



Sur Realism

in Exile

Max Aub & Luis Buñuel Aesthetics, Progressive Politics, and 20th-Century History

Max Aub and Luis Buñuel both strongly identified with the political Left, and exile to Mexico after the Spanish Civil War confirmed both in a lifelong, though opposite, aesthetic commitment. Buñuel, the Spanish-born transnational filmmaker, was a surrealist until his death. Aub, a Spanish writer born as a German Jew in Paris, believed the politics of his time demanded realism. Their exceptional texts and films—which share a sense of humor and despair—will serve to explore the interaction between politics, aesthetics, and 20th-century history. Taught in Spanish.

Prof. Sebastiaan Faber — Fall 2006
HISP 345 — 3 hours, 3HU, CD — MWF 2:30-3:20 — Peters 327

HISP 345
Max Aub & Luis Buñuel
Aesthetics, Progressive Politics,
and 20th-Century History

class meetings

MWF 2:30-3:30pm, 327 Peters

film screenings: W 7-9pm, 327 Peters (*Note:* All films screened are also placed on reserve.)

instructor

Sebastiaan Faber

phone: x58189

email: sebastiaan.faber@oberlin.edu

home page: www.oberlin.edu/faculty/sfaber

office hours: MWF 9:30-10:30 or by appt.

messages: The fastest and most efficient way to contact me is via email. You can also leave a message on my voicemail or with Blanche Villar at x55256, or stick a written note in my box in 301 Peters.

books to buy:

- Buñuel, Luis. *Mi último suspiro*. Barcelona: Plaza y Janés. ISBN 8401451043
- Aub, Max. *Campo del moro*. Madrid: Punto de lectura. ISBN: 8466313621
- Aub, Max. *Campo francés*. Madrid: Punto de lectura. ISBN: 846631363X
- Aub, Max. *Campo de los almendros*. Madrid: Punto de lectura. ISBN: 8466313648
- Morris, Pam. *Realism*. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 0415229391
- Graham, Helen. *The Spanish Civil War. A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford UP. ISBN: 0192803778

course description

This course studies the life and work of the writer Max Aub (1903-1972) and the filmmaker Luis Buñuel (1900-1982) as a way to reflect on the intersections among literature, film, politics, and history. Both Aub and Buñuel came of age during the avant-garde movements of the 1920s, which placed a premium on formal innovation for its own sake. Like many intellectuals of their generation, however, in the late twenties Aub and Buñuel developed a pronounced political consciousness that made them conceive of their work as an instrument for social and political change. The lives of both were profoundly changed by the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), in which both engaged in propaganda work on behalf of the Republic against the rebellious military led by Franco. For both, the Republic's defeat resulted in a life-long exile. Both spent most of their exile in Mexico, where they produced their most important work. They also became close friends.

In spite of all these commonalities, however, they radically diverged in the way they conceived of the relation between artistic form and politics. Aub strongly believed in *realism* as the politically most effective art form, while Buñuel—for several years a member of the group of writers and artists led by André Breton—upheld a life-long commitment to *surrealism* as a preferred artistic genre and “moral code.” Aub, a rationalist and humanist, rejected surrealism's embrace of the irrational, which he saw as the first step on the road to fascism. Buñuel, a modernist, was extremely skeptical of Aub's faith in reason and realist representation.

On a larger scale, this discrepancy between Aub and Buñuel reflects important twentieth-century debates and dilemmas. Beginning in the 1920s and '30s, the alignment of writers and artists with progressive political movements, in particular Communism and Socialism, sparked a series of discussions about artistic form and content, about the relationship between the artist and the larger public (the “people” or “masses”), and about the role of artistic autonomy vis-à-vis social and political structures and organizations, particularly the Communist Party. Although

within Marxism there was a wide range of opinions on these issues, the dominant, party-sponsored position paradoxically associated formal innovation—that is, modernism widely conceived—with political conservatism, and, conversely, art's revolutionary potential with traditional forms, especially realism.

The work of Aub and Buñuel is fascinating and important enough in its own right; but it also provides an opportunity to think through a series of questions that occupied many prominent minds between the late 1920s and the 1960s—questions that today remain largely unresolved: What, if any, is the social or political function of artistic and literary production? What is the relation between artistic form and the social or political impact of a particular work of art or literature? More generally, what is the relation among artistic representation, critique, and social change? Can art and literature make any claim to social, political or economic autonomy? To what extent are the institution of art in the West since Romanticism, and the related conceptions of the figure of the artist, part and parcel of bourgeois capitalism?

course objectives

- To develop an understanding of:
 - The lives & work of Max Aub and Luis Buñuel in their historical, political, and cultural context
 - The major debates around art and politics in the first half of the twentieth century
- To (continue to) develop the skills necessary to:
 - Read, write, and speak Spanish in an academic register
 - Write a research paper in Spanish
 - Conduct formal, thematic, and ideological analyses of films and literary texts

course requirements

- Active class participation and group work based on readings and assignments.
- Students are expected to have **read the assigned texts** by the day indicated on the syllabus and be prepared to participate in class discussion. **Responses on the Bb discussion board** need to be posted **by 6:00am** of the day the class is taught; students are expected to read all the posts prior to class; they are invited but not obliged to respond to each other's comments. Students are expected to deposit any **written assignments** in the digital drop box before the beginning of class (and to bring a printed copy to class).
- In addition to a series of electronic discussion posts and smaller 1- and 2-page assignments, there will be two mid-term projects (of around 5 pages each) and one final project (8 pages). The final project will be presented to the group in the last week of classes and handed in during Finals week.
- Attendance to all class sessions is mandatory. Any absence over 3 will lower the final class grade with 1 %. Attendance to the screening sessions is optional; either way it is required to view the film before Friday's class.
- Students are expected to be on time and to remain for the entire class. Unexcused tardiness or early departure will be regarded as an absence. The student who misses any part of the class is responsible for acquiring the information missed.
- No late homework will be accepted.
- Email and Blackboard will be the preferred media for announcements, questions, and assignments; students are expected to check their mail and Blackboard page at least once a day.

breakdown of the final grade

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| • class participation & attendance | 25% |
| • discussion board postings | 25% |
| • midterm papers | 25% |
| • final paper and presentation | 25% |

honor code

This course and all its assignments are covered by the Oberlin College honor code. This means, most importantly, that—unless otherwise indicated—you are to produce your own work and honor the rules and conventions of quotation, attribution, and citation. While you are allowed to ask advice and help from librarians and official writing tutors, you are, in the end, to submit work produced by *you*. Some assignments may be collaborative in nature; those will be clearly identified as such. Any case of (suspected) plagiarism will be reported to the Honors Committee. For more details, see www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html

helpful resources

- Max Aub: bibliographies (Bb)
- Luis Buñuel: bibliographies and filmographies (Bb)
- Corrigan, Timothy: *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* (Bb)
- Diccionario de Términos Cinematográficos (Bb)
- Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* ([Oxford Reference Online](http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html?book=t56&subject=s13))
<www.oxfordreference.com/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html?book=t56&subject=s13>
- Oxford Concise Spanish Dictionary: Span-Eng / Eng-Spain
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html?book=t67a>;
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html?book=t67b>
- www.diccionarios.com (subscription required)
- "Marcadores del discurso." (Bb) List of useful expressions and turns of phrases for formal writing in Spanish