

Pudovkin and the Censors: Juan Antonio Bardem's *Muerte de un ciclista*

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In the light of Juan Antonio Bardem's appeal for Spanish directors to avail themselves of digital technology to reconstruct a censored Spanish twentieth-century past, this article considers the influence on Bardem of Vsevolod Pudovkin and suggests that, although digital technology allows for an apparently seamless cinematic reconstruction of the past, along the lines of George Clooney's Good Night and Good Luck (2005), the Soviet-style disruption used by Bardem in Muerte de un ciclista may appeal just as effectively to the human psyche. It argues that this appeal lies with Pudovkin's point that 'editing is not merely a method of the junction of separate scenes or pieces, but is a method that controls the "psychological guidance" of the spectator'. So that for contemporary viewers and film-makers Muerte de un ciclista offers a reminder that dialogue, editing and mise-en-scène can manipulate viewer response with disruptive mechanisms that echo those of the unconscious and that have no need for the innovations of the digital age.

Introduction

In his memoirs, Spanish director Juan Antonio Bardem (1922–2002)¹ laments that Regime censorship has made it impossible for young Spaniards today to imagine the world he grew up in, and he appeals to contemporary Spanish directors to use the new technologies available to reconstruct a visual record of the twentieth-century history that was left on the metaphorical cutting-room floor of the Nationalist censors:

Es difícil que un joven español de hoy, año 2001, pueda hacerse una cabal idea de la vida cotidiana de un joven español de esos años. Puesto que el único material cinematográfico existente era el que filmaba los 'vencedores', no hay modo alguno de poder reconstruir con imágenes esa época. Únicamente el cine de hoy, si hay voluntad, talento y medios, podría recrearla. Hasta ahora no se ha hecho. Pero, dado mi optimismo incombustible,

¹ Bardem belongs to a dynastic Spanish acting family whose high profile continues with the success of his internationally renowned nephew, Javier. He joined the Madrid film school in 1947, and was a major figure in the Spanish film industry from the 1950s onwards. He founded the film journal *Objetivo* in 1953, since credited with a fundamental role in the development of opposition film in Spain despite being banned after only nine issues. He was a highly committed political director and a passionate believer in the need to improve Spanish film despite government control and censorship. For more detail, see Besas (1985: 39–47), Stone (2002: 41–52), and Triana-Toribio (2003: 71–72).

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pienso que alguien, que algunos, podrán y querrán realizar esa tarea imprescindible para nuestra historia e irrenunciable para nuestra cinematografía. (2002: 97)²

This appeal for a reconstruction he considers 'imprescindible para nuestra historia' corresponds with a wider movement for the reconstruction of memory in Spain. Three decades after the death of Franco, public interest in disinterring the country's insular twentieth-century past has gained momentum, and the most poignant manifestation of this call for resurrection is the appeal for the disinterment of the mass graves of victims of the Civil War. Spain has changed radically, and there is a sense of urgency now in the search to recapture the memories of the generations that lived through the Dictatorship. This historical and psychological trajectory is reflected in the development of the Spanish film industry. At the time of the Transition, Spanish cinema was famous outside Spain only to enthusiasts, and particularly for a film by its most inward-looking and melancholic *auteur*, Víctor Erice (*El espíritu de la colmena*, 1973). Now it is gaining widespread international recognition, largely due to the work of Pedro Almodóvar, whose films act as a barometer of the Spanish left-wing and liberal *Zeitgeist*. His films, initially concerned to ignore the past, have also come increasingly to focus on the notion of return, the title (*Volver*) of his latest success at Cannes (2005).³ Carlos Saura's controversial 1973 film, *La prima Angélica*, was once considered dated for its focus on the emotional and psychological legacy of the Regime, but the establishing shots that pan over a scene of literal disinterment as a middle-aged son collects his (Republican) mother from a Barcelona cemetery for reburial in the (Nationalist) family crypt at Segovia now have an air of almost uncanny prescience.

Good Night and Good Luck (Clooney 2005) may illustrate the kind of film Bardem is appealing for. The use of digital technology in this film allows for an almost seamless reconstruction and re-contextualization of the McCarthy era and its success indicates how useful this kind of film may be to fill the gaps in a younger generation's knowledge of its political past.⁴ However, it is my contention here that Bardem's work, despite censorship and the fairly primitive technology available to him, manages to convey much about the world of his youth that he feels Nationalist censors have erased. Annette Kuhn recently suggested that

The rise of new digital moving-image technologies and media forces us to ask what film — the quintessential twentieth-century medium — *is*, and indeed what kind of future it has in the twenty-first century. In search of answers, I believe that we can usefully return to some of the twentieth-century thinkers and writers who tried to get to grips with the nature and the potential of what for them was as groundbreaking and excitingly novel as today's 'new media' are for us. (Kuhn 2005: 404)

² On a lighter note, Bardem also comments that British film archives were invaluable to Spanish directors confounded by the lack of cinematographic evidence of Spain's past: 'Yo, por ejemplo, les pido un tren humeante de "circa" 1900-1905 cruzando al atardecer, de derecha a izquierda, un paisaje nevado, y ellos te lo mandan. ¡Espléndido!' (2002: 357). He also suggests that in the 1940s and 1950s such gaps were filled by splicing uncredited sections of American films into Spanish films (2002: 190).

³ Almodóvar commented in 1983 that 'the attention of filmmakers is fixed on the past, the post-war, but these are ghosts which half the country doesn't share' (Hopewell 1986: 238). Paul Julian Smith has recently suggested that 'Almodóvar's collected works are the nearest thing to a shared national narrative in a country where television, ever beset by controversy, has not historically provided such continuity' (2006: 161-62).

⁴ Digital technology allows for the integration of David Strathairn's compelling reprise of the role of Edward R. Murrow with existing documentary material (the video clips in which Senator McCarthy plays himself).

Following her suggestion, I propose to look back at the way earlier twentieth-century film theory influenced the work of Bardem as a young director growing up in post Civil War Spain. The theories of Russian director, Vsevolod Pudovkin, were fundamental to the way Bardem conveys a political message despite more primitive technology and Regime censorship, and he does this by disrupting the film narrative in order to speak through the gaps.⁵ I shall use examples from his 1955 film, *Muerte de un ciclista*, because, like Clooney's film, it is also a star vehicle, its thematic focus is also on censorship, it also manipulates pastiche (of 1940s *film noir*) to represent the 'real', and because for Spanish viewers, it refers back to a censored past that, as noted, liberal and left-wing Spaniards are increasingly concerned to uncover.⁶

Muerte de un ciclista could be read as a mere relic from a more innocent filmic age, and Bardem would be the first to admit that censorship left it less than aesthetically perfect (Bardem 2002: 210–11). Critics have noted a number of ideological and/or aesthetic flaws. Rob Stone suggests that 'at times Bardem is overemphatic in his composition and montage', but he concludes sympathetically that the film 'could be considered a derivative hotchpotch were it not for the force of its rhetoric and the always relevant appropriation of the disparate aesthetics for their political meaning' (2002: 49). Marsha Kinder provides a detailed and generally positive analysis of the influence of Italian neo-realism and Hollywood, although she was less pleased with the 'ideological limitations of the film concerning the issue of gender' (1993:80).⁷ It could therefore be asked what a film considered dated aesthetically and in terms of gender politics has to offer our increasingly cynical and sophisticated post-modern gaze. I shall argue that the film's continued relevance lies in the way it counters right-wing censorship with Soviet-style disruption, offering contemporary viewers a useful reminder of the psychological and political value of speaking through the gaps of a disrupted *mise-en-scène*.

⁵ *Pudovkin on Film Technique* was first published in English in 1929 by Victor Gollancz. All page references here are to the Vision Press edition 1968. Pudovkin (1893–1953) was a student of Kuleshov, the Russian director credited with the invention of montage editing, after experiments indicating that the language of cinema derives from the context of shots, from the 'collision' of one shot with the next. This discovery (that the juxtaposition of an image A with an image B combines to create an image C that transcends the meaning of either) has, of course, an ancient literary tradition, reworked most notably for the Spanish context in the complex literary metaphors of Góngora. Eisenstein and Pudovkin were contemporaries and, at times, antagonists. Eisenstein's use of collision editing (dialectical montage) was criticized by Pudovkin, who was more interested in the way shots provide 'building blocks' and construct meaning through association rather than collision. Their approaches overlapped, however, although Pudovkin is considered the less theoretical of the two, and his techniques, with hindsight, more linked to Hollywood. For more detail, see Ivor Montagu's comments (Pudovkin 1968: 7–18).

⁶ Lucía Bosé was not well known at the time in Spain and was apparently forced on Bardem by the film's Italian producers (Torreiro 1997: 363). She was famous internationally for her starring role in Rossellini's *Cronaca di un amore* (1950).

⁷ Bardem was a product of his era. He notes in his memoirs that when he won the CIFESA prize of 3000 pesetas at the end of his first year at the IIEC, he did two things: '1) me compré una gabardina, 2) convidé a cenar, a copas y a putas a toda la pandilla. Nos emborrachamos a modo y al final acabamos en un prostíbulo de la calle Alcántara, haciendo una cama redonda todos nosotros, menos Florentino Soria, que se abstuvo. Todos fuimos: Agustín Navarro, Luis García Berlanga, Carlos Grande y un servidor' (2002: 69). He also describes the options for the young men of his generation as 'muy frustrante para ese grupo de muchachos "salidos" y reprimidos que éramos todos nosotros. O putas o matrimonio católico apostólico y romano cuando tuviéramos la edad conveniente. No había otra salida' (2002: 128).

Muerte de un ciclista

Lo llevaba conmigo a todas partes. Hacía mía la fanfarronada del marqués de Bradomín, ante la Niña Chole en la Sonata de estío de Ramón María del Valle-Inclán: 'Los españoles se dividen en dos categorías: de una parte, el marqués de Bradomín, de la otra todos los demás.' Así me sentía yo con el Pudovkin en el bolsillo, aunque todavía no tenía una clara idea de quién puñeta era ese Pudovkin. (Bardem 2002: 62)

Eisenstein was one of Bardem's earliest role models, and friends nicknamed him *Bardemstein* (Bardem 2002: 79), but Pudovkin was his first theoretical mentor, and *Muerte de un ciclista* has more in common with Pudovkin's theories of 'relational editing' than with the intellectual rigours of Eisenstein's dialectical montage (Pudovkin 1968: 75–78). After discovering an English translation in the late 1940s, Bardem carried his copy around with him everywhere: '¡Era como si hubiera descubierto del cine! El cine como arma inigualable de creación estaba encapsulado en esas páginas' (2002: 62). Like Bardem, Pudovkin came from a background in engineering and for Bardem, living in a country where the Communist Party was outlawed, his inclusive appeal to 'the directors of the so-called left wing' must have seemed a revelation indeed (Pudovkin 1968: 165).⁸

Pudovkin credits the Americans with being the first fully to understand that the camera could be used to mimic an individual point of view, so that 'the camera, until now a motionless spectator, at last received, as it were, a charge of *life*' (1968: 82). Once this was understood, the camera could be manipulated to obtain a more visceral, more immediate response from the viewer, which provided the key to appreciating the value of film as propaganda. The Franco Regime was eager to exploit film in this way, to exploit what we would now call its capacity to 'suture', or to 'interpellate' the viewer, as well as to encourage the integration of a damaged and divided society by providing filmic images of a national identity that was more suited to the agenda of the Dictatorship than the realities of post-Civil War Spain.⁹ This national project was controlled through institutions such as the NO-DO, the IIEC, and the Filmoteca Nacional.¹⁰ These, combined with censorship, held a tight control over the industry that directors such as

⁸ Bardem's clandestine activities included the distribution, or rather, the attempted distribution of *Mundo Obrero* (2002: 104–07), translating for *La Pasionaria* (2002: 171), and travelling to the USSR (2002: 172), but any admission of left-wing political sympathies was carefully controlled. In 1947, at the end of his first year at the IIEC, he describes how he met Ricardo Muñoz Suay: 'en el transcurso de esa caminata yo supe leer inmediatamente entre líneas, ambos supimos hacerlo y nos dimos cuenta de la realidad: estábamos en la misma trinchera. Éramos dos comunistas que se habían encontrado por azar' (2002: 29).

⁹ Although Regime-approved films were designed to reinforce National Catholic morality, and to emphasize the fundamental ideological role of the family, Bardem's description of the films shown at the Falangista film club he joined suggest censorship could not always guarantee the non-'return of the repressed': 'ponían siempre unas películas "autorizadas" por la censura y generalmente bastante flojitas. Y siempre proyectaban *Lot en Sodoma*, una película extraña, una apología de la homosexualidad, que no hubiese desdenado firmar el fotógrafo Daniel Mappelthorpe, muchísimos años después' (2002: 67).

¹⁰ The NO-DO, or *Noticiarios y Documentales Cinematográficos* was founded in 1942, and the IIEC, Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas, in 1947. Bardem was one of the first year's intake but he failed to graduate because he ran out of film stock and had to submit his film unfinished. It was he says 'un claro pecado de vanidad y auto complacencia' (2002: 79). When he did successfully complete the course, the IIEC had become the EOC (Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía). Bardem so vehemently disliked the then director, Carlos Fernández Cuenca, a film critic, Falangista, and director of *Los misterios de Tánger* (1942), a film Bardem considers possibly the worst Spanish film ever made, that he would not collect his certificate (2002: 156). The Filmoteca Nacional was founded in 1953 for the promotion of Spanish films; for more discussion of this see Triana-Toribio (2003: 51–52).



FIGURE 1.



FIGURE 2.



FIGURE 3.

Bardem were determined to loosen.¹¹ Inspired by his reading of Pudovkin, Bardem counters the Nationalist propaganda of integration with Soviet-style disruption and disjuncture, and in *Muerte de un ciclista*, the creation of meaning through counterpoint is achieved in the contrast between deep focus long shots, and extreme close-ups; in the disjuncture between sound and *mise-en-scène*; in the use of the jump cut to disrupt narrative flow, and in the depiction of characters as ‘types’.

The contrast between depth of field and the extreme close-up sets up narrative tension and the theme of Juan’s guilt. In one striking example, the student Matilde, is at the blackboard, while Juan reads about the death of the cyclist. This highly dramatic montage, contrasting the extreme close-up of the paper and Juan’s eyes (Figs 1 and 2), with an earlier extreme long shot of the lecture hall, and the long shot of the confused students (Fig. 3) dramatically evokes his emotional reaction.

Juan ‘sees’ them as the jury he fears will condemn him for his role in the cyclist’s death.¹² Furthermore, this vision of the students (intuited between the gaps of the contrasting depth of field) will become self-fulfilling. At a later stage in the film the students will demonstrate against the decision to fail Matilde, thus turning them into the representatives of ‘judge and jury’ Juan’s projection has imagined them to be.¹³ Soviet-style montage is used here by Bardem (as it was by Hitchcock) to particularly melodramatic effect: in Bardem’s case, it is especially useful for a film which needs to highlight the drama of the affair in order to obscure the fact that the relationship between the adulterous couple and the dead cyclist has underlying political connotations that Spanish censors would not approve. As the film progresses, the cyclist will take on an increasing

¹¹ Bardem continued to work and live in Spain. Although tempted to leave after being arrested while filming *Calle mayor*, he was persuaded to stay by Eduardo Haro Tecglen (2002: 294).

¹² The cyclist was knocked over by his lover, the wife of a wealthy businessman, on the way back from a clandestine meeting outside Madrid. They left him by the roadside (alive, but injured) in order that their affair should not be discovered.

¹³ In a strange case of life imitating art, on 14 February 1956 university students in Madrid were preparing a conference of young writers when they were confronted by the SEU, arrests were made, and a State of Emergency was declared. Bardem comments wryly in his memoirs: ‘¡Qué ironía! El propio Estado franquista era de por sí una excepción’ (2002: 290). The fact that Bardem was also arrested and taken from Palencia, where he was filming *Calle mayor*, to the prison cells of the Puerta del sol indicates how dangerous a left-wing film director was considered to be. He was freed shortly afterwards when international personalities including Charlie Chaplin and Albert Schweitzer signed a telegram demanding his release (2002: 292). According to Bardem, Spanish police found themselves at a loss as to how best to verify the political sympathies of these middle-class, intellectual rebels, and found themselves having to interrogate them about their preferred choice of film director (2002: 292).



FIGURE 4.

metaphorical significance. His death becomes symbolic of the unrecognized Republican victims of the Civil War, so that the couple's attempt to dissociate themselves from him becomes, in turn, a reflection of Nationalist disregard.

While these shots illustrate how effectively meaning is conveyed through the gaps in the Soviet-style disruption of depth of field, the effect of using the soundtrack in counterpoint to image recommended by Pudovkin is also exploited by Bardem.¹⁴ A straightforward example of the way this is used to divert the censors can be seen in the representation of the sexual relationship between the adulterous lovers. María José and Juan meet up at the same meeting place (La Serrana) outside Madrid to discuss the implications for them, and for their relationship, of the death of the cyclist (Fig. 4).

María José is framed in deep focus by the curtains that separate the lovers in the foreground from the bed in the background. The carelessly discarded shoe lying on the floor between María José and the bed is a well-rehearsed metonym for illicit sex, but, out of deference to the Spanish censors, dialogue rules this out: Juan says that she has not allowed him to touch her since the accident with the cyclist. If this is a straightforward example of the way dialogue can be used in counterpoint to appease the censors, a more interesting example of the exploitation of sound and image is to be found in the long shot of Juan and the cyclists (Fig. 5). Juan is walking away from the viewer down a street, half-hidden by a group of cyclists who are ringing their bells as they overtake him. The sound of numerous bicycles bells is not diegetically necessary. It deliberately disrupts the realism of the *mise-en-scène* to set up tension and to accentuate, once more, the theme of Juan's guilt. The cyclists and their bells expose his obsession, which is, at this stage in the film, to suppress all evidence of their involvement with the cyclist. He has just discovered the police have no leads on the car that knocked down the (metaphorical, *diegetic* and eponymous) cyclist, and has phoned María José to share his relief, but she now fears that potential blackmailer Rafa may be more of a threat to them than the police. This shot of Juan leaving the bar with its deliberately exaggerated symbolic soundtrack of ringing bells is (like the shot examined earlier that framed the students as 'judge and jury')

¹⁴ For more discussion, see 'Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film' (Pudovkin 1968: 183-93).



FIGURE 5.

a projection of Juan's inner turmoil, indicating that he will not escape his feelings of guilt and complicity in their attempt to suppress the truth. The image of the lone, *noir* (anti-)hero walking down the street, combined with the disruptive soundtrack connoting inner conflict emphasizes Juan's individuality in a way that helps disguise the fact that his character in this film is also symbolic of a much more widespread disaffection with the Franco Regime.¹⁵

Bardem also establishes a wider narrative disruption in the opening twenty minutes of the film by moving rapidly between twelve different locations. The viewer sees, in rapid succession: a road outside Madrid, a road inside Madrid, the American Embassy, Juan's bedroom, Juan's mother's dining room, a cinema, María José's bedroom, a university lecture hall, a racetrack, a circus, another room at the university, and an art gallery. This rapid editing between locations with only the most cursory reference to the timeframe highlights the symbolic function of the *mise-en-scène*.¹⁶ Each location plays a specific symbolic role because the *diegesis* cannot be explicit about its representation of the Franco Regime. The road outside Madrid (where the cyclist is knocked down by María José) is revealed to be the site of the *trincheras* of the Civil War. The American Embassy, the racetrack, and the art gallery are all sites where Spain's privileged social élite meet, and at each of these locations the theme of blackmail, secrecy and lies is conveyed through dialogue involving the character of Rafa (discussed in more detail below). The two university locations are linked to the theme of political corruption through Juan's

¹⁵ This example echoes Pudovkin's advice on the use of sound to indicate a disjuncture between the perception of the outer and inner worlds: 'the course of man's perceptions is like editing, the arrangement of which can make corresponding variations in speed, with sound just as with image. It is possible therefore for sound film to be made correspondent to the objective world and man's perception of it together. The image may retain the tempo of the world, while the sound strip follows the changing rhythm of the course of man's perceptions, or vice versa. This is a simple and obvious form for counterpoint of sound and image' (Pudovkin 1968: 186).

¹⁶ Apart from a reference to María José dropping Juan off at 5.30, and various references to time that can be intuited from action (supper/ teaching/visiting public places), there is very little to indicate the timescale of the action in these different locations.



FIGURE 6.



FIGURE 7.

treatment of Matilde and her return to accuse him of destroying her university career.¹⁷ Finally, the over-riding, 'unrepresentable' theme in this film, which is the theme of Regime censorship, is implied in the dialogue. None of the characters speaks openly: Juan is evasive with his mother. María José is lying to her husband and her friends. Rafa refuses to give information in the hope that he will be able to blackmail María José later. María José and Juan speak openly only at the circus where the children's laughter drowns their words, and at the art gallery María José and Rafa speak in the carefully guarded riddles and lies that have already been established as common to María José's privileged right-wing social group.

All of these (inexpressible) themes are framed, in these opening twenty minutes, as deliberately disrupted 'pieces' that will provide the 'building blocks' Pudovkin recommends.¹⁸ This disruption of narrative chronology is achieved by repeated use of the jump cut that allows Bardem literally to 'speak through the gaps' of censorship. Three examples of the jump cut will now be examined to see how editing 'bridges' these to represent the 'unrepresentable'. The first indicates the adulterous relationship in *Muerte de un ciclista* that was literally 'unspeakable' (offensive to the National Catholic Regime); the second criticizes Spain's social elite; and the third sets up a relationship between the characters of Rafa and Juan that I shall then consider in more depth with reference to Pudovkin's recommendations about characterization. The first example occurs at approximately twelve minutes into the film with a jump cut from Juan, brooding at home on his bed and blowing out cigarette smoke (Fig. 6), to María José brushing smoke away with her hand as she sits on her own bed talking to her husband, Miguel (Fig. 7). The 'smoke bridge', eye-line match, and hand gesture place the lovers in the same bed, while dialogue confirms that they are not (Juan is silent and María José is talking to her husband about leaving Spain).¹⁹

¹⁷ Juan fails Matilde because he was reading about the cyclist in the paper while she was giving her presentation. She challenges him, pointing out she has no form of redress whereas he has his powerful *enchufe*, his brother-in-law, a government minister for Education, to protect him.

¹⁸ 'The expression that the film is 'shot' is entirely false, and should disappear from the language. The film is not *shot*, but *built*, built up from the separate strips of celluloid that are its raw material' (Pudovkin 1968: 24).

¹⁹ The use of the erotic 'smoke bridge' has even more resonance when read in the context of Bardem's description of post-Civil War deprivation in 1939. In his memoirs, the cigarette takes on a particularly profound connotation of illicit luxury. Bardem describes his maths teacher and mentor, don Eduardo Rodríguez as follows: 'era un hombre refinado y elegante. Citaba a San Juan de la Cruz, "la música



FIGURE 8.

A second highly symbolic jump cut occurs during the sequence that cross-cuts between the wealthy society wedding María José attends and the impoverished working-class district Juan visits to try to get information about the cyclist María José has run over. In this case the shock tactic of the jump cut is combined with the verbal bridge of a rich woman mentioning a 'charity do' for the 'niños pobres, niños tontos, o niños de algo' that implicates the Regime in Bardem's representation of the hypocritical charity of a wealthy élite, who care little for the actual children living in the crowded suburbs. The third, as noted above, provides a link between the characters of Rafa and Juan. A shot of Rafa flinging a glass bottle off a roof in frustration is juxtaposed with a breaking university window. It is through this broken window that Juan will look a few minutes later (Fig. 8).

Juan decides, looking through the broken university window at the rioting students below, to change the course of his life, to resign from his job, to confess to the police, and to live openly with María José, but the jump cut between the thrown bottle and the broken glass provides a link between his character and that of Rafa that I want to consider in more depth.²⁰

In Pudovkin's paper 'Types instead of Actors', which was based on Kuleshov's experiments, he points out that 'film art does not begin when the artists act [...] film-art begins from the moment when the director begins to combine and join together the various pieces of film' (1968: 167). For this reason he recommends the representation of characters as 'types' through which meaning can be expressed. Bardem is working with professional actors, but the notion that they are types to be manipulated by montage is

¹⁹ *Continued*

callada, la soledad sonora ..." para referirse a la ciencia matemática. Fumaba rubio americano *Camel* o *Lucky Strike*. En esos años horribles de escasez de todo y de hambre, el humo del cigarrillo de don Eduardo engendraba en nosotros, los fumadores, una sensación casi erótica. Yo me solía sentar en los primeros bancos de la clase, había algún compañero en la pizarra exponiendo un tema y don Eduardo hablaba desde el fondo de la clase. Uno oía el levísimo sonido del celofán que abría la cajetilla y, al cabo de un instante, avanzaba hasta mí, hasta nosotros, el humo del cigarrillo expelido por don Eduardo. ¡Qué placer!' (2002: 92).

²⁰ For those who have not seen the film, this decision leads directly to his death. Knowing that censors would not allow the adulterous couple to escape, Bardem kills both of them, María José will run Juan over, unwilling to allow his new-found commitment to ruin her marriage and comfortable lifestyle. She then dies in a car crash, caused by swerving to avoid another cyclist on her journey back to Madrid.



FIGURE 9.



FIGURE 10.



FIGURE 11.

fundamental to characterization in the film.²¹ The framing of Juan and Rafa as reverse types allows Bardem to convey meanings that would otherwise be censored. The riddling Rafa sets up tension, the question of how much he knows about María José and Juan's affair introduces the theme of corruption among the Regime élite, he is the 'invitado', the outsider who drinks their whisky and entertains them like a court jester, but he also knows all their secrets, the 'cosas feas' that they want to hide. The image of him as a 'court jester' is suggested by a close-up of Rafa's laughing face followed by a jump cut to the face of the weeping clown (Fig. 9). This visual connection, and contrast, between Rafa and the clown is continued in the *mise-en-scène* of the gallery which places his malleable and mobile facial features against a backdrop of abstract art (Fig. 10) in a way that links his public mask with the painting on the clown's face, then, finally, in his drunken row with Juan, this mask slips as Rafa reveals what he really thinks about the social group he is involved with (Fig. 11).

All of the above images appear to distance Rafa from Juan. Rafa is a blackmailer who hides behind the masquerade of the joker, while Juan is a university lecturer with some residual, if suppressed, sense of social responsibility. Rafa and Juan are linked, however, by their status in relation to the social group that is really the focus of disaffection in this film; both are outsiders who are tolerated but not equal to the élite circle they move in, Rafa because he entertains, and Juan because of his sister's relationship with Jorge, the government minister. In many ways Rafa functions as a negative of Juan (he is an inverse projection, an indication of everything Juan fears he may become), and this inverse link between them is made clear in the jump cut between the bottle and the broken glass that contrasts Rafa's recognition of his impotence with Juan's moment of illumination. Rafa will remain the joker for a social circle he despises, while Juan will choose to alienate

²¹ Pudovkin, writing during the early stages of sound technology, also comments that 'one must never show on the screen a man and reproduce his words exactly synchronized with the movements of his lips. This is cheap imitation, an ingenious trick that is useless to anyone' (1968: 172). This is advice that, with the technological advancements of the 1950s, Bardem ignores. His characters, however, are clearly delineated 'types' and are filmed accordingly: María José's 'raven-haired corrupt femme fatale' (Kinder 1993: 80) represents the upper class. She is filmed in soft-focus Hollywood close-ups that emphasize her beauty as well as her self-interest. Juan represents the middle class, and his increasing entrapment is reflected in the bourgeois clutter of his mother's home. This sense of entrapment is also conveyed in relation to Matilde, the student who represents a new generation and hope for a better future, and who talks to Juan through the chain-link fence that separates them at the sports ground, indicating that Juan will not escape his own doomed future. The working-class cyclist comes from the cramped suburbs of the outskirts of Madrid, which are filmed in long-shot, neo-realist style and using untrained actors.

himself from them by speaking out. In his drunken confrontation with Juan (Fig. 11), Rafa says he knows all the secrets of the social group that accepts neither of them; he knows their 'cosas feas' and their 'basura'. His drunken diatribe is an extended and explicit condemnation of the cheating, lying hypocrisy of the individuals that (in this film) make up the Spanish social élite, but his speech was not cut by censors, presumably because he has been framed as the most despicable character in the film. He is the sinister clown, the amoral joker who becomes a reverse *alter ego* figure that Bardem exploits to give voice to opinions Juan cannot be allowed to express, while using the jump cut to connote a link between the two that the 'broken glass' bridge makes explicit.²²

Conclusion

Quizá mi gran error óptico fue pensar que una vez conseguida la democracia en este país se abriría un horizonte venturoso para el cine nacional. No me di cuenta de que el horizonte estaba cerrado por la censura económica. (Bardem 2002: 369)

For Bardem, the role of the film director is to 'contar historias de hombres y mujeres en términos de luz', and he continues 'y esa luz existirá, de la manera que sea, hasta el final de los tiempos' (2002: 353–54). In *Muerte de un ciclista*, Bardem tells his story not by showing viewers what his historical context allowed him to show, but by the on-screen organization of the 'términos de luz' into narrative projections and disruptions that reveal a censored truth between the gaps. He states that the freedom denied to left-wing Spaniards was the ability to speak 'sin ambages, circunloquios, dobles sentidos, claves crípticas, máscaras. La libertad era poder respirar sin 'mascarilla', a pleno pulmón' (2002: 130), and it is one of the satisfying ironies of *Muerte de un ciclista* that this masked form of communication that Bardem encountered in everyday life, is transposed, in his film script, onto the dialogue of a Nationalist social élite who dare not speak openly for fear of revealing their own hypocrisy and exposing their own crimes. What censorship would not allow is revealed in the gaps between dialogue and *mise-en-scène*, in the disruption of narrative chronology and in the manipulation of characters as 'types'. Close examination of the way the film narrative circumvents censorship suggests that it still has a lot to offer directors of the digital age. The digital age may allow directors to recreate images of the past that Bardem laments having lost to the Nationalist censors, but *Muerte de un ciclista* manages to convey much of the atmosphere of the 1950s in the gaps between its ideological jump cuts. In 2001, Bardem was able to describe Spain in a way that was otherwise impossible during the making of *Muerte de un ciclista*:

Era un país hambriento y aterido. Un país sojuzgado por los vencedores de la Guerra Civil donde había cárceles de concentración para los que la habían perdido, fusilamientos, torturas, depuraciones, traslados forzados. Eran los años triunfales. (Bardem 2002: 97)

This is the Spain that can be intuited between the gaps of *Muerte de un ciclista*'s disruptions, disjunctures, and projection of meanings in counterpoint. Bardem is now clearly writing (see above) without fear of censorship, but his rhetorical use of the ironic aside 'eran los años triunfales' after an extended description of concentration camps,

²² The character of Juan could be read as an older *alter ego* of Bardem himself. Bardem was also disaffected with the Regime and was once a maths tutor. The character of Rafa is said, by Bardem, to have been based on Falangist film critic Alfonso Sánchez (2002: 205). Bardem no doubt took some personal pleasure in the fact that these words of condemnation are put into the mouth of this debased *alter ego* of a man more used (in his real life) to standing in judgement over Bardem.



FIGURE 12.

executions, torture and enforced exile, echoes the condensed emotional effect of the ironic jump cuts in *Muerte de un ciclista*. In this film Bardem counters the Nationalist propaganda of integration through censorship with ironic reversals that liberal and left-wing Spanish viewers were able to read between the gaps such as, for example, the image of an (anti-)hero walking away from the fascist symbolism of the sports stadium (Fig. 12).

The disruptive manipulation of Soviet-style editing appeals profoundly to the viewer's psyche. Its appeal lies with Pudovkin's point that 'editing is not merely a method of the junction of separate scenes or pieces, but is a method that controls the 'psychological guidance' of the spectator' (Pudovkin 1968: 75). Thus for contemporary viewers and film-makers *Muerte de un ciclista* offers not merely the beautiful *femme fatale*,²³ the tensions of Hollywood *noir*, and the sentimentality of Italian neo-realism, but also a timely reminder of the way that dialogue, editing and *mise-en-scène* can manipulate viewer response with disruptive mechanisms that echo those of the unconscious, and that have no need for the innovations of the digital age to produce meaning: a reminder that might well be of use to an industry no longer constrained by the censors of the Franco regime, but by the 'censura económica' of the twenty-first century (2002: 210).

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²³ For more on spectatorship in relation to female characters, see Jo Labanyi on gender representation and female pleasure in 1940s historical dramas (2004: 49).

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En su autobiografía Juan Antonio Bardem les pide a los directores españoles contemporáneos que empleen la nueva tecnología digital para la reconstrucción de un pasado censurado por la dictadura española. En este artículo se examina la influencia que tuvo el director soviético Vsevolod Pudovkin en el cine de Bardem y se plantea que, aunque la técnica digital nos permita alternar casi imperceptiblemente documentos cinematográficos antiguos y modernos tal como sucede en Good Night and Good Luck (Clooney, 2005), las rupturas soviéticas en el montaje de Muerte de un ciclista (1955) comunican lo censurado de un modo igualmente eficaz. Según Pudovkin 'el montaje no sólo permite juntar episodios o escenas aislados sino también controlar la reacción psicológica del espectador'. De tal modo se concluye que la primitiva cinematografía de la película Muerte de un ciclista demuestra que en cuanto a diálogo, montaje y mise-en-scène se refiere, las elipsis manipulan al espectador a base de rupturas que imitan las revelaciones involuntarias del inconsciente y que no necesitan las innovaciones de la era digital.