

(DIS)AGREEMENTS

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**MADRILEÑO SPACE:  
ANOTHER PROTAGONIST  
IN THE FILMIC NARRATIVE**

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**introduction**

Elios Mendieta

**discussion**

Arantxa Echevarría

Andrea Jaurrieta

Daniel Gascón

Samuel Alarcón

Natalia Marín

**conclusion**

Elios Mendieta



# | introduction\*

ELIOS MENDIETA

In this edition of (Dis)agreements we ask about the importance of the spatial element—and, more specifically, Madrid—for screenwriters as they begin to conceptualise a new piece of work and are confronted with the dreaded blank page at the very beginning of the writing process. What we want to know is, when they construct their story, does the screenwriter think of the city as another protagonist on the set? Do the spaces where the film is to be shot contribute to the conceptualisation and description of the characters? What does Madrid offer? These are among the many demands and challenges that every professional confronts in the process of writing a screenplay and thus, in the present discussion, we hope to shine a spotlight on how contemporary cinema inhabits the city and whether space necessarily exceeds its status as set

to become, as Greimas and Courtés (1990) would define it: an actant; a protagonist in the filmic narrative with the strength to influence the story and the psychologies of the human characters.

In his treatise concerning semiology and the urban, Roland Barthes contends that, for creative artists, the city becomes a discourse, and, in turn, this discourse becomes a language: “the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak to our city, the city in which we find ourselves, simply by inhabiting it, by travelling through it, by looking at it,” (2009: 349). It is about the erotic dimension that any filmed space achieves when it surpasses its straightforward function as film set; where the city’s eroticism can be thought of as the understanding it is possible to extract from the potent metaphoric nature of urban discourse. It is the

poetry of space (Bachelard, 2007). In the many films shot in Madrid every year, the audience will recognise some of the city's most iconic locations, those belonging to the so called *trans-aesthetic* era (Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2015) that inundate social networks due to their magnetic attraction. However, the camera will also stray into the labyrinthine streets of the city's periphery; streets that are less easily recognisable by people who live far from the Spanish capital's nerve centre. These streets symbolise the 'other' Madrid; a Madrid that knows equally well how to exploit its narrative potential, whether in the framework of film, as is the focus of this work, or in any other artistic discipline. As the novelist, Esther García Llovet, once said, this Madrid, that never appears on postcards, but nonetheless has its own very special place at the core of the capital is: "A documentary of the domestic *kinki* that is the beating heart of this city" (2017: 107).

The force Madrid exerts as a space in the seventh artform is an emerging topic in cinema criticism and academic research. This is clear, firstly, from the numerous research articles produced as part of this project, FICMATUR (La ficción audiovisual en la Comunidad de Madrid: lugares de rodaje y desarrollo del turismo cinematográfico), including, for example, *Madrid, ciudad de imágenes* [Madrid, city of images] (Fragua, 2022). It is also apparent in the wider body of work beyond this project concerning the role of the city as a setting for films from the earliest days of cinema to date, particularly in books such as *World Film Locations: Madrid* (Intellect Books, 2012), edited by Lorenzo Torres Hortelano. The importance of these studies lies not only in their confirmation of the topic under consideration as uniquely relevant, but also owes much to the shared opinion of artists in this field that space is an ever more subjective phenomenon due to the way human perceptions of it shape its existence. That is, space has become thematised (Bal, 1985: 101), and filmed locations are thus affective, oneiric, temporal, and

cerebral. Of particular interest in this regard, the Madrid portrayed by the screenwriter necessarily shows the imprint of time's passage because it contains memory: the remembrance of past experiences. Thus, we must understand urban space as a temporal element. What the screenwriter's words and the cinematographer's camera attempt to capture, then, is precisely the dialogue between past and present, engaging in a never-ending conversation. For a city such as Madrid which has been depicted on film since the beginnings of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century, this conversation is an affirmation of its history. For this reason, when contemporary cinematographers film in any location in Spain's capital, they don't simply capture the present but rather an era that has been embalmed—as André Bazin (2017) might say—already trapped and preserved in the screenplays of previous cinematographers. As Michel Foucault once asserted: "We do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but in one saturated with qualities, and that may even be pervaded by a spectral aura" (2007: 91).

This spectral aura cited by Foucault is evidence of Madrid's other existence, the traces left by the previous century. To cite a paradigmatic case, we need only point to the way in which Edgar Neville represents Madrid, the city of his birth, in the screenplay and direction of *The Tower of the Seven Hunchbacks* (La torre de los siete jorobados, 1944) depicting the contrast between the city in the first years of Francoism and the manifestation of its hidden underground world in a—successful—experimentation with the fantastical. Another case would be the impressive profile of marginal Madrid—those areas of the city left behind by Francoism's "desarrollismo" programme of urban development—in the film *The Delinquents* (Los golfos, 1960) directed by Carlos Saura, himself from Huesca, in collaboration with Mario Camus and Daniel Sueiro. The recently deceased Saura returned to the Spanish capital and its margins in other well-known works such as *Deprisa, depri-*

sa [Hurry, Hurry!] (1981) and *Taxi* [Taxi] (1996), as explored by Marianne Bloch-Robin in her article for this volume. In the present work, however, we aim to focus on how Madrid is written in contemporary film, and to this end, we hosted a debate between a group of screenwriters all of whom have given this city particular importance in their work over the last decade. These young writers—some of whom also direct—have each rethought Madrid’s urbanism through very different genres from which we obtain a range of unique approaches to space and its conceptualisation.

Having previously demonstrated her talent in numerous short films such as *De noche y pronto* [By Night and Soon] (2012) and *Yo, presidenta* [I [female] President] (2015), Arantxa Echevarría’s debut feature was the powerful *Carmen & Lola* (Carmen y Lola, 2018). This highly successful film, winner of two Goya awards, tells the beautiful story of the film’s eponymous characters taking us to a variety of Madrid’s locations, from Vallcasas to Hortaleza, with the purpose of describing and homing in on the realities of life for the city’s gypsy community. Madrid is the centre of Echevarría’s creative impulse and her next film, *Chinas* [Chinese Girls]—due for release next October—is set in Madrid’s Usera district.

Fiction is the vehicle through which Madrid is most often represented, and the city’s appearance in the screenplay of *Ana by Day* (Ana de día, 2018) is no exception. Written and filmed by Andrea Jaurrieta herself, from Navarra, this critically acclaimed film is highly original, daring to take excursions into less explored territories of the fantastical. Shot in some of Madrid’s most iconic neighbourhoods: Chueca, Tetuán, and La Latina, the influence of directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni, renowned for their emphasis on space in their own work, shines through in this film.

Daniel Gascón is something of an all-rounder in his writing. As well as being a screenwriter, he is an author, columnist, translator, and editor for the journal *Letras Libres*. Among his fiction work,

he co-wrote the screenplay for the film *Todas las canciones hablan de mí* [Every Song Is About Me] (2010) with his friend, Jonás Trueba, who also directed the feature. This was the first of a number of films Trueba has dedicated to the city where he lives, a series that culminated with the recent feature *You Have to Come and See It* (Tenéis que venir a verla, 2022). The feature on which Gascón and Trueba collaborated, *Todas las canciones hablan de mí*, is a tribute to authors such as Pio Baroja who have a special connection to Madrid, and, to help him write, Gascón took to the streets of Madrid as a *flâneur* following the routes the film’s main protagonist would later tread.

Without completely abandoning the focus on fiction, but at the same time taking an excursion into the realms of documentary, in particular, the essay-film, we turn to Samuel Alarcón and his work, *Oscuro y Lucientes* [Dark and Shining] (2018). This feature, which Alarcón both wrote and filmed, is a story about Francisco de Goya and an investigation into what happened to the artist’s skull after his burial. The skull is highly symbolic as the location of the artist’s thoughts and, furthermore, the site of his dialogue with Madrid, the city where he spent much of his life, and its architecture. As demonstrated by several others of this screenwriter’s films, for instance, *La ciudad de los signos* [The City of Signs] (2009), space is a fundamental element of Alarcón’s work.

Finally, we also talk to the screenwriter and creator, Natalia Marín. A member of the experimental documentary cinema collective Los Hijos, Marín has been rethinking the city where she lives for more than two decades in films such as *Enero 2012* [January 2012] (2012) and *La apoteosis de Isabel la Católica* [The apotheosis of Isabel the Catholic] (2012), both produced with other members of the collective, and her solo work, *New Madrid* (2016).

To focus this discussion concerning the importance of space in screenplay writing, for each of our interviewees, we shall centre the conversa-

tion on only one of their works. The five selected films: *Carmen & Lola*, *Ana by Day*, *Todas las canciones hablan de mí*, *Oscuro y Lucientes*, and *New Madrid* all take very different approaches to the representation of space in Madrid, allowing, in each case, for an original reading; thus, it seemed fitting to single out the conception of these particular films for our discussion. The key questions we seek to answer in this debate address the relationships between cinema and literature as well as those between characterisation and space; the intertextual references of individual screenwriters; and specifically, the importance of Madrid itself and its multiple locations in the selected works. ■

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# discussion

## I. What sort of screenwriter are you and how do you prepare for the writing process? What is essential for you before you begin writing a screenplay?

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### Arantxa Echevarría

I'd say I was intuitive, what I do is observe everything happening around me and I store all the ideas inside my head, and all the sensations—since so many events are sensorial. To be a screenwriter, you have to be a profound observer and want to learn and look at what's going on around you and look beyond yourself, because sometimes we screenwriters can be a bit self-centred. I think we have a tendency to look too much at ourselves and our own world; and what I do, is to expand my gaze, because I believe there are so many things all around that are worthy of attention.

### Andrea Jaurrieta

Really it emerges when an idea pops into my head and starts to take shape. More than just a general theme, it'll be some idea or concept and from there, it evolves into the story I want to tell. For example, in *Ana de día* the whole story follows from the initial phone call, from the freedom that comes from having a double to take on her duties and where freedom itself is located. In the case of *Nina* (a future project), as well as being an adaptation of a very free-form play, it also emerges from the idea of the need to return home after an act of revenge. The whole plot develops from that concept. I fall in love with those first ideas, the ideas that I have just before sitting down to write the screenplay; they can be so potent. I get an idea, then retouch it as I go along. That doesn't mean that when I sit down to write I haven't thought very carefully about the story I want to tell, where I want the story and its characters to take me, or what the plot should be. By the time I write

the first page I've already thought in depth about whether my idea can take me into a story or not.

### Daniel Gascón

I wrote several films with Jonás Trueba before going ahead with *Todas las canciones hablan de mí*. We'd worked together on a number of screenplays. I'd also collaborated in small ways on other projects like Pilar Palomero's *Las niñas* (The girls, 2020). You could call me a screenwriting tourist, a part-timer. I love cinema and all forms of storytelling. I also love working with others—I've always worked with a director—and that's the way I like it. It's interesting to see how something develops differently when there are two people; when the director gives you an opinion, it obliges you to reframe some of the ideas you had when you were writing, ideas that might be a little inconsistent. Also, it's not just about writing the first sequence, it's when you see how the director has to convince ten, twenty, or thirty other people that what you've written makes sense. Writing literature is more irresponsible, you don't have anything to do with the process of fund raising for the project as you do when you're writing the initial sequence for a film project. The collective effect is also fantastic when you see how something you've written, the thoughts you've had, get enriched, layer by layer. It's great, for example, when the audience in a movie theatre erupts into laughter at a joke you put into the script. I'm interested in the collective element, of sharing cinema. I enjoy seeing how my friend and fellow screenwriter, Fernando Navarro, thinks and works. He's written such a diversity of films, and each one takes a different approach to storytelling. Ignacio

Martínez de Pisón, a writer who has also turned his hand to screenwriting, has another perspective, a craftsman like approach similar to that of a lot of screenwriters whose work I like and follow. I'm still writing screenplays today and, you know, when I was fourteen, what I most wanted to be when I grew up was a cinema screenwriter.

### **Samuel Alarcón**

I'm an atypical screenwriter. When I write a dramatic screenplay for a fiction film—which up until now have just been shorts—I find it hard to separate it from the staging. I think it's something almost unavoidable for we screenwriter-directors. As those who know my feature length work will appreciate, my focus is documentaries and here, the concept of the screenplay is a little vague. I work on an outline and from the outline get to a more detailed framework and so on, successively, until I have enough scaffolding to begin filming, or until I have created some kind of parallel pre-film of images and sounds that may or may not be discarded later. Every film requires its own

method as it grows, and as for the screenplay it's essential to know how to listen to the film it carries inside it. So, for me, and specifically for documentaries, I'd say the screenplay is like the film's growth chart.

### **Natalia Marín**

I'm a workaholic, but I think I am quite slow as a writer. I lay down my goals and I set about reaching them. To give you an example of how I write, let me tell you about the way I approached the screenplay for *La casa de Julio Iglesias* (Julio Iglesias's House, 2018). I had the script very well prepared—loaded, if you like—and the challenge was to keep it measured and to refine it to make sure the content was very specific so as not to lose the audience. Then I added in the rhetorical parts, some humour, you see, it was very important to bring out the mickey-taking and the mischief. So, there you have it, first I make sure the script is fully loaded and I'm happy with it, and then I add what's necessary to create the screenplay I really want.

Image 1. *Carmen y Lola* (Arantxa Echevarría, 2018)





## 2. When you write a screenplay, how important is the role of space in the development of your work?

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### Arantxa Echevarría

For me, space plays an important part in the screenplay, and, I would say, the film's post-production phase always seems to strengthen my sense that location is itself another character. Now, when I was thinking of filming in Usera [one of Madrid's southern districts], specifically, the China-town area of that district, to help me write, I used to go there every afternoon to walk around and soak up the atmosphere. Spaces are, of course, a habitat for my characters, and to me they are intensely interesting, as another character.

### Andrea Jaurrieta

For me it's fundamental. Perhaps it's the director in me talking, but when I write, I tend to give detailed descriptions of the spaces where the action takes place. I believe space brings to bear meanings about social status, psychology. There are visual moments that, in literature, the writer needs three pages to describe the space, but with cinema, the conception of the setting gives you everything at once. That's why, when I write a screenplay, I think a great deal about where a scene is set and what elements that space needs to have to make it count. In that respect, I'm really interested Michelangelo Antonioni's use of space.

### Daniel Gascón

A great deal of importance. The films directed by Jonás Trueba are, in many cases, portraits of Madrid. When we were making *Todas las canciones hablan de mí*, Jonás lived in Madrid, and I was in Zaragoza, but I would go to his house and that's where we wrote the screenplay: in the area around Puerta del Ángel. We'd go out near Vistillas, Ópera, and other places close by, and the zone we moved around later came out in the film. Also, the final sequence of the film was shot in front of the Royal Palace. It was all very *topographied*; the spatial ele-

ment of Madrid was hugely important for us. Not only that, but the buildings that appear in the film are very important too. The character played by Bárbara Lennie, for example, is an architect and, in the film, she talks about renovating buildings, about Recoletos Boulevard, and other places. It's a film that, besides the landscape, has the purpose of showing the places I know and that's supported by the fact of the character being an architect. University City is also in there, for example, and the Complutense University. Many of those Madrid spaces reappear in other films by Jonás Trueba.

### Samuel Alarcón

In my case, and particularly for cinema screenplays, the importance of space is absolute. Space is where a film develops, for me, it is the film. Even in fiction, spaces are my oracle. Until now, I've found it impossible to imagine a story or reflect on a certain idea without visiting the relevant spaces; it's as if the lived experience of human beings in the past were still there and cinema is the way to invoke them. That's what I did, quite literally, in Italy with *La ciudad de los signos*, and in France and Spain with *Oscuro y Lucientes*. The screenplay is like the instructions on how to rebuild the past of a space using an illusion created by images and sound in motion.

### Natalia Marín

Space is more important than the screenplay. In my case, it comes above everything else, even before the image. For me, space is the theme, the grand idea. It's so important that the first thing I consider is that I want to talk about Madrid, and then I see what elements I should add. Or which elements not to, to the extent that, sometimes I even take out images in the very last stages of a project. It's something that's already there in the work of the Los Hijos collective, where we always



Image 2. *Ana de día* (Andrea Jaurrieta, 2018)

centre on two ideas: that of space and that of identity, but with questions about biopolitical issues, as in *Árboles* (Trees, 2013), our latest work. I'm really interested in the themes of urbanism and literature, questions of how and who decides where we

live, and why we live there. The absurd geometry that restricts our lives. For example, when I made *New Madrid*, it was very important to talk about Spain, but above all Madrid, the city I've lived in for twenty years although I wasn't born here.

### 3. Are the spaces in which the plot develops important elements to have in mind when you are writing about the film's characters?

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#### Arantxa Echevarría

In *Carmen y Lola*, Madrid is immensely important. You see, depending on which city we chose at the starting point the gypsy community would have been very different. The gypsy communities of the south are much more integrated with the “paya” (non-gypsy) communities—there are no big differences—but in Madrid, the spaces they inhabit are very separated. It's as if there were a type of invisible boundary separating the two worlds. And if we go further north, the gypsy communities there are more conservative. That's why I wanted to set the film in Madrid, because it's a gypsy community I know, and it would have seemed odd to do it in a place I knew less well, without having studied the community in depth, by being with them, as I did in Madrid.

#### Andrea Jaurrieta

Yes, without doubt. In fact, not only when writing about it, but also when filming or in the production process, which I take charge of too. When I produce, I look for spaces that have an eloquence with respect to the characters I've written about, always with the means at my disposal.

#### Daniel Gascón

This aspect was more important to Jonás Trueba than for me because he really had the visual con-

cepts in his mind as we were writing. I too like to imagine where my characters are, it gives you the feeling of being more engaged and that's the most difficult thing to achieve, but it's also important in the conceptualisation brought to the table by the art director. For me it's not an absolute determining factor for the spaces to match or come together with the characters. But perhaps it was more so for the director in this case.

#### Samuel Alarcón

Of course, characters pass through a place and Madrid gives the framework. Undoubtedly, I write about Madrid because I live in the city. If I don't make cinema, I can't empathise with a city nor with a space, and I think that if I lived in another country, I would try to work out what stories I could tell in that new space, a bit like psychoanalysing it. Places are like people, you can love them or hate them, or you overlook them as you come to know them. Being in a place and knowing what happened there and who used to live there is an exercise in understanding and I try to initiate this process—to a greater or lesser degree—in every film I make.

#### Natalia Marín

It's not something I have to bear in mind as my films don't contain characters.

Image 3. *Todas las canciones hablan de mí* (Jonás Trueba, 2010)



#### 4. Do you think the screenplay manifests the best way to unite word and image, cinema and literature?

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##### **Arantxa Echevarría**

Many people try to be very visual when writing a screenplay. I would say I write screenplays almost as a form of literature and so, I'll describe things that can be seen but it's through images that I really tell the story of what is seen. There's a very good example in *Carmen y Lola* where they go to the empty swimming pool and start pretending to swim as if there were water. In the screenplay this is written in quite a sensuous way; the sound, the sensation of cool air with every stroke they make. In general, screenplays are quite clinical and cold, but I don't agree with that; I think it's necessary to inject some literature into the screenplay. I think cinema has to have some literature and that the one should be soaked in the other. It's not a one-way street. When someone reads one of my screenplays, what I'm aiming for is that they can visualise and feel the emotions in there. And for that to happen, I am much more literary than perhaps I need to be to get a usable screenplay.

##### **Andrea Jaurrieta**

Yes, but sometimes I think there are too many words. With cinema we have the opportunity to say so many things without actually voicing any words, and I believe that, sometimes, when literature is decanted into cinema, we tend to verbalise things too much and it's something I worry about a great deal. In *Nina*, for example, I've had to make a huge effort to extract the story without it getting too verbalised. Literature is a different language to cinema; it's good that they interrelate, but I try to separate the two artforms somewhat.

##### **Daniel Gascón**

I believe a lot of the time, the best thing about art is its limitations. It's more difficult to convey the inner self in cinematographic language, it has less

depth perhaps. Like Rafael Azcona said, cinema is unparalleled in terms of the superficial, but when you've worked in the two media [literature and cinema] it's great to test the tension between them and see where you can get with each one. When you experiment with one side of your trade, you learn more about the other. For me, screenplays are instrumental, I love reading them, but I never come to see them as literature. I like reading a screenplay, and learning more, but always keeping in mind it's the framework for a film.

##### **Samuel Alarcón**

No, for me the screenplay isn't literature and nor is it cinema. Literature is a form of free expression through written language. The cinematographic screenplay is restricted by certain practical rules that enable the film to be constructed: it must be in the present tense, descriptions must be clear, there's no place for literary figures of speech, the screenwriter must avoid irony, playfulness, or being too serious, and so on. The screenwriter shouldn't engage in expressing anything other than the specific actions of particular characters. In this sense, a written play isn't literature either, because it's simply the characters and their dialogue; they have no life. Perhaps that's why published theatre scripts—although I like to read them—are the least popular form of literature. Looking at recent figures, for 2020 that is, I believe, of all the literature read in Spain, only two percent is theatre. Screenplays, not even that.

##### **Natalia Marín**

It's a very good way to bring together different artistic disciplines, not just cinema and literature. In the end, because I don't work with actors, the ideas I put into the screenplay are, quite often, derived from other artforms, from the things I read, or things that I watch.

## 5. Would you say Madrid is one of the characters in your film? Which places in this city are most important to its development?

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### Arantxa Echevarría

In *Carmen y Lola* one location was very important, although it barely features: El Ruedo. It's a megalithic social housing construction, right next to the M30 motorway, that's now full of gypsy families. The building is a hulking mass filled with little windows but inside, is a total contrast, a sub-world of colour and gardens. For me, Madrid's neighbourhoods were important. It was absolutely crazy filming in El Ruedo because we had to go in there with thousands of families all around, and well, if anyone didn't want us filming there, they might start bashing cooking pots to disrupt shooting. I was very insistent on filming there all the time, but in the end, we had to find other locations too, like the Vallecas market, and also Hortaleza. Very gypsy neighbourhoods, of course; places where the community lives. We needed to be right at the heart of these communities, as close to them as possible.

### Andrea Jaurrieta

Yes. In my film I try to contrast the real and the non-real, and for me, Madrid's spaces were very important in conveying the sense of the non-space, and the non-time of a vanishing Madrid. These are spaces where there's no evidence of technology, spaces that are gradually disappearing, like Pensión Loli, like the Manolita Chen Chinese theatre, places that allude to a past Madrid, one that existed before globalisation. As a result, for me it was fundamental, from the initial title sequences, when Ana tries to escape the day, that she enters a nocturnal space, out of time, a space that, as much as her words do, speaks to her existential situation. One of the most prominent places I wrote into the film is there because I went to a drag queen show in Chueca and I loved it, it was so different; however, when I finished the film—which took eight years—the

actual place had disappeared. But I had it in my mind and so, I set about looking for other places, although, with the tiny budget we had it ended up being a bit of a mash-up of several different spaces. The exterior is Sala X which, at the time, was closed. Parts of it were also shot in Tetuán and La Latina, really, we just looked for life with the resources we had. Later on, other spaces also made it into the montage.

### Daniel Gascón

Madrid is definitely another character, without a doubt. Above all, the lower La Latina area, around Vistillas, Ópera, Amistad street, Segovia bridge, and so on. It's the space we were living in. I remember one thing we did, after reading Bernardo Sánchez's book about Azcona—where he talks about “walking the screenplay”—that's exactly what we did. We walked through the streets endlessly, strolling with our ideas, helping things emerge, doing a little *flânerie*, you could say. And our ideas developed as we walked. In fact, many of the spaces in the film coincide with the places where we wrote the screenplay.

### Samuel Alarcón

Madrid is more symbolic: as Goya's home, the artist watches the city evolve, and later, as a centre of power, he has to flee it. Once he dies, Madrid is the return *home*. A home that has altered and welcomes him in a slightly erratic, inelegant fashion. So, Madrid represents the deal that Spain's political classes offer to celebrated artists of the past. But, more than this, it was also interesting as a way to look at what's left of the traditions Goya would have known, like the festival of San Isidro, or of San Antonio de la Florida. In that sense, what's brought together in *Oscuro y Lucientes* is more part of Madrid's intangible heritage.

**Natalia Marín**

Absolutely. In *New Madrid* I wanted to tell the story of the city that I'd lived in for two decades. I wanted to make a link with the city I live in, and do it in that moment, 2013. At the time, I believe Madrid was in pieces—and it still is—but then it was even clearer how it was suffering under the blows of economic crisis. So, the city I lived in was burdened, and I started roaming its streets to see what was going on there. That was how I discovered that there was *more* Madrid: in the United States, as well as in Colombia, Argentina, and other countries. And I confined the city with these *other* Madrids and unified them. I linked the utopia

of what it is supposed to be with the dystopia of what we were living. I enjoyed the thought that the last eight times Madrid was rebuilt were failures. *New Madrid* explores that a little, the idea of the failed utopia. In *Enero, 2012 (or la apoteosis de Isabel la Católica)*, a film I did with Los Hijos, we knew we wanted to shoot in Madrid, so we bought a Lonely Planet guide to the city, and decided to film Madrid the way the Straub brothers did. We felt we had to detach ourselves from the city and so we did something we'd never done before: we spent two days on a tourist bus. We captured the sounds of the tourist bus, recorded its voice, and started filming from there.

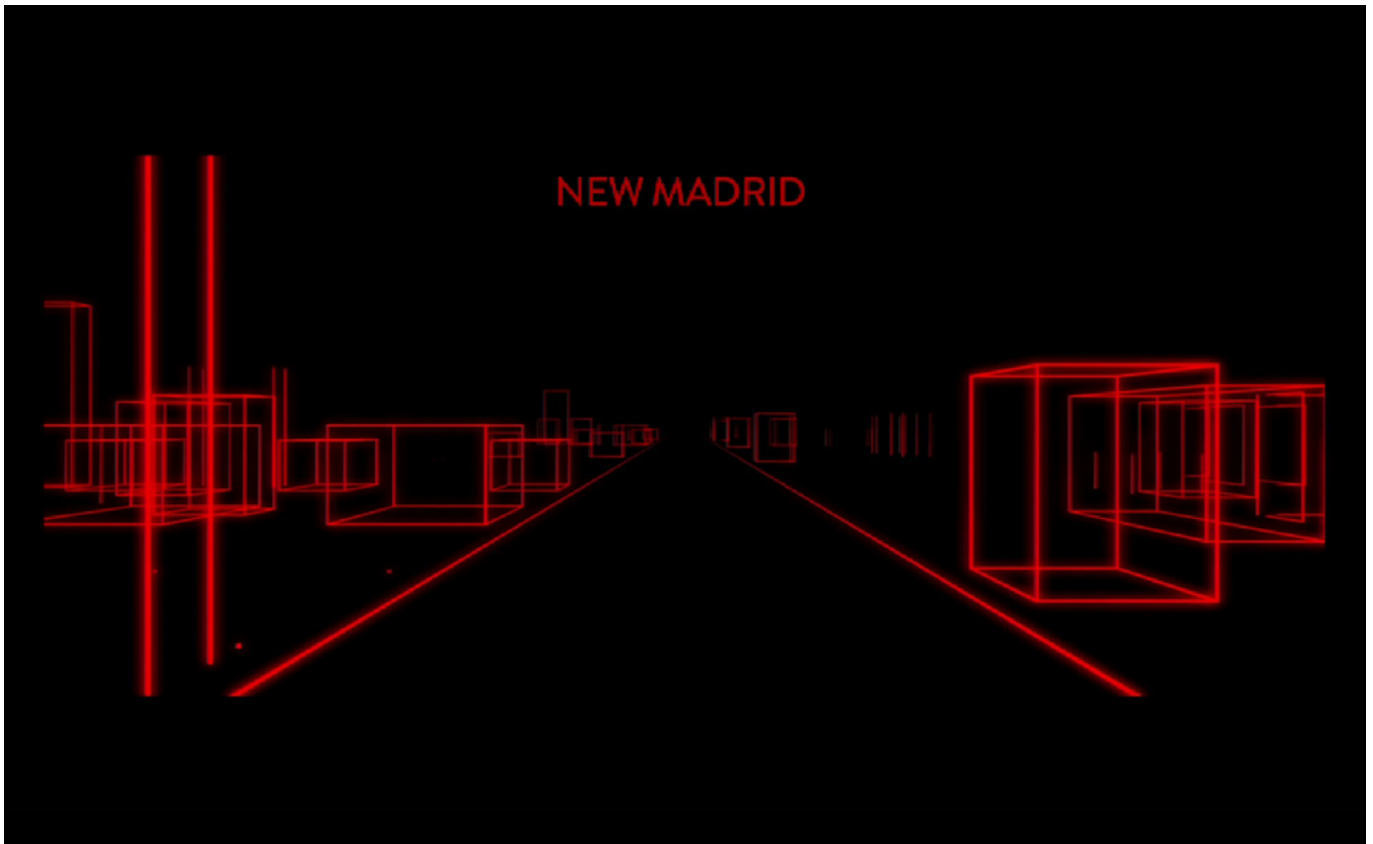


Image 4. *New Madrid* (Natalia Marín, 2016)

## 6. Which other films, texts, or authors—whether they take place in, or are connected to Madrid or not—have influenced the way you film the spaces that appear in your work?

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### Arantxa Echevarría

Although it's not about Madrid, I always think of *Dheepan* (2015), the film that won the Palm d'Or in Cannes and is set in a suburb of Paris with a reputation for being the place where all of the marginalised populations live. It's where you find the North Africans alongside Arabs, Senegalese, and Sri Lankans, but it still doesn't stop being the Paris of the Eifel Tower simply twenty kilometres away. I feel that any film with a social message always brings out the city at its heart, because I think the city is important as a character in itself. I think there are films that could only have been made in certain places, while others are more universal, but I love the ones where you can recognise the character of the city and its physiognomy, its urban anatomy, its spaces, and the concept of its slums.

### Andrea Jaurieta

The inspiration for *Ana de día* came from Luis Buñuel's cinema and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's: their supremely decadent worlds, worlds at the margins. Or Antonioni and the way he reads spaces in his work. I also found Michel Foucault's ideas useful, especially with respect to his interpretations of power dynamics. But it's the cinema itself that most influences me and I find so much in so many different films.

### Daniel Gascón

When we were writing we knew we wanted to put in all sorts of references to numerous other texts, and that it had to be more than the protagonist working in a bookshop. We wanted to give the work a structure like chapters, for Jonás it felt very *Barojian*. Some of Baroja's books are like walks through Madrid and walking is very important in this film and in several others. Another reference that comes out of the film and which happens in the bookshop, is Andrés Trapiello. He

has a cameo appearance of ten seconds as a writer who we follow imagining he must have an important role in *Todas las canciones hablan de mí*. Also, this film takes place in the same location as Fernando Trueba's first film, *Ópera prima* (1980)

### Samuel Alarcón

Any sort of essay, biography about Goya from any era. As well as the classics by Valeriano Bozal, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, or Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, and I also used contemporary texts by European essayists like Tzvetan Todorov or Folke Nordström. As far as films go, these are more diverse and loosely related, from comedic crime thrillers like *Cluedo* (1985) and *Murder by Death* (1976), to Disney's *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1999). Quite a cocktail, right? But, when it came to actually filming places, the determining factor was their architecture; that's why we restricted ourselves to frontal takes of the buildings and their interiors. When the technical team who shot *Oscuro y Lucientes* actually saw the film in its finished form said: "Now we understand why we shot nothing but facades".

### Natalia Marín

It depends on the moment or the work; I use all sorts of references. Since I don't have a technical team as such, my books are my personal technical team: everything I've read. That's why I think it's right to cite the authors I've read, like at the end of *La casa de Julio Iglesias*, for example. I have been travelling with those books for two years and one that's very important for me is *Into the universe of technical images* by Vilém Flusser. I also owe a lot to the Dadaists, for instance, who I really admire, also George Perec and his *Species of spaces*, for the games he plays with letters and words. I look for a dialogue with other disciplines. For example, I'm reading videogame manuals at the moment. With any work, there are always numerous references. ■

# I conclusion

ELIOS MEDIETA

The first big idea emerging from this discussion is that Madrid is a space with unlimited possibilities to explore all manner of themes: from social exclusion to identity, not forgetting literature, memory, and the concept of the meta-cinematographic device. Our interviewees' screenplays are like X-ray images of the city, confirming how the spaces in which they set their stories are, for the most part, in dialogue with the construction of character: we should never underestimate the narrative potential of the spaces where the action of a film takes place. Indeed, in the most experimental work, location plays the dominant role. This new generation of screenwriters is thoroughly conscious of the narrative potential and subjective value that can be attained by reconceptualising the spatial element and, in terms of their future creative endeavours—independent of genre—Madrid, like so many other global cities, is an ideal place in which to reimagine their trade.

The screenplay is indispensable as the scaffolding on which to begin building a story, and in our discussions, its overriding importance in a film's

construction becomes apparent. In essence, every one of the films discussed here constitutes a valuable text—in the semiotic sense of the term—since they each construct a sequence of symbols that have the ability to produce meaning, and everything hinges on the screenplay. The relevance, and, in turn, the complexity of a screenwriters' creative process has its roots in their individual approaches to writing and goes far beyond their personal attitudes concerning the irrefutable way in which space conditions the narrative. For Marín, the screenplay is a means to form the inter-artistic dialogue her work aspires to, while Echevarría confesses to taking a thoroughly literary approach to writing hers, and in the meantime, Alarcón considers it to be completely different from either cinema or literature. This is, in fact, one of the standout conclusions of our discussion: every screenwriter approaches the process of writing from a different perspective, but all know how to appreciate the potential offered by text, and not only in relation to space. This opens up many interesting and worthwhile avenues through which to study the importance



of space in the cinematographic writing process. Cinema in Madrid over the last decade, as shown in the films referenced here, is a great example of this. We have left behind the roaming-form about which Gilles Deleuze (2003) theorises, or the kind of vagrancy associated with the disorientation produced by the Second World War, which, thankfully for cinema history, was so excellently taken forward in the work of cinematographic modernists such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Jean-Luc Godard, and Wim Wenders, among many others (Font, 2002: 311). Even “non-places” (Augé, 1993) seem to be a thing of the past. Of course, *flânerie* still continues, but space no longer functions to reflect the psyche of particular characters, instead, it is more a cinematographic element in its own right, capable of sustaining the filmic discourse on its own. *New Madrid* is a wonderful example of this and, as its director, Marín recognises, the screenplay was an indispensable component in its production.

Thus, screenplay and space constitute a truly fertile pairing in cinematographic conception. Perhaps the key takeaway here is that from the moment a screenwriter begins writing a screenplay and inscribing their story onto Madrid, they are engaged in an activity something like arranging the music of their own unique urban symphony. A century has passed since the seminal work of Wal-

ter Ruttmann, Jean Vigo, and Alberto Cavalcanti, however, the narrative potential, both symbolic and aesthetic, of space and how it is written has not stopped growing. It is the job of critics, researchers, and, of course, screenwriters themselves to continue thinking about space and its many roles. ■

### NOTES

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Image 5. *Oscuro y Lucientes* (Samuel Alarcón, 2018)



## MADRILEÑO SPACE: ANOTHER PROTAGONIST IN THE FILMIC NARRATIVE

### Abstract

This edition of (Dis)agreements is a conversation with five Spanish screenwriters all of whom have written, in their very different ways, about the city of Madrid in their respective works. Through this dialogue, we aim to examine the relationships between cinema, screenwriting, and space in contemporary Spanish cinema. Participating are Arantxa Echevarría, Andrea Jaurrieta, Daniel Gascón, Samuel Alarcón and Natalia Marín, who between them present a varied and multifaceted body of work that provides the reference for this enriching dialogue exploring how different approaches to screenwriting can capture the city of Madrid and all its narrative possibilities.

### Key words

Cinema; Script; Space; Madrid; Contemporary Spanish Cinema; Cinema and Literature.

### Authors

Arantxa Echevarría is a screenwriter, director, and producer for cinema and TV. Her feature films include *Carmen y Lola* (2018), selected for the Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival and winner of, among other awards, two Goya's: one for Best New Director and another for the Best Supporting Actress; *La familia perfecta* (2021); and *Chinas* (2023), which will premiere in October this year. Contact: info@revistaatalante.com.

Andrea Jaurrieta is a director, screenwriter, and producer. Her debut feature film, *Ana de día* (2018), won a nomination for Best New Director at both the 2019 Goya Awards and the CEC Medals (Spanish Film Writers Circle). Her previous short films have been selected at multiple festivals and some of her video creations have been screened in cultural institutions in Spain and abroad. At present she is working on *Nina*, her second feature film as a director. Contact: info@revistaatalante.com.

Daniel Gascón is a writer, translator, editor, and scriptwriter. He made his debut in the seventh artform as the co-writer of *Todas las canciones hablan de mí* (2010), together with director Jonás Trueba. Subsequently he has collaborated on other screenplays, such as that for *Las niñas* (2020), by Pilar Palomero. He directs the Spanish edition of *Letras Libres* and has published several books, both novels and essays, including *La edad del pavo* (2001), *El golpe posmoderno* (2018) and the satirical novels *Un hipster en la España vacía* (2020) and *La muerte del hipster* (2021). Contact: info@revistaatalante.com.

## EL ESPACIO MADRILEÑO: UN PROTAGONISTA MÁS DEL TEXTO FÍLMICO

### Resumen

El presente (Des)encuentros propone un diálogo con diferentes guionistas españoles que han perfilado, de modos muy diferentes, la ciudad de Madrid en sus respectivos trabajos, para llevar a cabo un estudio de las relaciones entre cine, escritura de guiones y espacio en el cine nacional contemporáneo. Participan Arantxa Echevarría, Andrea Jaurrieta, Daniel Gascón, Samuel Alarcón y Natalia Marín. Lo polifacético y variado de sus perfiles provoca que se genere un enriquecedor diálogo con distintas aproximaciones a cómo, desde la escritura cinematográfica, se recoge la urbe madrileña y todas sus posibilidades narrativas.

### Palabras clave

Cine; guion; espacio; Madrid; cine español contemporáneo; cine y literatura.

### Autores

Arantxa Echevarría es guionista, directora y productora de cine y televisión. Entre sus largometrajes se encuentran *Carmen y Lola* (2018) —reconocida, entre otros galardones, con dos premios Goya a la mejor Dirección Novel y a la Mejor Actriz de Reparto, y seleccionada en la sección Quincena de Realizadores del Festival de Cannes—; *La familia perfecta* (2021); y *Chinas* (2023), la cual se estrena en octubre de este año. Contacto: info@revistaatalante.com.

Andrea Jaurrieta es directora, guionista y productora. Su ópera prima, *Ana de día* (2018), consiguió la nominación a Mejor Dirección Novel en los Premios Goya de 2019 así como en las Medallas CEC (Círculo de Escritores Cinematográficos de España). Sus cortometrajes previos fueron seleccionados en múltiples festivales y algunas de sus videocreaciones han sido exhibidas en instituciones culturales españolas e internacionales. Actualmente está desarrollando *Nina*, su segundo largometraje como directora. Contacto: info@revistaatalante.com.

Daniel Gascón es escritor, traductor, editor y guionista. Su debut en el séptimo arte se produce con la co-escritura del guion de *Todas las canciones hablan de mí* (2010), junto al director Jonás Trueba, aunque también ha colaborado en otros guiones, como el de *Las niñas* (2020), de Pilar Palomero. Dirige la edición española de *Letras Libres* y ha publicado diferentes libros, tanto novelas como ensayos, entre los que se pueden citar *La edad del pavo* (2001), *El golpe posmoderno* (2018) o las novelas satíricas *Un hipster en la España vacía* (2020) y *La muerte del hipster* (2021). Contacto: info@revistaatalante.com.

Samuel Alarcón works as a scriptwriter and filmmaker and between 2013 and 2022 he directed the programme *El cine que viene*, on Radio Nacional España. In 2006 he received a grant from the Royal Academy of Spain in Rome, to film *La ciudad de los signos* (2009), his feature film debut. His second film, *Oscuro y Lucientes*, premiered at the Seville European Film Festival. He is also the author of the short film *Déjame hablar* (2020), in which he tackles the work of the composer Luis de Pablo. Contact: info@revistaatalante.com.

Natalia Marín is a screenwriter, director, and film studies teacher. Her work within the experimental film collective Los Hijos—together with Luis López Carrasco and Javier Fernández Vázquez—has been critically acclaimed and screened at numerous national and international film festivals and art centres. Her latest audiovisual pieces include *New Madrid* (2016) and *La casa de Julio Iglesias* (2018), which was screened at the Locarno International Film Festival. Contact: info@revistaatalante.com.

Elios Mendieta holds a PhD in literary studies from the Complutense University of Madrid and a degree in journalism from the University of Málaga. He is currently a Margarita Salas postdoctoral fellow at the UCM, with a residence at the University of Granada. He is the author of the monographs *Paolo Sorrentino* (Cátedra, 2022) and *Memoria y guerra civil en la obra de Jorge Semprún* (Guillermo Escolar, 2023). His areas of research are the relationship between cinema and literature and the history of cinema. He is a contributor to *El Confidencial* and *Letras Libres*. Contact: Eliosmen@ucm.es.

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Samuel Alarcón ejerce como guionista y cineasta y ha dirigido, desde 2013 hasta 2022, el espacio *El cine que viene*, de Radio Nacional España. En 2006 recibe la beca de la Real Academia de España en Roma, con la que filma *La ciudad de los signos* (2009), su debut en el largometraje. *Oscuro y Lucientes* es su segundo trabajo, estrenado en el Festival de Cine Europeo de Sevilla. También es autor del cortometraje *Déjame hablar* (2020), donde aborda la obra del compositor Luis de Pablo. Contacto: info@revistaatalante.com.

Natalia Marín es guionista, directora y profesora de cine. Su trabajo dentro del colectivo cinematográfico experimental Los Hijos —junto a Luis López Carrasco y Javier Fernández Vázquez— ha sido proyectado y reconocido en numerosos festivales y centros artísticos nacionales e internacionales. Entre sus últimas piezas audiovisuales se pueden destacar *New Madrid* (2016) o *La casa de Julio Iglesias* (2018), la cual fue proyectada en el Locarno International Film Festival. Contacto: info@revistaatalante.com.

Elios Mendieta Rodríguez es doctor en Estudios Literarios por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y licenciado en Periodismo por la Universidad de Málaga. Actualmente es contratado postdoctoral Margarita Salas en la UCM, con estancia en la Universidad de Granada. Es autor de la monografía *Paolo Sorrentino* (Cátedra, 2022) y tiene otro volumen en prensa titulado *Memoria y guerra civil en la obra de Jorge Semprún*, que se publicará en Guillermo Escolar Editor. Sus áreas de investigación son la Literatura comparada y la Historia del cine. Ha publicado artículos en revistas indexadas académicas y pronunciado conferencias nacionales e internacionales sobre diferentes cineastas. Colabora en *El Confidencial* y en la revista *Letras Libres*. Contacto: eliosmen@ucm.es.

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