as they think that their ordeal is over and go to a church to thank God. They soon realize that they will never leave the church.

⁶² Buñuel claims that one of the sources of the gags in the film were inspired by a dinner party in New York. He was also amused by the various interpretations of the bear saying that it is not an allusion of the threat of "bolchevism" in the 60's but to a regression to some kind of bestiality. The guests do look at the animals with a certain respect. The invisible barriers that prevent them from leaving have generated a number of dubious interpretations that amused Buñuel. Do we need to claim Feuilleade as a source of inspiration!

Irony , if it is what it is, even the Lord cannot save his faithful sheeps. Buñuel's irony is never far.

The ten films or so which make up the so called French period, most written with Jean-Claude Carrière and produced by Serge Silberman are no more consistent in style, subjects or structure than the films from the Mexican period though, disruption is more prevalent; and while exploiting distinctly Buñuelian motifs and patterns, these films are clearly directed at a different public, a different kind of bourgeoisie, but affluent bourgeois all the same. ***The Phantom of liberty***, Buñuel's last film, is exemplary in that respect.

The term *disruption* is actually not accurate, given the number and variety of disruptions, dissociations, ellipses, cuts, since it can range from a faux-accords to major ellipses of space and time that one normally finds between major segments of narrative films.⁶³ But sometimes the juxtaposition is either diegetic or achieved within the frame. Some of these examples in ***L'Age d'or*** are discussed in the introduction to the shot analysis (part II) So, at this point I will only deal with the larger types of disruptions very frequent in the films of the "French period". As mentioned earlier, Buñuel wrote a number of

⁶³ Buñuel says (*My Last Sigh*) that he likes to tell stories, but he also likes to interrupt them and insert other stories, dreams, souvenirs etc. The Phantom of the Opera is certainly an excellent example. Although, the Mexican films showed a progressive loosening of the narratives.

film reviews and critical essays about film⁶⁴. Of special importance regarding the use of disruption is the article, “Découpage, or Cinematic segmentation.” But to stress the importance of this essay, I will use a segmentation of ***The Phantom of Liberty***⁶⁵. Découpage of course implies disruptions and linking, content as well as iconic, through the conventions (codes) of montage of classical cinema.

The Phantom certainly relies heavily on large segments and very subtle liaisons between the various stories; although, not always visible or understandable on a first screening. Which prompts the question: for whom are these connections? For example, a priori, the first segment is relatively straightforward: Two little girls’ nanny are reading a story taking place during Napoléon’s occupation, although we find out that essentially what we first see is the recreation of events that took place over one hundred fifty years ago (like the ending of ***L’Age d’or***). Thus, from a diegetic viewpoint, the time frame is divided into two segments: the Napoleonian troops executing Spanish partisans, the occupation of a church where among other things a captain is driven by his necrophilic impulses. Then, we move in the park where the nanny is reading—what we just saw is what one of them is riding and heard in the soundtrack—while the little

⁶⁴ The English translation has been published in *An Unspeakable Betrayal* (UC Press, 2000), 131-137.

French translations were published long ago in *Les Cahiers du cinéma*.

⁶⁵

girls are accosted by the pervert who gives them dirty pictures. We don't really see these pictures which are some famous monuments which get the girls' parents sexually excited when they show them, although they mean nothing to the girls.

Space, on the other hand present four or five locations (depending how one segments this section) as subsegments. But how can these 10 minutes of film be correctly segmented. The "naive" spectator can see readily that there is no way this adds up to a coherent story.

I doubt that the script would help the visual segmentation. Buñuel is well known for considering the films finished once the script is written. And he rarely modified them. The decoupage does exist and in effect controls the structure of the narrative. The multiple visible and invisible links, of course including the soundtrack, makes it difficult to establish a clear-cut break between the Napoleonic episode and the subsegment of the girls and the pedophile.

What should then be the next segment shows the parents' reaction, they go to school with the girls, dismiss the nanny, and the husband is unable to sleep, as some of his "visions" parade in front of him. He then goes visit a psychiatrist who dismisses his nighttime "visions" as apparitions in spite of the evidence of a letter. The conversation with the doctor is interrupted by his nurse

who asks permission to leave to go see her sick father. Again the mini-segments which made up this part of the story are barely held together by the co-appearance of actions and characters that link them. The girls, links to the parents, who, the father, at least links to the doctor, whose nurse intervenes in the narrative or rather sidetracks its progression, punctuated by short irrational or unexplained inserts. On the surface, the segments look relatively coherent, but in effect, it has been noted that it resembles the assemblages, of the Surrealists' so called "cadavres exquis."

"The intuition of film, its cinematic embryo, comes to life in that process called découpage. Segmentation. Creation. Excising one thing to turn it into another. What before was not, now is. The simplest and the most complicated way to reproduce, to create. From the amoeba to a symphony. An Authentic moment of creation in film is segmentation. A landscape to be recreate in film, has to be broken into fifty, a hundred or more pieces, all of the aligned warlike, ordering themselves into a colony, composing the film as an entity, the great tapeworm silences, made up of material segments (montage) and ideal segments (découpage).The segmentation of segmentation.⁶⁶

This idiosyncratic definition may fit Buñuel's films definition, it is far to loose to fit traditional narrative films. Forget the unity of space, of time or the unity of action. Découpage is what makes it possible to transform the world, that's what the segment makes possible. Buñuel's doesn't ignore the single image but *"it hardly represents anything. A simple monad, without organization. Where evolution stops and starts simultaneously. A direct transcription of the world: the lava of a film. The image is the active element, a cell of invisible action vis-à-vis the shot, the creative element.... he filmmaker is not so much filmmaking as during the filming as during the supreme instant os segmentation....Through segmentation the script of written assemblage of visual ideas cease to be literature and becomes cinema."* It is there in the process of organizing sequences of images suits that the "ideal shots come to life." (133) It is clear that for Buñuel, the function of cinema is not to copy, or imitate reality. In that sense, his idea of découpage, more than the simple process of dissociation

⁶⁶ Luis Buñuel, *An Unspeakable Betrayal*, Ibid, p.131.

through the juxtaposition of unrelated things⁶⁷, is to *expand the power of Surrealism*⁶⁸. *Cinema becomes a way to materialize dreams and all creations of the imagination*. It is tempting to adapt Breton's famous saying and say, images and segments make love.

Let's return to ***The Phantom of Liberty's*** segmentation which presents the greatest challenge as the disruptions are so radical and the interconnections of the segments so complex.

The Doctor's nurse runs into a rain storm during the night and encounters a tank on the road hunting foxes. The soldiers inform her that the road is blocked because of the storm, so she takes refuge in a nearby hotel. She clearly links the Doctor's segment and the next major segment in the hotel.

In this case, the **location** provides the continuity for the various dubious activities taking place in the hotel during the night.

First, four Carmelite monks offer to pray for her sick father which they do interrupting her supper in her room while next door a guitarist and flamenco dancer perform. Later on she drinks and plays cards with the monks. Meanwhile, a young man and his companion (his aunt) arrive. But the aunt refuses to have sex with him. A hatter and his partner arrive and then own proceed to a sado-masochist demonstration, shocking the rest of the guests.

⁶⁷ There is a curious tendency to stick the label "surrealist" to anything that doesn't make sense. This is certainly not what Breton Definition of the image in the ***First Surrealist Manifesto*** says.

⁶⁸ The Surréalistes may have been cinephiles but they knew little about filmmaking. Their practice of going to a movie and leaving in the middle of the film, going to the next movie theater down the street and so forth is a mother form of collage or "cadavre exquis." Hathaway's ***Peter Ibbetson*** (1935) their favorite film, may be a dramatic rendering of *L'amour fou*, but the film remains the visual transcription of a literary text.. Buñuel was not likely to indulge in this kind of fantasy, and if he did, it certainly would be perverse if not pornographic, as he has done, although not blatantly, naturally. ***L'Age d'or*** remains a fine catalogue of sexual perversions. But the kind of madness involved is not that of Breton. And one wouldn't be surprised to find out that he looked upon Breton's poetry with the same scorn as that of Lorca., whose poetry he and Dali described as "shit." On this issue he was clearly on the side of Bataille.



The young man returns to his aunt's room who is now ready to have sex with him, discovers that her naked body is that of a young woman. It is not clear whether the older woman's young body troubles the young man's incestuous desire. The hotel thus becomes a kind of brothel, or let's say a house of pleasure where anything goes. I am aware that I am going a little beyond Buñuel's literal representation, but after all, he does offer us a small catalogue of debaucheries practiced in the same space.— a variation of the dinner party that goes out of control in *The Exterminating Angel*. Nothing is said about the nurse's activities during the rest of the night. The monks are quite eager to fraternize with her. Undoubtedly, Buñuel is amusing himself, offering us this charming cocktail of perversions with a dash of blasphemy. Meanwhile, that fox is still running as it takes more than a tank to catch a fox.

The next morning, the nurses gives a lift to a client having breakfast to go to Argenton. This person happens to be a professor of the police academy. This whole section is farcical. He has a difficult time giving his lecture to students who disappear when they don't behave like moronic children. And to illustrate his lecture with the problems he faces, he cuts to a rich friend's dinner party which becomes the crowning piece of that part

of the film. Buñuel scatological humor in this segment remains under control. He uses a couple inserts. Still, one cannot fail to be amused by the elegant way Madame Calmette lowers herself on the toilet seat at the



dining room table. The conversion, comma par hazard, begins with a performance of *Tristan and Isolde*, ends with a pile of statistics about the amount of excrement produced worldwide.

In a famous scene of *L'Age d'or*, after the lovers who literally wallow in mud have been separated, Modot, his face in the mud, has a vision of his beloved⁶⁹ on a toilet seat.

Following this charming intermezzo, we return to the lecture where the last two police officers leave and stop a driver for speeding, who happens to be Mr Legendre rushing to see his doctor who tells him that he has cancer and offers him a cigarette. He returns home and tells his wife that nothing's wrong. At which point the school class them to let them know their daughter (seen earlier in the park) is missing.

⁶⁹ This is another example of what Buñuel calls in the script. "r'alt' de coincidence," but translated as a simultaneous mental image. This type of disruption is more frequent in *L'Age d'or*.



In the school, the teacher insists that the little girl has vanished despite the fact that she is right there (i.e. we see her).

One of the policemen is having his shoes polished. Then, the man sitting next to him who goes to the top of the Tour Montparnasse. and randomly kills people in the street below. Arrested, he is found guilty and condemned to death but relaxed and after leaving the courtroom, greeted as a hero.

Mr. Legendre is called to the Prefect of police to pick up his missing daughter. He is about to read a letter explaining where the girl was found but leaves to go to a bar. The narrator's voice is the same as the voice of the nanny earlier in the film. In the bar he meets a woman who looks like his dead sister. This prompts a flashback of his sister playing the piano naked.

He then receives a phone call from his sister asking him to meet her in the mausoleum. Visiting the cemetery that night, he finds a telephone in the crypt by the coffin with her hair hanging out. But he is arrested for desecration. The police officers do not believe he is the Prefect of Police. He is taken to his office where someone else occupies his place. They seem to know each other and discuss crowd control. The two police chiefs arrive and direct the police control of riot heard on the soundtrack. The last shot of the film is a close-up of an ostrich's head.

So, we do have about a dozen segments, none of which truly autonomous, separated by major disruptions of the bourgeoisie's not so discrete activities. Buñuel again must have been delighted to rehearse its favored sexual perversions. Sexual drives are undoubtedly a distinct feature of that peculiar entomological study. In *The Phantom of Liberty* we are spared the almost obligatory orgy or a facsimile. In spite of the years that separate *L'Age d'or* from the *Phantom of Liberty*, his subject of study hasn't changed much, except his choice of sexual perversions has been expanded, as he abandoned the funky masturbatory practices of the early days. And where is the politics in all this. Everywhere and nowhere. The problem is that it is far more radical, not to say funereal, than the sleek surface of his films lets on. But it is precisely there where the impact of disruption is the greatest between these well made segments of film and the cesspool it reveals.

I am not aware that Buñuel was ever asked if he didn't think his work was pessimistic, but I am certain, like Samuel Beckett, he would have emphatically denied it. Why then confront spectators with this sardonic vision of human experience. ***"To warn them that the world is not what it should be."*** While his affinity with some of Surrealism's vision is obvious, it is no more unconditional than his association with the Communist party. Furthermore, one shouldn't forget his Catalan roots and its love of anarchy and of course his Spanish heritage which is generally underestimated by non-spanish critics.

Ironically, Jacques Aumont, staunch proponent of montage theory of the past forty five years, said, in an interview published in the latest issue of *Senses of Cinema*⁷⁰, that "montage no longer really exists on the

⁷⁰ No. 83 (2017).

theoretical level”. I am aware that montage in a very classical sense and Buñuel’s concept of *découpage* are different. Yet, the great freedom now available to all filmmakers resemble Buñuel’s segmentation. Technology has removed all obstacles to creativity.

Obviously much has changed since 1930. Whether it is for the better is debatable. The provocation factor is much subtler (not always), understated or simply left for the viewer to figure out. But it is no less scandalous, less sophomoric (Dali is out of sight) and a darker vision of human experience.

Disruption is no more critical in the later films than in *Un Chien Andalou* or *L’Age d’or* but perhaps, by extending disruption to larger units of the filmic structure, the segment, Buñuel fully exploited its destructive, not to say demoralizing potential –*Tout est pour le mien dans le meilleur des mondes*. Instead of reducing to a few mechanical games, he introduces the Real wedge of Revolution. That form of Surrealism at least won’t be dismissed as weird.

The last shot of *L’Age d’or*, a cross with women’s scalps hanging from it in a snow storm to the tune of a *Paso doble*, following the Calanca drums which are heard since shot 583 when Modot trying to get up, hits his head on a hanging flower pot above him. They are heard until the shot of the cross. Buñuel must have appreciated the irony of quoting this text which may have been shown (or given) to him by de Sade’s grand daughter: The Marquise de Noailles, co-producer of the film.⁷¹



