

Un chien andalou –  
luis bunuel and  
salvidor dali essay  
sample



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This is an acclaimed surrealist masterpiece and also one of my favourite short films. Un Chien Andalou is a short film without any narrative flow. Bunuel and Dali fully intended there to be no links between the various scenes. The film contains some of the most shocking and bizarre imagery ever seen on the screen. The film opens with a man sharpening a cut throat razor. He steps out onto the balcony and looks at the moon, it then cuts to a woman and her eye is being held open by the man.

A cloud crosses the moon and it cuts back to the eye being slit. This is one of the most powerful scenes, especially in its day although it still retains much of its original power today. Quick editing removes the image before it has time to fully sink in. Suddenly it cuts to a nun like man riding a bicycle. There is no bridge to this scene and seemingly has no consequence on that which has come before. The nun-like man does have some objects which reappear in several scenes later on.

Later in the film there is a man dragging two grand pianos with the decaying remains of donkeys in them. There are also scenes where objects change into other objects, like books into guns and the woman's armpit hair transfers to replace the mans mouth. None of this seems significant. The great thing about Un Chiens Andalou's bizarreness means that almost any interpretation can be drawn from the images shown. Every single scene feels as though it were random and unconcerned with any other, but there are items which are present throughout the film.

In some ways the repeated use of these objects out of their original context adds to the confusion, because of their transformation into surreal objects.

Bunuel also uses a sequence of titles throughout the film which display a time frame, of sorts, although these times are completely non-scenically and confusing, rather than the traditional use of these time markers which would give an audience a sense of the time-line moving forward and where they were within the narrative story.

Bunuel's titles add to the utter confusion and reinforce the idea that time is inconsequential within his dream. "Once Upon a Time Eight Years Later Towards Three in the Morning Sixteen Years Before In the Spring" (Sequence of titles from Un Chien Andalou) The themes of life, death, lust and love run through out the film, although there is no framework on which to attach these emotions. Many people feel there is a story of a lover's triangle or the struggle for love. But over all Un Chien Andalou is a beautifully bizarre, confusing and powerfully shocking arrangement of images which create different feelings in each viewer.

" This film", said Bunuel, describing what was to become the most famous avant-garde film ever made — " draws its inspiration from poetry, freed from reason and traditional morality. It has no intention of attracting or pleasing the spectator — indeed, on the contrary, it attacks him to a degree to which he belongs to a society with which surrealism is at war ... this film is meant to explode in the hands of its enemies. " There is no " plot" — only innuendos; no logic except that of the nightmare; no reality except the inner universe of the subconscious.

The continuity, if any, arises solely in the mind of the viewer. The illogical, dream-like progression of feared or forbidden images in this intentionally

shocking work has by now entered film history and has almost acquired a patina of respectability, so far has the world moved towards real and worse nightmares. Yet we remain disturbed by the close-up of live ants crawling in a wound in the palm of a hand, by the sudden, “comic” transposition of a woman’s underarm hair into a man’s moustache, by the couple buried to their necks in the sand.

The inordinately lustful protagonist fingers the woman’s breasts which are suddenly transformed into buttocks; a severed hand is poked by a stick. But if these images have to some extent become more “acceptable”, one sequence has remained shockingly “liberating” as it was originally: the slitting of the woman’s eyeball, on camera, deftly conducted in close-up by the young Bunuel himself. By placing this sequence at the start of his first film (and thereby his life’s work as one of the cinema’s most original talents), Bunuel serves warning of his intention: to change our consciousness. ”

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