Luis Buñuel (Luis Buñuel Portolés, 22 February 1900, Calanda, Spain—29 July 1983, Mexico City, Mexico, cirrhosis of the liver) became a controversial and internationally-known filmmaker with his first film, the 17-minute Un Chien andalou 1929 (An Andalouian Dog), which he made with Salvador Dali. He wrote and directed 33 other films, most of them interesting, many of them considered masterpieces by critics and by fellow filmmakers. Some of them are: Cet obscur objet du désir 1977 (That Obscure Object of Desire), Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie 1972 (The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie), Tristana 1970, La Voie lactée 1969 (The Milky Way), Belle de Jour 1967, Simón del desierto 1965 (Simon of the Desert), El Ángel Exterminador/Exterminating Angel 1962, Viridiana 1961, Nazarin 1958, Subida al cielo 1952 (Ascent to Heaven, Mexican Bus Ride), Los Olvidados 1950 (The Young and the Damned), Las Hurdes 1932 (Land Without Bread), and L’Âge d’or 1930 (Age of Gold). His autobiography, My Last Sigh (Vintage, New York) was published the year after his death. Some critics say much of it is apocryphal, the screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière (who collaborated with Buñuel on six scripts), claims he wrote it based on things Buñel said. Whatever: it’s a terrific book. Leonard Maltin wrote this biographical note on Buñuel in his Movie Encyclopedia (1994): “One of the screen's greatest artists, a director whose unerring instincts and assured grasp of cinematic technique enabled him to create some of film's most memorable images...After the sardonic documentary Las Hurdes in 1932, Buñuel took a 15-year layoff from directing. During a stay in the U.S. he worked for the Museum of Modern Art, preparing documentaries for export to foreign countries, and as a dubbing supervisor of Spanish films at Warners....“His directing career began again in Mexico in the late 1940s; many of his films from this period, mostly assignment jobs, are undistinguished but bear interesting touches. Some, however, are genuinely excellent; the best remembered are Los Olvidados (1950), an unflinching look at Mexican poverty and juvenile delinquency, and Nazarin (1958), the story of a humble priest that was one of Buñuel's harshest critiques of Christianity. Buñuel's real renaissance as a filmmaker began in 1960, when he returned to his native Spain to direct Viridiana the deceptively simple tale of a novice pulled from the convent to tend to a family tragedy, unprepared for the corruption of the outside world she meets. The Franco regime in Spain banned it on release. Buñuel followed with one great work after another, attacking the most sacred of cows, particularly the Catholic church and the complacency of society-with remarkable energy and little mercy: The Exterminating Angel (1962), a savage assault on the bourgeois mentality, with guests trapped at a dinner party; Diary of a Chambermaid (1964), a costume picture updated to encompass the rise of fascism in the 1930s; the short religious parable Simon of the Desert (1965); a full flowering of surrealism in Belle de jour (1967), with Catherine Deneuve as a respectable wife who enjoys working at a whorehouse; The Milky Way (1969), a viciously funny, intricate trip through Catholic dogma; and Tristana (1970), with favorite
Buñuel actor Fernando Rey as the guardian of Deneuve, and their-to put it mildly-odd relationship. When Tristana was nominated for a Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, the greatest anarchist, typically commented, "Nothing would disgust me more, morally, than receiving an Oscar." His next film, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972), a marvelous, surrealistic odyssey about a group of dinner guests unable to finish a meal, did win the Oscar. Buñuel's reaction is unknown. He followed it with the equally bizarre, if less well-received, The Phantom of Liberty (1974).... Buñuel also had a good deal of fun with erotic obsession; his last film, the hysterical That Obscure Object of Desire (1977), short-listed mightily at an old patrician's love for a frustratingly virginal beauty (played by two different actresses).

JEANNE MOREAU (23 January 1928, Paris, France) has acted in 123 films, the most recent of which was the soon-to-be-released Go West. Biography from Leonard Maltin's Movie Encyclopedia: "A near-flawless embodiment of cinematic sensuality. Moreau's physical beauty, sensitivity, and charm made her instantly successful following an almost simultaneous film and stage debut in 1948. She first impressed American audiences in two 1958 films directed by Louis Malle: Elevator to the Gallows (aka Frantic) and The Lovers both successes on the art-house circuit. Moreau's appeal made her the thinking man's Brigitte Bardot; her intelligent, sensual persona was perfectly kept with the new freedom in films of the 1960s. Very much in demand, she starred for Michelangelo Antonioni in La Notte (1961), for Joseph Losey in Eva (1962), for Orson Welles in The Trial (1963) and Chimes at Midnight (1966), for Luis Buñuel in Diary of a Chambermaid (1964). Moreau's most memorable movies, however, may have been those she did for François Truffaut, including Jules and Jim (1961, arguably her greatest role, as the center of a classy, three-sided bohemian relationship) and The Bride Wore Black (1968, as the woman who coolly seeks revenge for the death of her husband on their wedding day). During the 1970s Moreau acted in a handful of American films (including the melancholy 1970 Western Monte Walsh and 1976's The Last Tycoon), tried her hand at directing (first with the well received features Lumière in 1976 and L'Adolescente in 1979, and then with a 1984 documentary on Lilian Gish), and even briefly married an American director, William Friedkin (a union long since dissolved). She is still sought after by the world's foremost filmmakers, and has taken a number of glorified cameo roles, in movies ranging from Bertrand Blier's Going Places (1974) to Lucrecia Bessoni's La Femme Nikita (1990). She had an especially robust part, as a flamboyant family friend, in the British production The Summer House (1993). She adds a distinction to every film in which she appears. Moreau has no peer in projecting worldly womanliness. OTHER FILMS INCLUDE: 1959: The Four Hundred Blows, Les Liaisons Dangereuses 1960: 5 Branded Women 1961: A Woman Is a Woman 1963: Bay of Angels, The Fire Within, The Victors 1964: Banana Peel 1965: The Train, Viva Maria! (teamed with Brigitte Bardot); 1968: "The Immortal Story" (made for TV), Great Catherine 1970: Alex in Wonderland (as herself); 1977: Mr. Klein 1982: Querelle, La Truite 1991: Until the End of the World.


from An Unspeaking Betrayal, Selected Writings of Luis Buñuel. U Cal 2000, Foreword by Jean Claude Carrière

“Cinema as an Instrument of Poetry”

Cinema acts directly upon he viewer in presenting concrete beings and things, isolating him in silence and darkness from what we might call his "psychic habitat." For that reason film can captivate him like no other form of human expression. But it can also dull him like no other.

Unfortunately, that seems to be the sole mission of the majority of films today: our movie screens make a show of the moral and intellectual emptiness in which cinema thrives, confusing itself to imitating novels and theater, except that its means of psychological expression are less rich. It repeats ad nauseam the same stories that the nineteenth century tired of telling, and that are still repeated in contemporary novels.

A moderately cultured individual would reject with scorn a book with one of the plots recounted in the biggest films. Yet, seated comfortably in a dark movie theater, dazzled by the light and movement that exert an almost hypnotic power over him, fascinated by the faces of people and instantaneous scene changes, this same nearly cultured individual placidly accepts the most disparaged clichés.

Thanks to this sort of hypnotic inhibition, the filmgoer loses a significant percentage of his intellectual faculties. . . .

Anyone who hopes to see good films will rarely be satisfied by the big-budget productions or by those that come with the approval of the critics and popular acclaim. The personal story, the private individual drama cannot, in my opinion interest anyone who is truly alive to his time; if the viewer participates in the joys, the sorrows, the anguish of a character on the screen, it can only be because he sees reflected in them the joys, sorrows, and anguish of society as a whole and, therefore, his own.

Unemployment, the uncertainty of daily life, the fear of war, social injustice, and so on are the things that affect all people today, and thus they affect the viewer. But that Mr. So-and-So is unhappy at home and looks around for a girlfriend to distract himself, then finally abandons her to return to his self-sacrificing wife, is undoubtedly moral and edifying, but it leaves us completely indifferent....

In the hands of a free spirit, the cinema is a magnificent and dangerous weapon. It is the best instrument through which to express the world of dreams, of emotions, of instinct. The mechanism that produces cinematic images is, among all forms of human expression, that which most closely resembles the mechanism of the human mind in the way it works, or better yet, that which best imitates the workings of the mind during sleep. . . .

The cinema seem to have been invented to express the life of the subconscious, the roots of which reach so deeply into poetry, yet it is almost never used to that end.”

“Pessimism”: Today I have come to be much more pessimistic. I believe that our world is lost. It may be destroyed by the population explosion, technology, science, and information. I call these four horsemen of the apocalypse. I am frightened by modern science that leads us to the grave through nuclear war or genetic
manipulations, if not through psychiatry, as in the Soviet Union. Europe must create a new civilization, but I fear that science and the madness it can unleash won’t leave time enough to do it.

If I had to make one last film, I would make it about the complicity of science and terrorism. Though I understand the motivations of terrorism, I totally disapprove of them. It solves nothing; it plays into the hands of the right and of repression.

The cinema seems to have been invented to express the life of the subconscious, the roots of which reach so deeply into poetry, yet it is almost never used toward that end. Among modern film trends, the best known has been “neorealism.” Neorealist films present the viewer with a slice of life, taking characters from the street and even showing actual buildings and interiors. With a few exceptions, among which I would cite in particular The Bicycle Thief, neorealism has done nothing to bring out that which is distinctively cinematic, namely, the mysterious and the fantastic.

What is the point of all the visual trappings if the situations, the motives that drive the characters, their reactions, and even the plots themselves are drawn from the most sentimental and conformist literature? The only interesting contribution—brought to us not by neorealism but by Zavattini—is the raising of the commonplace act to the level of dramatic action. In Umberto D, one of the most interesting neorealist films, an entire ten-minute reel shows a maid in a series of actions that only a short while ago would have been considered unworthy of the screen. Neorealism has introduced elements into cinematic expression that have enriched its vocabulary, but nothing more. Neorealist reality is incomplete, conventional, and above all rational; poetry, mystery, everything that completes and enlarges tangible reality is entirely missing from its works. Neorealism confuses ironic fantasy with the fantastic and black humor.

...Nevertheless, do not think by what I have just said that I favor a cinema exclusively devoted to the expression of the fantastic and the mysterious, an escapist cinema that spurns everyday reality and aspires only to plunge us into the unconscious world of dreams. I have indicated, albeit briefly, the great importance I attach to the film that addresses the fundamental problems of modern man, not considered in isolation, as an individual case, but in relation to others. Let me borrow a few words from Emers. He defined the function of the novelist (and here read filmmaker) in this way: “The novelist has acquitted himself honorably of his task when, by means of a faithful rendering of authentic social relations, he has destroyed the conventional view of the nature of those relations, shattering the optimism of the bourgeois world, and has forced the reader to question the permanency of the status quo, even if he does not directly point us to a solution, even if he does not ostensibly take sides.


Buñuel was born in the in village of Calanda in Aragon but insisted he was conceived in Paris. His father, Leonardo, had gone to Cuba with the Spanish military in his youth, made his fortune as a hardware merchant and at 42 married Maria Portoles, a 17-year-old from a wealthy aristocratic family. Buñuel’s mother would later help finance his filmmaking. Luis was the first of 3 sons and 4 daughters. His family moved to Saragossa shortly after Luis’ birth but retained the house in Calandra, a “completely feudal” village often reflected in Buñuel’s films.

His education was thoroughly religious to 15, including a year with French order of the Sacred Heart and 7 years at the Jesuit Colegio del Salvador. Buñuel was an excellent student of religion but his greatest interest was study of insects and animals. At 14-15 he had doubts about faith, read Spencer, Rousseau, Marx and especially Darwin at the secular Instituto Nacional de Enseñanza Media.

In 1917 Buñuel went to Madrid to enter university, and wanted to pursue music but his father put him to agricultural engineering where he didn’t do well enough in math and switched to natural sciences and his love entomology. Worked as an assistant to a distinguished insect specialist at the Museum of Natural History. Decisive education came from writers and artists he encountered at the student residence—including Lorca, Juan Ramón Jiminez (founder of a 1927 group of surrealist poets) and his future collaborator Salvador Dalí. Buñuel wrote, became an anarchist movement supporter and switched from sciences to Philosophy and Letters with concentration in history.

In 1925 after completing a degree and 4 months military service went to Paris as secretary of a Spanish diplomat, his way eased by financial support from his mother (his father had died two years earlier). He met his future wife Jeanne Rucar an Olympic gymnast ten years his junior and realized he wanted to become a filmmaker. In Paris he immersed himself in rich cinema offerings. Wrote for Cahiers d’art and got a movie pass. He “began spending entire days and nights at the cinema—attending private projections of American films in the morning, neighborhood theatres in the afternoon, art theatres at night. It was Fritz Lang’s Der Mude Tod (Weary Death, 1921) that finally jarred him into a realization of what film could do: ‘I came out of the Vieux Colombier [theatre] completely transformed. Images could and did become for me the true means of expression. I decided to devote myself to the cinema.’ ”

Buñuel made his way to avant-garde filmmaker Jean Epstein’s academy of cinema (class of 19, 18 were White Russians), worked as assistant on Mauprat (1926), also on Sirène des tropiques starring Josephine Baker. Played small role in Feyder’s Carmen . Did some theatrical work, became Epstein’s first assistant for La Chute de la Maison Usher “but he wound up quitting the production after an argument with the director over Abel Gance (to whom Buñuel refused to be civil, dismissing him as a hack [pompier]).” The incident, which reflected basic differences in orientation between Epstein and Buñuel, was not without repercussions: Buñuel was labeled a troublemaker. Buñuel again involved himself with the Student Residency in Madrid, “organizing the first series of avant-garde films ever presented in Spain. The screenings—of René Clair’s dadaist Entre’acte (1924), Alberto Cavalcanti’s “city symphony” Rien que les heures (1926), and Alan Crosland’s pioneering talkie The Jazz Singer, among other films—were a tremendous success and gave rise to the establishment of the first Spanish cine-club.”

Buñuel wrote a scenario on Goya whose imagery turns up in his later films. Worked on adapting a short story of his friend Ramón Gómez de la Cerna—neither project was successful. In January 1928 Buñuel visited Dalí and suggested they do a film together. They talked about their dreams and decided to use them and other images in a film constructed by free association. Buñuel says they wrote the scenario in 8 days: “We identified with each other so much that there was no discussion. We put together the first images that came into our heads, and conversely, we
In 1932 Buñuel broke with the surrealists, decided to give up directing and took a job dubbing films in Spanish for Paramount in Paris and Madrid. In 1934 after a severe bout of sciatica and nearly quitting filmmaking altogether he took a job dubbing for Warners in Spain. He and Jeanne Rucar married and their first child, Juan-Luis, was born shortly after.

Buñuel joined his long-time friend Ricardo Urgoiti in a commercial production venture known as Filmofono Films. His name appears as executive producer on credits for 4 films but he directed as well. Filmofono came to an end with the fascist coup in July 1936. Buñuel writes in My Last Breath “Although I had ardently hoped for subversion, for the reversal of the established order, when I was suddenly placed in the center of the volcano, I was afraid.” He accepted a post as cultural attaché for the Republican government at their embassy in Paris, where he was responsible for preparing propaganda materials. In 1939 once again invited to Hollywood to work as historical and technical advisor on Cargo of Innocents, a film about the Spanish Civil War, but after he got there, the Association Of American Producers, yielding to US government pressure, suspended all productions dealing with the current situation in Spain.

Stranded in Hollywood with his wife and son he was rescued by Iris Barry head of the film department at MOMA who found work for him on various war-related projects at the museum. “The first of these involved reediting two Nazi films recently smuggled out of Germany (Leni Riefenstahl’s 1935 Triumph des Willens and Hans Bertram’s Feldzug in Polen) to show their impact as propaganda. Buñuel then began supervising the dubbing of anti-Nazi films for distribution in Latin America. But his already precarious existence in exile was totally disrupted in 1942 with the publication of Salvador Dalí’s autobiography, in which Dalí characterized his former friend as a communist who couldn’t see very well.’). At the first screening, the commentary, written by Unik and Julio Acín was spoken by Buñuel; it was only two years later that a grant from the Spanish embassy in Paris enabled him to record the soundtrack.

Notwithstanding these constraints, Las Hurdes (Tierra sin pan, Land Without Bread 1932) became the most famous documentary of the Second Republic.”

In an epilogue added to the film in 1936 after the election of the Popular Front Buñuel noted the menace of Franco’s royalist forces and expressed the belief that “with the aid of anti-fascists throughout the world, tranquility, work, and happiness will supersede the Civil War and dispel forever the centers of misery you have seen in this film”

“The implications of Las Hurdes had not been lost on the Second Republic, which had banned the film at home and tried to prevent its being shown outside as well; only in the upheaval of Civil War was Buñuel able to find a European distributor. During the war, according to Buñuel, a friend in the Republican government came across his police file, which described him ‘as a dangerous libertine, an abject morphine addict, and above all as the director of this abominable film. A veritable crime against the homeland.’”

As André Bazin pointed out in a 1951 article, Las Hurdes, despite its documentary form and politicized content, hardly constituted a repudiation by Buñuel of his earlier films: ‘On the contrary, the objectivity, the impassiveness of the reportage surpassed the horrors and the powers of the dream.’

In 1930 MGM’s European agent didn’t understand it but was impressed and offered Buñuel a 6-month contract in Hollywood at $250 a week. Buñuel accepted and left immediately, missing the incredible controversy the film caused.

Buñuel made contact with illustrious expatriates– Chaplin, Eisenstein, Sternberg, Feyder, Brecht–but his visit ended abruptly after he flatly refused to screen a film that starred Lili Damita as a Spanish-speaking courtesan, declaring he didn’t want to “hear the whores.” Back in France by March 1931 and in Madrid just days before the end of the Spanish monarchy and proclamation of the Spanish Republic. He began working on an adaptation of Gide’s Les Caves du Vatican to be filmed in the Soviet Union. Project fell through and Buñuel turned to a less costly documentary on an isolated and backward region of Spain, Las Hurdes. Buñuel’s friend Ramón Acín, a militant anarchist, promised to finance the film if he won the lottery—which he did–and despite objections from fellow anarchists, he turned over twenty thousand pesos for the project. Borrowing a camera from Yves Allegret, Buñuel set off for Las Hurdes in April 1932 with his friends Pierre Unik (a fellow surrealist and communist) and Eli Lotar and spent just over a month filming. By the time they got back, there was no more money, and Buñuel edited the footage on his kitchen table with a magnifying glass. (‘Undoubtedly,’ he writes in his memoirs, ‘I threw out some interesting images that I
had perverted the original idea for *L’Age d’or* to suit Marxist ideology. This accusation was picked up by the right-wing *Motion Picture Herald*, and The Museum of Modern Art was soon under pressure to get rid of Buñuel. Although Barry and others stood behind him, Buñuel opted to quit his job and once again headed west with his family (now including a second child, Rafael, born in 1940).

He spent another two years working on Spanish language versions of films for Warner Brothers and saved enough to take a year off and went to Mexico to work on a Lorca play adaptation. The play fell through but Buñuel renewed acquaintance with Oscar Dancigers and signed to make a film for him in Mexico. After a decade on inactivity—and 15 years since he’d made a film under own name—he entered most prolific phase of his career.

Beginning of Mexico period was inauspicious—*Gran Casino* (1947) a musical melodrama.

*Los olvidados* (*The Forgotten/ The Young and the Damned*, 1950) shows the impact of Italian neo-realism on a surrealist imagination. “In the words of J. Hoberman ‘no film has ever been less equivocal than *Los olvidados* in suggesting that suffering does not ennoble.’ It was directly inspired by Vittorio de Sica’s *Sciuscà* (*Shoeshine*, 1946), the pathbreaking treatment of poverty and crime among young shoeshine boys in Rome; in the neorealist tradition, Buñuel developed his story among the people who lived it, spending four or five months in the slums around Mexico City, sometimes alone, sometimes with his coscenarist Luis Alcoriza or his set designer Edward Fitzgerald. ‘My film is entirely based on real cases,’ he said. ‘I tried to expose the wretched conditions of the poor in real terms because I loathe films that make the poor romantic and sweet.’”

He shocked people. Even the production crew was hostile. The film was attacked by Mexican public press and labor unions for its brutal portrayal of the underclass. It closed after 4 days and there were demands to expel him from Mexico. The groundswell was reversed after it was shown at Cannes in 1951 and received awards for best direction and the International Critics Prize.

Bazin wrote “at a distance of eighteen years and five thousand kilometers, it’s the same inimitable Buñuel, a message faithful to *L’Age d’or* and *Las Hurdes*, a film that lashes the spirit like a red-hot iron and leaves the conscience no possibility of rest.” Bazin linked it to Spanish traditions in the visual arts: “This taste for the horrible, this sense of cruelty, this search for the extreme aspects of the human being, all of this is also the heritage of Goya, Zurbarán, Ribera.”

Buñuel, along with Pablo Picasso and Pablo Casals had been one of the three symbols of cultural opposition to the Franco regime.

“When he presented *Exterminating Angel* in Paris, Buñuel prefaced the film with an explicit warning: “If the film you are going to see strikes you as enigmatic or incongruous, life is that way too. . . . Perhaps the best explanation for *Exterminating Angel* is that, ‘reasonably, there isn’t one.’” Like his Mexican producer, Gustavo Alatriste, who told him, “I didn’t understand anything; it’s marvelous,” critics were quick to declare the stunningly inexplicable film a masterpiece. Won prizes at Cannes, Acapulco, grand prize at Sestri-Levanti.

“The underlying idea, he said, was the same one that runs throughout his films; the inexplicable impossibility of satisfying a simple desire.’ *Exterminating Angel* takes place in an unspecified locale—most likely Mexico, possibly Madrid, and yet, according to Buñuel, he ‘imagined it in Paris or London instead.’ The time period also remains ambiguous, for the characters as well as the audience, and the spoken references to “yesterday evening” or “three or four days ago” are somewhat akin to the fictive intertitles of *Un Chien andalou*.

In any case, Buñuel seemingly went to the opposite extreme with his next film, a detailed period piece set in the French countryside of the late 1920s. *Le Journal d’une Femme de chambre* (Diary of a Chambermaid, 1964), the first of Buñuel’s six French productions, marked the beginning of his collaboration with producer Serge Silberman and scenarist Jean-Claude Carrière. The story was based on Octave Mirbeau’s famous novel about the landed gentry of Normandy seen through the eyes (and the diary) of the title character. While Mirbeau had sketched a portrait of the late nineteenth century, Buñuel chose to move the action forward to the period that corresponded to his own arrival in France, which was also the rise of fascism in Europe.

In Buñuel’s adaptation, Célestine (Jeanne Moreau) arrives at the estate of Monsieur and Madame Monteil (Michel Piccoli and Françoise Lugagne) in 1928. She is not slow to observe the peculiarieties of the landed gentry—Monteil’s lust; his wife’s frigidity; the foot fetish of the father-in-law, Rabour (Jean Ozenne); along with the pronounced racism of the gardener, Joseph (Georges Geret), and the fierce antiroyalist pride of the neighbor, Captain Mauger (Daniel Ivernel). Affronted and abused by all of them, she finds her sole ally in the free-spirited servant-girl Claire (Dominique Sauvage). After Rabour is found dead in his bed (clutching a woman’s boot in his hand), Célestine decides to return to Paris, but on the same day Claire is raped and murdered in the woods. Célestine, suspecting the gardener of the crime, stays on and embarks on a bizarre course of her own, promising to marry Joseph in order to trap him. Once he is under arrest, she marries Captain Mauger and retires to a comfortable life. But the larger menace of fascism is on the horizon: Joseph is freed for lack of evidence and opens a bistro in Cherbourg. In the street, the Right is demonstrating with cries of “Down with foreigners!” and “Long live Chiappe!”

As was generally the case with Buñuel’s adaptations, *The Diary of a Chambermaid* greatly condensed the literary source, focusing on character far more than narratives. According to his sister Conchita, the film contains many elements from their childhood at the country house in Calanda, and quite obviously, with the “Viva Chiappe!” at the end of the film, Buñuel was finally getting revenge against the Paris police chief who suppressed *L’Age d’or* in 1930. But at the same time—and this is also common for Buñuel—much of the “Buñuelian” detail in the film comes directly from the novel; citing the example of the foot fetishist, Robert Benayoun commented, “Buñuel has chosen his characters so well that he will undoubtedly be accused of having ‘Buñuelized’ to the utmost episodes that are quite consistent with the original.”

Despite a certain enthusiasm for Jean-Claude Carrière’s dialogue and Jeanne Moreau’s acting, *The Diary of a Chambermaid* was not a great success in France, and Buñuel retreated somewhat from the Parisian scene. He had an offer from David O. Selznick To do a Hollywood film starring Jennifer Jones, but he turned this down and rejoined Gustavo Alatriste for a final Mexican production. *Simon des Deserto* (Simon of the
Desert, 1965), a thoroughly Buñuelian evocation of an early Christian ascetic who spends thirty-seven years sitting on top of a column, took up an idea from the director’s student days, when García Lorca had drawn Buñuel’s attention to the life of Simon Stylites. The film was intended to be feature length, but it was cut off at forty-five minutes when the money ran out; abruptly abandoning the remaining sequences, Buñuel ended the story by showing Simon (Claudio Brook) on a junket to New York City in the company of a woman devil (Silvia Pinal) who condemns him to remain in the “hell on earth” (echoing García Lorca’s observation, “Hell is a city much like New York.”)...

After Simon, Buñuel resumed the collaboration with Jean-Claude Carrière that was to last, in work and friendship, to the very end of his life. They developed a scenario for Matthew Gregory Lewis’s The Monk, but the production fell through and Buñuel lost interest….He was then approached by the Hakim brothers in Paris to do an adaptation of Joseph Kessel’s 1923 novel, Belle de Jour, the story of a doctor’s wife who decides to deal with her boredom, as well as her masochistic tendencies, by working in a brothel during the afternoons. Buñuel frankly admitted that he didn’t like the novel, “but I found it interesting to try and turn something I didn’t like into something I did.”...

Buñuel had another bout with the censors before Belle de Jour was released—he wound up cutting a scene of necrophilia from one of Séverine’s fantasies—but when the film was shown at Venice in 1967, it received the grand prize. Among those who enthusiastically praised it was Joseph Kessel: “Buñuel’s genius,” he declared, “went far beyond anything I could have hoped for. It’s the book and it’s not the book. We’re in another dimension, that of the subconscious, of dreams, of secret instincts suddenly bared.”...

The mental world of Luis Buñuel—the turbulent unconscious given to eroticism, violence, the ways of chance—is well-documented in the thirty-six films that he directed over nearly half a century. But in a body of work that is nothing if not ironic, perhaps the greatest irony of all is the fact that Buñuel’s personal life was so remote from the inner world of eroticism, violence, and chance that he brought to the screen. In the words of his friend Michel Piccoli, “he was like a monk!” He remained married to one woman for all of his life; he preferred reading a book to going to the movies, and the only indulgence he allowed himself was alcohol, which he consumed for one hour a day (with his watch on the table according to Piccoli) late in the afternoon, and never to the point of drunkenness. Disciplined in his work as well, he wrote and rewrote his scenarios and then filmed them with care and precision: he only shot what was in the scenario and would do a single take if that was at all possible.

And while he was always very considerate of people he worked with, as well as the people who lived in the places he was filming, he demanded what his assistant Pierre Lary called a “terrifying exactitude.”

Wherever the juncture of the private man and his public oeuvre lay (and according to his collaborator Jean-Claude Carrière, Buñuel himself had little interest in finding out, rejecting psychological analysis as “arbitrary, useless”), his legacy of themes, forms, and inspirations has been enormous: “This supposed filmmaker,” wrote Carrière, “was in reality a personality of greater stature, monumental for some.” The records of Cannes or Venice speak clearly of his European trajectory, but his impact in the Third World, and particularly Latin America, is probably even greater. As Glauber Rocha observed even in 1966, with the first stirrings of Brazil’s cinema novo, “In the absurd framework of the reality of the Third World, Buñuel is the possible consciousness: in the face of oppression, the police, obscurantism, and institutional hypocrisy, Buñuel represents a liberating morality, a breaking of new ground, a constant process of enlightening revolt.”

**from Buñuel: 100 Years. Ed. MOMA. Instituto Cervantes/MOMA, NY, 2001**

**from an interview with director Carlos Saura**

Luis’s work was a revelation: to see that in Spain, there could be a different kind of cinema, much more imaginative, much more in touch with the culture that Luis knew so well. He knew all of Spanish culture: Quevedo, Calderón, Gracián, all had a fundamental influence on his films. He took images and phrases from Gracián’s El críticon, and translated them to the screen. He assimilated all of our classical culture and transported it to the contemporary world, the world of modernity and surrealism. Of all the forms of Surrealism, he was most nourished by the French.

Where would you situate Buñuel in the history of world cinema?

During the period in which he worked—and I’m talking only about Europe, not America—I believe there were three extraordinary filmmakers who, each in his own particular way, profoundly influence cinematic history: Buñuel, Bergman, and Fellini. The three maintained close relations, and admired each other intensely. Luis had great respect for the other two, perhaps most of all for Bergman. I know that in Madrid, one of the few times he went out to the movies, he saw Persona. He was overwhelmed to the point of exclaiming, “That Bergman! What a phenomenon! What nerve! He does a close-up on the girl’s face, and the camera doesn’t move for ten minutes!”

Luis knew everything about cinematography. It’s my personal opinion, but I think that his work follows two very different paths. One is narrative, where he’s trying to be a narrator telling a story, like, for example, John Ford or Kurosawa. In this category I’d put Diary of a Chambermaid and a few of the Mexican films. It is the “other” Luis I personally find much more brilliant: the one who wrote his own scripts, in collaboration with others. Those scripts have less dramatic structure, but are much more inventive, extravagant, even crazy, Viridiana, for example. To put it another way I prefer the Buñuel who gets from here to there by taking detours and circling around...The Exterminating Angel comes immediately to mind. And so do The Phantom of Liberty and The Milky Way.

**from an interview with Jean-Claude Carrière**

I met with Buñuel over lunch....I knew the project had to do with Diary of a Chambermaid, so I’d read the book several times and even had an idea for how to adapt it. When we met, he asked if I liked wine, which I understood immediately to be an important question. He wanted to know if we belonged to the same world. I told him that I not only enjoyed wine, but that I came from a family of vintners. His face lit up. Many years later, referring back to that meeting, he confessed, “I knew right away that if the work wasn’t going well, we’d at least have something to talk about.”

We wrote nine screenplays together, and six were made into movies. We had eighteen or nineteen years of close collaboration.

Our work on the first film also deserves a brief
commentary. After three weeks of work, Silberman came from Paris and invited me to dinner. It was extremely unusual that Buñuel didn’t come with us, I remember he even made up some pretext, that he had something else to do...Over dessert, Silberman told me that Luis was pleased with my work, that he appreciate how serious and conscientious I was. Then Silberman added, “But, now and then, you must learn to contradict him.” I realized then that Buñuel had asked Silberman to make the trip solely to give me that message. I admit that I had some trouble contradicting him, but by the end of that first script, I think I did learn. We each had the right to veto something we objected to. By the second screenplay, he had written into his contracts that he had to work with me....He taught me to go to the very limit of the imagination...that is to say, to bash through any prejudgments, preconceived ideas, reserve, all of that....It’s also true that in every case Silberman was with us all the way. In That Obscure Object of Desire, for example, he gave the same role to two actresses.

some things Luis Buñuel said:
"Sex without religion is like cooking an egg without salt. Sin gives more chances to desire"

"To compare me with Goya is a nonsense. Critics speak of Goya because they don't know anything about Quevedo, Teresa of Avila, the picaresque literature, Galdós, Valle Inclán and others.... Today's culture is unfortunately inseparable from economic and military power. A ruling Nation can impose its culture and give a worldwide fame to a second-rate writer like Hemingway. Steinbeck is important due to American guns. Had Dos Passos and Faulkner been born in Paraguay or in Turkey, who'd read them?"

"While we're making the list of bêtes noires, I must state my hatred of pedantry and jargon. Sometimes I weep with laughter when I read certain articles in the Cahiers du Cinéma, for example. As the honorary president of the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica in Mexico City, I once went to visit the school and was introduced to several professors, including a young man in a suit and tie who blushed a good deal. When I asked him what he taught, he replied, "The semiology of the Clonic Image." I could have murdered him on the spot. By the way, when this kind of jargon (a typically Parisian phenomenon) works its way into the educational system, it wreaks absolute havoc in underdeveloped countries. It's the clearest sign, in my opinion, of cultural colonialism."

"The two basic sentiments of my childhood, which stayed with me well into adolescence, are those of a profound eroticism, at first sublimated in a great religious faith, and a permanent consciousness of death."

"Morbidity—middle-class morality, that is—is for me immoral. One must fight it. It is a morality founded on our most unjust social institutions—religion, fatherland, family culture—everything that people call the pillars of society."

"In the hands of a free spirit the cinema is a magnificent and dangerous weapon. It is the superlative medium through which to express the world of thought, feeling, and instinct. The creative handling of film images is such that, among all means of human expressions, its way of functioning is most reminiscent of the work of the mind during sleep. A film is like an involuntary imitation of a dream. Brunius points out how the darkness that slowly settles over a movie theatre is equivalent to the act of closing the eyes. Then, on the screen, as with the human being, the nocturnal voyage into the unconscious begins. . . .The cinema seems to have been invented to express the life of the subconscious."

"Personally, I don't like film music. It seems to me that it is a false element, a sort of trick, except of course in certain cases."

"I am interested in a life with ambiguities and contradictions."

"The thought that continues guiding me today is the same that guided me at the age of twenty-five. It is an idea of Engels. The artist describes authentic social relations with the object of destroying the conventional ideals of the bourgeois world and compelling the public to doubt the perennial existence of the established order. That is the meaning of all my films: to say time and time again, in case someone forgets or believes otherwise, that we do not live in the best of all possible worlds. I don’t know what more I can do."

"It's no good telling people that all’s for the best in this best of all possible worlds...I believe that you must look for God in man. It's a very simple attitude."

"I have always been on the side of those who seek the truth, but I part company with them when they think they have found it. They often become fanatics, which I detest, or if not, then ideologues: I am not an intellectual and their speeches send me running. Like all speeches. For me, the best orator is the one who from the first phrase takes a pair of pistols from his pocket and fires on the audience."

"Cinema had always been seductive for me, because it is a complete means of expression, alternately realistic and oneiric, narrative, absurd, or poetic."

"In my films I grant particular importance to the action and strive constantly to create surprises. The point of departure is often a very simple idea: people who can't manage to eat (The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie) or who are unable to leave a room (The Exterminating Angel) . . . I like surprises to provoke laughter. And I've made much use of objects, and of the fetishism they inspire, to create a comic effect. It's certainly true that fetishism bothers me in reality."

"...The glut of information has also brought about a serious deterioration in human consciousness today. If the pope dies, if a chief of state is assassinated, television is there. What good does it do to be present everywhere? Today man can never be alone with himself, as he could in the Middle Ages."

"The result of all this is that anguish is absolute and confusion total."

"...In the film I’m thinking about, I would have liked to shoot in the hall of the Reichstag a meeting of fifteen Nobel prize-winning scientists recommending that atomic bombs be placed at the bottom of all oil wells. Science would then cure us of that which feeds our madness. But I rather think that in the end we’ll be borne off by the worst, because since Un Chien andalou the world has advanced toward the absurd."

"Filmmaking seems to me a transitory and threatened art. It is very
closely bound up with technical developments. If in thirty or fifty years the screen no longer exists, if editing isn’t necessary, cinema will have ceased to exist. It will have become something else.

That’s already almost the case when a film is shown on television: the smallness of the screen falsifies everything.”

“I am the only one who hasn’t changed. I remain Catholic and atheist, thank God.”

from the IMDB Buñuel entry:

“Buñuel liked to play tricks to his friends and, in Mexico, one of his favorite victims was the Spanish screenwriter Luis Alcoriza. During a hunting party Alcoriza saw an eaglet on a tree and knocked it down with the first shot but then he found a price tag on a paw: it was a stuffed bird put there by Buñuel. One evening the two were dining in a Mexico City restaurant and Alcoriza saw a beautiful and all alone woman that from her table shot to him passionate glances. Of course he began to apologize with his friend for leaving him but Buñuel rejected the excuses and seemed really angry. Alcoriza, a little embittered, eloped with the unknown belle and a little later, in a hotel room, saw these words written on her belly: ‘Happy night. Luis Buñuel’. The woman was a high-class prostitute engaged by the director.”

"With time, I finally discovered that nothing about movie making is more important than the scenario. But, unfortunately, I’ve never been a writer, and except for four films I’ve needed a collaborator to help me put the words on paper."

"Obviously, I like obsessions, my own as well as other people’s, because they make it easier to deal with life; I feel sorry for people who don’t have any. And I like solitude, as long as someone drops by for a chat from time to time."

"When it comes to the seven deadly sins, however, the only one I find truly lethal is envy, a decidedly Spanish weakness, because it inevitably leads people to desire the death of others whose happiness makes them miserable. (The other sins are strictly personal and don’t really harm anyone.)"

"I myself have always liked to watch the way women walk, and filming Jeanne Moreau in Diary of a Chambermaid was a great pleasure; when she walks, her foot trembles just a bit on its high heel, suggesting a certain tension and instability. Jeanne is a marvelous actress, and I kept my directions to a minimum, content for the most part just to follow her with the camera. In fact, she taught me things about the character she played that I’d never suspected were there.

"The film was shot in Paris and in Millay-la Forêt during the fall of 1963. It was the first time I’d worked with Pierre Lary (my assistant), Suzanne Durremberger (an excellent script girl), and Jean-Claude Carrière, who plays the priest and with whom I’ve continued to collaborate on all my French movies."

"Finally, I don’t like politics. The past forty years have destroyed any illusions I might have had about its efficacy. In fact, there’s really nothing to say at the sight of left-wing demonstrators marching through the streets of Madrid, as they did one day a couple of years ago, and chanting, ‘Contra Franco estabamos mejor!’—we were better off against Franco!"

COMING UP IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS:
Nov 1 Andrei Tarkovsky ANDREI RUBLEV/ANDREY RUBLYOV 1966 (DV)
Nov 8 Peter Yates BULLITT 1968 ((35mm)
Nov 15 Woody Allen ANNIE HALL 1977 (35mm)
Nov 22 Rainer Werner Fassbinder MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN/DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN 1979 (35mm)
Nov 29 Terry Gilliam BRAZIL 1985 (35mm)
Nov Dec 6 Luchino Visconti THE LEOPARD/IL GATTOPADRO 1963 (35mm)

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