**IL1: Film and Historical Modernism - Luis Buñuel**

Luis Buñuel & Salvador Dalí, *Un chien andalou* (1929)

Luis Buñuel, *L'Âge d'or* (1930)

Luis Buñuel, *Las Hurdes / Tierra sin pan* (1933)

**Important Questions for Today's Lecture:**

1. “The crucial question to ask about such a film (*Un chien andalou*, 1929) is whether we ourselves feel implicated or comfortably left outside? Do we feel imaginatively involved in a way that might lead us to some kind of cathartic release by the end or do we simply feel amused at what we have seen, do we simply feel smug? What kind of experience can we take away from *Un chien andalou*? How can it arrest us?” (Peter Harcourt 7).

2. “If Buñuel himself, after a week of filming of the slit-open eye, remained sick for a week […] how then can one not see to what extent horror becomes fascinating, and how alone it is brutal enough to break everything that it stifles?” (Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*)

3. “Is *Tierra sin pan* the kind of film that invites social action or does it seem more like an expression of social despair?” (Peter Harcourt 9)

**Recommended readings:**

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Aub, Max. *Conversaciones con Bunuel*. Madrid: Aguilar, 1985.

Balfour, Sebastian. "Spain from 1931 to the present." in *Spain: A History*. Raymond Carr, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 243-282.

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Edwards, Gwynne. *A Companion to Luis Buñuel*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005.

Evans, Peter William. *The Films of Luis Buñuel: Subjectivity and Desire.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Gubern, Román, and Paul Hammond. "The Production of *L'Age d'or*." in *Luis Buñuel: The Red Years, 1929-1939*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012. 18-37.

Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." Wide Angle 8.3/8.4 (1986): 63-70.

Gutiérrez-Albilla, Julián Daniel. Queering Buñuel: Sexual Dissidence and Psychoanalysis in His Mexican and Spanish Cinema. New York: Tauris, 2008.

Harcourt, Peter. "Luis Buñuel: Spaniard and Surrealist." *Film Quarterly* 20.3 (1967): 2-19.

Higginbotham, Virgina. *Luis Buñuel*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979.

Jay, Martin. “The Disenchantment of the Eye: Surrealism and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism.” *Visual Anthropology Review* 7.1 (1991): 15-38.

Lastra, James. "Why Is This Absurd Picture Here: Ethnology / Equivocation / Buñuel." October 89 (1999): 51-68.

Lewis, Helena. *Dada Turns Red:* *The Politics of Surrealism*. New York: Paragon House, 1988.

Mendelson, Jordana. "*Las Hurdes*: *Land Without Bread* (1933)." in *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929-1939.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

Mercer, Leigh. "Fear at the Hands of Technology: The Proto-Surrealism of the Film of Segundo de Chomón." *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 10 (2007): 79-90.

Short, Robert. *The Age of Gold. Dalí, Buñuel, Artaud*: *Surrealist Cinema*. London: Turnaround, 2008.

Stone, Rob, and Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla, eds. *A Companion to Luis Buñuel*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

**Important Quotes:**

<<Buñuel ha hecho una mierdecita así de pequeñita que se llama *Un perro andaluz*; y ese perro andaluz soy yo.>> - Luis Buñuel

"*L’Âge d’or* es un film político de los más agresivos, aunque ataca principios de organización moral y social tan antiguos que parece una utopía la existencia de la vida civilizada sin ellos. Estos principios son hoy defendidos drásticamente por la burguesía y en este sentido la obra posee una dirección concreta. Lo que *L’Âge d’or* afirma es la prioridad del amor por encima de todo." - José Francisco Aranda (“Luís Buñuel, biografía crítica”)

“The faithful alliance between the eye and the body came under severe attack with the oncoming of the first world war. The effects of trench warfare on peoples’ perceptions caused them to question and reevaluate the confidence they had once put in their sense of vision. The experience of trench warfare was characterized by confusion due to not being able to see the enemy, indistinguishable shadows, gas-induced haze, and sudden spurts of blinding light. […] The directive of this movement [Surrealism] was to restore a unified vision that would coincide with what was was desired for the emerging postwar society” – Martin Jay (“The Disenchantment of the Eye: Surrealism and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism)

“Surrealism taught me that life has a moral meaning that man cannot ignore. Through surrealism I discovered for the first time that man is not free. I used to believe that man’s freedom was unlimited, but in surrealism I saw a discipline to be followed. It was one of the great lessons of my life, a marvelous, poetic step forward” – Luis Buñuel (qtd. in Harcourt 3).

**Buñuel's summary of *L'age d'Or* (from the French):**

"Scorpions live in the rocks. Having climbed atop one of these rocks, a bandit sights a group of archbishops, who sing while seated in the mineral landscape. The bandit hurries to announce to his friends the presence of the archbishops. When he gets to his hut, he finds his companions in a strange state of weakness and depression. They take up their weapons and leave, with the exception of the youngest, who cannot even get up. They set out among the rocks, but one after the other they fall to the ground, unable to go on. Then the leader of the bandits collapses without hope. From where he lies, he hears the sea and sees the archbishops, who are now reduced to skeletons scattered among the stones.

"An enormous marine convoy comes ashore at this steep and desolate spot. The convoy consists of priests, soldiers, nuns, ministers, and sundry civil servants. All head toward the place where the remains of the archbishops lie. In imitation of the authorities leading the procession, the crowd takes off their hats.

"They have come to found imperial Rome. The first stone is being laid when piercing cries draw everyone's attention. In the mud close by, a man and a woman struggle amorously. They separate the two. They strike the man, and the police carry him off. This man and woman will be the main characters of the film.

“Thanks to a document that reveals his high status and the important humanitarian and patriotic mission entrusted to him by the government, the man is soon set free. From that moment on, all his efforts are directed toward Love. In the course of an unrealized love scene, characterized by the violence of its abortive acts, the protagonist is called on the telephone by the important person who had put him in charge of the humanitarian mission in question. This minister denounces him. Because he has abandoned his task, thousands of old people and innocent children have perished. The film's protagonist greets this accusation with insults, and without listening further, returns to his beloved's side just as a completely inexplicable accident succeeds in separating her from him even more definitively. Afterward we see him throw out the window a flaming fir tree, an enormous farm implement, an archbishop, a giraffe, some feathers--all at the exact instant when the survivors from the chateau of Selligny cross the snow-covered drawbridge. The Count of Blangis is clearly Jesus Christ. This final episode is accompanied by a *paso doble*. We also see in this film, among other things, a blind man being abused, a dog being crushed, a son nearly killed gratuitously by his father, an old lady being slapped, etc."

“Luis Buñuel’s documentary *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan* (1933), was commissioned by the first left-wing government of the Republic, but caused it only consternation. As D’Lugo observes: ‘the film’s depiction of poverty, hunger, and social backwardness of the rural Spanish region of Las Hurdes was perceived as offensive to the Spanish nation’. He adds ‘given the shift to the right in the general elections of 1933, there seemed very little chance that the film or its director would receive any support from official Spain’” - Núria Triana-Toribio (*Spanish National Cinema* 27)

“For its sympathizers […] the coming of the Republic heralded a historic shift in power and wealth from a small minority to the vast majority of society. […] The new government was thus entrusted with a huge burden of expectations” - Sebastian Balfour (“Spain from 1931 to the Present” 243).

THE SECOND REPUBLIC IN SPAIN:

“Two overriding objectives:

1. transform a corrupt and unrepresentative political system into a pluralist democracy
2. carry out from above a programme of reforms to modernize Spanish society” (Balfour, “Spain from 1931 to the Present” 245).