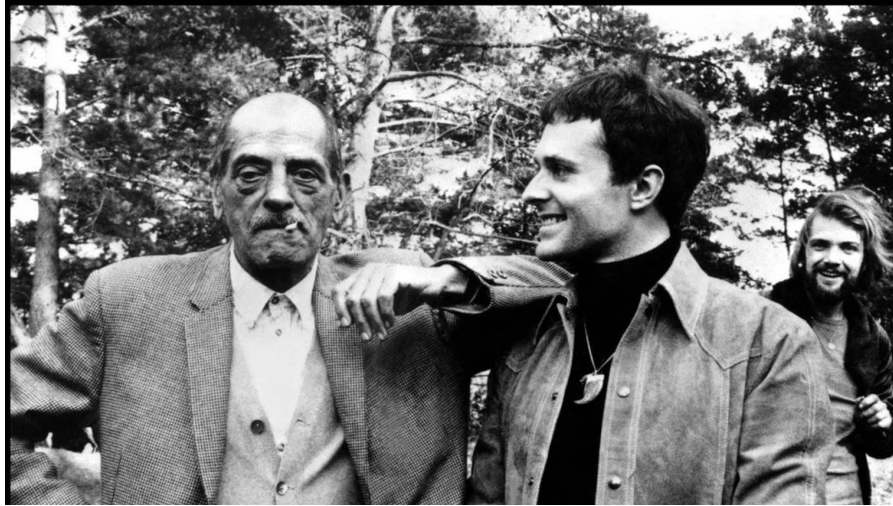


LUIS BUÑUEL WAS GENEROUS, BUT NOT WITH EVERYONE...

by Iris Mazzacurati
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30 years ago, on July 29, 1983, Surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel passed away. From *Un Chien Andalou* to *That Obscure Object of Desire*, he put his stamp on the history of cinema. Héléne Plemiannikov, editor, recounts their collaboration.

Her brother is the director Roger Vadim ¹, but Héléne Plemiannikov also lived an incredible life in the cinema, rich in collaborations with some of the greatest. We owe her the editing of *Holiday Hotel*, *Risky Business* ² and also *Max My Love*.

Between 1971 and 1977, she worked with Luis Buñuel on his last three feature films: *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *The Phantom of Liberty* and *That Obscure Object of Desire*.

Here are her impressions and anecdotes about their collaboration.

"I met Luis Buñuel via his producer, Serge Silberman. He was the one who introduced us. I was quite intimidated. I was rather quiet. But as soon as I spoke, I did my job, and he did his. And that is how it worked, because I knew that when he gave an opinion about a scene or an actor, he was committed to it!

I edited his last three films: *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *The Phantom of Liberty* and *That Obscure Object of Desire*. I especially liked *The Phantom of Liberty*...Buñuel also said that he also liked it a lot!

¹ He was born Roger Vadim Plemiannikov

² *Les risques du métier* is a 1967 French film directed by André Cayatte, not the 1983 American version.

I was always trying to solve his problems. For example, he did not like dubbing; it annoyed him tremendously. On his last film, *That Obscure Object of Desire*, there were two actresses who embodied/incarnated the same character, and who changed the character's voice according to her state of mind. For the dubbing, we had a French actress (Carole Bouquet, NdR) and a Spanish one (Angela Molina NdR). But we wanted to find an actress who could dub both characters in both languages with, each time, a small change in her voice. So Buñuel said to me, "I do not have the patience Hélène; I'm going to let you do all that."

In doing that, I learned a lot. I found a girl (Florence Giorgetti, NdR) who had never done dubbing work, but had worked in the theater. I did not want professional dubbing actresses, so I kept on battling with the sync person about it. I didn't show anything—neither to Buñuel nor to the actresses! I was alone when we did the dubbing work with the two girls. Moreover, they never realized that it was a single actress who dubbed two characters. This girl was wonderful! She was very spontaneous. It was an amazing learning experience!

Buñuel was discreet... and deaf! In fact, you had to know how to talk to him. I have a voice that carries...so that went well. He was someone who should not be told, "No, your hearing is bad" so one had to try to understand what he had heard.

For example, I think it was in *The Phantom of Liberty*: In the auditorium, someone had put headphones on him and one day he asked me about a certain sound of bells for one part of the film. During the sound mix, he heard them and exclaimed, "It's not at all what I asked for!" I replied that in fact we had discussed it beforehand, but he insisted: "But that's not what you made me listen to. It isn't that!"

So what to do? He knew what he wanted and had his own personality...I could not contradict him. I went to lunch with him and then returned to the auditorium and asked the engineers to give me the headphones: And I heard something different with the headphones! As it turned out, the headphones were distorting the sound! Buñuel was like that with a lot of things. But we had to try; of course, we could be wrong, but we talked things over and worked them out. He was so nice, smart and very kind.

He was a filmmaker who did many rehearsals because of his dolly shots³; he was a genius of the dolly shot! He was the only director to do that who was successful with it. Because, with a shot sequence, we end up either by cutting it or putting a close-up in the middle because it does not go well anymore. While there, it was generally very good. He was not fussy. He really knew what he wanted and we could not do otherwise. There were scenes where everything was done in three dolly shots!

³ "dolly shot" is used here for the French term she uses, "plan séquence." She is referring to a dolly, trucking or tracking shot: These are very long shots which usually involve complex camera moves, change of direction by the actors, etc. Due to their complexity, one normally has to do many rehearsals that involve the camera in conjunction with the actors (rehearsals are usually only for the actors without the camera being present).



Because he rehearsed so much, he had a control screen installed on the board. He was one of the first directors to work that way. Maybe [others didn't do it] because it was too expensive... I don't know. But Serge Silberman, his producer, adored him. He did everything to insure the quality of the film. Unlike the producers of today or even then, Silberman was able to reshoot a scene for the sake of its quality. He was great, despite being a very difficult man.

I remember a funny anecdote about the *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* in the scene at the reception. A character is shot three times: "Bam! Bam! Bam!" When I was editing, I asked Buñuel, "But why was he shot three times?" He told me that one of his first editors, the wife of a great director, had a lover who was extremely mean, who cheated on her, and so on. One day, she couldn't take it anymore, seized a revolver and "bam!" she killed him. There was a trial and she was pardoned because he was so monstrous; in short, he was a thug who beat her...She told this story to Buñuel and said to him, "You see: one shot is enough, why do it three times?" (Laughs). But he still did it three times! Out of habit! (Laughs).

Luis Buñuel was human. He had a tremendous humanity. And he was not a believer. He did not recognize the existence of God, but had a sort of belief in Him, an acceptance. He was discreet; he didn't show his affection, his understanding...Things came little by little...Because one had to understand what he was. Not necessarily be him, but understand him.

He was generous, but not with everyone...During the filming of *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, there was a private room ⁴ on the set. It was time for a break. But not everyone was allowed to come in and have what was in there. For example, the [camera?] operator, he was not interesting, he was not allowed to come. Suzanne Durrenberger, the script girl, was there. I was also, since I was in the studio...There were one or two other people, but that's all. And there was always a little snack, a little something to eat in the room for his regulars, in the middle of filming. This led to jealousies. But it did not matter to him. He was with the people he worked

⁴ In French, *loge*. So it seems to be something like a private meeting room.

with and loved very much. The others were not entitled to it and they were not happy!
Nevertheless, Buñuel was very respected.”

Translation by Su Friedrich and Charles Wolfe for the website “Edited by” at
<http://womenfilmeditors.princeton.edu/>

**"Luis Buñuel était généreux, mais pas avec tout le monde..." by Iris Mazzacurati at
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https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/cinema/luis-bunuel-etait-generoux-mais-pas-avec-tout-le-monde_1267632.html