

NYU Madrid

CORE-UA9750

Expressive Culture: Film

Instructor Information

- Instructor: José Carlos Vela Bueno
- Email: cv27@nyu.edu
- Mon. 6:00 p.m. – 8:50p.m.
- Office Hours: Monday from 17:30 to 18:00 in Calle Segre, and by appointment in the morning in my office.

Course Description

Expressive Culture is intended to introduce you to the study and appreciation of human artistic creation and to foster your ongoing engagement with the arts. Through critical engagement with primary cultural artifacts, it introduces you to formal methods of interpretation and to understanding the importance of expressive creation in particular and historical contexts.

This course analyzes the films of the two most well-known Spanish filmmakers, Luis Buñuel and Pedro Almodóvar, from the standpoint of grotesque expression.

There are serious differences between the two directors. Buñuel is the most representative filmmaker of Spanish modernity, while Almodóvar is the clearest representative of postmodernism. They were born in very different times: Buñuel in 1900 and Almodóvar fifty years later. Despite these differences, there are things they share that allow us to investigate very different moments in the cultural history of Spain with a specific focus: both were born and received their first sentimental education in rural areas, under strong religious influence (and religious repression), and in their works we can see a strong use of the grotesque expression. Both repression and grotesque expression will be related in our analysis of the films, since grotesquery is a way of degrading and decentralizing what is considered the center of social authority. Almodóvar and Buñuel react in their grotesquery to the dominant Catholic culture of their times, both rejecting and admiring this culture at the same time. The presence of that religion is something that the students will be able to see constantly in the field trips and visits to Museums.

The grotesque expression in Art is not an exclusive characteristic of the cultures of Spain but it still is a very important feature to understand the Spanish Cultural History since the Middle Ages. In many different artists who work in different ways of expression, from Quevedo to Goya, from Valle Inclán to Gutiérrez Solana, from Pío Baroja to Dalí, and, of course from Luis Buñuel to Pedro Almodóvar, we find the importance of diverse ways of grotesque creation. For this reason we will include two visits to museums in this course. We will visit the Prado Museum following the ideas of Wolfgang Kaiser, who began writing his book on the grotesque culture motivated by a visit to this Spanish museum. We will also visit the Reina Sofia Museum for students to relate the work of Buñuel with the grotesque expression of the 20s and 30s, and the cinema of Pedro Almodóvar with forms of musical and visual expression of Madrid in the 80s. Besides this, students will also be able to experience grotesquery in the streets of Madrid. Sometimes visitors to this city feel surprised about the grotesque sense of humor in colloquial language. They will also be able to experience this in expressions of mass culture. In recent films and television series it is very frequent to find this kind of humor. Therefore, at the end of the course sequences of some current television series will be included.

In analyzing the films, central importance will be given to the formal techniques that make cinematographic art an autonomous form of expression (planning, camera angles, lighting, etc.). These purely formal components will be expanded upon by situating them in the context of film's contact with other modes of interpretation such as history, mythology, symbolism, fine arts, and literature. Given the wide variety of disciplines that have converged in this art form since its origins, this course is taught from an especially multidisciplinary perspective.

To contextualize the work of both authors, we will give special relevance to the autobiography of Buñuel, *My Last Breath*, where he provides very valuable comments about his time, and the book of Mark Allinson, *A Spanish Labyrinth. The Films of Pedro Almodóvar*.

The texts of Hayward and Bazin included in the bibliography will be used to facilitate the students the knowledge of the language of cinema.

Taught in English.

- Co-requisite or prerequisite: *N/A*
- Class meeting days and times: Mondays 18:00 – 20:45H.

Desired Outcomes

Upon Completion of this Course, students will be able to:

-Provide students with an understanding of key films by Buñuel and Almodóvar, two of the most relevant filmmakers of Spanish Cinema, in their cultural and social contexts.

-Provide the students with an understanding of grotesquery in Spanish culture through the filmography of Buñuel and Almodóvar.

-Provide students with a complete understanding of the language of cinema.

Assessment Components

Participation 10%

The use of computers for things not related to the class will seriously lower the participation grade. Students who use computers or telephones in a manner not admissible for the class will receive a written notice from the teacher, if after this warning they persist in the improper use of said devices, their grade will be directly and seriously affected.

4 Writing assignments 60% (3 pages each)

The students will write 4 papers covering all the subjects of the course responding questions given by the instructor one week ahead.

1 Film Review 10% (2 pages)

Students will write one review on one film that has especially caught their attention. Guidelines will be discussed in class in week 3.

The best reviews will be published in an electronic journal

2 Short papers on museum visits 20% (3 pages each)

The students will select works of Art from each museum that clearly express grotesquery in Spanish culture. Guidelines will be given before each visit.

Grading of Assignments

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

Assignments/Activities	% of Final Grade
Class participation	10%
4 Writing assignments (3 pages each)	60%
1 Film Review (2 pages)	10%

Assignments/Activities	% of Final Grade
2 Short papers on museum visits (3 pages each)	20%

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component will result in failure of the class, regardless of grades achieved in other assignments.

Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Points	Percent
A	4.00	92.5% and higher
A-	3.67	90.0 – 92.49%
B+	3.33	87.5% - 89.99%
B	3.00	82.50% - 87.49%
B-	2.67	80% - 82.49%
C+	2.33	77.5% - 79.99%
C	2.00	72.5% - 77.49%
C-	1.67	70% - 72.49%
D+	1.33	67.5% - 69.99%
D	1.00	62.5% - 67.49
D-	.67	60% - 62.49%
F	.00	59.99% and lower

Course Schedule

Topics and Assignments

Week/Date	Topic	Reading
Session 1, September 3rd	<p>Buñuel: Rural Origins and Catholicism.</p> <p><u>Introduction to the Language of Cinema:</u> -Mainlines of the evolution of filmic language.</p>	<p>Scorsese, Martin. "The Persisting Vision: Reading the Language of Cinema." <i>New York Review of Books</i>. August 15, 2013: 1-11. March 2, 2016.</p> <p>Buñuel, Luis. <i>My Last Breath</i>. Translated by Abigail Israel. Glasgow: Fontana Paperback, 1985: 3-50.</p>
Session 2, September 10th	<p>Buñuel, Dalí and Grotesquery in the Spanish Avant Garde.</p> <p><u>Buñuel and Dalí</u></p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u> -Language of cinema, language of dreams. -Cross fade.</p> <p>On-site visit: Museo Reina Sofía.</p> <p>Film: <i>Un Chien Andalou</i>.</p>	<p>Reading: Williams, Linda. <i>Figures of Desire</i>. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 3-52. Hayward, "Fade", 132-133, "Avant Garde", 34-36, and Spatial and Temporal Contiguity", 347-348.</p>
Session 3, September 17th	<p>Buñuel, Dalí and Grotesquery in the Spanish Avant Garde. Buñuel and the Culture of the II Republic. Grotesquery and Politics in <i>Las Hurdes</i>.</p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u> -Documentary and fictional filmic narration. -Fade in – fade out.</p> <p>Film: <i>Las Hurdes</i>.</p>	<p>Reading: Williams, Linda. <i>Figures of Desire</i>. Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 53-79. Hayward, "Documentary", 111-116.</p> <p>Paper on Reina Sofia Gallery Due</p> <p>Discussion of guidelines for Film Review. Discussion of guidelines for First Writing Assignment.</p>

Week/Date	Topic	Reading
<p>Session 4, September 24th</p>	<p>Buñuel and the Culture of the II Republic. Grotesquery and Politics in <i>Las Hurdes</i>. <i>Los Olvidados</i> and the Aesthetics of Modern Grotesque.</p> <p>Buñuel and Exile in Mexico.</p> <p><u>The aesthetics of the Grotesque.</u></p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Buñuel and classical editing. <p>Film: <i>Los Olvidados</i>.</p>	<p>Readings:</p> <p>Mendelson, Jordana. "Las Hurdes: Land Without Bread." <i>Documenting Spain</i>. Penn State University Press: University Park, 2005. 65-91.</p> <p>Sloniowskj, Jeannette. "Las Hurdes and the Political Efficacy of the Grotesque." <i>Canadian Journal of Film Studies</i>. Fall 1998: 30-49.</p> <p>Harpham, Geoffrey: "The Grotesque: First Principles." <i>The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism</i>. Summer 1976: 461-468.</p> <p>Hayward, "Editing", 119-123, "Classic Cannons", 80-83, Codes and Conventions", 83-84.</p> <p>First Writing Assignment Due.</p>
<p>Session 5, October 1st</p>	<p><i>Viridiana</i>: Parodies of Catholicism and the Problems with Fascist Censorship.</p> <p><u><i>Viridiana</i>. Buñuel and the Spanish Grotesque.</u></p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Things and detail shot in Buñuel. -Close up and grotesquery in Buñuel. 	<p>Readings:</p> <p>Bakhtine, Mijail. <i>Rabelais and His World</i>. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. 1-58.</p> <p>Hayward. "Shots" 131-134, "Cuts" 96-98, "Editing" 119-123, and Scopophilia 321-322.</p>

Week/Date	Topic	Reading
	<p align="center">Film: <i>Viridiana</i>.</p>	
<p>Session 6, October 8th</p>	<p>The Dialogue of Luis Buñuel with the Grotesque Spanish Tradition Through the Novels of Benito Perez Galdós. A reconsideration of formal aspects in cinema before the midterm. Film: Tristana.</p>	<p>Readings:</p> <p>Buñuel, Luis. <i>My last Breath</i>. Translated by Abigail Israel. Glasgow: Fontana Paperback, 1985:78-250.</p> <p>Bazin, André. "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" in <i>What is Cinema?</i> Hugh Gray, Trans. Ed Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967: 23-40.</p> <p>Hayward. "Adaptation" 9-14 and "Costume Dramas / Heritage Cinema" 92.</p> <p>Discussion of guidelines for Second Writing Assignment.</p>
<p>Session 7, October 15th</p>	<p>The Grotesque and the Unconscious in Buñuel: The French Movies.</p>	<p>Reading: Edwards, Gwynne. <i>A Companion to Louis Buñuel</i>. Rochester: Tamesis, 2005. 82-143. Second Take Writing Assignment.</p>
<p>Session 8, October 22nd</p>	<p>Almodóvar: Between Grotesque and Pastiche. Parodies of the Patriarchal Family.</p> <p align="center"><u>Formal aspects:</u> -Camera angles and expressive values.</p> <p>Film: <i>What Have I Done to Deserve This?</i></p>	<p>Reading: Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." 1-12.</p> <p>Allinson, Mark. <i>A Spanish Labyrinth. The Films of Pedro Almodóvar</i>. London-New York: Tauris. 2001. 7-22.</p> <p>Hayward, "Gaze/Look" 173-176, "Genre/Subgenre" 182-188, "Film Noir" 149-153.</p>

Week/Date	Topic	Reading
Session 9, October 29th	<p>Almodóvar's Quoting: Camp and Pastiche.</p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u> -Diegetic and non-diegetic sounds in Almodóvar. -The music in Almodóvar.</p>	<p>Reading: Sontag, Susan. "Notes on Camp." 1-14.</p> <p>Hardwick, Elisabeth. "Susan Sontag." <i>New York Review of Books</i>. February 10, 2005. 1-2 Hayward, "Sound/Soundtrack" 335-340.</p>
Session 10, November 5th	<p>Is the spectrum of Franco Around the Cinema of Almodóvar?</p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u> -Offscreen. -Movements of camera.</p>	<p>Readings: Levy, Emanuel. <i>Gay Directors, Gay Films?</i> New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. XIII-XX and 1-47.</p> <p>Allinson, Mark. <i>A Spanish Labyrinth. The Films of Pedro Almodóvar</i>. London-New York: Tauris. 2001. 122-158.</p> <p>Hayward, "Sequence/Sequencing" 325-326.</p> <p>Discussion of guidelines for 3rd Writing Assignment.</p>
Session 11, November 12th	<p>Grotesque Background of Almodóvar: Azcona, Ferreri and Berlanga. Black Humor before Almodóvar in Spanish Cinema.</p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u> -Movements of camera and settings.</p> <p>Film: <i>El Pisito</i> by Marco Ferreri:</p>	<p>Readings: Allinson, Mark. <i>A Spanish Labyrinth. The Films of Pedro Almodóvar</i>. London-New York: Tauris. 2001. 7-23 and 25-46.</p> <p>Hayward, "Tracking Shot / Travelling Shot" 395.</p> <p>Third Writing Assignment Due</p>

Week/Date	Topic	Reading
Session 12, November 19th	<p>Postmodernism in Spain in the Eighties. Humor and Defamiliarization in Almodóvar.</p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Flat image in Almodovar's cinema. -Shots for comedy and shots for drama. -Glasses and frames. <p>Film: <i>Mujeres al Borde de un Ataque de Nervios.</i></p>	<p>Reading:</p> <p>Allinson, Mark. <i>A Spanish Labyrinth. The Films of Pedro Almodóvar.</i> London-New York: Tauris. 2001.158-217.</p> <p>Hayward, "Comedy" 89-91, "Mise-en-Escene" 239-240. "Art Direction" 25, "Eyeline Matching" 132, and "Spectator Identification" 348-353.</p>
Session 13, November 26th	<p>Unique Almodóvar: Between Grotesque and Tragedy. Grotesquery Nowadays. TV Shows.</p> <p>Film: <i>Volver.</i></p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The colors of pain and passion. 	<p>Reading:</p> <p>Levy, Emanuel. <i>Gay Directors, Gay Films?</i> New York: Columbia University Press. 2015.</p> <p>Hayward, "Colour" 84-89.</p>
Session 14, December 3rd	<p>Unique Almodóvar: Between Grotesque and Tragedy. Grotesquery Nowadays. TV Shows.</p> <p><u>Formal aspects:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The visual importance of the credits in Almodóvar. -Variety of forms of narration in Almodóvar. 	<p>Reading:</p> <p>Allinson, Mark. <i>A Spanish Labyrinth. The Films of Pedro Almodóvar.</i> London-New York: Tauris. 2001. 122-158.</p> <p>Hayward, "Lighting" 22-228 and "Flashback" 159-163.</p> <p>Discussion of guidelines for Fourth Writing Assignment.</p> <p>Film Review Due</p>

Week/Date	Topic	Reading
	Film: <i>Talk to Her</i> .	10TH of December: Fourth Writing Assignment Due and Paper on Museo del Prado.

Required Co-curricular Activities

Visit to an exhibition on Goya the first week of classes in a time convenient to the students.

Suggested Co-curricular Activities

Course Materials

Required Textbooks & Materials in NYU Classes – Available in Blackboard.

Required Readings

Allinson, Mark. *A Spanish Labyrinth. The Films of Pedro Almodóvar*. London-New York: Tauris. 2001. 7-23 and 209-217

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. 1-30.

Bazin, André. “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” in *What is Cinema?* Hugh Gray, Trans. Ed. Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967: 23-40.

Buñuel, Luis. *My Last Breath*. Translated by Abigail Israel. Glasgow: Fontana, 1985.

Edwards, Gwynne. *A Companion to Louis Buñuel*. Rochester: Tamesis, 2005. 82-143

Hardwick, Elisabeth. “Susan Sontag.” *New York Review of Books*. February 10, 2005. 1-2.

Harpham, Geoffrey. “The Grotesque: First Principles.” *The Journal of aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Summer 1976: 461-468.

Hayward, Susan. *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts*. 2nd edition. Routledge: London and New York, 2000.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture*. Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983. 11-126.

Levy, Emanuel. *Gay Directors, Gay Films?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 13-47

Mendelson, Jordana. "Las Hurdes: Land Without Bread." *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation: 1929-1939*. Penn State University Press: University Park, 2005. 65-91.

Scorsese, Martin. "The Persisting Vision: Reading the Language of Cinema." *New York Review of Books*. August 15, 2013: 1-11. March 2, 2016.

Sloniowski, Jeannette. "Las Hurdes and the Political Efficacy of the Grotesque." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* (Fall 1998): 30-49.

Sontag, Susan. "Notes on Camp." *Partisan Review*, 1964; repr. in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, 1964, pp 53-65.

Williams, Linda. *Figures of Desire*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press:3-79.

Wood, Michael. "Farewell Buñuel." *New York Review of Books* (November 10, 1983): 1-12. March 2, 2016.

Materials – FILMS TO BE SEEN INDIVIDUALLY

Every class we will analyze a film in detail. The films assigned for every session on the syllabus will be seen individually by the students before class. The movies will be either provided by the professor through electronic copies or will be found in the DVD collection of NYU Madrid (on Reserve for this class).

LUIS BUÑUEL

Un Chien Andalou (1929).

Las Hurdes (1934).

Los Olvidados (1950).

Viridiana (1960).

Tristana (1969).

PEDRO ALMODÓVAR

What Have I Done to Deserve This? (1984).

Mujeres al Borde de un Ataque de Nervios (1988)

Talk to Her (2002)

Volver (2006)

OTHERS

El Pisito by Marco Ferreri (1959)

Optional Textbooks & Materials

Resources

- **Access your course materials:** [NYU Classes](https://nyu.edu/its/classes) (nyu.edu/its/classes)
- **Databases, journal articles, and more:** [Bobst Library](https://library.nyu.edu) (library.nyu.edu)
- **Assistance with strengthening your writing:** [NYU Writing Center](https://nyu.mywconline.com) (nyu.mywconline.com)
- **Obtain 24/7 technology assistance:** [IT Help Desk](https://nyu.edu/it/servicedesk) (nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student's final course grade for every week's worth of classes missed. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in harsher penalties including failure.

Unexcused absences affect students' grades: In classes meeting once a week, a 2% deduction from the student's final course grade occurs on the occasion of the first unexcused absence.

Absences are excused only for illness, religious observance, and emergencies.

Illness: For a single absence, students may be required to provide a doctor's note, at the discretion of the Assistant Directors of Academics. In the case of two consecutive absences, students must provide a doctor's note. Exams, quizzes, and presentations will not be made up without a doctor's note.

Religious Observance: Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their instructor and the Academic Office in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose. If exams, quizzes, and presentations are scheduled on a holiday a student will observe, the Assistant Directors, in coordination with the instructor, will reschedule them.

Please note: if you are unable to attend class, you are required to email your professors directly and notify them.

Late Submission of Work

Papers delivered after due time will be penalized with a decrease in the participation final grade.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community.

Plagiarism: *presenting others' work without adequate acknowledgement of its source, as though it were one's own. Plagiarism is a form of fraud. We all stand on the shoulders of others, and we must give credit to the creators of the works that we incorporate into products that we call our own. Some examples of plagiarism:*

- *a sequence of words incorporated without quotation marks*
- *an unacknowledged passage paraphrased from another's work*
- *the use of ideas, sound recordings, computer data or images created by others as though it were one's own*
- *submitting evaluations of group members' work for an assigned group project which misrepresent the work that was performed by another group*

member

- *altering or forging academic documents, including but not limited to admissions materials, academic records, grade reports, add/drop forms, course registration forms, etc.*
- *using language translation software.*

For further information, students are encouraged to check [NYU Policies and Guidelines on Academic Integrity](#) (about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html)

Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance. For more information, see [Study Away and Disability](#) (<https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/students-with-disabilities/study-away.html>)