The shadow and its shadow

Surrealist writings on the cinema

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Contents

Buster Keaton's *College*

Luis Buñuel

Here's Buster Keaton in his wonderful new movie, *College*. Asepsia. Disinfection. Freed from tradition, our eyes have been rejuvenated in the youthful and restrained world of Buster, a great specialist against sentimental infection of all kinds. The film was as beautiful as a bathroom; with a Hispano's vitality. Buster will never seek to make us cry, because he knows facile tears are old hat. He's not, though, the kind of clown who'll make us howl with laughter. We never stop smiling for an instant, not at him, but at ourselves, with the smile of well-being and Olympian strength.

We will always prefer, in cinema, the monotonous mien of a Keaton to the infinitesimal one of a Jannings. Filmmakers abuse the latter, multiplying the slightest contraction of his facial muscles to the nth degree. Grief in Jannings is a prism with a hundred faces. This is why he's capable of acting on a surface fifty meters wide and, if asked for "a bit more," will contrive to show us that you could base a whole film on nothing other than his face, a film to be called *Jannings' Expression; or, The Permutations of* M *Wrinkles Raised to the Power* n^2.

In Buster Keaton's case his expression is as unpretentious as a bottle's, for instance; albeit that his aseptic soul pirouettes around the circular and unambiguous track of his pupils. But the bottle and Buster's face have infinite points of view.

They are wheels that must accomplish their mission in the rhythmic and architectonic gearing of the film. Montage—film's golden key—is what combines, comments on, and unifies all these elements. Is greater cinegraphic virtue attainable? The inferiority of the "antivirtuoso" Buster, when compared to Chaplin, has been argued for, turning this to the disadvantage of the former, something akin to a stigma, while the rest of us deem it a virtue that Keaton creates comedy through a direct harmony with the implements, situations, and other resources of filmmaking. Keaton is full of humanity, but streets ahead of a recent and increate humanity, of a humanity à la mode, if you like.

Much is made of the technique of films like *Metropolis* and *Napoléon*. That of films like *College* is never referred to, and that's because the latter is so indissolubly mixed with the other elements that it isn't even noticed, just as when living in a house we remain unaware of the calculus of resistance of the materials that go to form it. Superfilms must serve to give lessons to technicians: those of Keaton to give lessons to reality itself, with or without the technique of reality.

The Jannings School: European school: sentimentalism, a bias toward art and literature, tradition, etc.: John Barrymore, Veidt, Mosjoukine, etc. . . .

The Keaton School: American school: vitality, photogenia, a lack of noxious culture and tradition: Monte Blue, Laura la Plante, Bebe Daniels, Tom Moore, Menjou, Harry Langdon, etc. . . .

From *Cahiers d'Art* (Paris) 10 (1927). (Keaton's film dates from the same year.) Although written almost two years before Buñuel joined the Surrealists, and suffused with a particularly Spanish brand of avant-gardisme, this text is most heavily influenced by Desnos and Brunius.

Abstract of a critical history of the cinema

Salvador Dalí

Contrary to current opinion, the cinema is infinitely poorer and more limited when it comes to expressing the real functioning of thought than writing, painting, sculpture, and architecture. Just behind it comes music, whose spiritual value is, as everybody knows, almost nil. By its very nature cinema is consubstantially linked to the sensory, base, anecdotal face of phenomena, to abstraction, to rhythmic impression—in a word, to harmony. And harmony, the refined product of abstraction, is by definition diametrically opposed to the concrete [*le concret*] and, consequently, to poetry.

The rapid and continuous succession of film images, whose implicit neologism is directly proportional to a specifically generalizing visual culture, hinders any attempt at reduction to the concrete and more often than not annuls—given the factor of memory—the intentional, subjective, lyrical character of the latter. The mechanism of memory, on which these images always work in an exceptionally acute way, already tends of itself toward the disorganization of the concrete, toward idealization.

Within waking life latent intent and the violence of the concrete are almost always immersed in amnesia but frequently surface in dreams. In order to attain authentic lyrical existence the poetry of cinema demands, more than any other, a traumatic and violent disequilibrium veering toward concrete irrationality.

The experimental beginnings of cinema, up to and including Méliès, constitute (as much in the contemplative, quizzical exhibition of things and phenomena as in the presence of an action proffered as a simulacrum) its metaphysical stage. After the various gray periods during which technique is perfected, cinema, which has timidly broached an ephemeral pseudonaturalism, suddenly attains its authentic Golden Age in giving birth

to the first materialist films of the Italian school (in the prewar period and just after). I am speaking here of the grandiose epoch of hysterical cinema, with Francesca Bertini, Gustavo Serena, Tulio Carminati, Pina Menichelli, etc.; of this cinema so marvelously, so properly close to theater, which not only has the immense merit of offering us real, concrete documents of psychic disturbances of all sorts, of the veracious course of childhood neuroses, of the actualization within life of the most impure aspirations and fantasies embodied before it by those admirable art nouveau buildings, but also the merit of having attained complete possession over its essential technical means. From this moment on cinema rapidly enters its decadent phase.

The actors were really living these films, in a sustained and immodest way boastful contemporary humor would no longer put up with. There, in all its glory, an arrogant female exhibitionism. I recall those women with their uncertain, convulsive walk, their castaway hands of love groping along walls, along corridors, clinging to each curtain, each bush, those women whose décolleté perpetually slipped from the nakedest shoulders on screen, in an unending night of cypresses and marble stairs. During that fleeting and turbulent era of eroticism, palm trees and magnolias were materially bitten into, torn apart by the teeth of women whose fragile, pretubercular complexions did not outshine bodies audaciously modeled by a premature, febrile youthfulness.

In one of these films, called *The Flame,* it was possible to see Pina Menichelli completely naked in a costume of feathers depicting an owl, and this for the sole reason of justifying, once dusk had fallen, an uncultured and lamentable symbolic comparison made between the owl she personified and a flame—the flame of love—she had just lit with her fateful hands before the eyes in ruins, eyes incommensurably ringed by certified onanism, that belonged to Gustavo Serena, who henceforth made no other movement than the indispensable, automatic, depressive ones necessary for a gradual, nervy descent into the waters of a lake, until the habitual concentric circles that reestablish calm on the water abated after this suicide, the moral lesson of the film. Automatic, depressive gestures comparable only to the aged William Tell's, a William Tell dazzled by the coppery light of the setting sun, ready for death, with bloody knees, eyes drenched in tears, still walking, a pair of eggs on a plate (without the plate) perched negligently on his shoulders.

After Italian cinema and the extraordinary *Perils of Pauline,* the dynamism, sportiness, and much other mythological dreariness brought us by nascent, standardized American cinema never cease establishing, in an imponderable way, constant osmoses which have their own avant-gardist, artistico-literary applications, to the delight of Europe's modern, catholic intelligentsia. The cinema deliberately takes the absurd and stupid path of abstraction. It creates a boring language based on a cumbersome visual rhetoric of an almost exclusively musical nature culminating in the rhythmic utilization of close-ups, tracking shots, dissolves, superimpositions, of découpage's monstrous divisionism, of montage's allusive and sentimental spirituality, and of a thousand other turpitudes which, running through the lamentable pre-talkie films of every country in the world, and aiming at an increasingly *cinematic* cinema (avant-garde, usually "Belgian" films[1]), would have arrived, without the sudden intervention of talking pictures, at an authentic "pure cinema," that is to say, at a more comfortable, more complete shamefulness, if this is possible, than that of pure painting—properly and correctly so-called.

Sound cinema brings with it a marvelous impurity and an estimable confusion that permits us to hear dialogue in a single shot slightly longer than the shots in silent cinema. It also brings to bear, before literature and art intervene (an imminent and already distinguishable intervention), the reestablishment of certain notions of the concrete, capable momentarily at least of suggesting anxieties and complexities, given the persistence within memory of words over images, to the magnificent detriment of the latter.

Throughout the history of cinema, and especially contemporary cinema, a single tendency, *concrete irrationality,* that delirious, pessimistic aspiration toward gratuitousness, manifests itself again and again in an increasingly sterilized, increasingly conscious manner in those films wrongly

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1 I exclude *Entr'acte* here, by reason of the historical interest it presents. Despite René Clair, this film in fact brings together some of the ideas of Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and Francis Picabia, ideas representative of an isolated tendency running parallel to the products of American comedy film, but which because of the poetic, negativistic, and nonconformist preoccupations of the makers of *Entr'acte* display on a philosophic level a sort of semiconscious agnosticism, if one considers the scorn they have for phenomena and any attempt at a total reductivism of the latter, as well as the particular idea they have of the ungraspable, of the theoretical absence of knowing anything beyond the ruinous, aphrodisiac vertigo of accidents.

called "comedy films," for the simple and inadequate reason that they generally provoke laughter, an infinitely peculiar laughter, without this laughter implying the famous tears it is supposed to be hiding, an abominable and counterfeit invention of littérateurs, corroborated by pigs like Bergson, who thus aid and abet all the *laughing Punchinellos,* an inexhaustible and almost always abundant source of literature and art and which, in cinema, becomes the subject par excellence, the single subject, obligatory, solemn, omniscient, majestic, imperial, necessary, of consubstantial necessity, of apotheosiac rigor, of rigor mortis.

Analysis of the history of the so-called comedy film tends precisely to show the progressive elimination of the *laugh, Punchinello*[2] ilk, implying as it does, and in a very Latinate, swinishly picturesque way, all the seemingly transcendental seeds of abstraction in the domain of life.

For us to entertain contemporary cinema, that psychological, artistic, literary, sentimental, humanitarian, musical, intellectual, spiritual, colonial, departmental, Portuguese crap, for us to entertain, I repeat, the absolute crap of *laughing Punchinellos,* indistinctly cultivated and with the same affection by the Von Sternbergs, Von Stroheims, Chaplins, Pabsts, etc., etc., we needs must affirm that only comedy films of an irrational tendency mark the authentic route of poetry. Take those uncanny Mack Sennett movies, minor comedies with almost unknown actors of no especial talent as well as the ones due to somebody's genius, a Harry Langdon or a William Powell, as comic or as little comic as Langdon. Of late, *Animal Crackers,* with the Marx Brothers, is to be found at the pinnacle of the comedy film's development. There culminates, in this admirable film, a desire for systematic and concrete irrationality latent in all comedy films, a desire that gradually divests itself of all justification, pretext, subjective humor, etc., attenuating circumstances that hinder awareness of the violent moral category via which these films become *films à thèse. Animal Crackers* attains those kinds of grave, persistent and brutalizing, cold and transparent predispositions and contagions so rarely arrived at, and then only after having gone beyond the all too physiological stage of humor, the stage of frivolous solutions, not to say amusing schizophrenias, as soon as the ter-

2 [*Ris donc Paillasse.* Paillasse is Pagliaccio is Punchinello. "Laugh, clown, laugh" might be another way of putting this. Dalí may be echoing here the Surrealist Group's manifesto of the same year (1932), "Paillasse! (Fin de l'Affaire Aragon)." —*Trans.*]

rain of concession to instantaneous mental hypotheses is crossed, to attain the authentic and palpable lyrical consternation various passages in Raymond Roussel readily excite in me. It is equally possible for me to get close to this state of consternation via certain derivative notions of love, which might represent themselves to me in the form of a sudden and furious downpour of six or seven common-or-garden Anna Kareninas costumed in Portuguese cups, their handles covered partially or not at all in curdled milk, nunned-bollock.

The face of the Marx brother with the frizzy hair, a face of persuasive and triumphant madness, at the end of the film as well as during the all too brief moment when he interminably plucks the harp, contrives to disappear behind the horizon of psychological, pseudotranscendental, literary initiations, the infinitely prosaic gaze of Charlie Chaplin at the end of *City Lights,* the gaze of a gentle *arrivisme* which has no other equivalent save that implied by odious blind men or the phenomenal and stinking, pickled and vernal legless cripple.

In 1929 Buñuel and I wrote the scenario of *Un chien andalou;* in 1930 the scenario of *L'Âge d'or.* These are the first two Surrealist films.

Apart from revolutionary Communist propaganda films, which are justified by their value as propaganda, what one can expect of Surrealism and what might be expected of a certain "comedy" cinema are all that merit being considered.

From Salvador Dalí, *Babaouo: Scénario inédit; précédé d'un Abrégé d'une histoire critique du cinéma; et suivi de Guillaume Tell: ballet portugais* (Paris: Éditions des Cahiers Libres, 1932), 2–21. Courtesy Robert Descharnes. Perversely and tactically, Dalí flies in the face of his own pronouncements on cinema, published between 1927 and 1929. Was he hoping to settle scores with Buñuel after their internecine strife during and after the making of *L'Âge d'or*? Buñuel is being attacked in the paragraph beginning, "After Italian cinema and the extraordinary *Perils of Pauline*. . . ."

The cinema, instrument of poetry

Luis Buñuel

The group of young people who make up the Committee for the Diffusion of Culture approached me and asked me to give a lecture. Although I was duly grateful for the attention they were focusing on me, my reply was no: aside from the fact that I don't possess any of the qualities a lecturer needs, I feel a particular sense of modesty about speaking in public. Inevitably, the person speaking attracts the combined attention of his listeners, feels himself to be the target of all eyes. In my case I can't avoid a certain confusion to do with the fear that I might be thought somewhat exhibitionist, let's say. Although this idea of mine about the lecturer may seem exaggerated or false, the fact of feeling it to be true obliged me to beg that my period of exhibition be the briefest possible, and I suggested the setting up of a round table at which a number of friends, coming from different artistic and intellectual persuasions, could discuss *en famille* some of the problems concerning the so-called seventh art: it was agreed, then, that the theme would be "the cinema as artistic expression" or, more particularly, as an instrument of poetry, with all that this word possesses of a liberating sense, of a subversion of reality, of a threshold at the marvelous world of the subconscious, of a nonconformity with the mean-spirited society surrounding us.

Octavio Paz has said, "It suffices for a chained man to close his eyes for him to have the power to make the world explode," and I, paraphrasing him, add, it would suffice for the white eyelid of the screen to reflect the light proper to it to blow up the universe. But for the moment we can sleep in peace, since the light of cinema is being conveniently meted out and enchained. In none of the traditional arts does there exist a disproportion as great as in the cinema between possibility and realization. In acting in a direct way on the spectator, presenting him with human beings and con-

crete things, in isolating him, thanks to the silence, the darkness, from what we might call his psychic habitat, the cinema becomes capable of captivating him as no other human expression can. But it is capable of brutalizing him like no other, too. Unfortunately, the vast majority of current cinemas appear to have no other mission than this: their screens wallow in the moral and intellectual vacuity on which the cinema thrives, a cinema that limits itself to imitating the novel or the theater, with the difference that its means are less rich when it comes to expressing different psychologies; they repeat ad infinitum the same stories the nineteenth century grew tired of telling and that are still being repeated in the contemporary novel.

A moderately cultured person would fling aside in disdain the book that contained any of the plots the major films relate to us. And yet, seated comfortably in the darkness of the cinema, dazzled by a light and movement that exert an almost hypnotic power over him, attracted by the interest of the human face and ultrarapid changes of location, that same more or less cultured person placidly accepts the hoariest of clichés.

By virtue of such hypnagogic inhibition the movie spectator loses a high percentage of his intellectual faculties. I'll give you a concrete example: the film *Detective Story*, or *Hell's Antechamber*. The plot structure is perfect, the director magnificent, the actors extraordinary, the realization inspired, etc., etc. Fine, all that talent, all that savoir-faire, all the paraphernalia that the machinery of the film entails have been put at the service of a stupid story notable for its moral baseness. This puts me in mind of that extraordinary Opus II machine, a gigantic piece of equipment, manufactured from the finest quality steel, with a thousand complicated gears, tubes, pressure gauges, dials, as precise as a wristwatch, as imposing as an ocean liner, whose sole purpose was to frank the mail.

Mystery, the essential element of any work of art, is for the most part lacking in films. Scriptwriters, directors, and producers take a lot of care not to disturb our peace of mind by opening the marvelous window of the screen onto the liberating world of poetry. On that screen they prefer to depict issues that might be an extension of our ordinary lives, to repeat the same drama a thousand times, to make us forget the long hours of our workaday world. And all this, as is natural, fully sanctioned by conventional morality, by governmental and international censorship, by reli-

gion, presided over by good taste and embellished with white humor and the other prosaic imperatives of reality.

If we wish to see good cinema, rarely will we encounter it in major productions or in those others that come sanctioned by film criticism and the backing of the public. The personal story, the private drama of an individual, cannot, I believe, interest anyone worthy of living his era to the full; if the spectator shares something of the joys, sorrows, or anxieties of a screen character, it must be because he sees reflected therein the joys, sorrows, or anxieties of society as a whole, and therefore his own as well. The lack of work, insecurity of life, fear of war, social injustice, etc., are things that, in affecting all people today, also affect the spectator; but that Mr. X might not be happy at home and so seeks a woman friend to distract him, a friend who he will finally abandon in order to go back to his altruistic wife, is doubtless all very moral and edifying but it leaves us completely indifferent.

At times the cinematic essence gushes forth unwontedly in some anodyne film, in a slapstick comedy or poverty-row serial. Man Ray has said, in a phrase redolent with meaning: "the worst films I might have seen, the ones that send me off to sleep, always contain five marvelous minutes, and the best, the most celebrated ones, *only* have five minutes worth seeing; that is, in both good and bad movies, and over and above, or despite, the good intentions of their makers, cinematic poetry strives to come to the surface and show itself."

The cinema is a marvelous and dangerous weapon if a free spirit wields it. It's the finest instrument there is for expressing the world of dreams, of the emotions, of instinct. Because of the way it works, the mechanism for producing film images is, of all the means of human expression, the one that is most like the mind of man or, better still, the one which best imitates the functioning of the mind while dreaming. J.B. Brunius draws our attention to the fact that the darkness that gradually invades the auditorium is the same as closing the eyes: next, on the screen, and within man, the darkness of unconsciousness begins to make inroads; as in the dream, the images appear and disappear by means of dissolves or fades-in and -out; time and space become flexible, contract and stretch at will, chronological order and relative values of duration no longer correspond to reality; cyclical action may elapse in a few minutes or in several centuries; the movements speed up; the time lags.

The cinema seems to have been invented in order to express the subconscious life that so deeply penetrates poetry with its roots; despite that, it is almost never used for such ends. Among the modern tendencies of cinema the best known is the so-called neorealist one. Its films offer up slices of real life to the eyes of the spectator, with characters taken from the street and even with authentic buildings and interiors. Aside from a few exceptions, and I cite especially *The Bicycle Thief*, neorealism has done nothing to emphasize what is particular about cinema; namely, mystery and the fantastic. What use are all those visual trappings to us if the situations, the motives that drive the characters, their reactions, the plots themselves are modeled on the most sentimental and conformist literature? The only interesting contribution that not neorealism but Zavattini personally has made is raising the anodyne act to the level of a dramatic category. In *Umberto D.*, one of the more interesting films neorealism has come up with, a domestic servant takes a whole reel—ten minutes, that is—to perform actions that until quite recently would have seemed unworthy of the screen. We see the servant go into the kitchen, light her stove, put a pan on it, repeatedly splash water from a pitcher onto a line of ants marching in Indian file toward some food, give a thermometer to an old man who isn't feeling well, etc., etc. Despite the triviality of these situations, the action is followed with interest and even with suspense.

Neorealism has introduced into cinematic expression a number of elements that enrich its language, yet nothing more. Neorealist reality is incomplete, official—reasonable, above all else; but poetry, mystery, that which completes and extends immediate reality, is completely absent from its productions. It confuses ironic fantasy with the fantastic and black humor.

"The most admirable thing about the fantastic," André Breton has said, "is that the fantastic doesn't exist, everything is real." Speaking with Zavattini himself a while ago, I expressed my nonconformity with neorealism: we were eating together, and the first example that occurred to me was the glass of wine from which I happened to be drinking. For a neorealist, I said to him, a glass is a glass and nothing more: we witness how they remove it from the cupboard, fill it with drink, take it to the kitchen to be washed, where the maid servant breaks it, for which she could be dismissed from the house or not, etc. Contemplated by different people, that same glass can be a thousand different things, however, be-

cause each man charges what he is looking at with emotion, and nobody sees it as it is but how his desires and state of mind wish to see it. I advocate a cinema that makes me see that kind of glass, because such a cinema will give me an integral vision of reality, augment my knowledge of things and of people, and open up to me the marvelous world of the unknown, all the things I cannot read about in the daily papers or encounter in the street.

Don't think from what I've been saying that I'm only advocating a cinema devoted exclusively to the expression of the fantastic or to mystery, an escapist cinema that, disdaining our everyday world, would seek to submerge us in the unconscious world of the dream. Albeit very briefly, I indicated just now the crucial importance I give to the film that tackles contemporary man's major problems, not considered in isolation as a unique case, but in his relations with other men. I make my own the words of Engels, who defines the novelist's function thus (for novelist read filmmaker): "The novelist will have acquitted himself honorably if by conscientiously describing the real mutual relations he breaks down the conventionalized illusions dominating them, shatters the optimism of the bourgeois world, causes doubt about the eternal validity of the existing order, and this without directly offering a solution or even, under some circumstances, taking an ostensible partisan stand."

This text was first published in *Cuadernos de la Universidad de México* (Mexico City) 4 (December 1958) and appears in J. Francisco Aranda, *Luis Buñuel. Biografía crítica*, 2d ed. (Barcelona: Lumen, 1975), 385–391. Much of Buñuel's argument echoes the *L'Âge du cinéma* line (1951–52) as well as the ideas developed by Jacques B. Brunius in *En marge du cinéma français* (Paris: Arcanes, 1954).

Cinemage

Man Ray

The worst films I've ever seen, the ones that send me to sleep, contain ten or fifteen marvelous minutes. The best films I've ever seen only contain ten or fifteen valid ones.

That observation, made on many occasions during my ten years' stay in Hollywood, never provoked comment there, was politely ignored, or simply misunderstood. When I repeated it for the first time in Paris, it cheered me to see several gentlemen take it seriously enough to comment on and analyze it. It is a caprice, of course, and my intention in making it was to provoke discussion. I think I've succeeded in this!

Whatever my convictions, they are obviously extremely personal, biased even; besides, like the prophecies an oracle makes, you can't analyze a caprice.

I referred to ten or fifteen minutes because the few films I made some years ago were never longer than that, and it's on that basis that I craved the indulgence of my audience, in promising not to inflict an excess of footage on it. Since two people rarely agree on the merits of a film, unless they share a similar point of view or have been influenced by an astute publicity campaign, I have long cast doubt on the value of all criticism.

As for being a purist to the extent of preferring old, silent, black-and-white film, this criticism is purely arbitrary because I insisted from the start on sound accompaniment, longed for the use of color and three-dimensions, even hoped for the addition of the sensations of warmth, cold, taste, and smell to film, so that the spectator, coming out into the fresh air at last, could be totally in enjoyment of all his senses, with the added advantage of being the principal actor!

One of my critics points out that the cinema is situated somewhere between literature and the plastic arts. I thought that today the cinema was unanimously recognized as the junction of the seven arts, an opinion I

share as well. The critic also states that I was a photographer before being a Surrealist which, he says, explains everything. Excuse me, but that explains nothing unless it be that it is possible to explain an explanation. In fact, I was a Surrealist before being a photographer, and I flatter myself in having remained a Surrealist in the profoundest sense of the word, as defined by those who so admirably set out its principles, including the one which makes of Surrealism a product of every age.

If my quarrel with films seems principally founded on their length, as my critic-accountants suggest, it is simply because almost without exception these films cannot be seen twice over without giving rise to the nostalgic sensation that emanates from an old, yellowed photograph. At least, you can instantly rid yourself of that photo. Perhaps it is too early to expect a film to take its place beside a book or a painting and continue for all time to give lasting pleasure and inspiration as they do. Any form of art that is mainly resolved in a finance operation, or in a means of propaganda, must stand in for the immediately depleted money, which is replaced by fresh funds. Permanent values, then, are the last thing to be desired.

From *L'Âge du cinéma* (Paris) 4–5 (August-November 1951): 24–25. Courtesy Lucien Treillard and L'Association des Amis et Défenseurs de l'Oeuvre de Man Ray.

Manifesto of the Surrealists concerning *L'Âge d'or*

The Surrealist Group

On Wednesday 12 November 1930 and on subsequent days several hundred people, obliged to take their seats daily in a theater, drawn to this spot by very different, not to say contradictory, aspirations covering the widest spectrum, from the best to the worst, these people generally unfamiliar with each other and even, from a social point of view, avoiding each other as much as they can, yet nevertheless conspiring, whether they like it or not, by virtue of the darkness, insensitive alignment, and the hour, which is the same for all, to bring to a successful conclusion or to wreck, in Buñuel's *L'Âge d'or,* one of the most extensive sets of demands proposed to human consciousness to this day, it is fitting perhaps, rather than giving in to the pleasure of at last seeing transgressed to the nth degree the prohibitive laws passed to render inoffensive any work of art over which there is an outcry and faced with which we endeavor, with hypocrisy's help, to recognize in the name of beauty nothing but a muzzle, it is certainly fitting to measure with some rigor the wing span of this bird of prey so utterly unexpected today in the darkening sky, in the darkening western sky: *L'Âge d'or.*

The sexual instinct and the death instinct

Perhaps it would be asking too little of today's artists that they confine themselves to establishing the brilliant fact that the sublimated energy smoldering within them will continue to deliver them up, bound hand and foot, to the existing order of things and will not make victims, through them, of anybody but themselves. It is, we believe, their most elementary duty to submit the activity which results from this sublimation of mysterious origin to intense criticism and not to shrink before any apparent excess, since above all else it is a question of loosening the muzzle we were

speaking of. To give in, with all the cynicism this enterprise entails, to the tracking down within oneself and the affirmation of all the hidden tendencies of which the artistic end product is merely an extremely frivolous aspect, must not only be permitted but demanded of them. Beyond this sublimation of which they are the object and which could not be held without mysticism to be a natural aim, it only remains for them to propose to scientific opinion another term, once account has been taken by them of this sublimation. Today one expects of the artist that he know to what fundamental machination he *owes* his being an artist, and one can only give him title to this denomination as long as one is sure he is perfectly aware of this machination.

Now, disinterested examination of the conditions in which the problem is, or tends to be, resolved, reveals to us that the artist, Buñuel, for example, merely succeeds in being the immediate location of a series of conflicts that two nonetheless associated human instincts distantly engage in: the sexual instinct and the death instinct.

Given that the universally hostile attitude involving the second of these instincts differs in each man only in its application, that purely economic reasons oppose themselves within present-day bourgeois society to whatever this attitude profits by in the way of other than extremely incomplete gratifications, these same reasons being themselves an unfailing source of conflict derived from what they might have been, and which it would be permissible then to examine, one knows that the amorous attitude, with all the egoism it implies and the much more appreciable chance of realization it has, is the one which, of the two, succeeds in best sustaining the spirit's light. Whence the miserable taste for *refuge* of which much has been made in art for centuries, whence the great tolerance displayed to all that, in exchange for a good many tears and much gnashing of teeth, still helps place this amorous attitude above all else.

It is no less true, dialectically, that either one of these attitudes is only humanly possible as a function of the other, that these two instincts for *preservation,* tending, it has been pointed out, to reestablish a state troubled by the appearance of life, creates a perfect balance in every man, that social cowardliness which anti-Eros allows, at the expense of Eros, to be born. It is no less true that in the violence we see in an individual's spirited amorous passion we can assess his capacity for refusal, we can, from a

revolutionary viewpoint, making light of the fleeting inhibition in which his education may or may not sustain him, give him more than a symptomatic role.

Once, and this is always the case; this amorous passion shows itself to be so clear about its own determination, once it bristles the disgusting spines of the blood of what one wants to love and what, occasionally, one loves, once the much maligned frenzy has taken over, outside of which we, Surrealists, refuse to hold up any expression of art as valid, and we know the new and dramatic limit of compromise through which every man passes and through which, in proposing to write or paint, we are the first and the last to have, without more ample information—this more ample information being *L'Âge d'or*—consented to pass.

It's the mythology that changes

At the present, undoubtedly most propitious time for a psychoanalytic investigation which aims to determine the origin and formation of moral myths, we believe it possible, by simple induction, marginal to all scientific accuracy, to conclude in the possible existence of a criterion that would free itself in a precise way from everything that can be synthesized in the general aspirations of Surrealist thought and which would result, from the biological point of view, in an attitude contrary to that which permits the admission of the various moral myths as the residue of primitive taboos. Completely opposed to this residue, we believe (paradoxical as it may seem) that it is within the domain of what one is in the habit of reducing to the limitations(!) of the congenital, that a depreciative hypothesis of these myths would be possible according to which the divination and mythification of certain fetishistic representations of moral meaning (such as those of maternity, old age, etc.) would be a product which, by its relation to the affective world, at the same time as its mechanism of objectification and projection to the external, could be considered as an obviously complicated case of collective transference in which the demoralizing role would be played by a powerful and profound sense of ambivalence.

The often complete individual psychological possibilities of destruction of a vast mythic system coexist with the well-known and no less frequent possibility of rediscovering in earlier times, by a process of regression, already existing archaic myths. On the one hand, that signifies the affirma-

tion of certain symbolic constants in unconscious thought and, on the other, the fact that this thought is independent of every mythic system. So everything comes back to a question of language: through unconscious language we can rediscover a myth, but we are very much aware that mythologies change and that on every occasion a new psychological hunger of paranoiac tendency overtakes our often miserable feelings.

One must not trust in the illusion that may result from the lack of comparison, an illusion similar to the illusion of the moving off of a stationary train when another train passes by the carriage window and, in the instance of ethics, similar to the tendency of facts toward evil: everything happens as if, contrary to reality, what is changing were not events exactly but, more seriously, mythology itself.

Sculptural reproductions of various allegories will take their place in a perfectly normal way in the moral mythologies of the future, among which the most exemplary will prove to be the one of a couple of blind people eating each other and that of an adolescent "spitting with pure delight on his mother's portrait," a nostalgic look on his face.

The gift of violence

Waging the most desperate struggle against all artifice, subtle or vulgar, the *violence* in this film divests solitude of all it decks itself out in. In isolation each object, each being, each habit, each convention, even each image, intends to revert to its reality, without materializing, intends to have no more secrets, to be defined calmly, uselessly, by the atmosphere it creates, the illusion being lost. But here is a mind *that does not accept* remaining alone and which wants to revenge itself on everything it seizes on in the world imposed on it.

In his hands sand, fire, water, feathers, in his hands the arid joy of privation, in his eyes anger, in his hands violence. After having been for so long the victim of confusion man replies to the calm that's going to cover him in ashes.

He smashes, he sets to, he terrifies, he ransacks. The doors of love and hatred are open, letting violence in. Inhuman, it sets man on his feet, snatches from him the possibility of putting an end to his stay on earth.

Man breaks cover and, face to face with the vain arrangement of charm and disenchantment, is intoxicated with the strength of his delirium. What

does the weakness of his arms matter when the head itself is so subjected to the rage that shakes it?

Love and disorientation

We are not far from the day when it will be seen that, despite the wear and tear that bites into us like acid, and at the foundation of that liberating or somber activity which is the seeking after a cleaner life in the very bosom of the machinery with which ignominy industrializes the city,

LOVE

alone remains without perceptible limits and dominates the deepness of the wind, the diamond mine, the constructions of the mind, and the logic of the flesh.

The problem of the bankruptcy of feelings intimately linked with the problem of capitalism has not yet been resolved. One sees everywhere a search for new conventions that would help in living up to the moment of an as yet illusory liberation. Psychoanalysis can be accused of having created the greatest confusion in this area, since the very problem of love has remained outside the signs that accompany it. It is the merit of *L'Âge d'or* to have shown the unreality and insufficiency of such a conception. Buñuel has formulated a theory of revolution and love that goes to the very core of human nature, by the most moving of debates, and determined by an excess of well-meaning cruelty, that unique moment when you obey the wholly distant, present, slow, most pressing voice that yells through pursed lips so loudly it can hardly be heard:

LOVE . . . LOVE . . . Love . . . love . . .

It is useless to add that one of the culminating points of this film's *purity* seems to us crystallized by the image of the heroine in her room, when the power of the mind succeeds in sublimating a particularly baroque situation into a poetic element of the purest nobility and solitariness.

Situation in time

Nothing is more useless today than that a very pure, unassailable thing be the expression of what is most pure, most unassailable in man, when whatever he does, whatever we do, to insure his labors against injury, against misunderstanding—by which we mean merely to point out the worst that consists in the turning of that thought to the profit of another not on a par

with it—whatever he does, we say, is done in vain. At present everything seems indifferently usable toward ends we have denounced and reproved too often to be able to disregard every time we come up against them, for instance, when we read in *Les Annales* a statement in which the last clown to have done so indulged in some delirious commentary on *Un chien andalou* and felt qualified by his admiration to discover a link between the film's inspiration and *his own* poetry. There can, however, be no mistake. But whatever fence we put around a seemingly well-protected estate, we can be sure it will immediately be covered in shit. Although the means of aggression capable of discouraging swindling can hardly be contained within a book, painting, or film, despite everything we continue to think that provocation is a precaution like any other and, on this plane, that nothing prevents *L'Âge d'or* deceiving whoever hopes conveniently to find in it grist for his mill. The taste for scandal which Buñuel displayed, not from deliberate whimsy, but for reasons on the one hand personal to him that invoke, on the other, the desire to alienate forever the curious, the devotees, jokers, and disciples who were looking for an opportunity to exercise their more or less large capacity for airing their views, if such a mind has succeeded this time in the scheme it undertook, we could think he had no other ambition. It's up to the critical profession to look for more, and concerning this film, to put questions about the scenario, technique, use of dialogue. As long as nobody expects us to furnish them with arguments meant to fuel their debate on the expediency of silence or sound, for we maintain that this is a quarrel as vain, as resolved as the one between classical and free verse. We are too sympathetic to what, in a work or in an individual, is *left to be desired* to be very interested in perfection, wherever that idea of perfection comes from, in some progress it seems to initiate. That is not the problem Buñuel sets out to solve. And can one even speak of a problem in reference to a film in which nothing that moves us is evaded or remains in doubt? What do we retain of the interminable reel of film put before our eyes till today and now dispersed, certain fragments of which were just the recreation of an evening to be killed, certain others the subject of despondency or unbelievable cretinization, others the cause of a brief and incomprehensible exaltation, if not the voice of the arbitrary perceived in some of Mack Sennett's comedies, of defiance in *Entr'acte,* of a savage love in *White Shadows,* the voice of equally unlimited love and de-

spair in Chaplin's films? Apart from these, nothing outside of *The Battleship Potemkin*'s indomitable call to revolution. Nothing outside of *Un chien andalou* and *L'Âge d'or,* both situated beyond anything that exists.

Let's give way, therefore, to that man who, from one end of the film to the other, passes through it, traces of dust and mud on his clothes, indifferent to all that does not uniquely concern the love occupying him, driving him on, around which the world is organized and rotates, this world he is not on terms with and to which, once again, we belong only to the degree we protest against it.

Social aspect – subversive elements

One would have to go back a long way to find a cataclysm comparable to the age we live in. One would probably have to go right back to the collapse of the ancient world. The curiosity attracting us to those troubled times, times similar, with certain reservations, to our own, would love to rediscover in that time something more than history. A Christian heaven, alas, has completely obliterated everything else, and there is nothing in it that one has not already seen on the ceilings of the Ministry of the Interior or on the rocks by the seaside. This is why the genuine traces left on the human retina by the needle of a great mental seismographer will always be, unless they disappear along with everything else when capitalist society is annihilated, of utmost importance to those whose chief concern is to define the critical point at which reality is replaced by "simulacra." Whether the sun sets once and for all depends on the will of humankind. Projected at a time when banks are being blown up, rebellions breaking out, and artillery rumbling out of arsenals, *L'Âge d'or* should be seen by all those who are not yet disturbed by the news which the censors still let the papers print. It is an indispensable moral complement to the stock-market scare, and its effect will be direct precisely because of its Surrealist nature. For there is no fictionalization of reality. The first stones are laid, conventions become a matter of dogma, the cops push people around just as they have always done, and, as always too, various accidents occur within bourgeois society that are received with total indifference. These accidents which, it will be noticed, are presented in Buñuel's film as philosophically pure, weaken the powers of endurance of a rotting society which is trying to survive by using the clergy and the police as its only buttresses. The ulti-

mate pessimism issuing from the very bosom of the ruling class as its optimism disintegrates becomes in turn a powerful force in the decomposition of that class, takes on the value of negation immediately translated into anticlerical, therefore revolutionary, action since *the struggle against religion is also the struggle against the world.* The transition from pessimism to the stage of action is brought about by Love, the root, according to bourgeois demonology, of all evil, that Love which demands the sacrifice of everything: status, family, honor, the failure of which within the social framework leads to revolt. A similar process can be seen in the life and work of the Marquis de Sade, a contemporary of that *golden age* of absolute monarchy interrupted by the implacable physical and moral repression of the triumphant bourgeoisie. It is not by chance that Buñuel's sacrilegious film is an echo of the blasphemies screamed by the Divine Marquis through the bars of his prison cells. Obviously, the final outcome of this pessimism in the struggle and triumph of the proletariat, which will mean the decomposition of class society, remains to be seen. In a period of "prosperity" the social value of *L'Âge d'or* must be established by the degree to which it satisfies the destructive needs of the oppressed and perhaps also by the way in which it flatters the masochistic tendencies of the oppressors. Despite all threat of suppression this film will, we feel, serve the very useful purpose of bursting through skies always less beautiful than those it shows us in a mirror.

Maxime Alexandre, Aragon, André Breton, René Char, René Crevel, Salvador Dalí, Paul Éluard, Benjamin Péret, Georges Sadoul, André Thirion, Tristan Tzara, Pierre Unik, Albert Valentin

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