

Contested Territory: The Politics of Geography in Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan*

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ABSTRACT

Las Hurdes (1933), Luis Buñuel's third film and only documentary, has been the subject of critical attention throughout the past decade. Nevertheless, its early reception during the Thirties and its relationship to the political events of the Second Republic have been scarcely mentioned. This article seeks not only to historically contextualize the film, but also to examine the multiple references within the film to the conventions of documentary, the emerging disciplines of geography and ethnography, and the influence of the film's cameraman Eli Lotar and dissident surrealism. The article demonstrates that the film engages an aesthetic of collage and juxtaposition to provoke a different understanding of documentary, ethnography and the Spanish landscape.

RESUMEN

La politización de la geografía en el film de Luis Buñuel *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan*

Las Hurdes (1933), la tercera película y único documental de Luis Buñuel, ha sido objeto de una amplia crítica a lo largo de los últimos años. Sin embargo, la primera época de su recepción y la relación de la película con los acontecimientos políticos de la Segunda República apenas han sido mencionadas. Este artículo pretende no solamente contextualizar la película históricamente, sino también examinar las múltiples referencias a las características típicas de los documentales, a las disciplinas emergentes de geografía y etnografía y a la influencia del cámara Eli Lotar y del surrealismo disidente presentes en la película. El artículo demuestra que la película utiliza una estética de collage y yuxtaposición para dar una visión distinta de los documentales, de la etnografía y del paisaje español.

During the Spring of 1933¹, Luis Buñuel along with Eli Lotar, Pierre Unik, and Rafael Sánchez Ventura filmed *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan*. Produced during the Second Republic and in the midst of debates regarding agrarian reform and the social commitment of art, the approximately thirty minute documentary is a visual archive of Las Hurdes as a site of political and aesthetic contest. During the mid-Thirties the film was described as an objective documentary and reviewed in journals with Communist sympathies². For the most part, it was praised as a portrayal of a poverty stricken region of Spain, similar in style and purpose to that of social realist art. The inclusion of references to theories of geography and to documentary conventions of the period solidified such an interpretation. Despite the consensus implied by these reviews regarding its social and political importance, the film was censored in 1934. Indeed, *Las Hurdes*, may be read from another angle as a documentary that is composed of a polyphony of contradictory and disturbing references that has more to do with the techniques of juxtaposition and collage practiced by such dissident surrealists as Georges Bataille and Buñuel's cameraman Eli Lotar than with social realism³. By reading the film through the texts of Bataille and the journal in which he and Lotar published their work, *Documents* (Paris, 1929-1930), another interpretation of ethnography, realism and the significance of the soil in *Las Hurdes* becomes apparent. This paper seeks to explore the film's oscillation between social realism and dissident surrealism and the conflicting visual and textual references present in the film which explain its relation to both of these tendencies.

Ni la paraula *document* ni el que ella expressa són coses noves, és clar; però mai com ara no n'haureu sentit parlar tant, en tots els ordres.

«Documentals», *Mirador*, 9 April 1931

Even before any critical reception of the film appeared in the press, images of *Las Hurdes* were published in some of Spain's most politically vocal journals. *Octubre: Escritores y artistas revolucionarios* (Madrid, 1933-1934) was the first journal to reproduce still photographs of the film. Published by Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León, who had accompanied Buñuel and the crew on an earlier preparatory trip to Las Hurdes⁴, the journal was heavily influenced by both writers' belief in the goals of Communism and social realism. In fact, Alberti and León began the journal directly following their return from a trip to the Soviet Union and Germany and it was clearly marked by their experiences in both of these countries⁵. The articles ranged from reports on daily life in the Soviet Union and Madrid to reviews of art exhibitions, popular manifestations, and literature. The magazine attempted to reach a largely working class audience through its choice of subjects and the use of constructivist photomontages and abundant illustrations⁶. The affinity between the editors' and Buñuel's project was manifested by the decision to publish photographs from the film on the front and back cover of the journal's first number of June-July 1933⁷ (figure 1). In order to have been included in this number, Alberti must have obtained the photographs immediately after the film was shot.

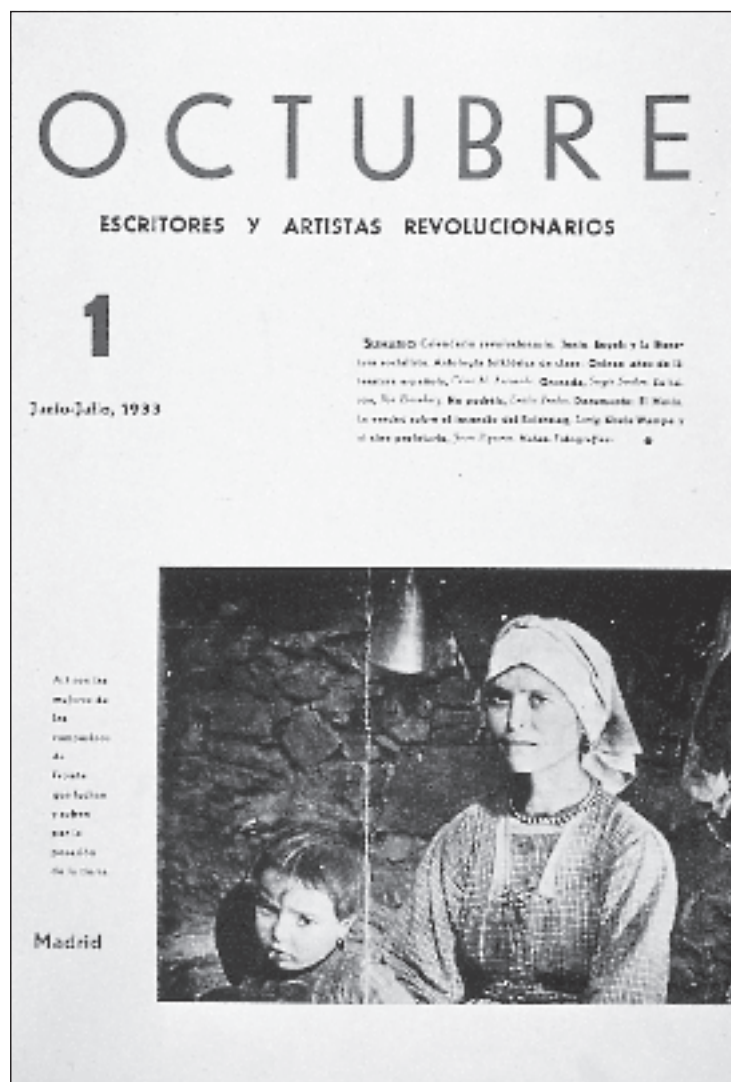
The photographs of *Las Hurdes* are presented as anonymous documents: there is no label indicating author or title. Instead, these images are incorporated into the journal's collection of visual

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1. Although for many years the film was considered to be shot during the Spring of 1932, due largely to Buñuel's own testimony and to the date given in the introduction of the film, it has now been dated to 1933. See: «L'Âge d'or. Correspondance Luis Buñuel-Charles de Noailles. Lettres et documents (1929-1976)», *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne* (Hors-Série/ Archives), 1993, letter 138. Cited in: SÁNCHEZ VIDAL, A., *El Mundo de Luis Buñuel*, Caja de Ahorros de la Inmaculada, Zaragoza, 1993; and DAVID, Y., *¿Buñuel! Auge des Jabrbunderts*, Kunst-und Ausstellungshalle der Bundes republik Deutschland, 1994.

2. This paper only deals with the reception of the film in the Thirties. For a more complete treatment of the film's historiography from its time of production to the present, see: IBARZ IBARZ, M., «Estratègies del documental. El cas de *Las Hurdes, Tierra sin pan*, L'obra i els seus crítics (1935-1995)». Treball de recerca dins del doctorat *Gèneres i estratègies de la comunicació audio-visual*, 1993-1993. Directed by Dr. Josep M. Baget Herms. Estudis de

Figure 1.
Octubre, number 1, June-July
1933, front cover.



facts. Photographs, drawings, caricatures, and press clippings are removed from their original context and presented to the viewer as ready-made political indictments. The titles to some of the articles reinforce the evidential quality that the images were to carry: «Documentos: Los desastres de la guerra», «Documentos, secretos del espionaje internacional» and «Viejos documentos de la Revolución de Octubre»⁸. The commentary alongside the photographs of *Las Hurdes* situates them within this same aesthetic of social protest. The text accompanying the photograph of a woman and child on the front cover subsumes the specifics of *Las Hurdes* within contemporary debates on agrarian labor reform and land ownership. On the back cover, the caption alongside the photograph of the Hurdano school children is even more combative, this time anchoring the image to the particular conditions of the region: «Los niños de Extremadura van descalzos. ¡Quién les robó los zapatos! Les hiere el calor y el frío. ¡Quién les quitó los vestidos!»⁹. Functioning as punctuated statements, released from the context of their production and the politics of individual authorship, the photographs, like the anonymous texts, are meant to incite the reader to action.

While in *Octubre* the photographs from *Las Hurdes* were set apart on the front and back cover, working as mastheads for the journal's political and aesthetic objectives, in 1935 *Nueva Cultura* (Valencia, 1935-1937) integrated photographs of the film with other documentary material in one of Josep Renau's photomontage series, «Testigos negros de nuestros tiempos»⁹. Renau, who was also the journal's director, included a shot from *Las Hurdes* amidst two rows of photographs, all seemingly taken from the press. In his satirical caption to accompany the photograph, Renau located *Las Hurdes*

Comunicació Àudio-Visual. Departament de Periodisme i Comunicació Àudio Visual. Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Barcelona, novembre de 1995.

3. Many more images which directly recall Lotar's photographic work may have been lost during the editing process. As Buñuel reports in an interview: «Monté la película sin moviola, sobre una mesa de cocina, con una lupa, y como yo aún entendía muy poco de cine, eliminé muy buenas imágenes de Lotar porque los fotogramas se hacían *flou*. Yo no sabía que el movimiento podía en cierto modo reconstruir la imagen. Así, por no tener moviola, desperdicié buenas tomas». PÉREZ TURRENT, T. and COLINA, J. DE LA, *Buñuel por Buñuel*, PLOT Ediciones, Madrid, 1993, p. 36.

4. «[...] Yo [Rafael Alberti] fui con Luis, Pierre Unik, y Eli Lotar en un viaje que hicieron a *Las Hurdes*, cuando Luis estaba planeando la película no en el momento de la filmación. Me acuerdo que fui con Gustavo Duran». AUB, M., *Conversaciones con Buñuel*, Aguilar, Ma-

drid, 1985, p. 289. Another source includes Georges Sadoul among those who visited *Las Hurdes* with the crew. See: «L'Âge d'or. Correspondance Luis Buñuel-Charles de Noailles. Lettres et documents (1929-1976)», *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne* (Hors-Série/Archives), 1993, p. 160.

5. For more on Alberti and León, see: SANTOJA, G., «Alberti y las publicaciones periódicas "comprometidas" durante los años treinta», *Cuadernos Hispano-americanos*, 514-515, April-May 1993, p. 352-360; and AZNAR SOLER, M., «María Teresa León y el teatro español durante la guerra civil», *Anthropos*, 148, September 1993, p. 25-33.

6. DIEGO, E. DE and BRIHUEGA, J., «Art and Politics in Spain, 1928-1936», *Art Journal*, 52, no. 1, Spring 1993, p. 57.

7. For more on Alberti's relationship with Buñuel and Aragón, see: ALBERTI, R., *La Arboleda perdida (segunda parte): Memorias*, Seix Barral, Barcelona, 1987, p. 19.

8. «Documentos: Los desastres de la guerra», *Octubre*, number 2, July-August 1933, p. 10; «Documentos. Secretos del espionaje internacional», *Octubre*, number 2, July-August 1933, p. 13; and «Viejos documentos de la Revolución de Octubre», *Octubre*, numbers 4 & 5, October-November 1933, p. 8.

9. RENAU, J., «Testigos negros de nuestros tiempos (paréntesis a la violencia)», *Nueva Cultura*, numbers 7-8, October-November 1935, p. 14-15.

10. The Unión de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios was founded in Valencia in 1934 and was affiliated with the AEAR in Paris. For more on *Nueva Cultura*, see: MOLINA, C.A., *Medio siglo de Prensa literaria española (1900-1950)*, Ediciones Endymion, Madrid, 1990, p. 227-232.

11. For more on Piqueras, see: LLOPIS, J.M., *Juan Piqueras: El «Delluc» Español*, Filmoteca Valenciana, Valencia, 1988.

12. PIQUERAS, J., «Itinerario de *Nuestro Cinema*», *Nuestro Cinema*, 1, number 1, June 1932, p. 2. My emphasis.

13. PIQUERAS, J., «Colofón a la primera encuesta de *Nuestro Cinema*», *Nuestro Cinema*, 1, number 7, December 1932, p. 203.

14. *Ibidem*.

15. *Ibidem*.

16. Villegas-López was an active promoter of the social responsibility of cinema, publishing *Espectador de Sombras* in 1935 and *Arte de Masas* in 1936. In the second book, he proclaimed *Las Hurdes* «uno de los mejores documentales del mundo», despite its official censorship. VILLEGAS-LÓPEZ, M., *Arte de Masas: Ruta de los temas filmicos*, Biblioteca del Grupo de Escritores Cinematográficos Independientes, Madrid, 1936, p. 110. In 1937, as head of the Servicios Cinematográficos de la Subsecretaría de Propaganda, he made the film *Madrid*, one of several documentaries shown in the 1937 Spanish Pavilion in Paris. GUBERN, R., «Exhibiciones Cinematográficas en el Pabellón Español», *Pabellón Español. Exposición Internacional de París 1937*, Ministerio de Cultura, Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 1987, p. 180.

17. VILLEGAS-LÓPEZ, M., «El Camí de les Hurdes», *Mirador*, number 380, 28 May 1936, p. 4.

18. In addition to writing «La France des cinq parties du monde», *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, 3, December 1931, p. 28 and «Un Panier de crabes», *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, 4, December 1931, p. 29-30, Unik also signed several important tracts such as *Au Grand jour* (1927) and *Autour d'un poème* (1932). For more on Unik, see: UNIK, P., *Les héros du vide: Roman inachevé*, Les Editeurs Français Réunis, Paris, 1972.

19. Jaime Brihuega lists Ivens as having accompanied the film

as the end result of the «gloriosa tradición de la cultura católica en España». As with the use of the word «documents» in *Octubre*, «testimony» in *Nueva Cultura* framed the images as facts. Once again, no indication is given as to the source of the image nor to its author and the text is as punctuated and accusatory as *Octubre*'s. Published in close association with the Unión de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios, the journal was politically combative with strong Communist sympathies and known for its polemical stance concerning the state of art and politics in republican Spain¹⁰.

Like the use of images from the film in *Octubre* and *Nueva Cultura*, the reviews reinforced its status as an objective documentary in the service of social realism. In contrast to removing still images from the film's context and publishing them as disturbing and anonymous documents, however, the film's critics refused to acknowledge Buñuel's inclusion of heterogeneous and oftentimes conflicting materials as an intentional aesthetic and political strategy. In other words, when the film is attributed to Buñuel and positioned within the context of political activism, the writers refuse to acknowledge the film's discordant structure. For the film to be read as realist it must maintain a certain structural cohesiveness, avoid ideological ambiguities, and suppress the disruptive potential of the document.

In February 1935, Juan Piqueras's politicized film journal *Nuestro Cinema* (Paris, 1932-1935) published a review of the film and an interview with Buñuel¹¹ (figure 2). Published during the magazine's last year, both texts asserted the relevance of the film to the political and artistic aims of the magazine and to Piqueras's original demand of 1932 for «un cinema que enfoque ampliamente en el tema social, el tema documental *sin falsearlo*»¹². Like *Octubre* and *Nueva Cultura*, the editor and writers of *Nuestro Cinema* were heavily influenced by Soviet film and believed in the social utility of documentary films as a means to educate the masses and bring about political change. Throughout 1932 the magazine featured a series of surveys which solicited opinions on the role of cinema in society. In the colophon to the series, Piqueras reconfirmed the political potential of documentary, declaring: «Inmediatamente, yo haría un cinema documental con la seguridad de que sería, al mismo tiempo, un cine revolucionario»¹³. In reviewing the film, César Arconada promoted *Las Hurdes* as a brutal report on the misery and injustice of the region, so distinct from Buñuel's two earlier and clearly surrealist works –*Un Chien andalou* (1928) and *L'Âge d'Or* (1930)– as to instigate a new Spanish cinema. The attraction of documentary, and *Las Hurdes* in particular, was its apparent ability to reveal the most disturbing aspects of society with the utmost clarity and without manipulation to show «aquello

que jamás iríamos a ver por mil causas: porque es feo, porque es triste, porque es vulgar, porque es amargamente pobre»¹⁴. Arconada squarely positioned the film in the camp of socialist realism, enthusiastically exclaiming toward the end of his review: «No todos los sumergidos en aquel subsuelo cenagoso del surrealismo [...] se han salvado. Buñuel, sí. Aragón, sí»¹⁵.

A year later, Manuel Villegas-López reviewed the film in the Barcelona weekly *Mirador*¹⁶. Like Arconada, Villegas-López emphasized the predominance of the camera and the efficiency of the images to communicate the hunger and desolation of the region. The review was written on the occasion of the film's exhibition in Madrid during the third session of the Cinestudio Imagen, despite its official censorship. Deriding the government's ban of the film –«oficialment, *Tierra sin pan* és "una pel·lícula vergonyosa". Vergonyós què, la pel·lícula o las Hurdes?»– Villegas-López affirmed, «No s'ha de trencar el mirall, ni prohibir el microscopi. Cal protegir oficialment aquesta pel·lícula»¹⁷. Though he continued to praise the film for its objective realism and maintained Arconada's comparison between Buñuel and Aragón, Villegas-López recognized the retention of some surrealist, Freudian inspired, motifs. In addition, he applauded the political potential of Buñuel's use of close-up and juxtaposition, a step toward recognizing the film's structural discordance as part of its ideological position.

That *Las Hurdes* should be promoted by writers with strong leftist sympathies is not surprising given the political affiliations of the film crew and of the writers and artists who supported its planning and production. Though Buñuel never accepted the tenets of socialist realism nor became a member of the Communist Party, and the money to produce the film came from Ramón Acín, Buñuel's long-time friend and anarchist, many of those involved with the documentary were, if not members, active supporters of the Communist Party. Pierre Unik joined the Communist party along with André Breton, Louis Aragón, Benjamin Péret, and Paul Eluard in 1927. During the Thirties his involvement with Communism and surrealism expanded as he wrote several important tracts, including the anti-colonial treatise, «La France des cinq parties du monde»¹⁸. Buñuel recounts that after 1932, Unik, along with Aragón and a few others, left Breton's circle as a result of the 1930 Kharkov Congress for Intellectuals for the Revolution, at which time Aragón had acknowledged the primacy of socialist realism over surrealism. Buñuel also modified his affiliations after 1932, sympathizing with Aragón's position and scaling back his relationship with the surrealists. Lotar, who worked with Joris Ivens, founder of the socialist film collective Amsterdam Filmliga, also had strong leftist sympathies¹⁹.

By using such conventions of documentary film and geography as maps and labels, Buñuel located political contest within the very structure of the film. In trying to analyze the significance of these conventions, it becomes clear that *Las Hurdes* was an historically and politically charged region which came to represent the larger problems of the Second Republic. Buñuel's stated inspiration for the film, Maurice Legendre's 1927 *Las Jurdes: Étude de géographie humaine*, is an exhaustive study which documents the customs, living conditions and beliefs of the Hurdanos²⁰. Legendre's study was written according to the principles of human geography, a term which he included in the subtitle of his book and which Buñuel repeated in the introduction to the film. In addition to citing Legendre's title, many of the shots in *Las Hurdes* mirror the photographs published at the end of Legendre's book, especially in the viewpoint and framing of the region's landscape, the churches in Las Batuecas, the streets of La Alberca, and the costume of the inhabitants (figure 3).

One of the most important texts to define human geography was Jean Brunhes's book of the same name, *La géographie humaine*, which was read widely during this period and provides the clearest description of the term. Defining human geography, Brunhes stressed the importance of «activity and relationship» as the «two principles which today must dominate geography»²¹. He used site specific examples to plot the relationship between landscape and economics, psychology and politics, or in Brunhes's own words, the relationship between «the phenomena of physical geography and the facts of material human geography»²². The principal means by which Brunhes documented these phenomena was through mapping and labeling. As he wrote in a section of the book entitled «The geographic spirit»:

Geographers must always endeavor to establish the exact locality where the phenomenon studied is produced. The question of place is all-important, and should find expression in maps or diagrams upon which would be represented two classes of facts: *the points or zones where the facts appear under maximum or optimum conditions, and, on the other hand, the limit that marks the extreme range of the phenomenon*²³.

Brunhes's maps establish the limits of a phenomenon. They contain these phenomena in order to study and classify them. Following the methodology of human geography, Legendre's text makes clear that even before Buñuel began his project and despite the particular conflicts enacted in *Las Hurdes* during the Second Republic, the region was already seen as a place in which the

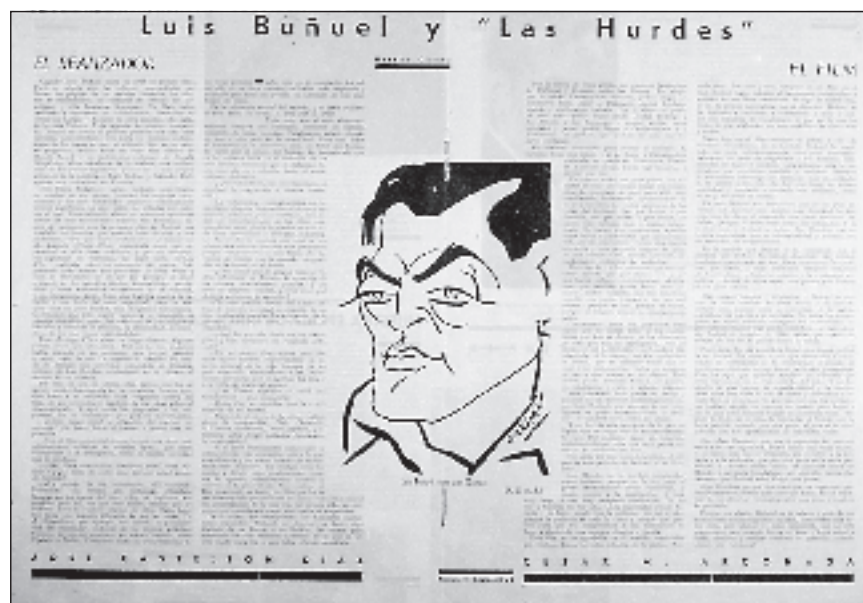


Figure 2. *Nuestro Cinema*, number 2, second era, February 1935, p. 8 & 9. Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.



Figure 3. Maurice Legendre, *Las Jurdes: Étude de géographie humaine*, Feret & Fils Éditeurs, Bourdeaux, 1927, fig. 1.

crew to *Las Hurdes*, but offers no documentation. BRIHUEGA, J., *La vanguardia y la República*, Ediciones Cátedra, Madrid, 1982, p. 21. For more on Lotar, his photographic and cinematographic work, and his time in Spain, see: LIONEL-MARIE, A., «Essay biographique: "Le cœur meurtri par de mortes chimères"», *Eli Lotar*, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1993, p. 9-34.

20. LEGENDRE, M., *Las Jurdes: Étude de géographie humaine*, Feret & Fils, Editeurs, Bourdeaux and Paris, 1927. Legendre was director of the French Institute in Madrid for many years and published many books on Spain in-

cluding, *Portrait de l'Espagne*, Éditions de la Revue des jeunes, Paris, 1923, and a book of photographs which contained a popularized version of his ideas on Spain, *En España: Ciento cincuenta y ocho fotografías*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona and Buenos Aires, 1936.

21. BRUNHES, J., *Human Geography: An attempt at a positive classification, principles and examples*, trans. T.C. Le Compte, Rand McNally & Company, Chicago and New York, 1920, p. 27.

22. *Ibidem*, p. 608.

23. *Ibidem*, p. 570. My emphasis.

problems and characteristics of all of Spain were crystallized. As Legendre wrote in the introduction to his study:

Il nous est apparu bientôt, au cours de notre étude, que les singularités du pays de las Hurdes étaient le plus souvent des singularités très espagnoles. Ce n'est pas que ce pays soit un raccourci fidèle de l'Espagne, mais il en est un raccourci qu'on peut appeler caricatural [...] Etudier cet étrange pays c'est donc étudier l'Espagne elle-même²⁴.

Following Brunhes' formula in which a general phenomena is studied by showing a specific manifestation of that fact within a clearly defined area, *Las Hurdes* begins with a sequence of dissolving maps²⁵. The first map provides the viewer with a series of equivalencies: Las Hurdes is not singular in its existence, but is representative of a group of communities throughout Europe where poverty and isolation determine its inhabitant's lifestyles and physiognomy. The second map shows the principal cities of Spain, from Barcelona to Salamanca, while the third map focuses only on Las Hurdes and the surrounding cities of Salamanca, Alberca, and Caceres (figure 4). Its status as a liminal, but politically charged, space is emphasized by its position between the last frontier of Republican Spain—Salamanca—and Portugal, which was already under the dictatorship of Salazar²⁶.

One of the most vitriolic political statements regarding the region was made by Doctor José María Albiñana Sanz, the leader of the small and short-lived radical Partido Nacionalista Español²⁷. Published the same year that Buñuel was shooting *Las Hurdes*, Albiñana's *Confinado en las Hurdes: Una Víctima de la Inquisición republicana* describes his forced exile to the region in 1932 by the Second Republic for his political activities²⁸. His text is a convoluted diatribe against the government and its failed attempts at reforms in agriculture, education and transportation. Included in Albiñana's book are a series of photographs showing the nationalist leader with inhabitants of Las Hurdes in different settings. In one of these, Albiñana poses with the Mayor of Martilandrán, one of the villages also highlighted in *Las Hurdes*, not, however, for its role in Albiñana's exile but because it had the highest rate of sickness and goiter. Albiñana also included caricatures of himself with the Hurdanos which had been published in the nationalist press. One of these cartoons satirizes the Hurdano's physiognomy and labels the clearly debased figures as «socialist-radicals» (figure 5). While Albiñana sets up Las Hurdes as a mini-theater for the contest between socialists and nationalists, Buñuel's treatment of the problems and political stakes of the region seems to be located

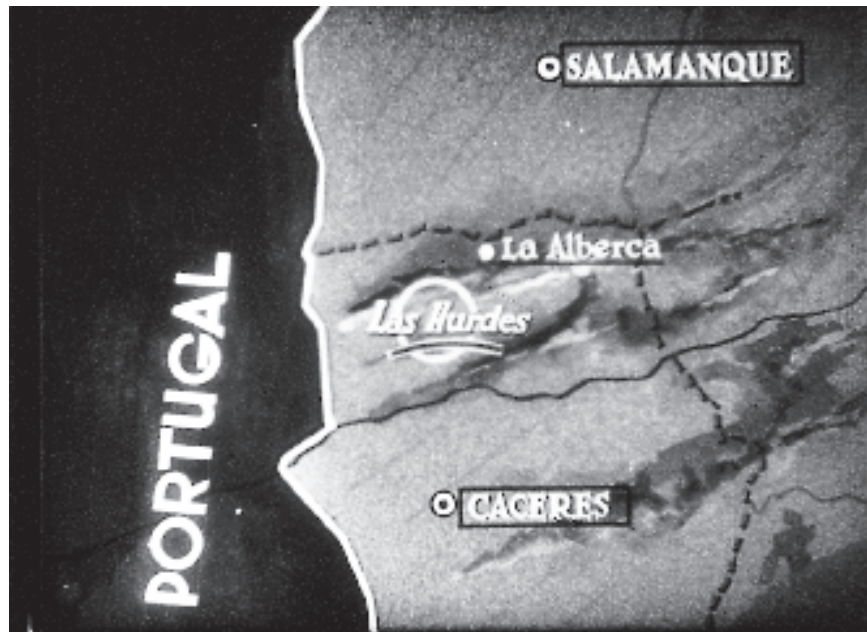


Figure 4.
Luis Buñuel, *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan*, 1933. Filmoteca Española, Madrid.



Figure 5.
«Albiñana en Las Hurdes», José María Albiñana Sanz, *Confinado en las Hurdes: Una Víctima de la Inquisición republicana*, «El Financiero», Madrid, 1933, s.p. Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.

24. LEGENDRE, M., *Las Jurdes: Étude de géographie humaine*, Feret & Fils, Editeurs, Bordeaux and Paris, 1927, p. x.

25. The inclusion of maps in *Las Hurdes* is not surprising given that Lotar worked with Joris Ivens, who used maps extensively in his films *Zuiderzee* (1932) and *Spanish Earth* (1937). Maps were a prominent feature in documentaries and newsreels during the period, especially during the Spanish Civil War and World War II.

26. For a description of the relationship of the Spanish Falange to Salazar and Portugal, see PAYNE, S.G., *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1961, p. 14.

27. Ibidem, p. 10-12.

28. ALBIÑANA SANZ, J.M., *Confinado en las Hurdes: Una Víctima de la Inquisición republicana*, «El Financiero», Madrid, 1933. Albiñana Sanz wrote a number of other similar books which, in addition to their impressionistic diatribes, also included photographs, such as: *Bajo el cielo mejicano (Sensaciones y comentarios)*, Compañía Ibero-Americana de Publicaciones, Madrid, 1930; and *España bajo la dictadura republicana (Crónica de un período putrefacto)*, Imp. El Financiero, Madrid, 1933.

29. HARRISON, J., *The Spanish Economy in the Twentieth Century*, Croom Helm, London & Sidney, 1985, p. 87.

30. For more on agricultural reform during the Second Republic and, in particular, for a discussion of the heightened debates on the subject from 1932 to 1933, see: RODRIGUEZ LABANDEIRA, J., *El Trabajo rural en España (1876-1936)*, Anthropos, Barcelona, 1991, p. 325-371.

31. For more documentation on this trip, see: *Viaje a Las Hurdes: El manuscrito inédito de Gregorio Marañón y las fotografías de la visita de Alfonso XIII*, Ediciones El País and Aguilar, Madrid, 1993.

within the general sphere of protest rather than tied to the political tenets of one group.

Only oblique references are made to some of the laws passed by the Second Republic relating to agriculture and labor, such as the *ley de terminos municipales* and the *ley de laboreo forzoso*²⁹. The first of these laws sought to delineate the nearly 9,000 municipalities in Spain with borders to determine the limits within which a farmer could acquire laborers. Instead of ameliorating the desperate situation of rural Spain, these laws harmed seasonal labor and made survival in communities like Las Hurdes even more difficult than it had been before³⁰. In the film there are a few explicit references to the *terminos municipales* and other laws. The first reference is in relation to the «Pilu» trade. In exchange for raising Pilu children, a Hurdano family received a sum of fifty pesetas, enough, the narrator tells us, to feed a whole family. However, with the Second Republic this trade was banned and the community was left with one less economic resource which only aggravated the only horrendous conditions. The second reference to the laws occurs when the camera pans the movement of a group of Hurdano men as they leave the valley to look for work in Castile and Extremadura. A few moments later, the film shows the group returning to the community without work or food, the result of the scarcity of employment and the restrictions against migrant labor. These commentaries on the economic conditions of the region complicate the partisanship of *Las Hurdes* as they are mostly implied judgments of the government's policies and not direct criticisms, while on the other hand the film makes no mention of Albiñana's nationalist presence.

Perhaps because of the film's ambiguity with regard to the Second Republic's policies, it was swiftly censored and perceived to be in conflict with the programs of the Republic, and more specifically with those of the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública. After the film was censored, Buñuel recounts visiting Dr. Gregorio Marañón, who had accompanied Alfonso XIII to Las Hurdes in 1922 and was now the President of the Patronato de Las Hurdes³¹, to try to have the film released:

Fui a ver al doctor Marañón, que era presidente del Patronato de Las Hurdes, y le pedí que viera la película para que se permitiera su exhibición [...] Al terminar, Marañón me dejó helado. Me dijo: «Ha ido usted a La Alberca y todo lo que se le ocurre hacer es recoger una fiesta horrible y cruel en la que arrancan cabezas a gallos vivos. La Alberca tiene los bailes más hermosos del mundo y sus charros se visten con trajes magníficos del siglo XVII»³².

Marañón's insistence on showing the lighter side of rural existence, its typical dances and folklore, was a viewpoint in part shared by the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública since 1931, when it officially created the Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas. The Mission's stated purpose was to bring culture—literature, theater, and cinema—to the rural populations of Spain, in a way that would be educational, but more importantly, entertaining, and in no way lead the populations of these areas to devalue their present conditions³³. Manuel B. Cossío, President of the Patronato, described in the Decree how he would explain the Mission's purpose to the communities: «Porque el Gobierno de la República que nos envía nos ha dicho que vengamos ante todo a las aldeas, a las más pobres, a las más escondidas, a las más abandonadas, y que vengamos a enseñaros algo [...] pero que vengamos también, y lo primero, a divertirnos casi tanto como os alegran y divierten los cómicos y los titiriteros»³⁴. Among the mediums most favored by the Patronato was cinema, which was used to entertain and teach the communities as well as to document the Mission's activities. If the Mission's purpose was to bring advanced culture of the cities to the country, in 1934 the Museo del Pueblo Español was created to record, collect, and officially protect the artifacts of rural Spain with the same progressive techniques—photography, cinema, and science—used by the Missions³⁵. At the time of Gregorio Marañón's meeting with Buñuel, in which he praised the traditional songs and costumes of Las Hurdes and vigorously censored the film's depiction of the region, he had recently been appointed President of the Executive Committee and of the Patronato of the Museum³⁶.

What kind of images might have satisfied Marañón's definition of popular culture, while at the same time promoting the activities of the Missions and serving as documentary material for the archives of both the Missions and the Museum? The principal cinematographer and photographer of the Misiones Pedagógicas and the Museo del Pueblo Español was José Val del Omar. From 1933-1934, the period when Buñuel was shooting and editing *Las Hurdes*, Val del Omar produced approximately 50 documentaries for both institutions³⁷. His photographs were published in the *Informes* of the Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas and *Residencia: Revista de la Residencia de Estudiantes* (Madrid, 1928-1934), which featured an article on the Missions in February 1933 and subsequently included photographs from the Mission's archive in the magazine's section «Por Tierras de España»³⁸. Val del Omar's photographs employ a high modernist aesthetic to capture the emotional reaction of the rural spectator, totally entranced by the modern wonders of cinema, the theatrics of the Missionaries, and the treasures of the mobile

32. PÉREZ TURRENT, T. and COLINA, J. DELA, *Buñuel por Buñuel*, PLOT, Madrid, 1993, p. 35.

33. MUÑOZ GUTIÉRREZ, M. del C., *Cultura y educación en la Prensa diaria de Madrid en el Primer Bienio de la Segunda República*, Ed. de la U. Comp. de Madrid, Madrid, 1993, p. 298-311. Also see the publications of the Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas, in facsimile, *Misiones Pedagógicas Septiembre de 1931-Diciembre de 1933. Informes I*, Ediciones El Museo Universal, Madrid, 1992; and *Memoria de la Misión pedagógica-social en Sanabria (Zamora). Resumen de Trabajos realizados en el año 1934*, Madrid, 1935.

34. Cited in «El cinematógrafo educativo en las Misiones Pedagógicas de España», *Popular Film*, número extraordinario, 28 October de 1933, s.p.

35. «El Museo recibirá con especialísimo interés las fotografías, grabados, dibujos, láminas, acuarelas y cuantos modos gráficos de reproducción representen tipos, vistas de lugares y edificios típicos, de fiestas, usos y costumbres regionales y locales». «Labor del Museo: Circular general y cuestionario para la recogida de objetos», *Anales del Museo del Pueblo Español*, 1, Cuadernos 1-2, 1935, p. 35.

36. Originally Manuel B. Cossío was to be President of the Executive Committee but he declined due to his poor health and Marañón was chosen as his replacement. «Reglamento para la aplicación del Decreto de 26 de Julio de 1934 creando el Museo del Pueblo Español», *Anales del Museo del Pueblo Español*, 1, Cuadernos 1-2, 1935, p. 19.

37. According to Juan Manuel Bonet, one of the other cinematographers for the Misiones Pedagógicas was Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal. See: BONET, J.M., *Diccionario de las vanguardias en España 1907-1936*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1995, p. 422 & 608.

38. OTERO URTAZA, E., «Sentido y alcance de las Misiones Pedagógicas», in Manuel B. Cossío y la renovación pedagógica institucionalista. *Ponencias presentadas en la Semana de Homenaje Nacional a Manuel B. Cossío (Madrid, 30 Septiembre/4 Octubre 1985)*, Edited by RUIZ BERRIO, J., TIANA FERRER, A. and NEGRÍN FAJARDO, O., Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid, 1987, p. 241. For a biography of Val del Omar and a chronology of his activities related to the Misiones Pedagógicas, see: SÁENZ DE BURUAGA, G. and VAL DEL OMAR, M. J., *Val del Omar Sin Fin*, Diputación Provincial de Granada, Junta de Andalucía, Filmoteca de Andalucía, Granada, 1992. I thank Horacio Fernández for bringing the photographs of the Misiones Pedagógicas to my attention.

39. Although Cossío's original idea for the Missions did not include social and economic assistance to the rural communities, many of the missionaries expressed dissatisfaction with limiting their interaction to performances and entertainment. The 1934 «Misión Pedagógico-Social en Sanabria (Zamora)» sought to combine cultural enlightenment with projects aimed at improving the town's agricultural methods, health conditions and education. Despite the success of this Mission and the publication of a report on the Mission in 1935, the funding for the Misiones Pedagógicas was drastically cut under the second Bienio, just as the Mission's goals were being modified to address the material needs of Spain's rural communities. See: PATRONATO DE MISIONES PEDAGÓGICAS, *Memoria de la Misión Pedagógico-social en Sanabria (Zamora). Resumen de trabajos realizados en el año 1934*, Madrid, 1935; and «Los jóvenes de Misiones Pedagógicas contestan a nuestras preguntas», *El Sol*, Madrid, num. 4988, 8 August 1933, p. 10.

40. OMS, M., «Terre sans Pain de Luis Buñuel. Des images inédites», *Archives*, num. 43, October 1991, p. 4.

41. BENJAMIN, W., «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction», *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 1968, p. 226.

42. BUNUEL, L., *Mi Último Suspiro*, p. 165-166.

43. «Las Hurdes (Terre sans Pain)», *L'Avant-Scène*, num. 36, 1964, p. 59.

44. RODRÍGUEZ DE LA FLOR, F., *De Las Batuecas a Las Hurdes: Fragmentos para una historia mítica de Extremadura*, Editora Regional de Extremadura, Mérida, 1989, p. 17.

45. *Ibidem*, p. 106.

46. MADRID, F., *Sangre en Atarazanas*, Las Ediciones de la Flecha, Barcelona, 1926, p. 10.

47. *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, num. 4, December 1931, p. 39.

48. SANTOS, M., «La Cruzada de la Cultura. Misiones Pedagógicas», *Popular Film*, VII, num. 287, 11 February 1932, p. 1.



Figure 6. José Val del Omar, «Cine en Trevélez, Granada», *Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas. Septiembre de 1931-Diciembre de 1933*, Informes. I, Madrid, 1934, s.p. Biblioteca de Catalunya, Barcelona.

museum. Many of the photographs were taken from a worm's eye view offering a heroic and monumentalizing view of Spain's rural inhabitants (figure 6). The economic and social relations of the rural communities are pushed out of the frame. In these photographs the close-up is not used, as in *Las Hurdes*, to shock or disrupt, but to assure the government and the public of the success of the Missions and the easy interaction between modern technology and rural life³⁹.

It is not that an interaction between the filmmaker and the Hurdanos, or between the city and the country, did not take place during the process of filming *Las Hurdes*, as Marcel Oms has pointed out, but that the optimism so desired by the Second Republic government was consciously edited out of the film⁴⁰. During the opening sequences, the viewer witnesses a series of darkened and narrow streets. Even when a few people straggle through the camera's range there remains a feeling of desolation and absence, the opposite of Val del Omar's pronounced *horror vacui*. The starkness of the street scenes in *Las Hurdes* recalls Walter Benjamin's descriptions of Eugène Atget's photographs, in which the expectant «crime» disclosed by an uncanny lens could provoke a revolutionary stir. A connection was formed in Atget's photo-

graphs between the evocation of crime through absence and the political content implicit in the use of photographs as evidence. Benjamin writes: «The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance»⁴¹. In *Las Hurdes* Lotar uses a similar aesthetic to expose the sickness and futility of life in the region. Rather than pulling the figures out of their context and creating isolated monuments to the traditions and folklore of the nation, the shots in *Las Hurdes* enforce the relationship between the physical condition of the figure and his environment. In a later sequence, when the camera fixes on the body of a sick woman laying like a bundle of fabric on the side of the road, the crime might be neglect, insufficient medicine to treat her illness, or more generally the waste and decay which reappear persistently throughout the film (figure 7). This politics of pessimism relies on the maintenance of the evidential quality of the photograph, its status as empirical testimony and as an indexical sign system. As such, it still depends on the conventions of documentary objectivity in transmitting the horror of the event and its existence as fact.

Esa afición por el turismo, tan difundida a mi alrededor, me es desconocida.

Luis Buñuel, *Mi Último Suspiro*, 1982

Before making *Las Hurdes*, Buñuel was approached by the Vicomte de Noailles to document the 1931 ethnographic mission from Dakar to Djibouti. As Buñuel recounts, «Rehusé. No me atraía África [...] Sería en España donde realizaría mi tercera película»⁴². Although he did not physically accompany the mission to Africa and despite his stated disinterest for tourism, there are repeated moments in *Las Hurdes* where ethnographic practices and the image of Africa appear as palimpsests over the geography and inhabitants of the region. For example, during the beginning scenes of the film, while the crew is still in La Alberca, the camera fixes on the figure of a tiny Albercan baby covered with silver charms (figure 8). The mother's hand lifts the charms and exhibits them to the viewer while the narrator explains, «[...] nous apercevons cet enfant, richement orné de médailles d'argent. Bien que ce soient des médailles chrétiennes, nous ne pouvons nous empêcher de penser aux amulettes des peuples sauvages d'Afrique et d'Océanie»⁴³.

Seeing Africa in *Las Hurdes*, was not unique to Buñuel. Indeed the relationship of the region to Spain's colonial exploits is part of its literary and mythic history. As Fernando Rodríguez de la Flor has described in his study *De Las Batuecas a Las Hurdes: Fragmentos para una historia mítica de Extremadura*, the literary myth of Las Hurdes gained prominence in the Madrid Court during the Siglo de Oro, the same period in which Spain was aggressively expanding her colonial interests⁴⁴. By the sixteenth century, Las Hurdes (and Las Batuecas) came to symbolize a sacred, mythic place which was alienated and different from the rest of Spain⁴⁵. This myth of difference, continued in the nineteenth century and was converted into an early ethnographic profile of its inhabitants as deformed, primitive, and physiognomically blemished. Las Hurdes was the primitive counterpoint located within the country's borders, or as one writer exclaimed, «Lo bueno y lo malo; la civilización y el "hurdismo", que es toda una política nacional»⁴⁶. The sequence of the Albercan baby makes visible this convergence of national and imperial history on the body of the region's inhabitants. The film's narration is probably meant to call attention to the implications underlying the stereotypical comparison between Spain's rural communities and Africa⁴⁷. For example, even the literature surrounding the Misiones Pedagógicas described Spain's rural outposts as «pueblecitos [...] tan alejados de la civilización como las más remotas tribus de África, de Asia, de Oceanía»⁴⁸.



Figure 7.

Luis Buñuel, *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan*, 1933. Filmoteca Española, Madrid.



Figure 8.

Luis Buñuel, *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan*, 1933. Filmoteca Española, Madrid.

49. During the same period that Marañón was President of the Patronato del Museo del Pueblo Español, he was also President of the Patronato de la Expedición Iglesias al Amazonas, an ethnographic expedition to the Amazon which was sponsored in part by the Second Republic government. See for example: MARAÑÓN, G., «Sobre la Expedición al Amazonas», *Crónica de la Expedición Iglesias al Amazonas*, II, num. 13, July 1933, p. 4-7; and IGLESIAS, C., «En defensa de nuestra Expedición», *Crónica de la Expedición Iglesias al Amazonas*, II, num. 14, August 1934, p. 3-10.

50. BUÑUEL, L., *Mi Último Suspiro*, p. 165.

51. BATAILLE, G., *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1985, p. 35. Stoekl dates the article from 1929-30 when it was intended to be published in the short-lived magazine, *Bifur*. It was first published in *Tel Quel*, num. 34, Summer 1968.

52. Cited in CASAUS, V., «*Las Hurdes: Land without Bread*», in MELLEN, J., (ed.), *The World of Luis Buñuel: Essays in Criticism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1980, p. 180.

53. Both Denis Hollier and James Clifford characterize this aspect of *Documents* as a «license to shock». See: CLIFFORD, J., *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 133; and HOLLIER, D., «La Valeur d'usage de L'Impossible», *Documents*, volume 1, reprint Éditions Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 1991, p. xvii. Although I am looking specifically at these shots in relation to Lotar, they also reintegrate specific techniques already used by Buñuel in *Un Chien andalou*—the close-up of a razor passing through an eye—and in *L'Age d'Or*—the inclusion of abstracted shots of earth and human waste.

The degree of geographic displacement in the film, also signals a difference in the choice of ethnographic models between the Republic's Misiones Pedagógicas, the report on the Dakar-Djibouti Mission published in *Minotaure*, and that of Georges Bataille's *Documents*. Although the propaganda surrounding the Misiones Pedagógicas would use Africa to emphasize the remoteness of rural Spain from the minds of the urban public, Marañón and the promoters of the Museo del Pueblo Español would probably not venture such a comparison, as for them, the typical costumes of rural Spain represented the fabric of the nation and its traditions, not to be confused with any other culture⁴⁹. A comparison between *Las Hurdes* and the presentation of the materials and data collected by the Dakar-Djibouti Mission and published in 1933 as a monographic number of *Minotaure* illustrates the difference between what Buñuel described as an «objeto burgués y mundano por excelencia» and his own project⁵⁰. While the maps and photographs in *Minotaure* are similar to other geographic and ethnographic projects, as in Legendre's book, where maps play a didactic role and photographs fulfill the reader's desire for exotic imagery, the model for *Las Hurdes* both corresponds to and departs from this ethnographic model. The stability of the tools traditionally associated with science, and especially geography, are manipulated, making the ideological content behind the methodology visible within the document itself. While the photographs of the Dakar-Djibouti Mission seek to order, control, and categorize the ethnographic material, in the pages of *Documents* and in the writings of Bataille, there is a juxtaposition of conflicting materials in the attempt to break down the limits between what is permissible and that which is transgressive. Hence, the distinction between the dirt and disease of places like Las Hurdes and the social advances of the city is not upheld. A different understanding of the soil, of folklore and of the disruptive potential of the photographic document is presented, one which also reverberates in Buñuel's film.

The writings of Bataille, and especially those related to politics, often refer to elements of the soil as metaphors for political activity. In his essay «The "Old Mole" and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*», from 1929-30, Bataille writes:

[...] brought back to the subterranean action of economic facts, the «old-mole» revolution hollows out chambers in a decomposed soil repugnant to the delicate nose of the utopians. «Old Mole», Marx's resounding expression for the complete satisfaction of the revolutionary outburst of the masses, must be understood in relation to the notion of a geological uprising as expressed in the *Communist Manifesto*⁵¹.

Bataille grounds revolutionary politics in the soil, in the base and in the abject. In that sense, the decision to make a film that was «merely to show the most abject region of Spain», where the idea of «decomposed soil» is nowhere more prevalent than in Unik's narration on the waste, disease and death of Las Hurdes, might also be seen as another aspect of the film's political content⁵². This aspect of *Las Hurdes*' politics, unlike those qualities emphasized by Arconada, does not require the film's moments of disjuncture to be overlooked. It is through Bataille's discussion of transgression that the deformity and poverty of the inhabitants of Las Hurdes finds its structural parallel. The delineation of boundaries which the mapping sequence represents in *Las Hurdes* is followed by scenes of varying degrees of transgression: the result of incestuous relationships in the form of dwarfs and midgets, of poor living conditions which produce dysentery and goiter, and of unsanitary habits which transform insect bites into deadly infections. Likewise, following those scenes in which Buñuel replicates images from Legendre, from pedagogical text books, or from the conventions of documentary, the camera's vertiginous movements break away from the restrictions of a legible model. Poverty and contagion are the principal means by which the limits of realism and the security of mapping are broken.

From 1929 to 1932, Lotar and fellow photographer Jacques-André Boiffard set up Studios Unis on the rue Froidevaux in Paris. Both frequently published photographs to accompany Bataille's articles and dictionary entries for *Documents*. The recurrence of this imagery in *Las Hurdes* is apparent throughout the film. In the magazine's sixth number, three of Lotar's photographs were published to illustrate Bataille's dictionary entry for the Abattoirs. Lotar's still images showing the mechanisms of slaughter and the compulsive organization of limbs, find reverberations in his camerawork for *Las Hurdes*: the sequence showing the ritual beheading of the cock as a rite of passage for Albercan men; the putrefied donkey on which the camera freezes for an inordinately long amount of time creating an abstracted scene of horror and provocation; and finally the scopic drive to capture the goat's fall into the ravine⁵³.

The integration of imagery from Bataille's dictionary appears with particular significance during the sequence of a young girl found laying by the side of a road with an infection. The camera quickly moves to an extended shot of the girl's mouth (figure 9). The extreme close-up from that sequence recalls Boiffard's photograph accompanying Bataille's entry «Mouth» (figure 10). For Bataille, the «closed mouth» is «as beautiful as a safe»: secure, sutured and seamless, while the open mouth is a sign of disruption, infection and bestia-

Figure 9.
Luis Buñuel, *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan*, 1933. Filmoteca Española, Madrid.

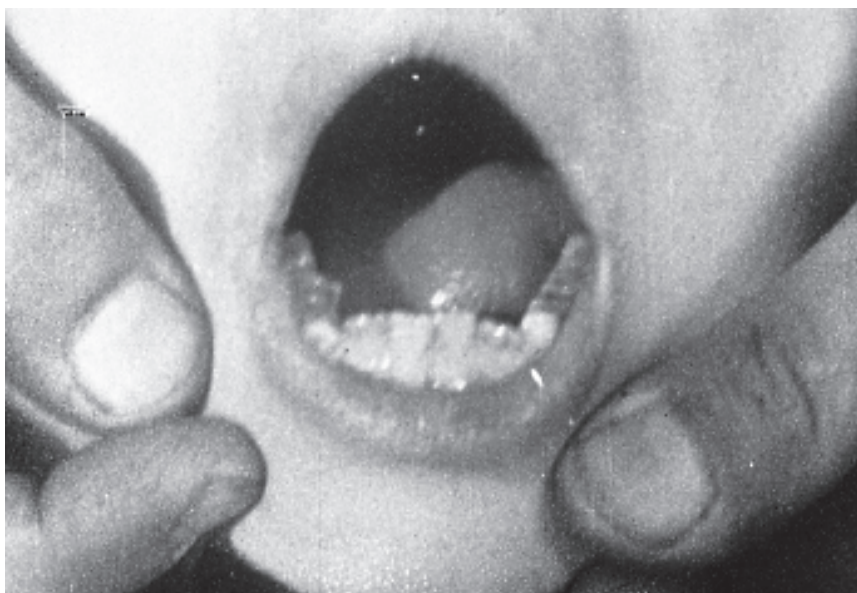


Figure 10.
Jacques-André Boiffard, «Untitled» Published in *Documents*, volume 2, number 5, 1930, p. 298. Biblioteca de la Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona.



lity⁵⁴. The gaping gesture of the mouth in *Las Hurdes*, like the photographs by Boiffard and Lotar in *Documents*, stands for a syntactic rupture. While in *Un Chien andalou*, the opening sequence of Buñuel wielding a razor and the slicing of the eye has been interpreted by Linda Williams as a «general symbol of the entire act of filmic creation»⁵⁵. In *Las Hurdes* there is no tool or sign of the editing process. It is only through the intervention of Bataille's definition of the open mouth as a wound or fracturing of the visual field that the process of splicing and juxtaposition is invoked. Each reference to a particular source, each sequence, becomes a discrete document which breaks up the film's structural cohesion and lays bare its fabrication. As James Clifford has explained with respect to the method behind *Documents*, «The cuts and sutures of the research process are left visible; there is no smoothing over or blending of the work's raw data into a homogeneous representation»⁵⁶.

Another series of close-up photographs by Boiffard, some of which accompanied Bataille's entry «The Big Toe» reinforces the relation between *Documents* and Lotar's camerawork in *Las Hurdes*. One of Boiffard's unpublished photographs juxtaposes the worn and dirt encrusted sole of a right shoe with the wrinkled skin and callused toes of the left foot⁵⁷. Just as Boiffard makes the comparison between external conditions and the physical transformation of the body, Lotar establishes equivalencies between the environment and the body, between the harsh terrain in the mountains and its effects on the peasant's physical condition. Lotar's camera focuses on the peasant's feet as they pass through the field searching for the wild strawberry bush, as the narrator explains that the brutal landscape of the region is particularly hard on the Hurdanos, especially those without shoes.

In an earlier sequence the camera takes a visual inventory of the feet of the Hurdano school children. After the narrator describes the tattered Hurdano clothing, while showing the blank expressions of the children as they stare into the camera, Lotar pans a row of feet for a significant amount of time (figure 11). Among the children's feet, one pair stands out as an echo of Boiffard's illustrations for «The Big Toe», only in this case the foot's deformity is apparent and does not need to be revealed by the alienating effects of the camera⁵⁸. The image of the children's feet is thus positioned within a context of cognition and acculturation. It comes just before a scene in which a boy writes the «golden rule» on the blackboard, «Respectad los bienes ajenos [...]» The camera cuts to the faces of two boys who are momentarily struck by the inscription, but later bend down to copy it. The juxtaposition of these two scenes forms a commentary on the film's own syntactic structure, whereby the feet represent a break in the

logic of grammar and cognition as they are taught in the school.

Georges Bataille's description of «The Big Toe» is crucial to understanding the inclusion of feet as it relates to the transgressive and political potential of geography and the soil. Bataille describes a series of values associated with the big toe, focusing on the particular taboos associated in different cultures with the exposure of feet. In explaining the Spanish lore, Bataille cites M. Salomon Reinach's insistence that in Spain «women's feet have been the object of the most dreaded anxiety and thus were the cause of crimes». Bataille's further observations that traditional peasant expressions equated «the most nauseating filthiness» with the foot, or more specifically the peasant foot, makes the exposure of the Spanish peasant's foot in *Las Hurdes* one of the most disturbing acts of moral and political transgression. Bataille concludes by equating the perception of feet with a widening of consciousness, an ability to see what has previously been denied: «A return to reality does not imply any new acceptances, but means that one is seduced in a base manner, without transpositions and to the point of screaming, opening his eyes wide: opening them wide, then, before a big toe»⁵⁹. In opening one's eyes wide enough to see the big toe, one is also finally able to see without the veil of bourgeois taboos and to accept the revolutionary potential of the ground, the base, the foot. Perception is political. Within the context of *Las Hurdes*, the image of bare feet becomes an image that represents deformity, the agrarian, the physical and the criminal, but also a kind of politics that depends on a breadth of vision for effectiveness.

The inclusion of references to photographs taken almost four years before Lotar filmed *Las Hurdes* also represents a transposition of the aesthetic strategies used to uncover the abject of the city—Paris in 1929—onto the country—Las Hurdes in 1933. As with the inclusion of references to materials ranging from human geography to Atget, here Lotar references his own past work. A leveling of sources takes place in which the heterogeneous is allowed to enter and interact with the institutional, the academic. The porous boundaries between various kinds of documents, between production and reception, between social realism and dissident surrealism allow for multiple misidentifications. Both geographic and temporal overlay takes place.

Despite the demands of the film's early critics and the criticisms of Marañón, the secure relations between ideological content and form seem to disappear. The film's various moments of disjunction, in large part caused by the excess of documents, is further accentuated by the identification between the film's structural porousness, the poverty of the film's subject matter, and the film's material quali-

54. BATAILLE, G., «Mouth», *Documents*, second year, 5, 1930, p. 299. Reprinted in *Visions of Excess*, 60.

55. WILLIAMS, L., *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, p. 72.

56. CLIFFORD, J., «On Ethnographic Surrealism», *The Predicament of Culture*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 146.

57. BOIFFARD, J.A., «Sole, Bare foot», ca. 1930 (Colección Lucien Treillard, Paris). Illustrated in Estrella de Diego, *Los Cuerpos perdidos. Fotografía y surrealistas*, Fundación «la Caixa», Barcelona, 1995, p. 143.

58. BOIFFARD, J.A., «Gros Orteil, sujet masculin, 30 Ans», *Documents*, number 6, November 1929, p. 299.

59. *Ibidem*, p. 23.

60. The camera used by Lotar was borrowed from Yves Allégret, who before being imprisoned and later deported from Spain as a dangerous Communist, was going to shoot a short documentary about Las Hurdes. LIONEL-MARIE, A., «Le cœur meurtri par de mortes chimères», *Eli Lotar*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1993, p. 22-23. Buñuel also recalls that the equipment used to shoot *Las Hurdes* was borrowed from Allégret. BUÑUEL, L., *Mi Último Suspiro*, p. 167.

61. BUÑUEL, L., *Mi Último Suspiro*, p. 167.

62. M., G., *Echo de Paris*, 10 December 1930. Cited in MELLEN, J. (ed.), *The World of Luis Buñuel*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1980, p. 163.

63. SÁNCHEZ VIDAL, A., *El Mundo de Luis Buñuel*, Caja de Ahorros de la Inmaculada, Zaragoza, 1993, p. 282; and DAVID, Y., *¿Buñuel? Auge des Jahrhunderts*, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1994, p. 454.

64. On the films shown in the Spanish Pavilion, see: GUBERN, R., «Exhibiciones Cinematográficas en el Pabellón español», *Pabellón Español. Exposición Internacional de París 1937*, Ministerio de Cultura, Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 1987, p. 174-180.



Figure 11.
Luis Buñuel, *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan*, 1933. Filmoteca Española, Barcelona.

ties. Noticeable in watching the film are the glitches, dust, and scratches which constantly assault the image plane. The borrowed equipment used to film *Las Hurdes* might in itself explain its poor quality⁶⁰. Or, perhaps, the fact that the film was edited without a moviola, in a short period of time, and on Buñuel's kitchen table⁶¹. It seems more plausible, however, that the use of low quality film was another means of provocation, as it had been with *L'Âge d'Or*. As one reviewer complained in 1930, «The technical execution is so poor that it would elicit catcalls in the poorest film houses of our most provincial towns»⁶². Because *Las Hurdes* was considered at the time the poorest of the most provincial of Spanish towns, the film's technical execution serves to mimic the physical conditions of the region and its inhabitants. Hence instead of causing disruption within a rural context, the aesthetic strategies previously used to reveal the base and *informe* of the city, are now employed in the representation of the Spanish landscape and return those elements which are most disturbing in the country back to the city. In *Las Hurdes*, the document is the form of currency exchanged between these two environments and between the various artistic strategies practiced in Spain during the

Thirties. Circulating, without necessarily changing its guises or the information it contained, the ideological content of the document was by force ambiguous.

Acknowledging the film's ambiguity, however, carries with it the risk of being unable to clearly define its ideological position within the growing polemics of the Second Republic. The completion of the film in 1936 and its official exhibition in Paris in 1937 make clear that neither Buñuel nor the republican government would take such a risk⁶³. As with the film's reception in the combative journals of the mid-Thirties, which anchored the film to the specific goals of socialist realism, *Las Hurdes* was once again contained within a clearly propagandistic frame. Luis Araquistain, Ambassador to Spain in Paris paid for two sound versions of the film to be completed, one in French and one in English. Nevertheless, the film was not shown in the Spanish Pavilion during the International Exhibition; instead it was exhibited at the Omnia Pathé theater⁶⁴.

Given that I have described the photographs of Val del Omar and the images of *Las Hurdes* as opposing models for representing Spain's rural population, one of the reasons for the film's exclu-

65. GUBERN, R., *1936-1939: La guerra de España en la pantalla. De la propaganda a la Historia*, Filmoteca Española, Madrid, 1986, p. 24-25.

66. «Las Hurdes (Terre sans Pain)», *L'Avant-Scène*, number 36, 1964, p. 62.

67. WRIGHT, B., «Land without Bread and Spanish Earth», *World Film News*, London, December 1937. Reprinted in JACOBS, L., *The Documentary Tradition: From Nanook to Woodstock*, Hopkinson and Blake, Publishers, New York, 1971, p. 146.

sion from the Pavilion's program might be that the Pavilion was already filled with photo-panels including images from the photographic archive of the Misiones Pedagógicas. Smiling faces of children covered the photo-panels dedicated to cinema, and photographs and regional costumes were brought from the Museo del Pueblo Español. Another, perhaps, more enticing reason might be that Buñuel, recognizing the transformation that *Las Hurdes* underwent during its various moments of reception, chose instead to edit a documentary about the Civil War for the Pavilion, which made no claims for authorship. Perhaps recalling the ability of photographs from *Las Hurdes* to operate as revolutionary documents when released from the film's structure and the filmmaker's name, Buñuel and Jean-Paul Dreyfuss «Le Chanois», only took credit as editors, compilers of documents, and not as authors, in the production of *Espagne 36*. As this paper has sought to show, however, Buñuel was already compiling and juxtaposing documents in *Las Hurdes*. So that *Las Hurdes*, even when exhibited outside the context of the Pavilion, would be anchored to the political goals of the Republic, an epilogue was added to the end of some copies

of the film⁶⁵. As a plea to the foreign public and their governments to assist the republican cause in the fight against fascism, the film ends with the following: «Avec l'aide des antifascistes du monde entier, le calme, le travail, le bonheur feront place à la guerre civile et feront disparaître à jamais les foyers de misère que vous a montrés ce film»⁶⁶. The success of reframing *Las Hurdes* to once again restrict the film's moments of disjuncture and ambiguity to accidental or incongruous additions to the film's original intentions is evidenced by the writer and filmmaker Basil Wright's well-known review of 1937. In claiming that the narration and musical score added to the film are additions made by someone, «presumably not Buñuel», Wright reinstalls, at least on the level of reception, the film's structural and ideological cohesion⁶⁷. In order to garner financial and political support against fascism, the republican government had to demonstrate that it could maintain order and protect private property, both of which stood in opposition to a politics of geography derived from the revolutionary and disruptive potential of the document and the base misery and ideological contest represented by the Spanish soil.