MADRID IN FILM,
CITY IN THE SHADOWS

**DIALOGUE
FERNANDO MÉNDEZ-LEITE**
FILM AND CHANCE.
A LIFE IN CINEMA ON THE
STREETS OF MADRID

**(DIS)AGREEMENTS
MADRILEÑO SPACE:**
ANOTHER PROTAGONIST
IN THE FILMIC
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MADRID, A CITY IN THE SHADOWS: CINEMA AND OBSCURITY*

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In the autumn of 1991, the Basque cinematographer Victor Erice and the Manchego painter Antonio López began filming one of Spanish cinema's most extraordinary films. In the area surrounding Chamartín station, in the courtyard garden of a property under renovation, stood a quince tree laden with mature fruits and, Antonio López, a notoriously slow painter, decided to trap its abundance on canvas. At the same time, Victor Erice, famous for producing a feature film only once every ten years, set himself the challenge of portraying the painter's process. The project would seem to be a bet against the inexorable march of time, and, from the first frame, the audience realise this bet is unwinnable as much for the painter as the director.

The Quince Tree Sun (El sol del membrillo) is a surprising film; focussed on a tree in a small, enclosed garden, it speaks profoundly of Madrid. In it we find not an attempt to depict the urban fabric—as we see in so many of López's oils—but nor is it and idealised vision of the city. Antonio López remarked more than once that: "Madrid is not lovely, rather it is an attractive monster," (Rojas, 2021, 4th November). And, the city is very present in this film: in the sounds that can be heard beyond the garden walls; in the construction site, symbolising Madrid's eternal building works; and, above all, in the meeting between two artists, Erice and López, who while alien to Madrid in the sense that neither was born there, both developed creatively and as human beings in that city. A realist, López's most famous works are his views of Gran Vía, however, the vast majority of his urban canvasses show wastelands, vacant lots, or panoramas that are almost unrecognisable as Spain's capital. It is unlikely to spoil the film for anyone if we let slip that the painting does not get completed. Nevertheless, the truly artistic aspect of this film about an unfinished painting of a quince tree is that it reflects the essence of Madrid with genuine clarity.

Image 1. Still from *El sol del membrillo* (1992)

In contrast to the majority of the great European cities, Madrid does not give the impression of having been there forever, burdened with history, rather it seems more like a small town that, by chance, simply transformed into a metropolis overnight. While Rome, Paris, Lisbon, and London evoke grandeur and history from the first glance, Madrid might well have been born with us, with our parents, or, at best, with our grandparents. Edward Baker (2009) observed certain repeated behaviour patterns among Madrid's citizens and many other authors writing about the Spanish capital also maintain that the city has only just emerged, that, it evolved from town to city in an instant. Writing in 1999, Luis Antonio de Villena comments: "Let's be honest, Madrid has become a great city" and a similar argument was expressed

by the historian Santos Juliá more than a decade before: "Madrid went from a badly constructed town to the sketch of a great capital," (1988) and, earlier still, Manuel Azaña (Spain's prime minister between 1931 to 1933), although he loved walking through the city, wrote: "Madrid is a badly constructed town in which there is the outline of a great capital [...] it is the capital of abandonment, of improvisation, of incongruency; the casual stroller would be happy to see the beginnings of modernisation" (2002).

Yet, as Baker (2009) discovered in his work on Madrid, the most interesting feature of this discussion, is that the same idea was around even in the early part of the twentieth century when Juan Ramón Jiménez noted how Madrid's modernity came from nowhere, coming to resemble

Barcelona in moment: "Madrid today. Dying town of La Mancha. Blossoming Catalan city," (1966: 66). Indeed, going back even further to the middle of the nineteenth century, we see authors already ruminating on Madrid's explosive growth. For instance, Benito Pérez Galdós wrote in *Fortunata y Jacinta* (2003: 64): "Before long, this proud Court would leave behind its condition as a vulgar town to become a civilized capital. Because Madrid had nothing of the metropolis other than its name and a ridiculous vanity. It was a peasant wearing a gentleman's cloak—the shirt underneath being torn and filthy". For over almost two centuries, then, every visitor, and every Madrileño has felt the city was born with them—or in many cases, for them.

The place that evokes the city's rapidly changing nature more than any other is Madrid's Gran Vía, an emblem of fast-paced, fleeting modernity. Unlike large-scale urban developments in other European cities which were planned and executed meticulously, Gran Vía's development was implemented hastily, and, in a very short time, this street became not only one of Madrid's major arteries, but also the symbol of progress for the whole capital. The impetus of this street—its enthusiasm—emerged because its growth was accompanied by the blossoming of a new spectacle: the cinema. As Rafael Alberti said of himself in his autobiography: "I was born with cinema—respect me!" (1921), so it is with Gran Vía. Thus, in a very short space of time, on the central stretch of this street—the small distance between San Luis junc-

Image 2. Photograph of the Velussia cinema by Luis Lladó

tion and the Velussia Cinema where seven major lots offering 1500 commercial premises jostled for attention alongside a few other minor players—the most important buildings were the cinemas. At the same time as the cinemas appeared, distributors and producers—mostly foreign but also Spanish—also set up their headquarters on Gran Vía. It is no surprise then, only a few years after its foundation, this broad avenue—which its planners optimistically thought would never reach capacity—suffered its first traffic jams and it was necessary to regulate the flow of vehicles using all manner of technological innovation.

Cinema and Gran Vía grew together. Gran Vía's focal Carrión building, was planned to be—and was—the most *expensive* movie theatre in Spain and the most high-profile premieres took place there. In addition, in the nineteen thirties, the great Valencian film-making company, Cifesa, set up their headquarters in this symbolic skyscraper. Twenty years later, a couple of youngsters, Luis García Berlanga and Juan Antonio Bardem, made their way there to ask if the company would produce their first film. Fernando Fernán Gómez watched over his horse from the Carrión's oval windows, in *El último caballo* [The Last Horse] (Edgard Neville, 1950), almost half a century later, Santiago Segura hung from its central billboard in Alex de la Iglesias's *The Day of the Beast* (El día de la bestia, 1995), and in the third season of one of Spain's most popular television series of all times, *Money Heist* (La casa de papel, Álex Pina, Antena 3, and Netflix, 2017-2021), millions of Euros were cast into the skies over its iconic cross.

In the nineteen twenties, the Madrileño, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, published a book entitled *Cinelandia* [Cinema-land] (1923). It was set in an imagined Hollywood, but the truth is, for every one of its contemporary readers it would have conjured the image of Gran Vía, the street where films premiered week after week. However, looking back at the photographs of the street in those early days it is astonishing to note that Gran Vía's final

ALMOST LOGICALLY, A RECENTLY CONSTRUCTED METROPOLIS, POPULATED BY CHARACTERS FROM A FARCE WITHOUT ANY KIND OF SHARED PAST, BRINGS WITH IT A FURTHER PHENOMENON: ANONYMITY

stretch (named in honour of Eduardo Dato and which opens onto Plaza de España) was, until the mid-nineteen fifties, a wasteland. While the city emerged at high velocity, the La Mancha's countryside stubbornly remained with scarcely five hundred meters separating the glamour of Madrid's Cinema-land from the grind of agricultural labour on its dry plains. This profound contradiction between the modern, or cosmopolitan, on one hand and the traditional, or Castilian, on the other, is one of the key factors in understanding Madrid's identity. Taking José Luis Garci's film *El crack* [The crack] (1981) as an example, the main character, detective Areta has an office on Gran Vía and in an imitation of US film noir, this is where he meets his clients, but on the sidewalk of the same street he confesses to his lover that, in his life he has only one skill and one possession: "I only know one city [Madrid] and I have an address book" (*El crack*, 1981)

Almost logically, a recently constructed metropolis, populated by characters from a farce without any kind of shared past, brings with it a further phenomenon: anonymity. Almudena Grandes said of Madrid: "Like a vulgar fairy godmother," (2018) the city gives its citizens anonymity since, "in this plebian town, which prides itself on its condition as much as, or more than, others do on their ancient and aristocratic coats of arms, no one is more than anyone else. Madrileños care very little about the origins, family-names, the distinctiveness of their fellow citizens," (Grandes, 2018). Thus, while the great plazas of the continent are flanked by opera houses, in Madrid, the so-called *género chico*, farce, and operetta tri-

umphed. As some historians have observed, particularly, Ríos Carratalá (1997), Castro de Paz and Cerdán (2011) and García Fernández (2015), these popular artforms have had a direct influence on Spanish cinema. It is difficult, if not impossible to speak about Spanish realism or even Spanish neo-realism, since even Mur Oti's most powerful melodramas of are infiltrated by farce.

The Spanish civil war violently erased any possibility of building a world capital of cinema in Spain. In Madrid, trenches dug from east to west and the narrow front-line—which didn't move for three years—divided Spain in two. This war between two parts of the same whole was foreseen with surprising prescience by that most Madrileño of all Aragonese painters, Francisco de Goya, in his work *A garrotazos* (Fight with cudg-

els,1819) on display in the capital's Prado Museum. Bunkers replaced the trees in Madrid's parks, and, in University City, the International Brigades raided the libraries to construct barricades using the books and doctoral theses produced by thinkers of the nascent Madrid school of philosophy. Francoism's first films such as *Frente de Madrid* (Madrid's frontline, Edgar Neville, 1939), tried to explain all this horror (Fernández-Hoya and Deltell Escolar, 2021) but, very rapidly, the regime decided to reconvert the city, which had seen some of the most enthusiastic celebrations of the proclamation of the Second Republic, into an imperial capital—but without an empire. Naturally, in this process, Spanish cinema experienced a series of deep ruptures, but also maintained a strong degree of continuity (Torreiro Gómez, 2016).

Image 4. Still from *Surcos* (1951)

Francoism, and the dictator himself, were aware of cinema's vital role in the construction of a new Spain. However, despite the iron control of the censors, the creation of cinema schools and unions—overseen and controlled by those in power—some cinematographers did manage to avoid producing the expected patriotic exaltations. Thus, we see cinematic depictions of Madrid as a conflicted city, and even some containing presages of the unrest that would eventually boil over in Francoist Spain. José Antonio Nieves Condes *Surcos* [Furrows] (1951), for instance, was conceived as a novel story about that miserable, brutalised city. A few years later, shortly before the first protest march by anti-Franco students, Juan Antonio Bardem shot *Muerte de un ciclista* [Death of a cyclist] (1955) in which a group of youngsters protest against the authorities and, although their activism did not address their lack of freedom, but rather academic questions, this film does give Spanish cinema its first representation of protest in the capital. In this way, even in the middle of the Francoist era, a group of dissident cinematographers emerged, and it seems the censors and the administration accepted it, tolerated it—or perhaps didn't even notice it (Heredero, 1993).

One of the themes running through all periods of Spanish cinema is Madrid's lack of decent housing. This had always been a problem for the city, but from the nineteen fifties the situation became unsustainable, and it is one issue that democracy has, so far, still failed to solve (Deltell Escolar, 2005). Even today, this theme appears in films set in the capital, including Juan Diego Botto's recent feature, *On the Fringe* (En los márgenes, 2022). In this way, over the years the fictions created by cinema show Madrileños resorting to all manner of tactics—some quite extreme—in order to secure a home: subletting, as in *Esa pareja feliz* [That Happy Couple] (Luis García Berlanga and Juan Antonio Bardem, 1951); facing down a bull in the ring, or literally setting up their home on the street, as we see in *El inquilino* [The Tenant] (José

Antonio Nieves Conde, 1957); marrying an old lady to inherit her rental agreement, as in *The Little Apartment* (El pisito, Marco Ferreri and Isidro M. Ferry, 1958); or, most dramatically of all, becoming a state executioner to obtain a grace and favour apartment as is the case in *The Executioner* (El verdugo, Luis García Berlanga, 1963). These last two films, penned by the Riojan screenwriter Rafael Azcona were key to shining a light on some of the more mad, cruel, and grotesque aspects of Spanish society of the time.

Produced at the same time as the films mentioned above, there is also a massive body of work that avoided the complexities of Spain's social, and urban realities and instead focussed on more palatable stories. While many of these films had clear propagandist aims, others were designed to be harmlessly entertaining, however, all were firmly in line with the Francoist regime. Thus, we see films such as *Murió hace quince años* [He Died Fifteen Years Ago] (Rafael Gil, 1954) presenting the city as still restless, still suffering from the open wounds of fratricidal conflict alongside other more genial titles including *¿Dónde vas Alfonso XII?* [Where Are You Going Alfonso XII?] (Luis César Amadori, 1958) or even, *Los últimos días del cuplé* [The Last Days of Cuplé] (Juan de Orduña, 1957) which demonstrate a clearly conservative-leaning view of Madrid. The intention was to stage a renewal of Madrid's former grandeur under the Bourbon restoration—a grandeur that never really existed.

It is impossible to talk about a unique strand of comedy in the Spanish cinema of the fifties and sixties. Indeed, styles changed and shifted so much it would be pointless to attempt to find a clear line uniting the available examples, however, a series of films does exist—films that were greeted with deafening applause—in which the city of Madrid takes an important role. Of these, we would highlight *Historias de la radio* [Radio Stories] (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1955), *Las chicas de la Cruz Roja* [Red Cross Girls] (Rafael J. Salvia,

1958), *Robbery at 3 O'clock* (Atraco a las tres, José María Forqué, 1962), *La ciudad no es para mí* [The city is not for me] (Pedro Lazaga, 1966), and *No desearás al vecino del quinto* [Thou shalt not covet thy fifth floor neighbour] (Tito Fernández, 1970). All of these films, with their merits—as well as their defects—show the changing city. For the most part, they present Madrid as modern and European; a depiction somewhat at odds with the reality.

Perhaps, this is why the films of Carlos Saura at the beginning of the nineteen sixties caused such a profound sensation among the censors, critics, and the tiny audiences that were able to see them. Taking the case of *The Delinquents* (Los golfos, 1960), this film was shot almost entirely on the streets of Madrid and follows a gang of youths as they goof around aimlessly in Lavapiés, Legazpi, and La Elipa, working-class neighbourhoods unsuitable as settings for either farce or European modernity. Even more devastating was Carlos Saura's *The Hunt* (La caza, 1966), in which a group of Madrileños leaves the city to hunt in the wastelands around the Espartinas Saltworks in Ciempozuelos. In contrast to the ersatz comedies of sixties Spanish cinema produced in glaring Eastmancolor, Saura's films were shot by the exceptionally skilled Luis Cuadrado in an uncompromising black and white which demanded total attention and inspired no hope in their audiences.

The portrait of Madrid during the Francoist era is also marked by the creation of two organ-

FEW CITIES HAVE A TRILOGY OF FILMS THAT SO ACCURATELY DEPICT A SPECIFIC PERIOD OF THEIR HISTORY OR DETAIL THE EXPECTATIONS THAT MOMENT AWOKE IN ITS CITIZENS THAN THAT COMPRISING THE THREE WORKS WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY GARCI SHOWING MADRID DURING SPAIN'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY [...]

isations: the national TV broadcaster, Televisión Española (TVE) and the Official School of Cinematography (Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía: EOC). The EOC—which began life as the Institute of Cinematographic Research and Experimentation (Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas: IIEC)—emerged due to the initiative of various cinema enthusiasts and as required by the regime, aimed to consolidate a national cinema industry dominated by young cinematographers aligned with Francoism. However, from its first generation of students, its general tone was more one of dissidence—as Fernando Méndez-Leite, the current director general of the Spanish Cinema Academy and former student of the EOC, confesses in an in-depth interview included in this issue. Indeed, if the point needed proving, among the school's inaugural cohort of students were none other than Juan Antonio Bardem and Luis García Berlanga.

As a result, the EOC failed to cement the Francoist vision of Madrid, rather the opposite. The school's young cinematographers set about filming on the city's streets developing a combative neorealism that was never seen in official, commercial Spanish cinema. Indeed, such work would have been banned by the censors, but the censors were not involved in the majority of practical work carried out by the students of the IIEC or the EOC. Furthermore, the EOC was important for Madrid not only in terms of the work produced within the institution itself, but also because it provided a cinematographic environment: a space to watch films, make comment, and debate.

The creation of TVE was also key to training new filmmakers and thus important for the development of Spanish cinema, as well as for the portrayal of the city of Madrid. Many of the creative people who studied at the EOC were unable to go directly into the film industry and so their careers took them via TVE. This was the case for Méndez-Leite, whom we mentioned above, as it was for both Pilar Miró and Josefina Molina and,

when these directors finally made the leap into cinema their films were set in Madrid: *El hombre de moda* [Man of Fashion] (Méndez-Leite, 1980), *El pájaro de la felicidad* [The Bird of Happiness] (Pilar Miró, 1993) and the exquisitely produced *Esquilache* (Josefina Molina, 1989). Indeed, it seems highly significant that the first two cinematographers to make their names solely as directors—that is, without combining acting and directing—Miró and Molina, had to first demonstrate their worth in TVE. It would appear that, at the time, a qualification from the EOC was considered merely decorative.

Sometimes, even the made-for-TV films produced by TVE itself were in fact master works, for instance, the medium-length film *La cabina* [The Telephone Box] (1972). Directed by Antonio Mercero, a student of the EOC, with the self-taught cinephile and cinematographer José Luis Garci as his co-writer, this film became one of the most influential in the history of Spanish audio-visual production. José Luis López Vázquez, in the lead role—an actor who came to represent the average Madrileño in the screenplays of Rafael Azcona—finds himself locked in a telephone box in the middle of Conde del Valle de Shuchil plaza in the centre of Madrid. As the film unfolds, we appreciate that Vázquez's character, a perfectly normal, innocent citizen, is being imprisoned and tortured by a powerful organisation before the avid gaze of his neighbours. Although, at the time of its broadcast, cinematographers denied the film was a critique of Francoism, today this seems obvious. Consciously or unconsciously, *La cabina* demonstrates the complexity of those last years of Franco's dictatorship.

Few cities can boast a trilogy of films so accurately depicting a specific period of their history or detailing the expectations this moment awoke in its citizens than that comprising the three works written and directed by Garci showing Madrid during Spain's transition to democracy: *Asignatura pendiente* [Unfinished Business] (1977),

Solos en la madrugada [Alone in the Dark] (1978) and *Las verdes praderas* [Green Meadows] (1979). These features, the first by this cinematographer, emerged as a clear response to a radical shift in Spanish society. Never again would anyone be trapped inside a phone box in Madrid. Garci's cinema provides a clear reflection of a universe of freedom and change that invited Madrileños to be sociable and kind. Perhaps even too much so.

IT IS NOT A MATTER OF THE *ALMODÓVARIAN* MADRID SOMEHOW BEING MORE OR LESS LIKE A SUPPOSED REAL MADRID, RATHER THAT, IN MANY INSTANCES, THE CITY AND ITS CITIZENS HAVE BEGUN IMITATING THE MADRID AND ITS CHARACTERS AS DREAMED UP BY ALMODÓVAR

In most places across the world, when a person prefers to be on their own, all they have to do is say so. In Madrid the situation is more complicated. The Madrileño screenwriter Jorge Semprún once told a conference at the Residencia de Estudiantes (a cultural centre in Madrid) that he had never managed to finish a book or a screenplay while living in Madrid, saying he was confounded by the suspicion with which you are treated if you turn down an invitation to go out for a drink, or to leave work and go to the cinema or theatre: "When I come to Madrid I know I have to assume I won't write a line since its quicker to go out to see a film than explain to a Madrileño that there's nothing wrong but, just for one evening, you want to stay in to write," (Semprún, 2003). Semprún was born and bred in Madrid's Retiro district, but his observation is shared by the Peruvian writer, Julio Ramón Ribeyro, celebrated for his depictions of Liman personalities and Parisian downpours, and who lived in Madrid during two significant periods of his life:

It's curious, but in Madrid, I lose my ability to concentrate and tend to become more extrovert. I find it difficult to be alone, to reflect, and as a consequence, maintain a regular daily schedule. The proof is in the fact that during the eight months of my first sojourn in Madrid (November 1952 to July 1953) I didn't write a single line in my notebook and spent most of my time in cafés with friends. In Paris, everything is different. It's a great school for solitude [...] In Madrid, in contrast, the boundaries between personal and social life are blurred and a person rapidly identifies with the spirit of the city (Ribeyro, 2013).

Going out, playing the fool, or meandering round the city seem as Madrileño as *patatas bravas*. Thus, so-called Madrileño comedy, and the films of the nineteen eighties represent this city as a space where solitude is impossible. Fernando Colomo, Fernando Trueba, and Emilio Martínez Lázaro all show Madrid as paradigmatically divorced from the Francoist cannon, generating a new environment that is luminous, easy going, and happy.

Yet there is only one director who has succeeded in bringing Madrid international status, and he is Pedro Almodóvar. Few Madrileños will recognise themselves in the first films of this Manchego director, but, over time, his personal and creative visions have gained momentum, first outside of Spain and then, little by little they have come to change the city itself and its inhabitants to the point where Madrileños have ended up adopting Almodóvar's creations as their own. It is not a matter of the *Almodóvarian* Madrid somehow being more or less like a supposed real Madrid, rather that, in many instances, the city and its citizens have begun imitating the Madrid and its characters as dreamed up by Almodóvar. The humour, the exaggerations, and, above all, the lung-full of freedom breathing life into his films have consolidated an image of Madrid that is far freer, and human, than this city could ever possibly be in reality. Although there are several interesting works concerning the Madrid of Almodóvar's films—for example those of Camarero Gómez (2019) and Sánchez Noriega (2017)—there is space for a study relating the importance of Almodóvar's filmography to the city of Madrid. His films, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios, 1988), *The Flower of my Secret* (La flor de mi secreto, 1995) and *Volver* (2006) are not only portraits of the city but have also helped construct it.

Image 4. Still from *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (1988)

In the nineteen nineties, three cinematographers hit the jackpot in their engaging portrayals of Spain's capital: Álex de la Iglesia, Fernando León de Aranoa, and Alejandro Amenábar. Each of these directors approached the city from a very distinctive perspective but all three achieved success with their features winning various prizes. In *The Day of the Beast*, the Basque director, de la Iglesia convinced audiences the antichrist would be born in Madrid the following Christmas eve and demonstrated how humour and horror could intermingle at the feet of the emblematic—and diabolic—Kio Towers. Amenábar's debut work, *Thesis* (*Tesis*, 1996), set in the Faculty of Information Sciences in Madrid, received the greatest number of Goya prizes ever awarded to a debut film. Everything about this film is steeped in the city, while at the same time, the grammar of the feature clearly imitates the style of a US thriller. The success of *Tesis* enabled Amenábar to go on to tackle the large-scale project *Open Your Eyes* (Abre los ojos, 1997), the opening scenes of which show the main protagonist walking down a deserted Gran Vía in the middle of Madrid. One year later, Fernando León de Aranoa, presented *Barrio* [Neighbourhood] (1998), a film about a band of bored, dissolute youths wandering Madrid's streets during a torrid summer. Here, it is almost impossible to forget the films of Ferreri, Azcona, and the other cinematographers working under Franco's dictatorship who attempted to film the tedious urbanity of this city dreaming of modernity.

More recent Spanish cinema, particularly the films of Jonás Trueba, Arantxa Echevarría and Carlos Vermut, have focussed on a different Madrid. Their films bear no comparison with those of their predecessors and each of their respective depictions of the city are very different from those of previous eras. As exemplified in *Carmen & Lola* (Carmen y Lola, Arantxa Echevarría, 2018), these cinematographers attempt an entirely novel reading of the city. The farcical and the traditional have been banished, even when the context is typically Madrileño—the city's summer street festivals, for example, as is the case in *The August Virgin* (La virgen de agosto, Jonás Trueba, 2019)—there is no trace of the influence of Edgar Neville or the Quintero brothers in their imagery. Perhaps. The most radical voice in this distancing movement is that of Carlos Vermut, who while always setting his films in recognisable places and choosing itineraries very characteristic of central Madrid, particularly the Arganzuela district, these locations seem to represent other places that have nothing to do with the traditional way in which the Spanish capital is depicted.

All cities have a powerful and intense relationship with cinema. Films and TV series not only enable us to understand their urban (Larson, 2021) and geographic (Gámir and Manuel Valdés, 2007) development, but also help us to get a genuine feeling for them (Berthier, 2021). Thus, in a city as open as Madrid it is not strange that so many of the important cinematographers who have chosen to portray it—Nieves Conde, Berlanga, Azcona, Ferreri, Bartolomé, Molina, Almodóvar and Amenábar—were not actually born there. But then, being a Madrileño is not about birth certificates, family names, or genetic inheritance. Anyone can be a Madrileño (or stop being one at will). As the magnificent actor, Manuel Alexandre, once said, Madrid is a contagious city and after a few days walking its streets, any visitor, if they wish, can become one of us. ∎

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INTRODUCTION

MADRID, A CITY IN THE SHADOWS: CINEMA AND OBSCURITY

Abstract

The city of Madrid is widely depicted in Spanish cinema. This choice has been a constant from the inception of cinema but became especially accentuated after the Second Spanish Republic. The motivations behind this are diverse: sometimes commercial, at other times social, and occasionally even political. While the model for its representation has altered with each historical period and, indeed, many directors offer different visions of the city in their different films, what is true is that farce and comedy have been the most influential genres in its visual construction. Some cinematographers such as José Antonio Nieves Conde, José Luis Garci, and Pedro Almodóvar have achieved such an intensely individualised portrait of the city that we can talk of a Madrid belonging to each one of them.

Key words

Madrid; city; Spanish cinema; farce; localization; Pedro Almodóvar.

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MADRID, UNA CIUDAD EN LA SOMBRA. CINE Y ANONIMATO

Resumen

Madrid es una ciudad muy retratada por la filmografía española. Esta elección ha sido casi constante desde los inicios del cine, pero se ha producido muy especialmente desde la Segunda República Española. Los motivos han sido diversos: a veces industriales, otros sociales e, incluso, políticos. Aunque el modelo de representación ha ido fluctuando en cada período histórico e, incluso, muchos de los directores ofrecen miradas distintas de la ciudad en sus diversos films, lo cierto es que lo sainetesco y la comedia han sido los géneros que más han influido en esta construcción visual. Algunos cineastas, como José Antonio Nieves Conde, José Luis Garci o Pedro Almodóvar, han logrado codificar en sus películas un retrato tan intenso de esta villa que se puede hablar del Madrid de cada uno de ellos.

Palabras clave

Madrid; City; Spanish cinema; Farce; Localization; Pedro Almodóvar.

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INTRODUCTION

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Referencia de este artículo

NOTEBOOK

MADRID ON FILM, CITY IN THE SHADOWS

FROM MADRID TO HELL: THE CITY IN THE FILMS OF CARLOS SAURA

MARIANNE BLOCH–ROBIN

INTRODUCTION

Although he would end up settling in the Sierra del Guadarrama just outside the Spanish capital, Carlos Saura is not identified as one of the many filmmakers who claim Madrid as their home, either by birth or by adoption, such as Edgar Neville, José Luis Garci, Pedro Almodóvar, Álex de la Iglesia and many others. Indeed, only a handful of the 43 feature films made by the Aragonese director use Madrid and its environs as their setting. And even in films such as *Cría Cuervos* (1975), *Sweet Hours* (Dulces horas, 1981) or *¡Dispara!* (1994), whose action takes place in the Spanish capital, the city does not play a central role. However, three of his feature films made in very different eras, *The Delinquents* (Los golfos, 1959), *Faster, Faster* (Deprisa, deprisa, 1980) and *Taxi* (1996), as well as his short film *La tarde del domingo* [Sunday Afternoon], which he completed as a final project while studying at the Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cine-

matográficas in 1957, place the city at the heart of the story and urban spaces are of primordial narrative and aesthetic importance. Despite the time that separates these films and the very different socio-political contexts in which they were made—from the Franco dictatorship in the late 1950s to Spain's transition to democracy in the 1980s and finally to the resurgence of the far right in democratic Spain in 1996—they can be analysed as a coherent trilogy in terms of the filmic construction of urban space, which creates an image that evolves but that also maintains certain constants over the course of 35 years. In all three films, Saura constructs a hostile urban space in which his protagonists are trapped, confined, and persecuted by an oppressive city. He thus creates a stifling, exclusionary setting that engages in a dialectical relationship with the characters. This depiction of Madrid would endure beyond the end of the dictatorship and into the 1990s, when he made the last of his films set in the Spanish capital.

Urban and peripheral spaces play an important role in these films, fulfilling an essential aesthetic and narratological function that makes them much more than mere settings for the action. Moreover, in each case these spaces reveal historical and sociological dimensions of Spain, which underwent major changes from 1959 to 1980 and again from 1980 to 1996.

In each period, Carlos Saura explores the city as a synecdoche for the situation of the country through the themes of youth, marginalisation and violence. For *The Delinquents* and *Faster, Faster*, the director adopted a clear realist approach, using documentary material for the development of the script and choosing non-professional actors, some of whom had even been delinquents in real life (Sánchez Vidal, 1988: 28, 147). On the other hand, while *Taxi* also reflects social and political issues in Spain in the mid-1990s, its expressive aesthetic and use of a cast of professional actors demonstrate an evolution in the filmmaker's creative process. It is worth highlighting Saura's collaboration on this last film with the acclaimed Italian cinematographer Vittorio Storaro, who would subsequently work with the director on a regular basis.

The focus of this study is the cinematographic construction of the physical space of Madrid in the three aforementioned films. Indeed, beyond the referential locations (Gardies, 1993: 79), which are always present because even an imaginary city is constructed based on references to reality, all the filmic elements contribute to the construction of the space, as André Gardies points out, "[b]ecause in cinema, space is neither given nor represented (except of course in the form of places), it is yet to be constructed, on both the cognitive and perceptual levels" (1993: 99). The framing, scale and duration of the shots, the camera movements, angles, lighting, film formats, and choice of black and white or colour are all visual elements that can contribute to the creation of completely different spaces using the same reference location.

This can also be done with the soundtrack: in any given location, a city filled with deafening noise will be very different from the same city when all is silent. The role of music in the construction of space is also vitally important, as it can make a significant contribution to its characterisation, with the power to open up the space represented or to infuse a place with the emotions it elicits, thereby shaping the diegetic space (Bloch-Robin, 2018: 151-176).

The mode of representation thus always contributes to the construction of the space by offering a point of view that is essentially subjective. Moreover, our understanding of space also needs to take the audience into account, as the pact established between film and spectator is based on viewers' prior knowledge and on their relationship with the story developed at each level of cinematic articulation: shot, sequence, and film as a whole (Gardies, 1993: 99). Finally, the space of the city may play an important role in the story, constituting the object of the protagonist's quest, a support for that quest, or even an antagonist to the main character.

Before delving into a more specific analysis of the spatial construction of Madrid, its relationship with the protagonists and the dialectic between centre and periphery in the three films analysed here, a brief outline of the contexts in which the films were made is offered below.[1]

THREE HISTORICAL AND CINEMATIC CONTEXTS: *THE DELINQUENTS* (1959), *FASTER, FASTER* (1981) AND *TAXI* (1995)

The Delinquents was Saura's first feature film. It was produced by Pere Portabella in 1959 and co-written with Daniel Sueiro and Mario Camus. The film tells the story of a group of petty criminals from the suburbs of Madrid who try to get ahead in life by helping one of their group to become a bullfighter. To raise the money needed to secure his future they commit crimes, each one

more dangerous and violent than the last. The bullfighting apprentice ends up failing in the bull-ring and one of the gang's members drowns in the muddy water of the Manzanares River after being "swallowed" by the sewers while trying to escape a crowd of pursuers. According to the filmmaker himself, the film was intended to be a metaphor for the struggle that he and his friends faced to make a film under the Franco regime (Brasó, 1974: 62), because, as one of the characters observes in the screenplay: "It's hard to get to be someone here."[2] Both during and after the production of *The Delinquents,* Saura faced severe difficulties. In particular, despite the film's selection to represent Spain at Cannes in 1960, the Spanish censors cut it up drastically and gave it a "2nd B" rating (a classification that placed extreme limitations on a film's release), and although it was subsequently upgraded to "2nd A", it did poorly at the box office and lasted less than a week in cinemas (Deltell, 2006: 254).

The film is above all an attempt at realism, a "transition film" (2006: 254) founded on two trends in modern cinema. On the one hand, although Saura himself would deny it (Kinder, 1993: 87-133), the influence of neorealism is evident, while on the other there are similarities to the films of the French New Wave (it is worth remembering that Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* [A bout de souf-fle, 1959] was made in the same year).

According to André Bazin, beyond its aim to offer a documentary view of the lives of the down and out, neorealism eschews the idea of editing as an illusionist practice, instead respecting the ambiguity and open meanings of reality captured in its physical continuity (1985: 49-61). In *The Delinquents*, the long descriptive shots that unify the diversity of the slums where the protagonists live (today the La Elipa neighbourhood), the depth of field of the extended shots that sweep around the Legazpi market, the traditional dance at the Salamanca cinema and the area around the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium allow viewers the free-

THE AUTHORITARIAN NATURE OF THE REGIME, WHICH CANNOT BE EXPLICITLY CONDEMNED, IS REFLECTED ON THE SCREEN THROUGH A *SPATIALISATION* OF THE IDEAS OF CONFINEMENT, AGGRESSION AND OPPRESSION THAT CHARACTERISE THE CITY

dom to discover telling details of the city in the 1960s without forcing them—as classical cinema always did[3]—to focus on the main action. On the other hand, the French New Wave, and particularly Godard's work, uses editing to reveal the filmic enunciation, exposing the constructed nature of the shots, which are juxtaposed, combined and deconstructed in a collage process. In *The Delinquents*, Saura uses an editing style that does not adhere to a coherent narrative logic. He cuts scenes before the action is over and introduces jumps in time and space that are often disconcerting for spectators accustomed to being guided by the *transparent* editing of classical cinema, forcing them to reconstruct the story in order to give meaning to the sequence.[4] Spectators thus become conscious of their position and may therefore adopt a critical view of the film, as Marvin D'Lugo points out when he suggests that the audience can thus assume a critical distance—in relation to Spanish society under Franco—that the characters lack (D'Lugo, 1991: 29-45). The authoritarian nature of the regime, which cannot be explicitly condemned, is reflected on the screen through a *spatialisation* of the ideas of confinement, aggression and oppression that characterise the city. This spatialisation is presented as a metaphor for repression. Moreover, in narratological terms, the protagonists' desire to conquer their hometown reflects Saura's determination to make a film in his home country despite the difficulties he faces in doing so. This aspiration, much like the heroes' failure in the film, led to frustra-

tion, as *The Delinquents* would be extensively altered by the censors and poorly received by the public (Bloch-Robin, 2013: 52, 54).

In the years that followed, and particularly after the production of his third feature film, *The Hunt* (La Caza, 1965), Carlos Saura would develop a personal universe distanced from realism, developing a metaphorical, symbolic style with complex stories and metalepses that allowed him at least partly to get around the censors. Twenty years later, after eighteen years subjected to constant censorship and two years after Spain's transition to democracy, in 1980 Saura sought to question the evolution of Spanish society by returning once again to the depiction of a marginalised group, using non-professional actors and with extensive prior research into their lifestyles, language and favourite music. While the characters in *The Delinquents* had a specific goal to pursue amid the constraints of Francoist society (giving the film a clear storyline despite the deconstruction of the editing), the young protagonists in *Faster, Faster* have no aim at all other than a constant quest for freedom in a nascent democracy depicted as disconnected from its past, where the values of fighting for political justice seem to have vanished. The gang of four youths, including one female character (Ángela), live on the outskirts of Madrid and commit a series of crimes, each one more dangerous than the last. The film ends with the violent deaths of all three boys, while only Ángela survives. The protagonists' ignorance of their own country's history is made patently clear in a sequence where the group visit the Cerro de los Ángeles, the site of the Sacred Heart of Jesus monument that was bombed by the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War, a major historic event about which the youths evidently know nothing (Sánchez-Biosca, 2006: 211).

The film has been identified as part of the *cine quinqui* ("delinquent film") movement that came to prominence in Spanish cinema during the transition to democracy (Ríos Carratalá, 2014). Although

the similarities between *Faster, Faster* and films of the *quinqui* trend are much more than incidental, Saura's film could be said to occupy a place of its own in this genre. Specifically, the very particular treatment of space in *Faster, Faster* distinguishes it from other *quinqui* films, especially the duration of the shots, which are quite long for an action film, although that length is compensated for by Saura's use of music (Bloch-Robin, 2018: 53) and carefully choreographed camera movements (2018: 56-86).

The film seems to reflect the disillusionment that characterised the period of the transition to democracy in Spain (Bessière, 1996: 286), which itself coincided with the post-modern disappointment over the failure of the great utopias of the 20th century, described by Jean-François Lyotard as the incredulity towards metanarratives (1979: 63). This *double* disillusionment is expressed in *Faster, Faster* in particular in the protagonists' lack of a clearly defined goal. Their stance, verging on nihilism, reflects the sense of emptiness of the post-modern world, which no longer offers ideals or ideologies to fight for, a feeling that also characterised the situation of democratic Spain. This feeling is *spatialised* on screen through the aimless wanderings of the protagonists. In aesthetic terms, the long duration of most of the shots and the frequent use of sequence shots—and music—is evocative of the road movie genre. This editing approach, highly unusual for a film in which action and speed are crucial, is handled with great mastery. At the same time, the empty spaces of Madrid's outskirts may also evoke the arid atmosphere of certain American landscapes, such as the setting in Wim Wenders' film *Paris, Texas* (1984).

From *The Delinquents* to *Faster, Faster*, from the tension of the dictatorship to the disillusionment of the transition, it is possible to identify signs of Spain's entry into the post-modern era. This moment of an absolute crisis of values and utopias that affected Western democracies seems to push Pablo and his companions irrevocably to-

wards the abyss of drugs and death, in a frenetic, nihilistic race to nowhere. Saura thus reveals the extent to which the Spanish society of the transition is heir to the society and social structures of the Franco regime, leaving marginalised youth with no way out of their situation. The film can therefore also be analysed as a tragedy that uses music in particular to foreshadow the protagonists' dismal fate as early as the title credits, with Los Chunguitos' song *"¡Ay qué dolor!"* ("Oh, the pain!") (Bloch-Robin, 2018: 215).

Fifteen years later, in *Taxi* (1996), the city of Madrid had changed again, with the return of right-wing forces to political power in Spain. Like the other two films, *Taxi* has a linear narrative structure. However, the point of view and the spaces represented on screen have evolved a great deal since *Faster, Faster*. In 1996, Carlos Saura made a film that uses certain narrative elements of the crime film genre, with a screenplay by Santiago Tabernero and an aesthetic that could be described as expressionistic. To denounce the savagery of far-right groups in Spain, Saura once again situated a romantic relationship between two youths at the heart of the film, which in some ways recalls the love story in *Faster, Faster*.

The story revolves around Paz, a young woman who discovers that her father belongs to a group of taxi drivers calling themselves "The Family", who are committed to "cleansing" the streets of Madrid by killing off the "scum" or "garbage" that they believe makes them filthy: LGBTI+ people, drug addicts, and immigrants. Despite their problems, the protagonists in *Faster, Faster* are filled with vital energy and enjoy a utopia of freedom that no longer exists in *Taxi*, where the marginalised have changed from heroes to victims. They are now the African and Latin American immigrants who arrived in Spain in the 1980s, but also people with drug addictions and members of the LGBTI+ community. In aesthetic terms, while in *Faster, Faster* Saura sought to reflect Spanish society and Madrid in the 1980s in a realistic way,

in *Taxi* he portrays the capital in the 1990s with an approach which, although anchored in reality by the constant geographical references, uses expressive (visual and auditory) strategies to evoke a kind of urban violence in a futuristic megalopolis. The film is the second of seven collaborations between Carlos Saura and Vittorio Storaro.[5] The extremely sophisticated lighting, with strong contrasts and violent colours, combines with the accentuated camera angles, the editing and the frenetic soundtrack to contribute to the film's expressionistic aesthetic, creating a strange nocturnal world that echoes the violently colourful graffiti covering the city.

The reference to Expressionist cinema is aesthetic, but it is also thematic in the film's depiction of atrocities, bearing in mind Kracauer's (1973) argument that German Expressionist cinema was a precursor to Nazism. The obscurantism, intolerance and far-right ideology of "The Family", whose members conceal their monstrous, murderous personalities, is a continuation of themes closely associated with the Expressionist aesthetic, projected onto an urban nightmare setting that becomes a kind of phantasmagorical manifestation of their criminal ideology, connecting the diabolical characters to their city. On the other hand, the film's expressionistic quality also suggests the aesthetic influence of Goya (Bloch-Robin, 2013: 109-112), an influence claimed by Saura himself:[6] the light reorganises the space, sculpting the filmed location, just like many of Goya's paintings in which the brushstrokes highlight the outlines of the figures (Bozal, 2009: 132). Goya's work has much in common with the Expressionist movements of the early 20th century, which he influenced in various ways. At the intersection of these diverse aesthetic influences, the colours and lighting in Saura's film may also evoke some of the works of the *Der Blaue Reiter* group, and more specifically, certain paintings by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc. Fascinated by colours and contrasts, both painters used bright

chromatic variations organised on opposing surfaces that give the themes represented a violent and anti-naturalist quality. From Franz Marc's blue horses to the blue motorcycle in the Saura/Storaro collaboration, along with Goyaesque distortions and Expressionist cinema, *Taxi* belongs to the expressive constant identified by Valeriano Bozal (2009: 125-134), an aesthetic that clearly aims to reflect the violence and angst that reigned in Spain in the period when the film was made.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY SPACE

While the characterisation of city spaces in his films evolved over time, the city is always depicted as a hostile place that ultimately rejects and destroys the protagonists, while also operating in the first two films in an antithetical binary with peripheral spaces. In *The Delinquents*, the urban space plays a prominent role as it is present throughout the story, alternating quite regularly with the peripheral space. Of the film's total duration of 75 minutes, 33 take place in the city centre. The film begins with one of the delinquents robbing a blind woman selling lottery tickets for the National Spanish Organization for Blind People, followed by a long digression that presents the protagonists' living conditions on the city outskirts. From this point on, the story alternates between the centre and the periphery right up until the final sequence of the bullfight.

The city centre is characterised by the omnipresence of crowds: the Legazpi market,[7] filmed with alternating high-angle and low-angle shots, is a seething pit in which the workers are slaves, while the Santiago Bernabéu stadium looms menacingly in the background. The crowd rushes to the doors of the stadium like a dehumanised mass in a Francoist version of the Roman bread and circuses. The city is also associated with high noise levels: roaring car engines, shouting and honking horns, in an occasionally unbearable saturation of the soundtrack that activates the off-screen space,

reinforcing the aggressive nature of the metropolis. Initially, the characters claim possession of Madrid to roam its streets freely, albeit only the working-class neighbourhoods. The city seems to accept the presence of the delinquents, and even to welcome them into its crowded, overpopulated, noisy and chaotic spaces (the El Rastro flea market, for example). The delinquents take advantage of the hustle and bustle to commit their petty crimes with impunity. In narrative terms, the film could be interpreted as an attempt by inhabitants of the periphery to conquer the city centre, represented symbolically by the bullring. Indeed, the members of the group all share this one goal. At the same time, the suburban space to which the delinquents belong (but with which they have a dysphoric relationship), compels them to leave it, to find a way out through Juan's dream to conquer the bullfighting world.

Following the sequence in which Paco is recognised by one of his victims, the city seems to turn decisively against the protagonists. This hostility of the space is represented by the angry crowd that chases Paco and forces him to seek refuge in the sewers, but also by the different urban aesthetic features that seem to threaten to crush him. The camera angles, the vanishing points, the long tracking shots and the deafening noises con-

Figure I. The bullring as a synecdoche for the city

Figure 2. The connecting railways and roadways separate the spaces

is the trigger for the gang's tragic fate. In aesthetic terms, the urban space seems visually distant from the peripheral district of Villaverde, where Pablo and Ángela live.[9] The city is thus presented as far away and largely inaccessible to the protagonists, who are distanced from it by means of various aesthetic elements: obstacles (paradoxically, the roads connecting the different parts of the city seem to separate the protagonists from it), reflections on glass and the frames of car windows. This space is also depicted in opposition to the same space in *The Delinquents* because it is orderly and peaceful. However, in both films, the city's famous monuments are conspicuously absent. The capital has been turned into a space without a heart, and thus, without a soul. This is a significant choice on Saura's part, as the bustle and noise of working-class Madrid was still there in the 1980s, but in the film the city is only depicted through its modern, peaceful, residential areas. It is also a space of order: the big modern buildings stand in neat rows and the cars seem to be carefully parked around a square with extremely limited traffic. These quiet spaces might belong to any city. There is no clearly identifiable site of Madrid shown on screen, except for the M-30 ring road, which is shown when the protagonists come to this borderline separating the urban space. The Madrid of *Faster, Faster* is thus indistinct; its modern redbrick buildings are all the same and the city looks as if it is populated entirely by a docile middle class. The working class no longer seems to form part of this monolithic, soulless city.

In *Taxi*, the excessively orderly, controlled city of 1980 has been transformed fifteen years later

tribute to this inversion of the urban space that literally seems to attack him. Then, the sewers, the city's intestines, absorb Paco, swallow him whole and "spit out" his corpse on the miserable periphery, now just one more piece of rubbish among the waste. Finally, in the last sequence, when the bullfight is over, with a hateful roar the crowd (used as a key element to represent the city) symbolically kill Juan with their booing, cursing and whistling, as the young man is unable to deliver the final blow to finish off the bull. In this urban space, the Madrid bullring is a synecdoche for the city itself. It serves as a symbolic centre, as although it is not actually in the centre of the city[8] its shape can be interpreted as a representation of the metropolis and its periphery, a *hypercentre* dreamed of and longed for by the heroes who fail in their attempt to conquer it.

Only five sequences in *Faster, Faster* take place in the city, amounting to 12 minutes and 44 seconds out of the 97 minutes of the film's total length. The urban space is the setting for the opening sequence, and then for the lead-up to the film's denouement with the bank robbery, which

into a wild and menacing jungle in which those nostalgic for the order of the Franco regime attempt to restore it by oppressing the marginalised, who are thus doubly victimised: once by society, which confines them to the city's dirtiest, most isolated corners, and a second time by the extreme violence of the neo-fascist groups. As was the case in *Faster, Faster*, the protagonists seem to be hemmed in by the metallic structures of the cars and the daunting reflections of the buildings

Figure 3. Reflections of the city

on their car windows. However, the lighting and the colours of the urban space, contrasting with the darkness of the night, give *Taxi* an almost fantastical, infernal dimension. The martial beats of Diego Carrasco's score take over the drums, mixing with the noise of the city to give the urban space a rhythmic quality, bringing it to life with a frantic pulse that is both visual and auditory.

In quantitative terms, *Taxi* is the film in which the urban space dominates the screen most. The historic city is shown right from the opening credits. A long, masterful tracking shot begins the film, panning down from the top of the Metropolis Building to the Grassy Building with its rotunda lit up, then to the bright lights of the Gran Vía, and finally to a taxi and the hands of the driver, her long red fingernails drumming on the door of the vehicle. This shot establishes a connection between the city—using one of its main streets, the Gran Vía, as a synecdoche—and the vehicles that fill its streets and render it threatening, with the red fingernails of Reme, a taxi driver who belongs to the neo-fascist group, hinting at the predatory savagery of the killers. The pronounced camera angle, the bright lights contrasting with the dark-

ness of the night, the car horns and the rumble of the traffic extending the first note of the film's recurring theme music, accompanied by martial drum rolls, establish an aesthetic paradigm that contributes to the homogeneity of the film as a whole.

In subsequent scenes, the spectator may recognise some of the city's most famous landmarks: the main streets of the capital, the Segovia Viaduct,[10] or Retiro Park with its Crystal Palace and the imposing monument to King Alfonso XII that looms over the pond, which serves as the nocturnal setting for the final chase scene. The location for this last scene, in which the expressive aesthetic used by Carlos Saura reinforces the grandiose, opulent architecture of the monument, could be associated with the ideology of the killers, given that, as Bernard Bessière points out, Francoism "is a kind of military regency" in which "the aristocracy and the monarchy are by no means obsolete values" (1996: 274).

The city depicted in *Taxi* exhibits some very specific qualities that construct an aesthetically and narratively cohesive space. The urban spaces in *The Delinquents* and *Faster, Faster* are not so anchored in the landscape of Madrid and its monu-

ments. While in these first two films Saura sought to reflect each period through a realist treatment, in *Taxi*, Madrid is a futuristic megalopolis that at times even resembles a science fiction world, filled with vehicles whose incessant movements contribute to the unity of the urban space. In narrative terms, the city aids and abets the killers and clearly contributes to the execution of their victims. Throughout the film, the neo-fascists are able to commit their crimes under the protection of the different elements that make up the urban space. Bridges, viaducts, monuments and even more sordid locations such as the parking lot where "The Family" meets all seem to shelter the group and facilitate their actions, which are carried out with decisive determination with the support of all these architectural elements.

MADRID'S SUBURBS AND ENVIRONS

In *The Delinquents*, the periphery where the protagonists live and with which they identify is characterised above all by its heterogeneous nature. It is an intermediate space, neither city nor country, and yet at the same time both city and country, where shantytowns coexist with condemned buildings and new constructions. The marginalised status of the protagonists is thus represented metaphorically by the poverty and heterogeneity of their homes and by the image of the vacant lot, an emblematic space that belongs neither to the city (as it contains no construction or urban development) nor to nature (as it is contaminated by the constructions that surround it). This marginalised space is presented as separate from the city, which rejects it, but it also reflects the rootlessness of the protagonists, as most of the residents of these neighbourhoods have moved here relatively recently from elsewhere.

The vacant lots are often filled with rubbish dumped there by the city, and the characters who live in the midst of this garbage are identified with it. These suburbs are thus depicted as doomed to be nothing more than receptacles for the city's waste. On the other hand, certain elements participate in the creation of a nostalgic space that evokes life in the country in this same space: a rooster crowing, the harmonious movements of Paco's mother throwing water over the ground, or a young woman passing by with a basket full of flowers, leading a girl by the hand, to the sound of variations on the nostalgic melody of the flamenco tune "*Al pie de un árbol sin fruto*". This song played on a guitar becomes associated with the peripheral urban space. Nearly always extra-diegetic, it adds a sheen of nostalgia and a touch of poetry to the depiction of the city's outskirts. It also alludes to the rural (and especially Andalusian) origins of the protagonists, and to their original space, a *topos* that is introduced through the music played in the slums.

The periphery is presented with some similar features in *Faster, Faster,* but while in the earlier film the city is the centre of attraction, in *Faster, Faster* the protagonists always return to the suburbs. It is a primordial space, which metaphorically represents the status of the protagonists, who are equated with the urban waste strewn everywhere in a place contaminated by human activity. Meca and Pablo take Ángela to a vacant lot far from the city so that Pablo can teach her how to fire a gun. During her training, a kind of confrontation is established between the heroes and the industrial and domestic waste that litters the ground, reinforced by the use of a shot/reverse-shot editing technique. The protagonists also contribute to the desecration of the non-urbanised peripheral space through their fascination with destruction and the self-destructive nature of their essentially suicidal quest, as illustrated in the three sequences in which Meca sets fire to the getaway cars they use for their robberies.

The association of the protagonists with the city's waste is made particularly clear in the death of Meca, which could be compared to Paco's death in *The Delinquents*. In this sequence, the city's des-

Figure 4. Death of Meca in the dust

ecration of nature is symbolised by a monumental factory in ruins. Meca's death in front of this factory is filmed in a wide shot that frames his body as he falls in a heap. The camera freezes on an almost abstract shot in which Meca's pale shirt and dark trousers merge with the surrounding dust into a shapeless mound, like one more scrap of waste in this decaying space. However, like the film's four protagonists themselves, the periphery is ambivalent. The delinquents are not merely the waste rejected by the big city, represented by a standardised, regulated middle-class society that pushes young people like these to the margins in the same way it disposes of its garbage, polluting nature in the process. The periphery also reflects the insouciance, vitality and freedom of these youths, like the freedom of nature itself, rebellious and strong, like the wild grasses fighting to reclaim their rights over the rubble of industrial society.

In *Taxi*, the marginalised are no longer heroes but victims, and their place is no longer in the daunting and dreaded city, which shelters their aggressors under cover of night. The nocturnal wide shot that opens the sequence of the attack on an immigrant shantytown frames the slum in the distance; a motley collection of shacks from which joyful, rhythmic Eastern music emerges under the lights of a motorway that dominates the setting. The shantytown, attacked by a gang of skinhead youths dressed in paramilitary gear and wielding baseball bats, is turned into an apocalyptic space when the attackers set it on fire under an infernal multicoloured light. The extreme violence of the attack is reinforced by the soundtrack, punctuated with the screams of the victims and the shouts of the attackers, and by the unsettling recurring drum rolls of Carrasco's score. This sequence constitutes a spatial projection of the group's discourse of hate, which, in an amalgam of ideas typical of the far right, blames immigrants, drug addicts and gays for all of Spanish society's ills.

The La Elipa bridge, which appears in *Taxi*, is in a working-class neighbourhood located outside the symbolic boundary of the M-30 ring road. It is the place where the gang of killers murder a trans person: Calero shoots her in the mouth after humiliating her. This bridge is the same one that seemed to dishearten the protagonists in *The Delinquents*, cutting them off visually from the city rather than giving them access to it. When Saura shot his first film in 1959, he set it in a shantytown and underscored its distance from the city, while in 1996, the bridge forms part of the megalopolis.

CONCLUSION

The city of Madrid as imagined and expressed on screen by Carlos Saura over the course of nearly three decades is constructed in this trilogy of films through an initial dialectic between city and suburbs, between an exclusionary city centre that bars access to the protagonists and the outskirts where the marginalised live cut off, confined and

constrained in spaces polluted by urban waste. His last representation of the city in the 1990s is of a tentacular, phantasmagorical, merciless metropolis that leaves no room for the marginalised—not even on the periphery.

Madrid is the setting for this trilogy, but it is also a protagonist in the films, playing an active role in each story. While it can host the marginalised in its urban chaos, it seems to be identified with a ruling class or a subjugated working class while participating in the ruthless elimination of marginalised groups decried by Saura. The evolution of Saura's depiction of Madrid is of course marked by visions specific to each era, concluding with the evocation of a violent and xenophobic megalopolis that seems relevant to the city today, nearly thirty years later. But beyond the return of the far right in Spain, the trilogy evokes other extremely topical issues, such as pollution and the destruction of nature, which is linked to the forced displacement and annihilation of the city's most disadvantaged populations. ∎

NOTES

1   This outline is partly an update of elements taken from the book *Madrid dans le cinéma de Carlos Saura* (Bloch-Robin, 2013).

2   Original Spanish: *"Es difícil llegar a ser alguien aquí."* This line from the screenplay to *The Delinquents* was removed by the censors. Readers of the Directorate General of Cinematography. Readers' Report, 9 September 1959, on the second version of the script submitted to the censorship board. Ref. Archives C/36.4807. Alcalá de Henares, Ministry of Culture.

3   Luis Deltell stresses the point that when Saura made *The Delinquents*, he already had a highly developed theoretical understanding of cinema: "The storyboarding and subsequent editing of *The Delinquents* is thoroughly modern, and quite distinct from any American or Soviet classical approach. Carlos Saura had studied the Soviet school of montage. The professor who delivered the classes was Carlos Serrano de

Osma, a great lover of Russian silent film. However, Saura flatly refused to accept the Soviet theories of editing, or of course to adopt the approach of classical Hollywood cinematic language" (2006: 263).

4   It is difficult to distinguish between the original cuts made to the film and the 11 minutes of cuts made by the censors after the film's screening at Cannes.

5   For *Flamenco* (1995), *Taxi* (1996), *Tango* (1998), *Goya* (1999), *Io don Giovanni* (2009), *Flamenco, flamenco* (2010) and *The King of All the World* (El rey de todo el mundo, 2020).

6   Goya has been a constant aesthetic influence on Carlos Saura's work. In 1952, the filmmaker shot Madrid from San Isidro Park with the intention of making a montage using images from Goya's *The Meadow of San Isidro* (1788) and *A Pilgrimage to San Isidro* (1820-1823). Throughout his filmography he references Goya in numerous films, and in 1999 he directed *Goya in Bordeaux* (Goya en Burdeos), a biopic on the painter that evokes and represents his work in many different ways.

7   The Legazpi market was one of the starting points for the project. Saura wanted to direct a documentary feature film presenting the reality of Madrid and Daniel Sueiro had written several news reports on this wholesale market.

8   The bullring is represented on screen by two locations: the Ciudad Lineal bullring in the city's 15th district in east Madrid, and the bullring that the bullfighting apprentice longs to enter, which appears at the end of the film. The final sequence was supposed to be shot at the Vista Alegre bullring in Carabanchel, but in the end it was filmed at the Colmenar Viejo bullring.

9   Villaverde was the last town to be annexed by the city of Madrid, in 1954. The location is thus an urban space that was once peripheral, but that by 1980 had been part of the city for more than 25 years.

10   The Segovia Viaduct, nicknamed the *"Puente de los suicidas"* ("Bridge of Suicides"), located just outside Madrid's old centre, serves as the setting for a key sequence in the film. At night, "The Family" push a drug addict off the viaduct. The wide shot that shows the body falling from the structure from a sharp low

angle clearly identifies the viaduct, whose imposing concrete arches are lit up in the darkness of the city with contrasting lights.

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FROM MADRID TO HELL: THE CITY IN THE FILMS OF CARLOS SAURA

Abstract

Although he could not be called a Madrid filmmaker, Carlos Saura directed three films set in the city that problematise the Spanish capital as a hostile space and reflect its evolution over different periods. *The Delinquents* (Los golfos, 1959), *Faster, Faster* (Deprisa, deprisa, 1980) and *Taxi* (1996) all deal with the common theme of marginalisation and violence in Madrid, used as a synecdoche for Spanish society as a whole under the Franco regime, during Spain's transition to democracy, and in the crisis of the 1990s. This article explores the aesthetic and narrative roles of Madrid in these three films. The first two films establish a dialectic between the city and an urban periphery identified with the protagonists, who are rejected by the city centre and equated with urban waste, while the third film depicts a phantasmagorical city that has no room for the marginalised, who are persecuted and annihilated.

Key words

Carlos Saura; Madrid; Filmic Space; City and Film; *The Delinquents*; *Faster, Faster*; *Taxi*.

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DE MADRID AL INFIERNO: LA CIUDAD EN EL CINE DE CARLOS SAURA

Resumen

Carlos Saura, a pesar de no ser un director que se puede calificar de madrileño, dirigió tres películas ambientadas en la ciudad de Madrid que problematizan la capital española como espacio hostil y reflejan su evolución en distintas épocas. *Los golfos* (1959), *Deprisa deprisa* (1980) y *Taxi* (1996) tratan un tema común, la marginalidad y la violencia en la capital del país, sinécdoque de la sociedad española en su conjunto durante el franquismo, en la transición española y en la crisis de los años noventa. En este artículo, nos interesamos por los papeles estéticos y narrativos del espacio madrileño en las tres películas. Los dos primeros *opus* establecen una dialéctica entre la urbe y sus alrededores a los que se identifican los protagonistas rechazados por el centro y asimilados a los deshechos, mientras que la tercera película modela una ciudad fantasmagórica que no deja ningún resquicio a la marginalidad, que persigue y aniquila.

Palabras clave

Carlos Saura; Madrid; espacio cinematográfico; ciudad en el cine; *Los golfos; Deprisa, deprisa; Taxi.*

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THE DEPICTION OF MADRID AT WAR IN *FRENTE DE MADRID*

JAVIER SÁNCHEZ ZAPATERO
MARÍA MARCOS RAMOS

1. CINEMA AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

It is obvious that immediately after the Spanish Civil War, cinema became a powerful tool at the service of the Franco regime's propaganda machine, as a means of disseminating "ideas that legitimised its victory and justified the repression that would follow it" (Pérez Bowie, 2004: 24). Controlled by a strict system of censorship and by interventionist mechanisms that allowed Spain's political authorities to condition film production in a context of economic autarky, the films made at the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s were characterised by their simplistic parroting of the official discourse of the new regime.[1]

Within the ideological uniformity of the productions of this period, critics have tended to identify a range of variants, notably including films "with a military inspiration, relating heroic deeds that defined the [Francoist] uprising and victory of the immediately preceding years" (Sánchez-Biosca, 2006: 114). As Jean-Claude Seguin (1996: 33) has pointed out, the first to make a film of this kind about the Spanish Civil War was Edgar Neville, who directed *Frente de Madrid* [The Madrid Front] (1939). Neville's film was the first of a genre that would come to be known as *cine de cruzada* ("crusade cinema"), which would develop in the following months with *El crucero de Baleares* [The Balearic Cruiser] (Enrique del Campo, 1940), *The Siege of the Alcazar* (L'Assedio dell'Alcazar, Augusto Genina, 1940), *Boda en el infierno* [Wedding in Hell] (Antonio Román, 1942), *Rojo y negro* [Red and Black] (Carlos Arévalo, 1942), and *Raza* [Race] (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1942).

However, despite its title and the inclusion of various scenes in the trenches that had surrounded Madrid since the autumn of 1936, *Frente de Madrid*, an adaptation of a short story of the same name written by Neville himself,[2] can only be described as a war film in the loosest sense of the term, referring to films that merely address

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PAGE 1: MORE THAN 80 YEARS AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FRANCO'S DICTATORSHIP, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, CINEMA BECAME A POWERFUL TOOL AT THE SERVICE OF FRANCOIST PROPAGANDA

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the impact of war on society without necessarily conforming to a "repetitive" formal structure (Altman, 2000: 48) marked by the same clichés. No battles are shown in the film, nor are there any military action or adventure scenes; instead, the war is present in the tale of espionage that underpins the film, in which a Francoist soldier has to cross enemy lines to make contact with Nationalist "fifth columnists" operating in Madrid. It is true that the whole mise-en-scène is conditioned by the war, as shots recreating the military atmosphere in which the Nationalist combatants live are combined with others showing the transformation experienced by Madrid society during the conflict. This duality reflects the peculiar reality, practically unheard-of in military history up to that time, of life in Madrid during the war, when it was simultaneously a battlefront and a rearguard: on the one hand, there was fighting on the outskirts of the city, which remained under siege practically throughout the war, with trenches in neighbourhoods such as Ciudad Universitaria, the Casa de Campo park and the slums in the south of the city; on the other, holding out in the city centre, amid the brutal bombing campaigns carried out by one faction and the fierce, repressive violence perpetrated by the other against its enemies, was a society split in two that had to carry on in conditions of cold, hunger, deprivation and fear.

In addition to Neville's personal knowledge of what had happened in Madrid during the war,[3] the choice of the city as the setting for his film seems to have been motivated by "an attempt by the Franco regime to reclaim the city in more than a strictly military sense […]; to reconquer it, to take it back from the working classes who had been occupying the whole city since 1931" (Castillo, 2016: 99). Indeed, throughout the Civil War, while the Republicans were promoting the myth of the "Madrid of the resistance" and the assertion that *No pasarán* ("They shall not pass"), the Francoists were constructing an image of the Spanish capital as a city in need of rescue, for which the priority should be to extirpate all its evils, exemplified by the "Red Terror" that had been ravaging the city since the summer of 1936. In an article published in 1937 in the magazine *Vértice*, simply titled "Madrid", Neville himself argued that the Francoists were fighting not *against* but *for* the capital, to defend it against those who had invaded it with "their rancour and their envy". He went as far as to suggest that the city had been "turned into the dunghill of the world's carrion" and even that he would have "rather died than see Madrid in the power of this rabble" (Tranche, 2007: 103-104). In consonance with Neville's article, the film, like the story on which it was based, could be interpreted as yet another example "of the need that the Francoists had not only to defeat the [Republican] defence of Madrid, but to erase the memory of the city of the resistance" (Gómez Bravo, 2018: 11). Indeed, the depiction of "Red Madrid" as a vulgar, violent and chaotic place is present in other films of the period, such as *Rojo y negro* and *Boda en el infierno*, both of which, despite their very different storylines, include at one point in the story the detention of different female characters in one of the notorious *checas* set up around the city by the Republicans in the first months of the war as instruments of repression. Beyond the ideological dimension, in Neville's work the use of the physical and human space of Madrid should be understood in terms of the lifelong connection he had with the city, and especially with the aristocratic locations frequented by the upper classes,

which he viewed as basic features of the traditional, *costumbrista* essence of the Spanish capital that the Republicans sought to destroy.

2. *FRENTE DE MADRID*: PHYSICAL AND HUMAN SPACES

Frente de Madrid was the product of filmmaking partnership agreements signed between the Franco and Mussolini regimes[4] that resulted in the production of "twenty-four feature films between 1938 and 1943 [...] which for Spain represented 15% of its film production" (Álvarez Rodrigo, 2022: 234). Of these 24 productions, two others were also directed by Neville, who spent long periods in Italy from 1939 to 1941: *Santa Rogelia* [Saint Rogelia] (1939) and *La muchacha de Moscú* [The Girl from Moscow] (1941).[5] Although these agreements often simply meant that the films were shot in Italy (usually at Cinecittá studios) and immediately dubbed into Spanish and Italian, in some cases versions in both languages were filmed, and sometimes different actors were even used for each version, as was the case for *Frente de Madrid*.[6] The fact that the film was the product of this international partnership agreement is particularly significant, as on the one hand it gave Neville access to resources and infrastructures that were unavailable in Spain at that time, while on the other, it helps explain why a film whose title underscores its connection to Madrid contains barely any images of the city, except for a few shots, obviously from documentary footage, showing easily recognisable sites such as the Telefónica Building and the trenches and hollowed-out buildings in the Ciudad Universitaria neighbourhood.[7] There are also a few shots filmed on sets with a dilapidated appearance, showing rubbish in the streets, graffiti on the walls and long queues of people outside local businesses.

The near-total absence of points of reference makes the depiction of the city more social than geographical, perfectly reflecting the myth of Red Madrid present in all Francoist rhetoric about the Civil War. In this sense, the depiction of the city in *Frente de Madrid* is based on the conviction that during the war the Spanish capital encapsulated "the animosity towards certain ideas, towards a particular political system and model for society" (Castillo, 2016: 89), as it symbolised an enemy that the Franco regime interpreted in absolutely denigrating terms through an ideological operation based on "dehumanising the Red [...] [and presenting him as] a genuine subhuman with a human appearance, a being incapable of recognising his God, his nation (as an anti-Spaniard), or his family" (Márquez, 2006: 86-87). The whole film reinforces this interpretation—which is already present in the story on which it is based, in which the "legions of scoundrels" who made up the Republican faction stand in opposition against the "common sense" (Neville, 2013: 44) that guided Franco's rebels—through its juxtaposition in the development of the story of two clearly differentiated spaces: one identified with the "combatant city [...] that took up arms to defend the Republic against the rebel siege" and the other with the "clandestine city", made up of those Madrid residents who, as "opponents of the Republic [...], found themselves in enemy territory and [...] decided to contribute to the victory of their fellow Nationalists" (Cervera, 2006: 24).

Obviously, the representation of these two spaces was in keeping with the propagandistic aims of the film, which portrays Republicans as brutal, almost diabolical characters—with a few limited exceptions—and the Francoists as heroes capable of sacrificing everything to defend what were considered the traditional values of Spain. The *combatant city* and the *clandestine city* thus acquire different values in the film, as while the first is intended to convey the chaotic, violent and "anti-Spanish" attitude of the Republicans, the second attempts to legitimise the rebellion of the Nationalists as a way of *saving* the country and

restoring the *national essence* that the Republicans had tried to usurp.

The story begins two days before the beginning of the Civil War—specifically, 16 July 1936, as indicated by a detail shot of a calendar—when a young couple, Carmen and Alfredo (Javier in the Spanish version of the film and in the original story), are finalising the preparations for their wedding. The set for the opening scene makes clear the social status of the protagonists, who are shown elegantly dressed in a large living room adorned with luxury objects and opulent furniture, notably featuring a piano. This setting contrasts with the scene that Alfredo finds when he goes outside to get his car to drive to Salamanca, as when he steps out into the street, he encounters a dirty, shabbily dressed, bad-tempered man roughly scolding a child. When Alfredo reprimands him, the man replies between clenched teeth: "that's going to change very soon." The man's remark hints at the atmosphere of social tension of that period and foreshadows one of the ideological slogans that in time would become an essential feature of the Francoist interpretation of the war: that the Republicans had not acted to defend their convictions or political legitimacy, but simply to express the *social resentment* that had built up over decades of submission. The first sequence thus exposes the simplistic dualism of the film, analogous to that of the story on which it was based, whereby the narrator describes the events in Spain from 1936 to 1939 not as "a civil war or a political war, [but as] a case of justice and thieves" who confronted "the decent people of a country that rose up against the killers" (Neville, 2013: 158).

The Nationalist uprising and the subsequent outbreak of the Civil War take Alfredo by surprise in Salamanca, and he attempts to return to Madrid to be reunited with Carmen. A squadron of rebel soldiers warn him that there are roadblocks on the highway to the city because it is still controlled by the Republicans, whom they refer to systematically as "Reds". The troubled Alfredo wonders whether "they haven't already purged the city." Obviously, the use of a word such as "*purgar*" ("purge"), whose first dictionary definition is "to clean or purify something, removing the unnecessary, unsuitable or superfluous" (Real Academia Española, def. 1), is a deliberate choice, as it reflects the interpretation of the war that Neville seeks to convey, based on the premise of the Francoists' moral superiority over their enemies, and consequently, the legitimate nature of their uprising, which was necessary to overthrow those who in the story are presented as "bad people", characterised by their extreme degree of "moral turpitude" (Neville, 2013: 44).

The simplistic distinction between one faction and the other also acquires social and aesthetic dimensions, as evidenced in the original story with its reference to the Republicans in control of the Spanish capital as "backstreet scum" and even as people "so ugly [that] they don't look like they could be from Madrid" (Neville, 2013: 24, 43). The film adopts this same simple characterisation, as the first scenes depicting the situation in Madrid are intended as a condemnation of the brutality of the militiamen, who are shown destroying religious images and unabashedly declaring their intention to "annihilate the enemies of the revolution". This opening sequence also depicts a confederal militia forcing their way into Carmen's house. In contrast to the propriety and elegant attire of Carmen and her family, the militiamen look dirty and dishevelled, and their behaviour is rude and uncouth: using foul language, breaking an opulent vase, yanking open the drawers of the dressers, harassing Carmen with lewd remarks, hitting her father, etc. To underscore their intellectual and cultural inferiority, one of them is shown banging randomly at the keys of the piano that Alberto and Carmen were shown playing so skilfully at the beginning of the film.

The sequence ends with Carmen and her father being arrested and taken to a *checa*, whe-

re they will be subjected to so-called "justice by consensus" (Cervera, 2006: 60), an illegitimate, unregulated process that condemned numerous Madrid residents to imprison or even execution, in many cases on mere suspicion of being sympathisers with the enemy, for failing to express their support for the Republican faction with sufficient enthusiasm, for having religious convictions, or simply because somebody had a personal grudge against them.[8] The random nature of these prosecutions is reflected in the fact that one of the men in charge of the *checa*—curiously, the same man Alfredo had confronted at the beginning of the film—approaches Carmen's father, announces "this case is clear to me," and orders his immediate execution. In addition to the so-called *paseos* (literally, "walks", referring to victims being taken out on a walk to the place of their execution, which are represented euphemistically in this scene's dialogue and in a few subsequent shots of a park with the sound of gunfire off-screen), another of the forms of repression used by the political and trade union committees that took control of Republican Madrid in the first months of the war was imprisonment, represented in a scene showing Carmen sharing a cell with two other women. She will not spend much time in prison, however, as a neighbour, Fabricio, will be instrumental in securing her release. Contradicting the monolithic message of Francoist rhetoric, Fabricio is a Republican who is not portrayed as a diabolical figure; instead, he is represented positively as a man who puts himself at risk to save Carmen, explaining that he has supported the Republican cause in the interests of "trying to improve the living conditions of the disadvantaged, not to end up murdering his fellow citizens" and explicitly accusing his fellow Republicans of murdering "innocents".

In addition to clearly and simplistically underscoring the main points of the film's propagandistic message, the opening sequences of *Frente de Madrid* reveal that the destruction of Madrid, understood more in human terms than in strictly

ALFREDO AND CARMEN SERVE TO CONNECT THE DIFFERENT SPACES OF THE *CLANDESTINE CITY* AND THE *COMBATANT CITY* IN WHICH THE ACTION UNFOLDS

physical terms, is one of its central themes. Neville seems to be interested in tracking the process whereby the pleasant world shown in the opening scene, with a happy family celebrating the imminent wedding of the protagonists, is torn to shreds by the war—or more precisely, by the Republicans' actions in that war. While Alfredo is trapped in another part of the country, Carmen's family suffers the horrors of the repression: prison for her, the *paseo* for her father, and confinement for her brother, who is forced to hide in his house to avoid capture by the Republican militias. The film's mise-en-scène emphasises this change, as there is a progressive shift towards increasingly dimmer lighting, which becomes almost gloomy in some cases. The actor's performances, especially Conchita Montes's portrayal of Carmen, also underscores the transformation, as her character charts the journey from cheerful innocence to suffering. The symbolic importance of Carmen, whose fate seems to represent that of the whole city, has led Fernández-Hoya and Deltell Escolar to suggest that "*Frente de Madrid* revisits the notion of the woman as allegory for the earth, [...] [humanising] the events that took place in Madrid and [...] [expressing them] emotionally through Carmen" (2021: 41).

As the main characters, Alfredo and Carmen serve to connect the different spaces of the *clandestine city* and the *combatant city* in which the action unfolds. Indeed, the storyline, which draws heavily on the patterns of the spy film and the romantic drama, revolves around the vicissitudes faced by the couple in their efforts to be reunited in a hostile context of war after their initial se-

paration. Enlisting with the rebel forces, Alfredo experiences life on the front, presented from an idealised perspective with images conveying the camaraderie of the soldiers, who laugh and sing[9] while manning the trenches of Madrid's Ciudad Universitaria neighbourhood. This enthusiastic exultation of the rebels is complemented by evidence of Alfredo's bravery when he offers himself for a mission that will require him to cross enemy lines and return to Madrid undercover in order to contact the Nationalist sympathisers who are conspiring against the Republic from within. In this way, the Francoist rhetoric—and especially the propaganda promoted by the Falangists—presents the idea that "courage and heroism defined the male identity: the camaraderie of the trenches formed the basis of all relationships between men" (Vincent, 2016: 137). However, despite risking his life for the Francoist cause, Alfredo never identifies fully with the "brave and strong" men who "stood undaunted in the face of danger and [who were] governed by reason and determination instead of their feelings" (Vincent, 2006: 138), as it is evident that the reason behind his decision to return to Madrid is not his warrior's zeal or his commitment to Nationalist ideals but his desire to see Carmen again. Throughout the film he is depicted as a carefree individual for whom the war is almost a game and the only thing that really matters is love.

The way Alfredo sneaks into the city is extremely revealing in terms of the ideological discourse the film seeks to convey, and particularly its intention to denigrate the Republicans. First of all, he has to find his way through a series of sewers and tunnels to get inside the city, which is thus graphically represented as a kind of *underworld* with obvious scatological connotations.[10] Secondly, the presence of a whole network of individuals able to conceal their true identities and their affiliation with the Falange, like the ones who help him get from one side of the trenches to the other in order to carry out his mission, clearly betrays

an effort to call the strategic ability and intellectual capacity of the Republicans into question. And equally revealing is the way Alfredo dresses in order to pass unnoticed in Red Madrid, wearing a filthy, stain-ridden militia uniform.

Once inside the city, Alfredo carries out his two objectives. In accordance with his own priorities, he goes to Carmen's home first. A wide shot shows the house, which has changed little since the beginning of the film, apart from some rubbish strewn around it and a poster that reads: "It is better to kill a hundred innocent people than to save one Fascist" (a slogan which, although it has some basis in reality,[11] was never actually used in Republican propaganda, and which thus seems intended merely to stress the idea of the moral bankruptcy of the "Reds"). Apart from the obvious desire to conceal any signs of the destruction that the Francoists wreaked on the city with their repeated bombing raids (thereby promoting an interpretation of the war in which all violent acts are attributed to the Republicans), the absence of artillery damage on the building is historically accurate, as the Salamanca district, the location of the street where Carmen lives (Calle de Serrano), suffered very few attacks during the war, not only because it was an upper-class residential neighbourhood that was home to many Francoist sympathisers, but also because it was home to numerous embassies (Cervera, 2006). The location of Carmen's home in this district may also reflect Neville's attempt to identify the traditional, pure Spanish essence of Madrid with neighbourhoods in the city centre historically associated with the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, in opposition to the periphery, which was home to the masses of workers who had moved to the city in the early 20th century. The film thus conveys the idea that the Francoists' desire to take back the city was not just a strategic objective in the war but the consequence of a process that had begun with the rise of the Second Spanish Republic, when "Madrid had turned into a city taken over by the masses,

by lower classes who were calling for a series of reforms that clashed with the values and lifestyles that had defined Spanish society up until that time" (Castillo, 2016: 18).

After reuniting with Carmen, Alfredo comes into contact with a member of the Falange in hiding in Madrid who has managed to infiltrate the Republican hierarchy for the purposes of spying and carrying out sabotage. The film thus introduces the idea of the "Fifth Column", a recurring trope in Francoist mythology related to wartime Madrid, represented with the usual hero and martyr stereotypes. This time, the clandestine resistance is presented in the form of a secret association that attempts to send information on the strategic plans of the "Reds" to the rebels stationed at the front surrounding the city. In Alfredo's various encounters with the members of the clandestine Falangist organisation that he must collaborate with to complete his mission, we can find a number of the essential elements of the anti-Republican underground in Madrid. Notable among these is the radio, which "played a role of huge importance" (Cervera, 2006: 148) because it facilitated communication of information about developments in the war that would otherwise have been impossible to discover in a Madrid under siege and subjected to Republican censorship. The conversations between the members of the organisation—a fictional version of the "clandestine Falange" that operated during the war—underscore the same values of manliness and sacrifice evident in the portrayal of the soldiers in the trenches, as the various characters spur one another on with calls to be brave and assurances that they must not hesitate to give their lives for a good cause.

Carmen expresses herself in similar terms, as after seeing the impact of the war on her family she also decides to collaborate with the secret organisation, recognising the need to "make sacrifices" and telling Alfredo that although they may be on opposite sides of the front, they are "fighting for the same cause". In this way, the female pro-

tagonist transcends the passive, submissive role traditionally assigned to the woman, reflecting how "in the complex ideological model of early Francoism [...] the only gender equality permitted [was] that of submission and political activism at the service of the Fatherland" (Fernández-Hoya & Deltell Escolar, 2021: 42). Alfredo and Carmen thus represent the same values (although expressed with more conviction in Carmen's case because, unlike Alfredo, she never gives her romantic feelings precedence over the cause), thereby confirming that the requirements of sacrifice and self-denial traditionally associated with the woman also served for the construction of male role models in the context of military conflict.

THE FEMALE PROTAGONIST TRANSCENDS THE PASSIVE, SUBMISSIVE ROLE TRADITIONALLY ASSIGNED TO THE WOMAN, REFLECTING HOW "IN THE COMPLEX IDEOLOGICAL MODEL OF EARLY FRANCOISM […] THE ONLY GENDER EQUALITY PERMITTED [WAS] THAT OF SUBMISSION AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM AT THE SERVICE OF THE FATHERLAND"

In the course of their clandestine activities, Alfredo and Carmen have to meet each other in a bar called the Shang-Hay, where she, disguised as a cigarette seller, acts as a liaison to bring him together with a Francoist spy who will provide him with information on the Republican army's strategic plans. As the epitome of Red Madrid, and by extension of Republican Spain, the place where they meet is dark, grimy and crowded, with a raucous atmosphere that turns to absolute chaos when a wild brawl breaks out in which everyone seems to be fighting against one another. The women in the bar are depicted as the antithesis of the submissive and demure Francoist female; in fact, many of them are portrayed as prostitu-

tes. A notable aspect of the men is the diversity of nationalities represented (with reference to the brawl, one character remarks that "an African and a Chinese man were fighting"), reflecting Neville's intention to promote the idea that wartime Madrid was a foreign city at the mercy of international powers—during the war, the term *Madridgrado* ("Madridgrad") became popular among the rebels—and contrary to true Spanish values. The fact that the bar is given a name with cosmopolitan connotations (*Shang-Hay*, as in Shanghai) is far from incidental, as it is worth noting that after the war bars and cafés appeared all over Spain with patriotic names such as *Nacional* or even *España*.

After Alfredo escapes Madrid and brings the information he obtained to his superiors, he discovers (thanks to the radio communication system that keeps the rebels in contact with the fifth column inside the city) that Carmen's activities have been discovered and a group of militia men are on their way to capture her. Determined to save her (and proving that love is more important to him than any political cause), Alfredo crosses the trenches in an attempt to get back into Madrid. He is spotted by the Republican soldiers guarding the front, and after an exchange of gunfire he falls, mortally wounded, beside another man in the "no man's land" between the respective trenches of the two factions. He begins talking to the other wounded man, and they discover that although they have been fighting on opposite sides, they both used to live in the centre of Madrid—one on Calle Cádiz and the other on Calle Trujillos, where Neville himself had once lived—and that they had both unknowingly crossed paths several times before the war. Both in the final throes of death, they end up attending to one another's wounds, leaving aside their ideological differences. The film thus offers an image of reconciliation that is quite rare in the simplistically hostile rhetoric of early Francoism. It is an image already present in the story on which the film was based, which con-

cludes with a call for a future "union of Spaniards, the good and noble ones on both sides, against the villains and killers, from wherever they may come" (Neville, 2013: 81). This spirit of reconciliation can also be found in the scenes showing day-to-day life in the trenches, when soldiers on either side of the front shout out to one another, sharing their common interests, discovering their connections in life before the war, and in short, revealing that what unites them outweighs what separates them.

However, to assuage any doubts as to the suitability of the film as Francoist propaganda, the film does not end with the scene of Alfredo and the Republican soldier. After Alfredo dies with Carmen's name on his lips, superimposed over a shot of his dead body are images of Madrid after it has been taken by the Francoists—aeroplanes flying over the Puerta del Sol and the Telefónica Building, soldiers in formation, crowds making the Fascist salute, etc.—that dissolve into a shot of Alfredo and Carmen side by side with a Spanish flag flying in the background while a military song plays. This final shot of the protagonists, depicted as martyrs who have achieved the reunion in heaven that they were denied on Earth, conveys the idea that their deaths have not been in vain, as their efforts helped rescue Madrid from the *claws of the Red Terror*.[12]

3. NOSTALGIA AND PROPAGANDA

The analysis offered in this article exposes an ambivalence in *Frente de Madrid*, which conforms to the aim of legitimising the new regime that characterises all Francoist propaganda while at the same time offering small signs of dissent like those identified above, which could be interpreted as the result of Neville's ambiguous political position and attitude towards Franco, as previously explored by authors such as Burguera (1999), Ríos Carratalá (2007) and Torreiro (2016). Despite its obvious subjectivity, the realistic, documented re-

presentation of the physical and human space of Madrid is central to conveying this message, as it allows the filmmaker to establish a simple opposition between the values of the Republican and Nationalist factions and to uphold the "Red Madrid" myth that was so popular in the first years of the Franco regime. However, the choice of setting seems to serve a function that transcends the strictly ideological, as Neville made use of Madrid as a setting in many of his films, such as *The Tower of the Seven Hunchbacks* (La torre de los siete jorobados, 1945), *Carnival Sunday* (Domingo de carnaval, 1945), *The Crime of Bordadores Street* (El crimen de la calle Bordadores, 1946), *El último caballo* [The Last Horse] (1950), *El baile* [The Dance] (1959) and *Mi calle* [My Street] (1960). The interpretation of the Spanish Civil War offered by the film should therefore not be understood solely in political terms, as it is also—and mainly—a social interpretation, given that the director is also interested in taking a nostalgic look at the traditional, aristocratic, elegant and enlightened atmosphere to which he belonged and which he identified as the essence of Madrid, which the Republicans had threatened to usurp during the war. Madrid in *Frente de Madrid* is thus more than a mere backdrop to the story; it is a symbol used with the aim of erasing the signs of the myth of Republican resistance, conveying the values of the new regime, and expressing Neville's love for his hometown.

FRENTE DE MADRID CONFORMS TO THE AIM OF LEGITIMISING THE NEW REGIME THAT CHARACTERISES ALL FRANCOIST PROPAGANDA WHILE AT THE SAME TIME OFFERING SMALL SIGNS OF DISSENT

NOTES

1   For an exploration of the propaganda dimension in cinema in the first years of the Franco regime, and particularly the importance of film depictions of war, see Monterde (1995), Pérez Bowie (2004), and Sánchez-Biosca (2006).

2   The story first appeared in 1941 in the compilation *Frente de Madrid*, which also includes the war stories "La calle Mayor" ["Main Street"], "F.A.I.", "Las muchachas de Brunete" ["The Girls from Brunete"] and "Don Pedro Hambre". Some of these stories had been previously published in the Falangist magazine *Vértice*.

3   Neville was stationed intermittently on the front from May 1937 to January 1938, working for the Radio and Propaganda division. According to Hernández Francés León and Justo Álvarez (2022: 275), his activities included installing loudspeakers in the trenches, preparing and delivering speeches, taking photographs, and accompanying foreign journalists to the front. Neville's experience at the front—reconstructed by Burguera (1999) and Ríos Carratalá (2007) and rounded out with the discovery of his war journal, "Los que teníamos muchas moscas", written in 1937 and as yet unpublished—provided essential material for the stories "Frente de Madrid" and "F.A.I.", as well as the documentary *Ciudad Universitaria* (1938), a propaganda film made for the National Department of Cinematography.

4   The Franco regime established international agreements with Germany and Italy. Specifically, in addition to the co-production of a series of films, the agreements signed with the Italian fascist government included reciprocal exchanges of actors, directors and film crew. As Cabrerizo explains, these agreements entailed a financial investment by the Italians, who covered nearly all production costs in return for the protection of the distribution rights to their films in Spain and Hispanic America, giving them advantages over other national film industries (2004: 122-124).

5   According to Ríos Carratalá (2007: 259-261), Neville's time in Italy was made possible thanks to the support of the producer Renato Bassoli and (especially) Spa-

nish Minister of Propaganda Dionisio Ridruejo, who facilitated the translation and subsequent publication of some of his short stories—including "Frente de Madrid"—in the Italian magazine *Nuova Antología. Rivista di scienze, lettere e arti*.

6   While in the Spanish version the male lead was played by Rafael Rivelles, in the Italian version, which was released under the title *Carmen fra i rossi* [Carmen Among the Reds], the actor was Fosco Giachetti. According to Monguilot-Benzal (2017: 155-156) and Ríos Carratalá (2007: 262-266), the distribution of the film was complemented by the appearance of two other versions: a successful German version based on the Italian one, released in 1942 as *In der roten hölle* [In the Red Hell], and another Spanish version released after the original version that premiered in March 1940 in Madrid, modified by the censors, who eliminated certain scenes and dialogues.

7   Both these locations played an important role in the Spanish Civil War and in the subsequent mythical narrative constructed around it by the Francoists. The Telefónica Building, which was home to the Republicans' main communications centre, suffered severe damage in the bombing raids, due to both its height and its proximity to Cerro de Garabitas in Casa de Campo Park, where Francoist troops were stationed. It was located on the Gran Vía, the main boulevard that came to be known as the "Avenue of the Howitzers" or the "Avenue of the Fifteen and a Half" (an allusion to the calibre of the bombs used) because it was subjected to so much bombing. In the case of Ciudad Universitaria, the project to rebuild the parts of this neighbourhood destroyed in the war entailed a transformation of its significance, as it became a Francoist "place of memory" whose regenerative force was constructed in opposition to the Republican zeal to annihilate.

8   According to Oviedo Silva, "these prosecutions are a recognisable feature, almost a cliché, of the memory of wartime Madrid" (2018: 374), and in many cases were the work of the porters at residential buildings. The importance of these individuals in such summary proceedings is reflected in *Frente en Madrid* in the porter at Carmen's family home, who is in constant contact with the militias, notifying them of the presence of individuals hostile to the Republic in the building, and who commits petty robberies in the apartments that she is supposed to be guarding.

9   The song they sing is *Adiós, Pamplona*, a popular number that originally served as a closing tune at the Festival of San Fermín, but which came to be used as a song of farewell to the young recruits who joined the rebel forces. Its inclusion in the scene gives the portrait of the Francoist rebels a more populist quality than is suggested in the original story, which stresses the educated backgrounds of the soldiers, who talk about Chopin, Beethoven, Mozart, Debussy and de Falla, read history books and recite Shakespeare.

10   According to Monguilot-Benzal, the presence of the dark passages and tunnels that Alfredo has to take to get into the city reflects Neville's interest in "portraying […] underground spaces, often gloomy and claustrophobic, which serve as bridges between different realities, the best example of which can be found in his film *La torre de los siete jorobados* (1944)" (2007: 159).

11   Although there are different theories regarding its source, it is widely agreed that the original phrase was uttered by the Spanish communist leader Dolores Ibárruri (nicknamed *La Pasionaria*). Its exact wording was apparently: "Better to condemn a hundred innocents than to absolve one who is guilty." The remark was made in the context of the internal conflicts within the different parties of the Republican faction in the spring of 1937. The "guilty" referred to were therefore not Francoists but members of the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, who were labelled as dissidents by the Spanish communists.

12   While the film's realism and technical quality were generally reviewed positively by critics, they questioned its "ideological inconsistency" (Pérez Bowie, 2004: 113; Monguilot-Benzal, 2007: 152-155).

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THE DEPICTION OF MADRID AT WAR IN *FRENTE DE MADRID*

Abstract

This article analyses the depiction of the city of Madrid in the film *Frente de Madrid* (Edgar Neville, 1939), an adaptation of the director's short story of the same name. Aware of the importance of cinema as one of the most effective forms of propaganda, Neville depicts Madrid as a war-torn city that the Francoists, characterised as heroes, must save from the "Reds", who are portrayed as brutal thugs. The film, associated with what came to be known in Spain as *cine de cruzada* ("crusade cinema"), is set in the Spanish capital not only for the purpose of the storyline, but also because of the symbolic value that the city acquired during the Spanish Civil War for both sides in the conflict. Beyond the obvious ideological and political significance of the city, the depiction takes on a markedly social dimension through its emphasis on how the war destroyed the traditional, bourgeois, enlightened atmosphere that Neville idealistically identifies with the city.

Key words

Frente de Madrid; Edgar Neville; Madrid; *Cine de cruzada*; Spanish Civil War.

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LA REPRESENTACIÓN DEL MADRID EN GUERRA EN *FRENTE DE MADRID*

Resumen

En este artículo se analiza la representación de la ciudad de Madrid en la película *Frente de Madrid* (Edgar Neville, 1939), adaptación de un relato homónimo del mismo autor. Neville, consciente de la importancia del cine como uno de los más eficaces medios de propaganda, representa la ciudad de Madrid como un espacio bélico al que los franquistas, caracterizados como héroes, deben salvar de los *rojos*, que son retratados como seres brutales. La película, adscrita al denominado *cine de cruzada*, no solo se contextualiza en la capital española por cuestiones estrictamente argumentales, sino por el valor simbólico que la ciudad adquirió durante la contienda para los dos bandos en lid. Más allá de la evidente carga ideológica y política del espacio urbano, la representación adquiere un marcado tinte social en la medida en que se insiste en cómo la guerra ha destruido el ambiente castizo, burgués e ilustrado que Neville identifica de forma idealista con la ciudad.

Palabras clave

Frente de Madrid; Edgar Neville; Madrid; Cine de cruzada; Guerra Civil española.

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MAIDSERVANTS AND MIDDLE-CLASS *SEÑORITAS* IN PRE-DEVELOPMENTALIST MADRID: SAURA AND PATINO AT THE INSTITUTO DE INVESTIGACIONES Y EXPERIENCIAS CINEMATOGRÁFICAS

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MADRID IN THE FILM SCHOOL

To obtain a clear picture of the way Spanish films represented the city of Madrid during the Francoist period, it is essential to consider the work produced by Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas (IIEC) and its successor, Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía (EOC). Throughout the period from 1947 to 1976, almost all outdoor footage taken by students of these Madrid film schools was shot in the streets, parks, gardens, municipal facilities and monuments of Spain's capital. In total, there are several hundred short and medium-length films made by film students who just a few years later, upon completing their studies, would be responsible for some of the most important milestones in Spanish cinema in the second half of the 20th century.

The precarious nature of these productions—in terms of both the film equipment and the sets—and the increasing influence of the realist fashion on these apprentice filmmakers over the course of the 1950s would make outdoor locations an almost inevitable choice for the settings of their stories, as had been the case in post-war Italy. The ruins of Madrid's University City in *Paseo por una guerra antigua* [A Stroll through an Old War] (Luis García Berlanga, Juan Antonio Bardem, Florentino Soria & Agustín Navarro, 1949) (Pérez, 2016; Deltell & García Sahagún, 2020; Aranzubia, 2021), the airport in *Barajas* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1950), El Rastro in *Dos veces trece* [Twice Thirteen] (Florentino Soria, 1951), and the suburbs in *Áspero camino* [Rough Road] (José Gutiérrez Maesso, 1950) thus became privileged locations for the student projects completed by the first generation of IIEC graduates, all of which reflect the realist trend in different ways. And when, by the middle of the next decade, fantasy (and other genres) had replaced realism as the model to follow, outdoor settings would somewhat paradoxically continue to be the preferred option for certain

low-budget science-fiction films, such as *Los buenos samaritanos* [The Good Samaritans] (Francisco Montolio, 1966) and *Soy leyenda* [I Am Legend] (Mario Gómez Martín, 1967) (Aranzubia, Aguilar & Castro de Paz, 2022), which would use vacant lots on Madrid's outskirts to create the image of the futuristic and in some cases post-apocalyptic landscapes typical of the genre. However, of all the city locations chosen as sets by IIEC-EOC students, El Retiro park would be the site of the most and the widest variety of film shoots: from the moral fable with the atmosphere of a Chinese fairytale in *Gran plegaria ante los muros de la ciudad* [The Great Prayer at the City Walls] (Carlos Gortari, 1967) to the social drama about a serial child killer in *Luciano* (Claudio Guerín-Hill, 1965) (Aranzubia & Castro de Paz, 2010), along with the political tirade of *Antoñito vuelve a casa…* [Antoñito Returns Home] (Manuel Revuelta, 1969) and the various projects based on the same premise of a Sunday evening in the city, notably including two productions with practically identical titles: Carlos Saura's *La tarde del domingo* [The Sunday Evening] (1957) and Basilio Martín Patino's *Tarde de domingo* [Sunday Evening] (1961).

THE *MAIDSERVANT*

After two initial practice efforts without sound—*Tío vivo* [Merry-Go-Round] (1954) and *La llamada* [The Call] (1955)—filmed in his second and third years at IIEC, and one flawed final project—*Pax* (1955)—that received a failing grade, Carlos Saura was advised by Eduardo Ducay that for his next submission he should try "something more sensible, more everyday" (Santesmases, 2021: 32) and in some way closer to the principles of Italian neorealism that were so in vogue at the time. Although Saura intended to try again with "something […] experimental, with a lot of camera movements and all that [and] had chosen an American novel, by William Irish, something a little Hitchcockian", no doubt influenced by the Madrid première in

October 1955 of *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954), based on another story by the same American author, he ultimately allowed himself to be guided by the compelling opinion of his fellow Aragonese, the man who had directed his work on *Carta de Sanabria* [Letter from Sanabria] (Eduardo Ducay, 1955) and in just one night (according to Saura himself) they adapted a story by Fernando Guillermo de Castro about a thwarted autumn Sunday evening in the life of a humble small-town girl employed as a housemaid by the kind of uncouth, narrow-minded middle-class national Catholic family typical of the era.[1]

Despite the undeniably neorealist premise—and Saura himself would acknowledge that it is perhaps his only film made under the more or less direct influence of the Italian movement, although there is also a clear connection to the literary group known as the Generation of '50, some of whose members (such as Ignacio Aldecoa, Carmen Martín Gaite, Jesús Fernández Santos, and Daniel Sueiro) were friends of the filmmaker—the impact of Juan Antonio Bardem's recently released landmark film *Main Street* (Calle Mayor, 1956) seems to be just as crucial for a full understanding of some of Saura's semantic strategies in this film. Indeed, the narrator's voice-over that begins the film while the camera pans over the rooftops of Madrid on a Sunday morning reveals a clearly didactic and generalising intention[2] that might have been taken either from Italian cinema or from the early use of extra-diegetic narrators in the *cinema herido* of post-war Spain (Rafael Gil's adaptations of Fernández Flórez, Luis García Berlanga, and Bardem himself), combined here with the naturalist approach of *Death of a Cyclist* (Muerte de un ciclista, Juan Antonio Bardem, 1955), which aspired to present "a 'scale model' of Spanish society taken as a whole, […] to give full form to the old naturalist dream of being able to reconstruct the whole of a society out of the fragment of a lost fingernail" (Zunzunegui, 2005: 167).

The obvious didactic approach that the first part of the film might initially be accused of—taking place almost entirely in the family's apartment on the morning of that Sunday (the middle-class family treating the maid with such blatant rudeness, the girl herself so patently despondent)—is clearly a popular, melodramatic and somewhat *Bardemian* starting point that would facilitate the depiction of the everyday life of one of the many poor girls working as domestic servants in those days, setting up what will in fact be a meticulous description of her thankless and interminable household chores and her often humiliating interactions with her bosses and their children.

In exactly the same sense, and in full consonance with the tone of recognition and engagement Saura sought with his potential audience in order to provide access to more complex and obscure discursive realms, the film's soundtrack is equally worthy of analysis, marking as it does the beginning of a film career that would earn Saura the label of "acoustic auteur" (Vernon, 2021: 313-331), capable not only of conceiving of music "as a central thematic element and a basic sign of his directorial style" (Gorbman, 2007: 149), but also of transforming "the acoustic atmosphere, the timbre of the voices [...], the rhythm of the sounds and the silence, [and] the relationship of the auditory phenomena with dramatic and emotional effects" (Wierzbicki, 2012: 12). With total conviction about the dramatic and discursive weight that he wanted to give his film's music, Carlos Saura and his composer Rafael Martínez Torres worked with *Canción de la calle* [Song of the Street] by the sisters Elia and Paloma Fleta,[3] an extremely big hit of the moment that played constantly on the enormous radio receivers found in Spanish houses in those years, like the one that appears in numerous shots in Saura's film. It thus became the musical background in countless Spanish homes, making its presence in the film entirely natural and realistic for a Spanish viewer in 1957. At the same time, the song's lyrics, which refer to thwarted young

Image 1

love, the memory of which "passes from mouth to mouth around the city outskirts",[4] and its profoundly melancholy tone serve as the basis for all kinds of uses and variations over the course of the film: an orchestra version with winds, strings and piano on the film's non-diegetic soundtrack; the original song played on the radio; and a version performed by the band in the party hall at the Cine Salamanca. The song effectively signals Clara's inability to escape her pitiful situation—subtly but powerfully foreshadowing the film's heartbreaking conclusion—and, through some outstanding audiovisual compositions, it is also able to reveal the private emotional evolution of the protagonist, played by a sometimes insecure but nearly always extremely believable Isana Medel.

Shortly after the opening credits begin, while an initial trumpet version of the song plays over shots of the street showing life in the city on a typical Sunday morning (the music shares the audio track with the sound of carts pulled by the humble rag pickers in a Madrid with neighbourhoods still in many ways stuck back in the 19th century, while the church bells calling people to mass), in

Image 2

Image 3

a half-lit establishing shot. And walking along the pavement in the background we see Clara for the first time, practically indistinguishable in this first appearance. The camera seems to anticipate her destination, as it pans upwards to show the outside of the apartment where she works.

The Sunday edition of the Spanish national newspaper, *ABC*, which the paper-boy slips under the door, is the central image of the film's first expressive composition. Its front page shows a woman gathering the wheat harvest, an image echoed at once by Clara's entrance on the left: two subjugated women in different times and places, a natural, diegetic juxtaposition that could be read as a critique of the injustice suffered by maidservants.

While a new ambient instrumental version of the song plays in the background, Clara, who can barely read, struggles to make sense of an ad in the paper and she sits down wearily at the table in a kitchen carefully arranged for the most realistic effect possible (furniture, coffee grinder, dishes, cups, tablecloths, broom, etc.).

Although the very few studies of this film have highlighted its obvious referencing of *Umberto D* (Vittorio de Sica, 1952), thereby confirming its unequivocal debt to neorealism, there has been a tendency to overlook another equally important feature: the sophisticated use of Clara's

point of view, which serves as a formal device to convey her inability to achieve even her humblest dreams. It could be argued that there is a point at which Saura abandons the Italian style of atmosphere creation with the inclusion of a brightly lit close-up of the smiling young woman gazing hopefully at the calendar (Sunday, 20 September).

Then, having aggressively established the model of the individual gaze that dominates the mise-en-scène of this first segment in different ways, the subjective composition is abruptly undone by the sour-faced lady of the house shouting: "Clara! Clara! You're starting the day well, sitting down. Come on, get the coffee ready." Saura is happy to present this character to us as a threatening dragon wearing her hair badly done up and a long bathrobe as tasteless as it is supposedly elegant. This marks the beginning of a whole series of visual (im)possibilities for the girl, which are constantly disrupted by the presence or the voice of one of the family members, who cut short her fleeting daydreams. In fact, the only person that Clara can really talk to (albeit not without difficulties) is Visi, the maid who works in the apartment upstairs, with whom she communicates out of the kitchen window. This strategy, supported by the camera's upward pans, portrays the friendly solidarity of the working class, but confines it to

awkward, unnatural exterior shots of a messily framed void. Later, when the employers are gone, they meet briefly to prepare their evening outing, and for the first time we hear the name of Juan, who according to Visi is an extremely handsome "military man" who "never stops talking about" Clara. Although she hides her feelings from her friend, Clara's excitement shows clearly on her face as soon as she is alone.

A short but significant interlude in El Retiro park, where they have arranged to meet with other friends (also housemaids), we are presented with a series of compositions depicting a solitary, melancholy Sunday, while we hear their conver-

Above. Image 4. Below. Image 5

sations about their hopes of enjoying the evening ("If you don't enjoy your Sunday, the rest of your week will be dull"), the men they fancy (and who have agreed to meet them that night), and their blushing embarrassment at the bare breast of a statue in the park, but also Clara's complaints about the treatment she receives from her employers: "their kind insult anyone they want to... But don't even think of insulting them back."

Juan fails to show up, and although his friends try to justify his absence with some pretext related to his military service ("what he is is a shameless cad who has gone off somewhere else," concludes Visi), Clara's romantic daydream is irremediably torn apart. Her friends and the young men all try unsuccessfully to console her, and all the supposed thrills of the dance she had been expecting (the crowded hall, the music, the boys asking her to dance) now turn into violent signifiers of aggression.

As other authors have astutely noted, this second part of the film—the long sequence of the dance—marks the first real example of the documentary realism that would characterise the films Saura made immediately after this one. In fact, with his notable talent as a photographer (Berthier, 2017: 355-387), Saura had previously documented the dance hall at Cine Salamanca, where much of this sequence was filmed with a hidden camera, mixing the actors in with members of the public at a real Sunday dance. This strategy was only possible thanks to the use of the Tri-X negative film stock left over from the filming of *Carta de Sanabria*:

> I think it is the first time that Tri-X, left over from [...] [Ducay's film], had been used in the film school (and perhaps in Spain); it was well-known in photography, but not in cinema. Nobody had dared to use this material in cinema, because it was very fast, around 400 ASA, sheer madness. Thanks to that, I was able to film in the dance hall at the Cine Salamanca, where I used to go quite often. And because in those days you couldn't throw anything

Image 6

Image 7

out (90% of the footage taken was used in the final cut), however deficient the results might be, you had to leave it in (Sánchez Vidal, 1998: 19).

Clara gradually sinks into a state of desperation, and while she drinks Coca-Cola with a male friend who tries to cheer her up, a quick montage of shots of her face and of the orchestra musicians begins to create a *crescendo* of anxiety that will conclude with her rushing out of the dance hall—the version of *Canción de la calle* played by the orchestra, distorted and grating in her ears, is the definitive trigger for her departure—and running home through the streets of Madrid, where the frenetic city bustle and the lights in the shop windows seem to threaten her mercilessly thanks to the effects of the Tri-X negative film stock. In any case, what is interesting about this sequence is not only the increasing pace of the alternating cuts that seems to foreshadow the visual violence of the famous rabbit hunting scene in *The Hunt* (La caza, Carlos Saura, 1965), but also the relatively long-lasting shots of Clara playing first with the zip on her purse and then with a soft drink bottle cap, where time seems to stand still somehow, presaging the focus on dead time and temporal

ambiguity that would come to characterise modern film styles.

Back again in her (non-)home, Clara has to prepare the dinner for the family, in a scene "filmed and lit from a high angle, from a chandelier whose rays of light, like something imposed and crushing, [that] envelopes not only the maid but also its own components" (Sánchez Vidal, 1998: 19). The laughter and applause on the radio contest playing in the background contrasts with

Image 8

Clara's final emotional collapse and her uncontrollable weeping, as she pulls off the page of the calendar while a slow pan seems to show us her dark present and even darker future. She is one of so many Claras, condemned by social inequality to a life that seems much like a living death.

THE MIDDLE-CLASS *SEÑORITA*

After making two films that have not been preserved—*El descanso* [The Rest], shot in 1957 in his second year at film school, based on photographs of a construction worker who had to cross from one end of Madrid to the other every day after work to get home, and *El parque* [The Park] in his third year, starring his friend Mario Camus, about a couple who meet a poor hungry man in a Madrid park—Basilio Martín Patino chose for his final project to explore the tedious evening of an affluent middle-class *señorita* after her parents and the maid (who, like the protagonist in Saura's film, only gets Sunday evenings off) leave her alone at home, an apartment located in the central street of Calle Barceló in Madrid's Justicia neighbourhood, next to Calle Fuencarral, while they go out and enjoy their respective Sunday activities.

Tarde de domingo was based on a screenplay that was unsurprisingly approved at first only "provisionally"[5] by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia at the beginning of 1960. The script's original title, *Muchacha a la ventana* [Girl at the Window], reflected the vital importance its underlying structure gave to the subjective gaze of the nameless protagonist[6] and her reactions to what she sees. That structure would ultimately constitute just one of many elements of the textual framework of an experimental and innovative film which, with minimal dialogue and eschewing the option of a voice-over to tell the story or even to share the protagonist's thoughts with the viewer, manages to establish a sombre discourse on the almost imperceptible and only vaguely suggested

> THE LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE ON THE RADIO CONTEST PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND CONTRASTS WITH CLARA'S FINAL EMOTIONAL COLLAPSE AND HER UNCONTROLLABLE WEEPING, AS SHE PULLS OFF THE PAGE OF THE CALENDAR WHILE A SLOW PAN SEEMS TO SHOW US HER DARK PRESENT AND EVEN DARKER FUTURE. SHE IS ONE OF SO MANY CLARAS, CONDEMNED BY SOCIAL INEQUALITY TO A LIFE THAT SEEMS MUCH LIKE A LIVING DEATH

longings, fears and existential angst of a young woman who decides not to go out that evening. And it does so in a light-hearted and apparently casual and inconsequential way, creating subtle combinations of audiovisual effects that not only evoke the passage and the weight of the interminable, mournful dead time of a Sunday in which the terrors of childhood and the anxieties of growing up seem to converge, but also (and especially) aim to give cinematic form—with the bold use of his newly created yet strikingly well-stocked filmmaker's palette—to some of the girl's *mental experiences*: attitudes, movements and gestures that are almost unconscious, details that are apparently ordinary, unremarkable and even automatic, yet in the final instance profoundly revealing. All this is shaped by a historically situated conception of the world, society, education and family, a socio-political and cultural system comprised of a set of values, customs, practices and family and social relations that are strictly coded and conditioned by the narrow constraints of an asphyxiating Catholicism whose empty rhetorical formalities are always visible and audible in the still very dull public and private world of Francoist Spain in the early 1960s, in which any sign of modernity could only be glimpsed from a distance.

Image 9

With unmistakably *Bardemian*[7] resonances, the closer shots of the girl gazing out the window constitute one of the film's most important formal devices, while at the same time they are directly related to the diegetic origins of the other two sources of sound: the voices and noises of the street outside, and the voices and music coming from the party taking place in the apartment upstairs.

Most of these scenes[8] take place at the balcony window of the piano room, which looks out over the Jardines del Arquitecto Ribera, a park surrounding the old Royal Hospice of San Fernando, which today is the History Museum of Madrid. The protagonist—who metaphorically shares the cage hanging next to the balcony with her canary, whose birdsong punctuates the soundtrack repeatedly in numerous shots—observes the visual and auditory echoes of a reality that is far from encouraging or appealing. While the first POV

shot belongs to the maid and her soldier boyfriend walking away arm in arm down the street, the second shows us three young men whistling at a girl as they surround her and for a moment block her way: "Pretty, gorgeous, beautiful! Where are you going? So long, doll!" Much later, towards the end of the film, two older men who notice the protagonist looking out the window will call up to her from the street in similar terms: "Hey! What a woman! You're alright…! Beautiful!" In this way, Patino seems to want to make clear what women had to deal with on a daily basis.

Moments later, two youths arrive on a Vespa and stop in front of the building, gleefully calling to a group of people who respond to them from the balcony of the apartment upstairs, some with glasses of wine in their hands. Just then, while we hear the sound of church bells, the protagonist takes away the canary's cage and pulls back slightly from the balcony. She subsequently disappears

completely behind the curtains after coming back to watch the group harassing a young woman walking down the street. The group's members now seem to have noticed her and are gazing up at her. This conjunction of incidentally coinciding details—the church bells, the beginning of the party in the apartment upstairs, the youths looking at her, her withdrawal from the window—offers suggestions, clues never explicitly spelt out but legible, about some of the possible reasons for her shy and reserved demeanour.

The visual—and auditory—relationships with the young people at the party are temporally and semantically central to the film, and from these elements Patino attempts to extract some of the most suggestive of the subtle *mental* rela-

Image 10

Above. Image 11. Below. Image 12

tionships and sensations referred to above. The well-known rock, jazz, blues, calypso and bolero songs played on the record player at the party, for example, at this point become the diegetic soundtrack in a wide sampling of the various musical styles in fashion in 1960 (Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock", Harry Belafonte's "Will His Love Be His Rum" and "Hosanna", the Kalin Twins' "Jumpin' Jack", Charlie Parker's "Slam Slam Blues", Lous Armstrong's "C'est Si Bon", etc.), which are mixed as well with songs on the radio at certain moments,[9] resulting in brief but highly unique and strident musical combinations, unexpected blends of sound that suggest cultural, historical and social models, forms and transformations which at that time were still only latent and could hardly have been conveyed in any other way. At one point, the protagonist even tries to play one of the songs she hears on the piano (Nat King Cole's "Quizás, Quizás, Quizás"), but she quickly shifts back to her socially accepted practice piece "Für Elise". A little later, Domenico Modugno's famous "Volare" overlaps with an excerpt from the traditional Spanish zarzuela "La Verbena de la Paloma" being played by an organ grinder right in front of the building, who is given an *ad hoc* close-up filmed on the street, while our bored protagonist has fallen asleep sitting at the table in the living room. When she wakes up, she looks out and sees

Image 13

Image 14

the youths at the party tossing coins down to the organ grinder from the balcony above, and she is about to do the same when she catches sight of another young man in the street who is arriving for the party with two bottles in his hands. When he notices her, he makes a few gestures that could be interpreted as sexual insinuations.

The partygoers' discovery of the *Miss Lonely-hearts* (to use the Hitchcockian expression) in the apartment below them occurred just before this scene, when she came out onto the small terrace outside the kitchen. Without getting too close, trying her best not to be seen, she looks up through the two windows of the apartment upstairs to where couples are dancing, drinking and kissing in various POV shots (some of which are closer than others, explicitly underscoring their significance). In another shot, the protagonist turns her full attention to a boy who is trying unsuccessfully to kiss his dance partner. After the young man notices the protagonist watching him, Patino accords him the *right* to the point of view and even an attempt at dialogue ("Hey, sweetheart! Why don't you come up and dance a little with us?"), provoking the extreme embarrassment of the

protagonist, who quickly gathers up the clothes hanging out on the terrace, even dropping a bra before she gets back inside. The partying neighbours don't give up and even call her twice on the phone to invite her up. She doesn't answer, although she is curious enough to pick up the phone the first time.

The protagonist gazes repeatedly at the gardens, accompanied by the canary once again in its cage hanging on the balcony, while we hear the songs from the party and the musical sounds and noises coming from the street as the evening goes (or drags) on. At a given moment, one of the romantic melodies wafting down from upstairs begins to blend with a children's tune with significant lyrics sung by a girl on the pavement below while she bounces a ball ("One, two and a pear to the chicken, the skull looks dead…") and with the powerful sound of church bells in the foreground.

After a fade to black, we see the maid in the street, saying good-bye to her soldier. A bus is returning from a Sunday in the mountains. Night has fallen, the parents come back and the waltz resumes. The girl tries to play the piano. When she gets up to open the door, the sheet music is

swept up in the wind blowing through the open balcony. The noise of the doorbell and of the banging window shutters thus adds to the waltz, the rock music and the bells, in a strange medley that floods the empty, cheerless final shot with sound.

CONCLUSIONS

With a few exceptions, the image of Madrid conveyed in Spanish films of the late 1950s has little to do with the view of the city offered by the two medium-length films analysed in this article. In contrast to the Madrid with modern interiors—with the first signs of those white kitchens typical of Hollywood films, which for Isabel, the protagonist in *Main Street*, represent the very height of luxury—and brightly lit, colourful avenues (Gran Vía, Alcalá, Paseo de la Castellana, etc.) so perfectly in keeping with the image of progress that characterised Spanish comedy during the Franco regime's developmentalist period, in their film school projects Saura and Patino seem determined to present a very different image of the city.

The Madrid of *La tarde del domingo* is a city closer to the autarkic Spain of rag pickers, emigrants and black marketeers portrayed so well in José Antonio Nieves Conde's *Furrows* (Surcos, 1951) than to the Spain of the tourism boom and increasing motorisation depicted in the films of Masó, Dibildos, Lazaga, Salvia & co. But above all, the city in Saura's film is a hostile environment, as made evident in the dark and narrow inner courtyards that make it so difficult to articulate even a furtive class solidarity; the housemaids' tram trips (an image whose composition, deliberately uncomfortable for the viewer to look at, constructs an inhospitable reality with no real place for the maids); the long and unsettling sequence of the dance, and above all, Clara's subsequent flight through the streets of a nocturnal Madrid whose insidious shop window lights and frenetic activity only aggravates the protagonist's desperation. Of course, this far from pleasant image of Ma-

drid would reappear in Carlos Saura's subsequent work; indeed, one need look no further than his first project as a professional filmmaker, *The Delinquents* (Los golfos, 1959), which would allow him to introduce audiences to some of the ideas he had tried out at film school.

As Pérez Millán (2002: 49) points out, the connections between Saura's and Patino's student projects are so substantial that they seem to "prolong, project or complement" one another. This is not only because the main character in Saura's film is a supporting character in Patino's, but also because of certain similarities in their respective portraits of Madrid. Because it is this same hostile city that treats the *maidservant* so cruelly that is the reason for the confinement of the middle-class girl *señorita*. However, the Madrid of *Tarde de domingo* is not so much a physical city as an accumulation of sensations or mental experiences provoked by a range of auditory, visual, verbal and other types of stimuli coming in from outside—from the street, from the apartment upstairs, on the telephone or the radio—and that to some extent are the expression of a particular system of values, customs and practices; or more precisely, assorted manifestations of the familial, religious, social and cultural order underpinning a regime that had abandoned autarky but, somewhat paradoxically, condemned some of its own subjects to a kind of voluntary confinement. Whether that confinement would be transitory or permanent remained to be seen. ∎

NOTES

1   Sánchez Vidal (1998: 18) astutely argues that "the film expresses perfectly the everyday life of a young maid, as well as her subjection to the demands of a very middle-class family, of the kind that lives off baking soda, *La Casera* soft drinks, the *ABC* newspaper, Sunday mass and weekend football. The real theme revolves around her expectations for her free Sunday evening and her frustration at the dance

with her friends. The rhythm of the dull and almost ritualistic activities of a housemaid up to the crescendo of the dance hall that [...] upsets Clara is perfectly achieved."

2   "This could happen in Madrid on any Sunday of the year... Perhaps a Sunday in autumn, when the sun shines softly, when just a few leaves are left on the trees, when one has hope and waits for things that never come. Perhaps, a Sunday in September that starts like any other: the solitary streets, the carts of the rag-pickers, the closed shops, the early morning mass, and Clara; Clara, who like many other Claras, was waiting for Sunday evening..."

3   The extraordinary success of the Fleta sisters (who enjoyed huge sales right from their first record, released in 1953, and received an Ondas award for Best National Attraction in 1954) introduced Spain to new styles and rhythms of light-hearted, melodic music unrelated to the tradition of the *copla* that had completely dominated Spanish popular music up until that time.

4   The song's lyrics are: "Una simple cancioncilla de la calle/va de boca en boca por los arrabales/despertando en tantas almas mil recuerdos/de despreocupada y dulce juventud. Una simple cancioncilla de la calle/con palabras que el amor ha envejecido/y que siempre hay quien la escucha conmovido/recordando un tiempo que no volverá. Un ventanal se iluminó/y poco a poco se entreabrió/alguien se asoma a escuchar y a suspirar. Una simple cancioncilla de la calle/ va de boca en boca por los arrabales/para quien espera y sueña con amores/es la eterna y dulce historia del amor." ["A simple little song of the street/passes from mouth to mouth around the city outskirts/awakening in so many souls a thousand memories/of the carefree sweetness of youth. A simple little song of the street/with words that love has grown old/and that always moves someone listening/recalling a time that will never return. A window lit up/and little by little began to open/someone looks out to listen and to sigh. A simple little song of the street/passes from mouth to mouth around the city outskirts/for

someone waiting and dreaming of love/it is the eternal, sweet love story."]

5   In his report, the IIEC's director at the time warned of the extreme difficulty of the project, given "the intimate nature and levity of the anecdote, supported on pure nuance, [which] makes the production of this script very difficult, as its subject matter requires a very finely tuned formal language. It would need a very carefully measured orchestration of all the elements—camera, setting, performance—that would be difficult to achieve with insufficient experience and limited resources" (Filmoteca Española, IIEC-EOC Archive, "Tarde de domingo").

6   The protagonist is played in the film by Matilde Marcos, a young woman chosen by the director after he saw her by chance in a store in Salamanca and who would not pursue an acting career. "[I] thought she had exactly what I was looking for: she wasn't a star, or a known face, but a normal, anonymous young woman... She might have been an office worker or a student, I don't know... I asked her if she would work with us, she accepted happily and showed extraordinary interest. But she wasn't an actress, and it shows. I think I miscalculated my possibilities," given that "many of the film's possibilities of communicating something" depended on her (Pérez Millán, 2002: 52).

7   Basilio Martín Patino would include *Main Street* (Calle Mayor, Juan Antonio Bardem, 1956) among his favourite Spanish films in a survey taken in 1961.

8   But not all of the scenes, as in addition to the kitchen windows (referred to in this analysis) she would also look once out her bedroom window, which offered a view of the busy entrance to a cinema where Terence Fisher's version of Dracula (*Horror of Dracula*, 1958) was showing, starring Christopher Lee as a physically imposing and attractive vampire, in a film very much focused on blood, sex and death.

9   On two occasions the girl turns the knob on the classic 1950s radio receiver and the melodies broadcast on it offer a brief and precise construction of the *sound of an era*, foreshadowing the director's interest in sounds and songs as building blocks of the Spanish social imaginary that would form the basis for his

later film *Canciones para después de una guerra* [Songs for After a War] (Basilio Martín Patino, 1971): soccer scores, broadcasts of bullfights with bugles, cheers and applause, *coplas* (*A la lima y al limón* sung by Concha Piquer), *cuplés* (*El lindo Ramón* performed by Lilian de Celis), zarzuelas (*La rosa del azafrán* with music by Jacinto Guerrero), military marches and advertising for the army (*El ejército aumenta*) and songs dedicated by listeners to family members, all of which was also mixed together with the sounds of the street and the songs being played at the party, as noted above.

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MAIDSERVANTS AND MIDDLE-CLASS *SEÑORITAS* IN PRE-DEVELOPMENTALIST MADRID: SAURA AND PATINO AT THE INSTITUTO DE INVESTIGACIONES Y EXPERIENCIAS CINEMATOGRÁFICAS

Abstract

The film production of the Spanish film schools Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas (IIEC) and its successor, Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía (EOC), offers some excellent material, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, for studying how Spanish cinema during the years of the Franco regime depicted the city of Madrid. This article proposes an initial approach to an object of study (the relationship between Madrid and IIEC-EOC) based on a detailed analysis of two medium-length films produced by this institution, which should necessarily be the subject of future research. The similarities between *La tarde del domingo* (Carlos Saura, 1957) and *Tarde de domingo* (Basilio Martín Patino, 1960) are not limited to their title and premise, but also extend to the role played by the city in both films. In both stories, Madrid is a hostile space that functions as a projection of the anguish of the two protagonists. But while in Saura's film the threat of the city is embodied physically (the stifling tram, the lights in the shop windows, the frenetic city bustle, etc.), in Patino's production the city is primordially an accumulation of sensations, an experience more mental than real.

Key words

IIEC-EOC; Madrid; *La Tarde del Domingo*; *Tarde de Domingo*; Basilio Martín Patino; Carlos Saura; Pre-developmentalist Spain

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CHICAS DE SERVIR Y SEÑORITAS DE CLASE MEDIA EN EL MADRID PREDESARROLLISTA. SAURA Y PATINO EN EL IIEC

Resumen

La producción cinematográfica del Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas (IIEC) y de su sucesora la Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía (EOC) ofrece, tanto en términos cuantitativos como cualitativos, un material de primer orden a la hora de estudiar cómo el cine español del periodo franquista ha representado la ciudad de Madrid. A partir del análisis pormenorizado de dos mediometrajes producidos por dicha institución, este artículo propone un primer acercamiento a un objeto de estudio (las relaciones entre Madrid y el IIEC-EOC) sobre el que necesariamente habrán de volver futuras investigaciones. Las similitudes entre *La tarde del domingo* (Carlos Saura, 1957) y *Tarde de domingo* (Basilio Martín Patino, 1960) no se circunscriben al título y a una premisa compartida, sino que alcanzan también al rol que desempeña la ciudad. Madrid es, en ambos relatos, un espacio hostil que funciona como una proyección de la angustia de las dos protagonistas. Pero mientras que en la práctica de Saura la amenaza de la ciudad tiene una encarnadura física (el agobio del tranvía, las luces de los escaparates, la actividad frenética...) en la de Patino Madrid es, sobre todo, un cúmulo de sensaciones, una experiencia mental antes que real.

Palabras clave

IIEC-EOC; Madrid; *La tarde del domingo*; *Tarde de domingo*; Basilio Martín Patino; Carlos Saura; Predesarrollismo

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CONTRASTS OF MADRID: DEVELOPMENTALISM AND CONTROVERSY IN INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTARIES OF INTEREST TO TOURISTS DURING THE BOOM*

LUCÍA RODRÍGUEZ GARCÍA DE HERREROS

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, film historians have associated the evolution of Spanish cinema in the 1950s with a growing interest in realism. It has been argued that "Spanish cinema took to the streets [in this decade] and talked with varying degrees of conviction about the life of the average citizen" (Arocena, 2005: 92). The idea of the camera being in the street is quite literal, as in the second half of the 1950s filming on location became more common, which contributed to the closure of some film studios (Deltell, 2006: 36-37). The high concentration of the Spanish film industry in Madrid favoured the city as a location for many of these new films.

However, historians have pointed out that the hegemonic notion of realism changed considerably during the 1950s, and the projected image of the Spanish capital changed with it. Thus, besides the (sometimes contested) influence of Italian Neorealism, Spanish cinema of that time also incorporated elements from the Spanish *costumbrista* literary tradition and the comic theatrical genre of the *sainete* in order to reflect the everyday life, before finally giving in to saccharine depictions of reality that enjoyed significant box office success.

This article explores the attitude of the tourism institutions of the Franco regime towards these changes to Madrid's image. Its aim is to identify whether these institutions promoted, benefited from, or were indifferent to this significant iconographic and discursive shift in relation to the Spanish capital, given that the tourist boom has been often considered a significant influence on Spanish comedies during Francoist Spain's developmentalist period. The hypothesis of this study is that the tourism authorities were caught by surprise by the rise of the developmentalist comedies and their box office success; however, they benefited from their new imaginaries and tourist-oriented representations of a modern, cosmopolitan Madrid, including their projection abroad.

This research is framed in film history, and its main sources are the non-fiction films commissioned by the Ministry of Information and Tourism to promote tourism in Spain: specifically, documentaries filmed in the 1950s that focus on Madrid. Despite the importance of pragmatic aspects related to documentaries, and of contextual aspects associated with a historical perspective, this study also integrates a discourse analysis of the films, in order to avoid the paradoxical marginalisation of the film texts themselves that some authors have identified as a shortcoming of Spanish film history (Castro de Paz, 2020; Zunzunegui, 2018).

For this reason, the methodology employed consists of three stages. The first is film analysis, involving the segmentation of the visual, verbal and sound elements of the film, which facilitates the subsequent reconstruction of its underlying narrative, thematic and discursive structures. In this stage, elements are taken from the classical approach proposed by Casetti and Di Chio (2007). The audiovisual sources necessary for this analysis have been consulted at Filmoteca Española and on the website of the RTVE Archives.

It has been considered essential to take into account that the films analysed were conceived according to their planned use: as tourism propaganda for Spain. With this in mind, the second stage draws on Elsaesser's approach to non-fiction film (2009: 23), a historio-pragmatic methodology that seeks to answer three basic questions: who commissioned the film, what was the occasion for which it was made, and to what use was it put/ to whom was it addressed. The need for pragmatic methodologies in the field of documentary has been highlighted by other theorists (Plantinga, 2014: 21), and Elsaesser's system has been adopted by authors who have analysed some forms of useful non-fiction, such as industrial cinema (Hediger and Vonderau, 2009: 46). The documentary sources needed for this stage have been mostly retrieved from the Spanish government's general archives (*Archivo General de la Administración*).

Thirdly, beyond the communicative act related to a specific title, historical perspectives always entail a wider contextualisation that allows the assessment of the evolution of discourses. There are complementary materials that are useful to explain the networks of meaning surrounding a film, including texts related to its reception. Again, in this case, documents retrieved from the *Archivo General de la Administración* have been especially useful.

To be able to implement this three-stage methodology, it has been necessary to limit the scope of the research to a small selection of titles. The short film *Contrapunto de Madrid* [Contrasts of Madrid] (José López Clemente, 1957) has been chosen because it is representative of the first series of documentaries commissioned by the Francoist tourism authorities, in terms of both its discourse and its production model. Moreover, it is a film whose iconographic and discursive proposal made it the object of a heated controversy that illustrates the priorities, concerns and aspirations of different actors in the Ministry of Information and Tourism.

This interesting controversy around *Contrapunto de Madrid* makes it necessary to offer a brief description of the film the tourism authorities chose to replace López Clemente's film: *Sobre Madrid* [About Madrid] (Jorge Grau, 1960).

STATE OF THE ART: MADRID AND TOURISM DISCOURSES IN SPANISH FILM IN THE 1950S

The image of Madrid in Spanish cinema during the Franco regime has been analysed in numerous publications, nearly always based on a traditional/developmentalist binary (Aubert, 2013). The 1950s was a period of transition from the hegemony of the former towards that of the later. In the first half of the decade, modernity and urban development were often treated as

synonymous with sleaze, frustration, and moral and physical corruption, following the model of the Madrid depicted in *Furrows* (Surcos, José Antonio Nieves Conde, 1951) and also present in works by Juan Antonio Bardem and Luis García Berlanga.

Their association with Italian neorealism was initially one of the main approaches to the analysis of these films, although in recent years it has been pointed out that this relationship is perhaps much more indirect than has traditionally been suggested (Deltell, 2006: 31-32). It has even been argued that the term "neorealist" sometimes constituted a fashion stripped of substance rather than a genuine inspiration (Monterde, 2006: 59). Even *Así es Madrid* [This is Madrid] (Luis Marquina, 1953), a film obviously influenced by the style of the *sainete*, was promoted as "a blockbuster of Spanish neorealism" (Gil Vázquez, 2017: 63). Indeed, the legacy of earlier media forms and traditions like the *sainete* is evident in many comedies of the time, allowing for alternative approaches to this incipient modern trend. Although these films are more stylised, authors such as Cerdán and Castro de Paz (2011: 52) and Gil Vázquez (2017: 64) highlight the presence of ambiguous discourses that are difficult to classify as strictly in line with the regime.

As Deltell (2006: 89-10) points out, the predominance of *sainete*-style realism in the comedies of the first half of the 1950s (*Así es Madrid*) gradually gave way to a more *costumbrista* realism, with hints of the picaresque in films such as *Los tramposos* [The Cheaters] (Pedro Lazaga, 1959) or even the *esperpento* literary style in comedies like *The Little Apartment* (El pisito, Marco Ferreri and Isidoro Ferry, 1959). However, by the end of the decade these tendencies coexisted with a series of romantic comedies obsessed with progress and characterised by beautified settings, which have been labelled as "developmentalist comedies": *The Girls in Blue*) (Las muchachas de azul, Pedro Lazaga, 1957), *Red Cross Girls* (Las chicas de la Cruz

Roja, Rafael Salvia, 1958), and *Las aeroguapas* [Air Beauties] (Eduardo Manzanos and Mario Costa, 1958), among others. The traditional, stereotypical Madrid predominant in earlier films was thus replaced with a Spanish capital where modernity is synonymous with cosmopolitism, progress, sophistication, and consumerism. Prime examples of the image of Madrid in the films of this period can be found in filmographies such as those of Pedro Lazaga—analysed in depth by Grijalba de la Calle (2016)—and Rafael Salvia.

The energising and modernising elements most representative of the capital are concisely presented in the opening credits to *Red Cross Girls*: new architectural features (skyscrapers such as Edificio España and Torre de Madrid, the Ciudad Universitaria campus buildings, etc.) and leisure facilities (the Hippodrome, the Santiago Bernabéu stadium) that coexist with other elements that can be associated primarily with the rise of tourism (Alcalá Gate, the Royal Palace, etc.). As noted above, the incipient tourist boom was quickly becoming one of the most important themes of developmentalist discourse.

Tourism discourses in Spanish cinema have been analysed in depth in the collective book *La huella del turismo en un siglo de cine español* [The Mark of Tourism on One Century of Spanish Cinema] (Del Rey Reguillo, 2021a). According to Del Rey Reguillo (2021b: 159), in the post-war years, tourism was depicted in Spanish films as an activity of the aristocracy. However, in the 1950s, films would begin falling in line with the government's interest in promoting an activity often presented as synonymous with modernity and liberalisation (Del Rey Reguillo, 2021b).

Nevertheless, these images of modernity had to coexist with the picturesque images of Spain that foreigners expected, which were particularly obvious in depictions of Andalusia. As Moreno Garrido notes, in the 1950s almost a third of official Spanish tourism posters had images of flamenco, bullfighting or other representations

of Andalusian folklore as their central features (Moreno Garrido, 2007: 210). This preference was sometimes combined with the common trope of the honeymoon (Del Rey Reguillo, 2021c), for example, in the UK-Spanish co-production *Honeymoon* (Michael Powell, 1959); and by the 1960s it would begin to be associated with a self-consciousness of its own inauthenticity that some authors have connected with post-modern pastiche (Crumbaugh, 2010: 11).

In short, the representation of Madrid spearheaded a developmentalist iconography whose hegemony during the tourist boom should never be overstated, as it coexisted with other more traditional, stereotypical tourist images. This is true of a significant number of commercially successful fiction films of the late 1950s. However, there are far fewer studies of Spanish documentaries of the 1950s, which have tended to be limited to the official NO-DO newsreel production office operated by the Franco regime. In addition to the most important research on this institution (Tranche and Sánchez-Biosca, 2000), there are monographs focusing on NO-DO documentaries (Matud Juristo, 2007), although unlike its stranglehold on newsreel distribution, NO-DO did not enjoy a monopoly on documentary production.

Along with the tourist themes and depictions of popular festivals that were common both in NO-DO documentaries and in non-fiction works by private studios, the image of Madrid in 1950s documentaries was also appears associated with art. For example, Madrid was a key setting in many documentaries about Goya, as pointed out by Lázaro Sebastián and Sanz Ferreruela (2010: 188).

One other important theme associated with the Spanish capital is urban growth. A recurrent theme in 1960s documentaries (Sanz Ferreruela and Lázaro Sebastián, 2013), this issue was already receiving attention by the end of the previous decade. Life in the newly developing suburbs was an interesting topic for student projects at Madrid's film school, Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía, and the films they made display a social perspective that has been relatively unexplored in studies of the documentaries of this period.

DOCUMENTARIES ABOUT MADRID OF INTEREST TO TOURISTS: A THREE-STAGE ANALYSIS

Selecting a 1950s documentary about Madrid for an in-depth analysis based on its potential interest to tourists is no easy task. Cross-checking data from different sources, such as the database of filming permits at the *Archivo General de la Administración*, the information available in film directories (del Valle Fernández, 1962) and the catalogue of Filmoteca Española, it is possible to confirm that several filming permits were requested each year to make short documentaries about Madrid, with a focus on art (*San Antonio de la Florida*, Santos Núñez, 1957), festivals (*Fiestas de San Isidro* [The San Isidro Festival], Julián de la Flor, 1957), or aesthetics (*Música para un jardín* [Music for a Garden] José María Hernández Sanjuán, 1957), among others. It seems clear that these films in reality had a purpose similar to others overtly presented as tourist documentaries that aim for a more comprehensive image of the Spanish capital.

From this pragmatic perspective, and assuming that the best evidence of potential interest to tourists is the fact that the documentaries in question were used as tourism propaganda, the role of the General Directorate of Tourism becomes particularly significant. Established in 1951 under the purview of the Ministry of Information and Tourism, this office launched a project for a film library of documentaries of interest to tourists in 1956. The two main titles focusing on Madrid during the first years of this film library are *Contrapunto de Madrid* and *Sobre Madrid*.

Image 1. Plaza de España, an iconic developmentalist setting, in *Contrapunto de Madrid*

DISCURSIVE AND ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF THE DOCUMENTARIES

Contrapunto de Madrid is a short film by José López Clemente, about twelve minutes long and shot in Gevacolor (although the colour is barely distinguishable in the preserved print). It is a traditional expository documentary with no live sound, so it relies exclusively on music and a voice-over by Guillermo Fañanas. As suggested by the title, the documentary seeks to present Madrid as a city of contrasts between tradition and modernity, which are shown in each of the thematic segments of the film. In order, the themes are transport, accommodation, urban development, shopping, production sectors, education, and leisure. Each segment generally offers a modern, sophisticated vision, usually accompanied by a symphonic ensemble with a predominance of strings, and also a traditional, common vision,

accompanied by music played mainly on the barrel organ, the accordion or wind instruments. Overall, the scenes associated with a modern, sophisticated Madrid take up more footage than those associated with the traditional, common Madrid: for example, in the segment about transport, the "modern" shots last about a minute and twenty seconds, whereas the "traditional" shots barely take up forty seconds.

The voice-over uses the kind of bombastic language identified by Tranche and Sánchez-Biosca in most NO-DO productions (2000: 242), characterised by the inclusion of pompous expressions, hyperbole, epithets, etc. (e.g., "since ancient times we have guarded the most beautiful pictorial relics"). The repeated use of the first-person plural ("our city") is also noticeable. There is an overwhelming predominance of static full shots, often lasting over six seconds, even when there is minimal action movement in the shot. This slow

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TRADITIONS OF THE COMMON PEOPLE ARE PRESENTED AS VESTIGES OF A BYGONE ERA, WHILE MODERNITY IS MORE CLEARLY CONSTRUCTED THROUGH THE PRACTICES OF THE WEALTHY CLASSES

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pace is only slightly disrupted in the segment on shopping, which features short takes and superimposed images of shop windows and neon lights in Madrid at night.

As in many documentaries of interest to tourists of the time, the organisation of thematic segments can be understood as chronological in relation to the tourist experience. Thus, the arrival in the city is shown first, then the accommodation, followed by an urban exploration that could be associated with a kind of preliminary walk around the city, then shopping, and finally, perhaps at the end of the hypothetical day of a tourist, sunset (highlighted by the lighting of street lamps) and night-time in the city centre. The second roll of film begins with the first signs of activity around the Plaza de la Villa, before moving onto portraits of production sectors, education, and finally, leisure activities typically associated with the afternoon, such as a bullfight, a football match, a horse race, etc.

However, this temporal organisation is not strictly adhered to and does not feature a specific tourist. In the first scenes, a woman in a red jacket gets off a Talgo train and then hails a taxi to a hotel, but her presence is subsequently less prominent. Thus, the main structure of the filmic text depends not on the tourist experience but on the idea of contrast. The Barajas Airport and the highways and automobiles contrast with the "picturesque" horse and carriage, while the budget trains arriving at the old Goya Station, from which workers disembark hurriedly, contrast with the modern high-speed train models. Similarly, the luxury hotels contrast with the inns, the street stalls with the elegant stores, the narrow streets of old Madrid and its workshops with the new factories, and so on.

The central motif of contrast is the duality between old and new, which is often made explicit in the voice-over narration ("as a vestige of another era, we still have inns and masons in the old neighbourhoods"). But there is also an explicit association between the old and the working-class ("it is not easy to find workshops as primitive and basic as those sometimes found in the streets of our working-class neighbourhoods") and between the new and the sophisticated and cosmopolitan (the Ciudad Universitaria is attended, "in addition to the Spanish [students], by more than 1,500 foreign students").

Developmentalist urban growth is a potentially problematic topic, since it alludes not only to skyscrapers or large flagship projects but also to "the creation of new neighbourhoods, such as La Concepción or San Blas". The shot that accompanies this statement shows a vacant lot filled with children and their mothers where a merry-go-round has been installed; in the background, newly constructed residential blocks offer a prototypical portrait of the *barrio de aluvión*, hastily built housing developments to accommodate

Image 2. Superimposed images and Dutch angles showing neon lights in *Contrapunto de Madrid*

the growing number of migrants to the city. This is an example of an unusual association of the modernisation of the city with its working classes, beyond certain other details that serve to nuance the cosmopolitanism of the wealthy (for example, the background music in the cocktail bar of the leisure segment: the lounge-style pieces being played on the piano, very typical of such places, are in fact versions of some of the best known *chotis*, traditional Spanish folk numbers). Generally, traditions of the common people are thus presented as vestiges of a bygone era, while modernity is more clearly constructed through the practices of the wealthy classes. This is the strategy López Clemente uses to reconcile the authenticity that tourists look for with the advances of modernity. The intersection, which is offered towards the end of the documentary, is the hospitality of both social classes: "Maybe the secret of Madrid's charm is carried inside by its inhabitants, who are inclined to social interaction both in common, traditional settings and in more distinguished ones."

On the other hand, in *Sobre Madrid* the information is organised around two female protagonists on a visit to Madrid. The film, about twenty minutes long and suffering from colour and audio defects on the print preserved at Filmoteca Española, is also an expository documentary without live sound, but in this case the voice-over is provided by Alfredo Mañas, who gives a more impersonal point of view, and Gemma Mañas, whose comments offer a point of view identified with the tourists, thereby introducing hints of performativity. Gemma's voice-over implies that the visitors are foreign tourists ("who would think of asking someone without knowing a single word of Spanish?"), and she makes it clear that they have arrived in Spain with certain preconceptions that hint at an Orientalist view of Spain ("And the barrel organ plays, just like in the movies! [...] But it is so exciting to be close to a real organ grinder, like the ones in Hemingway's novels") that will be confirmed by their attendance at a flamenco show.

In this case, the chronological order is therefore explicit: the journey is organised over three days. Although the topics are very similar to those in *Contrapunto de Madrid*, the thematic blocks are less marked, and the film is structured mainly around the wanderings of the tourists. Some of the places they visit are conceived of as associated with Spanish tradition (for example, the areas around the Plaza Mayor), and others with the incipient modernity (the Gran Vía); however, unlike López Clemente's film, *Sobre Madrid* never presents tradition and modernity as two opposing extremes within the same theme. On the contrary, it

Image 3. Lower class neighbourhoods in *Contrapunto de Madrid*

suggests that the modern tourist's gaze can superimpose new meanings on traditional Spanish settings: this seems to be the case with the idealised gaze of the tourists at the El Rastro flea market, a scene accompanied by the Frank Sinatra song "Cheek to Cheek"; and with the sequence that switches between a bullfight, a football match, and a horse race at the Hippodrome, spectacles presented as perfectly equivalent in each of their ceremonial parts.

The two protagonists visit the most emblematic sights in Madrid, but their experience is also marked by situations that involve more than mere gazing. First, they meet an organ grinder, who recovers the handkerchief lost by one of the tourists and returns it to her in a later scene, in a gallant show of chivalry. The tourists will also run into this young man engaged in other street trades, such as selling balloons in Retiro Park. The film will end with this man, who represents the survival of Madrid's most traditional side and whose presence is usually highlighted with barrel organ music, contemplating the sunset from the Toledo Bridge while the tourists depart for home. According to Fuentes Vega (2017: 177-185), foreign visitors in the 1950s expressed in their travel books about Spain an undisguised fascination with the country's beggars, which they even associated with iconographies of Baroque painting (such as the paintings of Murillo). She explains how the regime, which found such images intolerable, replaced the image of the beggar in its photographs and brochures with pictures of various street workers with a traditional air, such as the shoeshine boy, or in the case of Madrid, the organ grinder and the balloon seller.

Secondly, the tourists also meet a more affluent Spaniard. As they travel along Gran Vía in a taxi, the voice-over remarks that "a red light can be the beginning of a new adventure." At that red light, the foreigners strike up a conversation with the young man driving a convertible next to them. In a later scene, the tourists will come across him again when they carelessly cross the street and he is forced to stop his convertible right in front of them. The young driver gets out of the car, ready to invite the foreigners for a Sunday aperitif. This driver personifies the modern, hedonistic and developmentalist face of Madrid, and as in *Contrapunto de Madrid*, it is suggested that hospitality is the common element defining the customs of both the privileged the lower classes.

With this more experiential approach, *Sobre Madrid* gives prominence to some activities that are not present in *Contrapunto de Madrid*: for example, the preparation of aspiring bullfighters in the Casa de Campo, a trope whose authenticity is confirmed by the interest it would later arouse in several documentaries of the 1960s, even in films by recognised *auteurs* (*Torerillos 61*, Basilio Martín Patino, 1962). All this helps reinforce a message present in the film: that tourism is as much about looking for the postcard as it is about bringing it to life.

In short, *Sobre Madrid* reflects the foreigner's point of view and does not focus on the opposition between tradition and modernity, although it does make explicit the existence of these two complementary sides of the city.

PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE DOCUMENTARIES

Spanish tourist authorities had been using documentaries for promotional purposes since the 1920s (Soto Vázquez, 2021). However, despite some pioneering projects such as the two series *Estampas Españolas* [Spanish Postcards] and *Ciudades Españolas* [Spanish Cities], budget limitations kept this type of propaganda from being used in any systematic way until the creation of the Ministry of Information and Tourism in 1951.

In 1956, the General Directorate of Tourism announced a competition for short film scripts for tourism films. One of the main reasons for the creation of this contest was to meet the needs of

Spain's International Tourism Offices (*Oficinas de Turismo en el Extranjero*, or OTE), a tourism diplomacy network created before the Civil War that by 1955 already had offices in Brussels, Buenos Aires, Chicago, Stockholm, London, Mexico, New York, Rome and Tangiers, after a very marked decline during the Civil War and the years immediately after it. According to Jesús Romero Gorría, one of the politicians responsible for the National Tourism Plan, these offices "continuously and repeatedly" demanded films that they could screen in private sessions for travel agents, businessmen and workers, associations or students of Spanish (AGA (3), 49.001 21/5709, 25-5-54, Letter from the director of the Department of Works of the National Tourism Plan to the Minister of Information and Tourism).

In the 1956 contest, twelve submissions were successful, including *Contrapunto de Madrid*, a script submitted by Salvador Vallina and Gonzalo Rodríguez Castillo. The production of the twelve selected texts was paid for by the Ministry of Information and Tourism, but the work was entrusted to NO-DO, in order to create a tourism documentary short film library that would meet the needs of the OTE offices. NO-DO took on this responsibility but outsourced some of the work to small studios while reserving for itself the production of documentaries that were "more complicated to carry out, and at the same time, more costly and difficult" (AGA (3), 49.001 21/5710, 24-12-55, Letter from the director of NO-DO to the Minister of Information and Tourism).

The filmmaker commissioned to make *Contrapunto de Madrid* was NO-DO contributor José López Clemente, who had a small production com-

Image 4. Travellers getting off the train at Goya Station in *Contrapunto de Madrid*

pany named Studio Films. Despite the outsourcing arrangement, the film crew was largely the same as the regular NO-DO team, including cinematographer Manuel Rojas and editor Rafael Simancas. The project accumulated cost overruns until its budget exceeded 230,000 pesetas (AGA (3), 49.002 9780, 11-4-57, Letter from the director of NO-DO to the Minister of Information and Tourism).

By 1962, there were about 2,000 copies of the twelve titles resulting from the Ministry's short film contest in circulation, in different languages (English, French, German, Swedish, Italian and Spanish) (AGA (3), 49.010 40063, 15-11-62, List of twelve 16mm colour films owned by the DGPT). The films were distributed in Spain, and especially internationally, through OTE loans to travel agencies, companies, schools and even television networks all over the world, which at the time were consolidating their programming schedules and looking for material to fill them.

While the circuit was being consolidated, the OTE offices claimed that they needed films that were better adapted to the purpose of attracting tourists. In Madrid, the film library was viewed as a more complex tool for foreign relations, but

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PAGE 8: THE FILMS WERE DISTRIBUTED IN SPAIN, BUT ESPECIALLY INTERNATIONALLY, THROUGH OTE (INTERNATIONAL TOURISM OFFICE) LOANS

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the OTE request was met in any case, channelling the tourism department's film production activity towards purchases from private studios that were better than NO-DO at adapting to the latest trends. It was in this context that *Sobre Madrid* was acquired from a studio named Procusa. It was subsequently sent to numerous OTE offices and started to appear on the lists of documentaries kept at these offices (AGA (3), 49.010 40063, 15-12-65, List of the films in the Warehouse on the current date, with an indication of those on loan by order of the Tourism Propaganda Service).

DEVELOPMENTALISM AS A DEBATE GENERATOR: THE DISCUSSION BEHIND THE EVOLUTION OF THE DISCOURSE

Developmentalist comedies focused on characters who belonged to Madrid's wealthier classes. They abandoned the *sainete* and shifted away from more traditional settings, such as the Las Vistillas gardens, to more iconically modern locations, such as the Plaza de España. They also embraced lighting and saturated colours (Deltell, 2006: 37, 103-104). As noted above, a canonical example of this style is the successful film *Red Cross Girls*, shot practically at the same time as the documentary *Contrapunto de Madrid*. The notable contrast between the image of the capital projected in these two films was probably the line of thinking behind the complaints of various OTE offices. There is evidence of these concerns as early as 1959, when the head of the Chicago office expressed his first reservations about the scene shot at the Goya Station: "There are a few shots showing a shabby train loaded with workers on the running boards and jumping from the train in motion. This scene is too long and seems to us inappropriate, ugly, and potentially misleading, and we request permission to eliminate it" (AGA (3), 49. 010 40064,

Image 5. The old inns in *Contrapunto de Madrid*

14-1-59, Letter from the head of the Chicago OTE to the Director General of Tourism).

A few years later, the OTE in New York claimed that López Clemente's documentary often disappointed its audience (AGA (3), 49.010 40065, 2-21-63, Letter from the head of the New York OTE to the Undersecretary of Information and Tourism). The Puerto Rico office complained that it was the worst documentary in the film library and yet it was the most requested: "It gives the impression of being old, the colours are poor and it fails to give a positive impression of the contrast it tries to make between the old Madrid or the common people's Madrid and the modern part" (AGA (3), 49.010 40064, 2-14-63, Letter from the head of the San Juan, Puerto Rico OTE to the undersecretary of Information and Tourism). The Copenhagen office stated flatly in 1966 that it did not include *Contrapunto de Madrid* in its catalogue because "screening it would harm rather than help our promotional work" (AGA (3), 49.022 45954, 24-2-66, Letter from the head of the Copenhagen OTE to the Minister of Information and Tourism). In his explanation, the head of the office criticised the images of poverty shown in the poorer parts of the city: inns and taverns, carriages, *corralas*, and so on. In the same vein, the Marseille office explicitly pointed out that "the footage of the poor neighbourhoods, while trying to be picturesque, end up being squalid" (AGA (3), 49.010 40065, 7-12-62, Letter from the head of the Marseille OTE to the undersecretary of Tourism).

These opinions had begun reaching Madrid spontaneously by letter, but with the reorganisation brought about by the arrival of Manuel Fraga at the Ministry, the OTE offices were explicitly asked what tourism promotion documentaries should be like. A document titled *Points of View of the OTE Offices on our Documentaries* (AGA (3), 49.010 40063, ca. 1963) summarises some of the most frequent suggestions from the offices. The two most prominent were the following:

The documentaries should be based on the life and events awaiting tourists in Spain, choosing precisely what attracts and pleases them the most. They should be shown comfortable luxury hotels, the technical progress our country has made in tourism, beach scenes, restaurants, swimmers, swimming pools. [...] Artistic elements should be combined with typical features, but always striving to ensure that the typical, whether it be bullfighting or gipsy or flamenco dances, is always framed in a beautiful setting, avoiding squalid gipsy huts or shabby flamenco stages.

It was thus decided that the film library of the new General Directorate of Tourism Promotion should use a film like *Sobre Madrid*, which better fulfilled these intentions and whose performative touches seemed to connect with the imaginary of the developmentalist comedies. However, even this documentary did not arouse widespread enthusiasm in the OTE offices, which also considered Grau's film insufficient to give "an appropriate image of the city" (AGA (3), 49.010 40065, 22-2-63, Letter from the head of the Toronto OTE to the Undersecretary of Information and Tourism). The offices would have to wait until this collective imaginary was consolidated and the collaboration between the General Directorate of Tourist Promotion and NO-DO was reestablished years later to receive a film that portrayed the best side of developmentalist Madrid: *Madrid y sus alrededores* [Madrid and Its Surroundings] (José Luis Tafur, 1969).

CONCLUSIONS

Before the Ministry of Information and Tourism even existed, NO-DO shot a documentary titled *Así es Madrid* [This is Madrid] (Joaquín Soriano, 1949), a couple of years before the fiction film of the same name was made. Besides the spots that would continue to be the usual points of interest a decade later (Gran Vía, the Santiago Bernabéu stadium, Retiro Park, etc.), the most striking fea-

ture of this film is a flashback, framed through the daydreaming of an old man napping on a bench, to an open-air celebration in Madrid, with a traditional folk dance to some of the most famous *chotis*, with the dancers dressed in regional costume. In a similar vein, Hermic Films' *El pulso de Madrid* [The Pulse of Madrid] (Santos Núñez, 1945) portrays the Spanish capital through the imagery of the grand old houses of the La Mancha region.

At a time when the General Directorate of Tourism began engaging systematically in film production, the big discursive shift in 1950s documentaries about Madrid involved eschewing traditional stereotypes. It was a discourse that only became acceptable when it was expressed with no more *costumbrista*, folkloric or pseudo-ethnographic expectations than the tourists themselves harboured. In general terms, developmentalist Madrid, modern, cosmopolitan, and associated with the wealthier classes, won the day.

Despite the central role of tourism in this shift, it is clear that to produce their promotional films the tourism authorities followed the most successful trends at the box office. Although the Ministry and the production studios seemed to share nearly all the same interests in developmentalist comedy, to describe the regime as the driving force behind the circulation of new discourses would be to undervalue the intrinsic power of certain representations and trends, such as consumerism, and to simplify the network of actors involved, including the expectations of foreign visitors. However, this was precisely what laid the foundation for the institutional discursive successes of the Ministry of Information and Tourism in the 1960s, when a projection towards the future coexisted with a tradition often turned into a commodified pastiche. ■

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CONTRASTS OF MADRID: DEVELOPMENTALISM AND CONTROVERSY IN INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTARIES OF INTEREST TO TOURISTS DURING THE BOOM

Abstract

In the 1950s, the General Directorate of Tourism began systematically using short documentaries for tourist promotion purposes. The image of Madrid in these films soon left behind the traditional nativist stereotypes of Spain characteristic of the first half of the decade to embrace the icons, discourses and notions of developmentalism, as was the case in Spanish fiction films. This article analyses the first two documentaries about the Spanish capital that were widely used by the tourist authorities, *Contrapunto de Madrid* (José López Clemente, 1957) and *Sobre Madrid* (Jorge Grau, 1960) with the aim of identifying the official stance in relation to this change (promoters, beneficiaries, opponents, etc.). In addition to a discursive analysis of the films, the article presents a pragmatic study of the documentaries, considering how they were used and the reasons for their production, as well as a contextual analysis, which seeks to explain the terms of the controversy that led to the withdrawal of more traditional iconographies and discourses of Madrid in tourism promotion.

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CONTRAPUNTOS DE MADRID: DESARROLLISMO Y POLÉMICA EN EL DOCUMENTAL INSTITUCIONAL DE INTERÉS TURÍSTICO DURANTE EL *BOOM*

Resumen

La Dirección General de Turismo comenzó, en los años cincuenta, a utilizar documentales de cortometraje de forma sistemática con fines de promoción turística. La imagen de Madrid en estas películas pronto dejó definitivamente atrás el casticismo imperante en el cine del primer quinquenio de la década para acercarse más a los iconos, discursos y propuestas del desarrollismo, al igual que sucedió en el cine de ficción. Se propone el análisis de las dos primeras películas sobre la capital utilizadas profusamente por esta institución, *Contrapunto de Madrid* (José López Clemente, 1957) y *Sobre Madrid* (Jorge Grau, 1960), con el fin de detectar cuál fue la postura de las autoridades turísticas en este cambio (patrocinadores, beneficiarios, opositores...). Además del análisis discursivo de los films, se realiza un estudio pragmático de los documentales, atendiendo a sus usos y los motivos de su realización, y un estudio contextual, en el que se explican los términos de la discusión que terminó por marginar las iconografías y discursos más casticistas sobre la capital en el ámbito turístico.

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NARRATIVE SPACE, AUTHENTICITY, AND DRAMATIC EXPRESSION IN *ADIÓS, CIGÜEÑA, ADIÓS**

GEMA FERNÁNDEZ-HOYA

Over six weeks in May 1971, the heart of Madrid witnessed the filming of *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* [Goodbye, Stork, Goodbye] (Manuel Summers, 1971) (AGA, 36/04217). The film's director attempts to capture "the reality that inundates the daily tasks of the moment," (Cotán Rodríguez, 1993: 53-54), and opens a public discussion concerning a subject that would have been tabu for the society of the time: sexual repression and its consequences for adolescents. Naturally, the key theme is veiled by an idyllic love story. Narrated from the perspective of the kids at the centre of the drama, the film's humour, tenderness, and child-like reasoning highlights the senselessness of societal norms, and the irrationality of the society that imposes them: repressed and repressive such a society lives in a state of denial about its own moral health (Rajas Fernández, 2009; Heredero, 2022; Olid Surero, 2022). Summers deliberately selects places in the capital that formed part of his own childhood experience. His decision to choose these locations is hardly unexpected since he is of the so-called Nuevo Cine Español generation of directors, and despite the heteroge-

neity of this group, the one thing they share is a tendency to autobiography (Monterde, 2022). In *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós*, the city acts as refuge for a gang of youngsters who, longing for freedom, reject the oppressive social rules enforced by state and church institutions, and their families. Madrid's spaces provide the backdrop to all the principal action and establish an intriguing nexus between these places and the film's narrative. Meanwhile, the storyline helps to create a collective conscience, a construct that fosters the generation of common ideas in a community (Larson, 2021; Larson and Sambricio, 2021).

Following the lead of a multitude of previous features (Deltell Escolar, 2006; Grijalba de la Calle, 2016), Summers uses Madrid's streets, plazas, and parks as ready-made sets for *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós*. The audio-visual discourse and, as a consequence, the metropolis reflected here give rise to thoughts and feelings that the audience come to associate with the on-screen spaces and locations where the film was shot (Ramkissoon and Uysal, 2011).

In short, cinema constructs a spatial consciousness that audiences easily internalise: "Since the

mind of the recipient is open both in its conscious and its unconscious dimensions [...] and as a result, its persuasive force is reinforced," (Stanishevski, 2007: 50). From the middle of the twentieth century, the visual memory of the populace has been cemented primarily around audio-visual images (Barber, 2006). The language of films, just as in any other communication system based on shared symbolism offers a reading of the world and each new audio-visual production acts as a cultural agent enabling the transformation of how space is viewed with respect to the representations of previous times (Lotman, 1979). In this way, cinema signifies or re-signifies real locations through fiction or documentary film (Benjamin, 2013; Deltell and García Sahagún, 2020). Spaces, often neglected in cinematographic analyses, are an important avenue of expression for the director and a source of knowledge and information for audiences (Bazin, 2005; Chatman, 2013; Aumont 2020).

This article studies the dimensions and functions of fictional space in *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós*, splitting the analysis into two distinct parts: first, examining the film from a historic and cinematographic perspective (Zunzunegui, 2018) in order to understand its value as an active social agent in the reality of the era in which it was filmed (Trenzado, 1999); and secondly, exploring the use of audio-visual space understood as an intrinsic part of the film's structure. For this second strand of analysis, we will take a narratological approach drawn from literary theory (Bajtin, 1991; Weisgerber, 1990; Welleck and Warren, 2009; Prince 2012; Chatman, 2013), but with the incorporation of key concepts from cinematographic aesthetics and semiotics (Lotman, 1979; Bazin, 2005; Aumont, 2020).

HUMOUR, LOVE, AND THE BLESSING OF SAINT AUGUSTIN, OR HOW TO FACE THE CENSORS

The plot of *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* emerged from the imagination of the then septuagenarian An-

tonio Lara, referred to affectionately as Tono, and a founder member of the Otra Generación del 27. This experienced author wanted to create a storyline concerning sex-education and its impact on young people's lives, and together, he and Manuel Summers, wrote a screenplay to do just this. The result is a film replete with large doses of humour and tenderness, characterised by dialogue that perfectly conveys the child's perspective. Surprising structural elements combine seamlessly with the film's—for the time—subversive theme. This strategy distances the film from the archetypes consolidated on screen under the Francoist regime (Fernández-Hoya and Deltell Escolar, 2021) in which prodigal children are used as a "weapon of propaganda" (Durán Manso, 2015: 128).

The film's two co-authors, Summers and Tono, share many creative and professional characteristics: first, both engaged in a wide range of creative projects, and secondly, their forms of creative expression were sufficiently similar that they could communicate in the same artistic key. Thus, since the end of the nineteen twenties, Tono had cultivated a humour based on a critique of clichés, children's language, and verbal dislocations pushing the borders of absurdism (Fernández-Hoya, 2023). What's more, his unique style had inspired him to assemble a collection of kids comics and story books. The much younger, Seville-born Summers, was the inheritor of the *codornicista* humour (Castro de Paz and Aranzubia, 2022: 16), but with his own twist: a dose of melancholy with a hint of black humour and rebellion (Heredero, 2022). For Summers too, the universe of children was something of a personal passion and a recurring theme in his filmography: "Children are a surreal world, so innocent, so gentle" (Figueroa, 1984: 9); "I love children [...] I want to spend the rest of my life throwing balls, I want to play, I want to carry on being a child, never lose my curiosity [...] I want to scrutinise life, I don't want to be bland and derivative," (Petit, 1989).

Adiós, cigüeña, adiós tells the love story of 13-year-old Paloma and 15-year-old Arturo. She has a difficult life; her mother abandoned the family home shortly after Paloma's birth and so she lives with her grandmother and a father who is always away because of his work. Arturo in contrast, is the oldest son of a comfortable, run-of-the-mill family. During a school trip, chance separates the two youngsters from the group and finding themselves alone together, they have sex—despite Paloma's clearly articulated resistance. Not long after this, Paloma discovers she is pregnant and she, Arturo, and the kids in their friendship group decide to hide this situation from the adults. They manage to find an abandoned attic where Paloma hides while the other kids search for information about pregnancy and gather everything they need for the birth. Finally, with her girlfriends as her midwives, Paloma gives birth to a baby boy, and everyone celebrates.

To evade Franco's censors, the two screenwriters constructed their script with exceptional care. They introduced a multitude of references to Catholicism—verbal and visual—their imagery scrupulously avoiding any hint of sinfulness, while the children's voices resound like loudhailers of reproach. In addition, a quote by Saint Augustin, appears strategically at the beginning of the film: "If what I write about a generation of men shocks the impure, let them blame their own impurity and not my words".

Indeed, even from the first stages of pre-production Summers and Tono had to employ numerous tactics to slip past governmental obstacles. To try to ensure the script gained a positive evaluation at the review stage, the production company, *Kalender Films* presented a series of endorsement letters from various personalities. The censor charged with assessing the screenplay, Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui Alonso, summarises—not without certain grace—these missives:

> Supported by the most right-wing of writers, and, we might add, practicing catholic, José María Pemán; by a priest of the more progressive persuasion, Padre Aradilla; by Chuchi Fragoso, whose nineteen children would appear to give her a certain authority in this matter, and with the blessing of a UNESCO official [...]. I personally authorise this screenplay, although with the most serious warning that the production must not fail to convey the gentleness with which it is imbued [...]. It must be reiterated that Summers is one of the more private of Spanish directors, however, he is also the most accustomed to "tangle" with the censors [...] on viewing the film it is of a sufficient level to qualify for special interest, section 1(AGA, 121 36/05072).

The film was evaluated by the Board of Film Censorship and Appraisal in July 1971. Despite its letters of recommendation, after its screening, the majority of council members vetoed its distribution and the Sub-director General of Cinematography called for a new evaluation requesting further explanatory reports. After this second evaluation, the film was authorised for audiences over 18 years of age with some cuts and the refusal of all requests for financial assistance. Naturally, the mention of "special interest" was also rejected (AGA, 36/04217).

Adiós, cigüeña, adiós finally reached the box office in September 1971.[1] The day of its premiere, its stars—all non-professional actors between the ages of 7 and 17 years—were denied entry because they were underage. The furore caused was taken up by the press in articles, for instance, in the *Pueblo*'s article entitled: *¡Adiós, sentido común, adiós!* [Goodbye, Common Sense, Goodbye!] (Camarero, 1971) and this first point of conflict was the precursor to an ongoing controversy that would follow the film on its endless travels around the censors' offices.

After its public premiere, state institutions, the media, the film's producer, and even Summers himself, received a massive influx of letters and comments. Teachers, priests, and youngsters alike all begged for the feature's age rating to be lowered. Records at the Ministry of Information and Tour-

ism show a petition signed by five hundred nuns who, after seeing *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* at a training seminar decided to lobby for there to be special showings of the film for girls under fourteen years of age. Further support for this citizen's movement came from the pages of the national press, including publications such as *ABC* (1972), *Informaciones* (Campany, 1972) and *Pueblo* (Soraya,1972).

The film's impact was astonishing. It remained on the bill for twenty-four months during which time over 3,300,000 people came to see it (Olid Suero, 2022). It grossed "ninety-six million pesetas" which was a huge economic success considering that the "mean production costs in Spain would be between twelve and sixteen million," (Cotán Rodríguez, 1993: 55). The film's reception and distribution abroad were also formidable. It was shown in France, Italy, Belgium, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Venezuela (AGA, 36/042179). However, it received the most rapturous approval in Colombia: in Bogota alone, its audience reached some six hundred thousand and its box office receipts put it in the top three highest grossing films of the time alongside *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) and *A clockwork orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) (Brill, 1972). The film was even shown to huge acclaim at the Spanish embassy in Tokyo, Japan, as recorded in an announcement published by this organisation (AGA, 36/042179).

Pressure from the general public, as well as from the international press and critics meant that the film was revised and re-classified several times throughout the late-Francoist period and even into Spain's early democratic era. In fact, this feature was re-classified in 1971, and 1972, twice more in 1978 and, for the last time in 1984 at which point it was finally authorised for audiences aged 14 or over, and minors accompanied by an adult (AGA, 36/042179). The film was a legal and economic triumph for Summers after the terrible setback he had suffered only five years before with his film *Juguetes rotos* (Broken Toys, 1966).

RESIGNIFYING THE CITY: THE STREETS OF MADRID AS A SYMBOL OF FREEDOM

The locations Manuel Summers selected as settings for *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* function first and foremost as a framework or support structure for the narrative. They are all in the centre of Madrid and, chosen to project the feelings, thoughts, fantasies, memories, and obsessions of the cinematographer himself, they can be summed up in his statement: "In these films we always end up telling our own life story and adapting it to the times. The telling is always something of a personal exposure, warts and all," (Galán, 1975: 41). The director's intentionality in locating his personal universe gives each space a *symbolising* function (Lotman, 1970; Garrido Domínguez, 1996), which takes on greater relevance when these locations host events or personalities of interest to the audience (Bajtin, 1991; Chatman, 2013), as we see in the film at the centre of the present discussion.

In the meantime, Franco's dictatorship had spent four decades honing a very particular image of Spain and indeed, Madrid, as the state capital. The clearest evidence of this is found in the news-documentaries that cinemas across Spain were obliged to show in the years between 1942 and 1981. These films were shown before the main feature and were designed to craft a stereotyped common vision of Spain and its cities. For many years then, cinemas had functioned as one of the main communicative organs for Francoist propaganda. *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* shreds the institutionally established image of Madrid. Many of its sequences are set in the city's most emblematic locations, however they show these spaces from a perspective entirely at odds with official representations. Thus, the film gives novel meanings to territory through fiction: the Prado museum, the Rastro flea market, the Puerta del Sol, the Retiro park's famous lake, Recoletos Boulevard, the Cuesta de Moyano, among others, come to en-

compass a distinct set of values and Summers is very conscious of this:

> For me, humour is the most important thing, because it seems to be a very serious issue. As they might say now, it's a matter of using it to change structures, and not only the local political structures of a country but universal structures. With humour you yourself make the scale of values [...] It's important to play with a world of meanings as if they were little led soldiers (Galán, 1975: 41).

In the face of a monolithic, imperial, and prosperous city with its enforced social, moral and political unity, this cinematographer presents Madrid's streets as places of encounter from which to experiment and dream. Their inhabitants are a generation living on the margins of an oppressive society; they are incredibly young, slightly daunted but united, supportive of one another, and keen to learn. These kids' ability to improvise, their companionship, the sounds of their playing and their laughter are the hubbub of the city. We see them go to school, go boating, go skating, or to museums on their own. In the rhythm of their lives, adults appear only at the peripheries, their silent comings and goings only forming part of the city's background.

The film resignifies Madrid's metropolis, and the medium- and long-term effects of this promote the emergence of a common opinion concerning the film's central plot (Trenzado, 1999). It's showing moved a good proportion of the population most likely because the vision it offered added to a latent collective disquiet caused by the socio-political and cultural changes sweeping across Spain at the time.

Naturally, other films besides *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* also attempted to communicate various messages and bring new meanings to the capital during the period of Franco's dictatorship. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* lies precisely in its contribution to the vision of Madrid as a capital leading the fight for individual freedom and the demand for a holistic education, but importantly, without taking a political stance. In addition, the focus of this film is substantially different to those of other features thanks to the ages of its main actors and the brilliance of its screenplay which reflect the world of childhood with huge sensitivity without falling into the trap of cliché or paternalism. These are features of Summers' work already apparent in his earlier productions such as *Del rosa...al amarillo* (From pink... to yellow, 1963) and *Me hace falta un bigote* (I need a moustache,1986) which some cinematographers class as a sub-genre of children's comedy (Garci, 1996).

AUTHENTICITY AND ANTICLERICALISM IN *ADIÓS, CIGÜEÑA, ADIÓS*

Almost all the scenes of *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* take place in the very centre of Madrid, with the exception of the sequences shot in the Guadarrama mountains. Although, in the words of the director himself, the film's second half takes on a certain fairy-tale feel (Galán, 1975: 41), the story has, in general, a very realist aesthetic, thus the city is essentially a naturalistic setting.

Urban space illustrates a historical moment so contributing decisively to anchoring the film's action in time as well as adding nuances of meaning; furthermore, the flow between locations serves as a thread to guide its narrative (Bajtin, 1991). The fact that the spaces filmed are all located in the same city gives the work a homogeneity that enhances its realism (Bazin, 2005). The narrative structure provided by the treatment of space also adds coherence and integrity to the film's fictional world, a factor that, in the final analysis, gives the film its authenticity, its "reality effect" (Barthes, 2016), or "impression of reality" (Aumont, 2020).

Adiós, cigüeña, adiós not only uses spaces well-known to its audiences, but also shares the same temporal moment with them. This spatiotemporal correspondence between the fictional representa-

tion of reality in the film and that inhabited by the audience enhances the film's impact on its viewers. The isomorphism of the screen and viewer amplifies the "sensorial knowledge" offered by the spaces depicted (Garrido Domínguez, 1996: 209) and the impact of the film's controversial subject matter is thus multiplied since viewers are effectively being challenged directly (Weisgerber, 1990; Prince, 2012).

Throughout the film, the director maintains a constant equilibrium between plot events and religious elements in order to justify the possibility of a sexual relationship between two adolescents within a Christian framework. Not only does the film begin with a religious quote but it also finishes on a scene in which Paloma cradles her newborn surrounded by the baby's father and three girls in a humble, poorly lit attic room the walls of which are plastered with religious pictures. This final scene, accompanied by sacred music, is clearly meant as a classical Christian representation of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

These nods to the prevailing morality of Spain in the nineteen seventies do not detract from the narrative's message that the institutions and social norms of the time represent an obstacle to love (Garci, 1996). Religious spirituality is an ever-present undercurrent in Summer's filmography (Image 1): priests and "estampitas", postcards featuring holy images such as pictures of saints or the virgin Mary, appear frequently and there are constant allusions to guilt and the fear of sin (Cotán Rodríguez, 1993). The ecclesiastical figures that appear in *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* are disempowering figures of maximal power and definitively part of the adult world. They exclusively inhabit closed spaces such as the school, churches, offices, among others, and exercise a suffocating authority. This kind of representation earned the director a reputation as anti-clerical, one that he himself readily accepted:

> It seems to me that I have no option but to be anti-clerical [...] they've never done me anything but

Image 1. Stills from *Del rosa... al amarillo* and *Adiós cigüeña, adiós*

harm. They have scared me since I was a child, traumatising me with the concept of purgatory, hell, souls, devils, and punishment. I have no choice about being this way because they haven't ever offered me anything else; they've never offered me heaven, but rather the threat of hell (Galán, 1975: 41).

THE AXIOLOGICAL DICHOTOMY OF SPACES

The choice of which space should be the setting for key elements of the plot is determined by the director's point of view (Weisgerber, 1990). As a result, the perspective presented by the place itself is linked to the idiosyncrasies of a given cinematographer and this has consequences for its expressive meaning and the critical response of the audience (Ball 2006; Chatman 2013, Orcinolli,

2017). Summers takes the viewpoint of his adolescent protagonists as they create their own rules to solve their own problems—and their attitude plainly reflects the director's fundamental ideas.

From this position, it is possible to see how space *semiotises* and demonstrates mutually opposing meanings (Lotman, 1970: 281). Thus, we find a dichotomy in the signification and the assignment of spaces which are systematically associated with specific concepts and characters. In *Adiós, cigüeña, adios*, the world of adults is situated indoors—school, homes, offices, and churches (Image 2)—while the children's universe develops outdoors (Image 3). The children also have access to interior spaces, but in the majority of cases they go there accompanied by adults who generally engage in some abuse of power. The youngsters appear listless and downtrodden in these adult-dominated indoor spaces, and it is only when they are out on the streets that they seem to behave as their true selves. The way in which the nature of particular spaces and actions is marked leads us to appreciate the existence of a conceptual division with relation to location: interior space is governed by an unquestionable authority, a disempowering religion, an established hierarchy, blind obedience, a silence imposed on the young, and verbal violence against children; exterior spaces in contrast are characterized by laughter, games, religion as a spiritual support, and above all, freedom. Following the film's structure through the locations it uses, on one hand, interior spaces containing adult characters emerge as a metaphor (Wellek and Warren, 2009) for the oppression exercised by the socio-political and ecclesiastical establishment of the time while, on the other, exterior spaces occupied by the younger generation are an allegory for freedom.

Thus, spaces take on meanings due to the fictional action that takes place within them, and they are defined by axiological opposition (Garrido Domínguez, 1996; Barthes, 2016). The bifurcation of space into two territories: a space of repression

Image 2. Stills from *Adiós cigüeña, adiós.* Interior spaces are inhabited by adults who exercise their authority

Image 3. Stills from *Adiós cigüeña, adiós*. Madrid as a liberating space occupied by children (the Rastro flea-market, The lake in Retiro Park, Recoletos Street and Velázquez Street)

versus a space of freedom, lays bare the director's intentions allowing access to relevant information through the detailed study of space.

Other interesting dichotomies existing with respect to locations in the film similarly hint at deeper meanings, for example, in the contrasting of social space against transgressive space. The former encompasses all those places that are visible to others, that is, those places where the children are constrained by prevailing social structures and expected to behave according to the hegemonic social rules including both the adult world of home and school as well as the places where the children meet in the streets. The latter sort of space comprises all those isolated locations where it is possible to break the rules: the public baths where the boys swap their shorts for trousers in order to seem older; the secluded bench in the park where forbidden books can be read in peace; the music club where Paloma and Arturo dance in one another's arms; the ruins that hide the two adolescent protagonists during their sexual encounter; and the attic where Paloma gives birth to her baby.

Of course, the dimensions of space are multiple, and a further division can be found in terms of spaces of knowledge and those of routine. Art, books, and play are presented as the principal sources of knowledge and these activities are always accessed away from places dominated by the established order, in other words, outside of school, home, or church. Once again, space becomes a symbol, representing zones where knowledge can be accessed: the children consult the books they have found in secluded parks, or hidden in the attic, and learn about female anatomy from looking at paintings by Reubens and Titian. In contrast, routine spaces are those in which they must live by the behavioural norms imposed by authority figures whose teachings seem to contribute little to the children's wellbeing or indeed their existences more generally.

Similarly, the film separates dream space from real space. The latter has the greater narrative

Image 4. Stills from *Adiós cigüeña, adiós*. Space and dramatic expression elucidate the links between and hierarchies separating different characters

weight throughout the film and is constructed with reference the middle-class experience of Spain in the seventies. The few dream-sequences in the film are all instigated by young Arturo who effectively functions as a portal into an oneiric world in which he sometimes takes on the role of narrator. This dream world is a "peculiar [place] where there is a dual addressee": the audience and the person imagining themselves in the dream; thus, it is an exercise in meta-fiction in which space is shared but outside of real-time (Mínguez Arranz and Fernández Hoya, 2022: 216). Summers uses these dream-sequences to introduce some of his more absurdist humorous elements, for example, when Arturo imagines the death of one of his friends and the coffin is draped with an Atletico de Madrid flag; or when he is sitting in class—bored—with a history book in front of him and he mentally replaces the heads of Isabella the Catholic and Fernando the Catholic with those of his girlfriend and himself, respectively, in an image entitled: "Modern Age". Here, place gives us an insight into the character's thoughts and states of mind, a technique common in romantic as well as literary fiction (Welleck and Warren, 2009).

Space is intimately linked to character, and both these elements of fiction feed on one another. The location of actors within a set and their behaviours are not only an important source of information concerning the values of and power relations between different characters (Chatman, 2013), but also provide information about what a given space means for the characters themselves and the plot. The position of a character and their actions, specifically, their non-verbal language express links and hierarchies with respect to others and assist in defining a given space (Image 4). Thus, each character tends to be assigned their own particular zone within a space and has boundaries that must not be crossed. For instance, consider the scene where the children congregate at one corner of the sofa to watch television while the head of the household takes the prime position; or how Arthur's father, progenitor of a numerous family, works in a spacious office that his children hardly dare to enter. In this way, a sort of "spatial polyphony" (Lotman,1979: 281-282) is created as a function of a character's role and their authority over a particular situation.

A MORAL STORY OF LOVE AND SEXUALITY SET IN SEVENTIES MADRID

In the cannon of cinema produced during Spain's transition to democracy, *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós*, can be placed among those films specifically aimed at the middle classes: productions of acceptable quality in which the comfortable, comedic tone includes a moderate critique so giving the audience permission to reflect (Asión Suñer, 2022). The film made waves even at a time when the Spanish nation was experiencing significant social convulsions with

student marches, labour disputes, and protests against the death penalty. And, from today's perspective, the film's success seems largely connected with the intense need for access to educational resources tackling issues such as sexuality—which the film addresses through its plot—without coming into conflict with state or church authorities.

Adiós, cigüeña, adiós presents a simple—perhaps implausible—plot but its transgressive character was magnified due to insistent calls from the general public for it to be shown to minors as a channel through which to address the percieved gap in education.

Its author and co-screenwriter, Tono's inspired idea to use children's voices as a loudspeaker to broadcast a social need, served to circumvent the censors. A protective manoeuvre that Summers further enhanced by constructing a fantastical story full of humour and tenderness over the backdrop of corrosive repression. These strategies alongside the endorsements secured from regime insiders supporting approval of the film's screenplay helped *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* to navigate various institutional obstacles: censoring of the screenplay, and later, evaluation by the Board of Film Censorship and Appraisal. Indeed, this government body which, after revision, approved the feature for over eighteens, was forced ultimately to re-examine its criteria and become more flexible due to the amount of pressure exerted by the public and foreign critics concerning this film.

All the key themes characterising Summer's filmography are present in *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós*: sexual repression; lack of individual freedoms; the Church and family as the greatest societal oppressors. As in his previous productions, he selects his childhood haunts in Madrid as film-sets mixing into the narrative memories, fantasies, and personal bugbears, all of which give each chosen space layers of symbolic meaning. In this way, Summers is instrumental in fracturing the collective vision created by the Franco's dictatorship through the financing of specific kinds of cinema

and news-documentary film. *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* articulates for an emancipated Madrid, personified in a childhood that conquers urban space—a symbol of free-will.

Fictional spaces are transformed into symbols which acquire meanings defined by opposition between one another and their associations with particular characters. Thus, for example, places that might seem safe and educational for children (church, school, etc...) are, in fact, oppressive while Madrid's streets that could be construed as risky, offer protection. This axiological dichotomy found in the film's symbolism of space includes many other examples: the contrast of social and transgressive space; spaces linked to knowledge set against those linked to routine; dream-space as opposed to the real space inhabited by the film's characters.

Setting the film in the city of Madrid contributes to the coherence of its storyline and the integrity of its plot bringing realism to the narrative and providing a facet of authenticity. At the same time, locations where the action happens, the positioning of the actors on set, as well as their dramatic expression feed into one another and provide the audience with insights into the nature of each space, and the relationships between characters thereby creating a form of spatial-relational polyphony. In *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* a taboo subject—teenage pregnancy and adolescent sexuality—finds its way into the public arena in the dying years of the dictatorship. It is a case of the cinema taking the pulse of the streets and translating it onto the big screen.

The passage of time has taken its toll on this film, causing it to lose some of its freshness and the boldness with which it connected to its audiences, keen for structural change. Nevertheless, it remains for us to ask ourselves, more than half a century later, living in an established, supposedly egalitarian democracy, whether the topics addressed in *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* have been dealt with, or whether, in fact, they are as yet unresolved.[2] One thing is for sure, cinema is still creat-

ing stories centred on these issues, most recently, for instance, in the film *La maternal* [Motherhood] (Pilar Palomero, 2022). ∎

NOTES

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1. *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* premiered on 6th September in the Novedades de Barcelona cinema and on the 11th of the same month in the Avenida de Madrid cinema.

2. Worldwide, in 2019, twenty-one million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 years old became pregnant, one million of these girls were under the age of 15 years (OMS, 2022). In Spain there were more than 130 pregnancies among underage girls that same year (NIE, 2022).

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NARRATIVE SPACE, AUTHENTICITY, AND DRAMATIC EXPRESSION IN *ADIÓS, CIGÜEÑA, ADIÓS*

ESPACIO NARRATIVO, VEROSIMILITUD Y EXPRESIÓN ACTORAL EN *ADIÓS, CIGÜEÑA, ADIÓS*

Abstract

This article studies the dimensions and functions of narrative space in the film *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* (Manuel Summers, 1971), which was shot in Madrid. To this end, two strands of analysis are performed, firstly a historical analysis of the film is completed enabling it to be contextualised and understood as a social agent and secondly a study of the fictional space using the narratological model from literary theory, augmented with insights from key works in cinematographic aesthetics and semiotics. The film's locations are shown to be essential elements of coherence and integrity giving the film a sense of authenticity. Likewise, space is demonstrated to be *semiotised* through its connection to the memories, experiences, fantasies, and desires of the filmmaker himself, so generating a spatial axiological dichotomy affecting the meanings places and the characterization of the characters. Furthermore, the feedback between space and dramatic expression offers audiences valuable insights into the film's action and plot.

Key words

Spanish Cinema; Narrative Space; Filming in Madrid; Manuel Summers; Acting; Film Space; Fictional Space.

Resumen

El presente artículo estudia las dimensiones y funciones del espacio narrativo en el film *Adiós cigüeña, adiós* (Manuel Summers, 1971), rodado en Madrid. Para ello se realiza un análisis histórico-fílmico, que permite contextualizar y comprender el impacto de la película como agente social; y posteriormente, se desarrolla un estudio del espacio ficcional utilizando el modelo narratológico proveniente de la teoría literaria, incluyendo algunos conceptos clave de la estética y la semiótica cinematográfica. Se muestra la importancia de las localizaciones en sí mismas como elemento esencial de coherencia, cohesión y verosimilitud del largometraje. Igualmente, se observa como el espacio se *semiotiza,* a través del volcado de los recuerdos, experiencias, fantasías y deseos del propio cineasta, dejando al descubierto una dicotomía axiológica espacial que afecta a la significación del lugar y a la caracterización de los personajes, así como una retroalimentación entre el espacio y la expresión actoral ofreciendo al público información de valor respecto a las acciones y la trama.

Palabras clave

Cine español; Espacio narrativo; Rodajes en Madrid; Manuel Summers; Expresión actoral; Espacio fílmico; Espacio ficcional.

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A VIEW OF MADRID AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOODS THROUGH THE DOCUMENTARY *LA CIUDAD ES NUESTRA* BY TINO CALABUIG*

ELENA BLÁZQUEZ

1. AN IMAGINARY OF MADRID DURING THE LATE FRANCOIST PERIOD AND THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Film productions are valuable sources for the configuration of imaginaries: of possible individual or collective ways of representing time and space (García Canclini, 1997). As in every period, in the 1970s various filmmakers captured their particular vision of Madrid in images (Sánchez Noriega, 2014: 207-226). Each of these visions began to give life to an imaginary of a city, which was changing rapidly due to the social and political changes taking place during the last years of the Franco regime. It was an imaginary conditioned by the symbolic construction that the dictatorship urgently sought to achieve, with the aim of turning the city into "the imperial capital of the New State".[1] This desire would soon be expressed in a concentration of power through symbols of domination designed to undermine the idea of Madrid as a bastion of Republican resistance during the Spanish Civil War.[2] However, in opposition to the grandeur of this image of the capital as the nucleus of Francoist power, there was inevitably a counterweight, a Madrid of the resistance. This opposition was being expressed in public protests that were gaining force and becoming increasingly visible in different contexts of confrontation in the 1970s. Similarly, in contrast to the official efforts to promote an image of Madrid as prosperous and free of violence, audiovisual productions that could offer a counter-narrative began to appear, such as those made by Tino Calabuig.

Born in 1939, the Madrid filmmaker Tino Calabuig began his career as a painter in the 1960s. After studying in the United States, on his return to Spain in 1968 he joined the painters' group of the Spanish Communist Party. At the end of 1975, he joined a film group known as Colectivo de Cine de Madrid (Madrid Film Collective), which sought to make *counter-informational* films with a clear

political commitment.[3] It was precisely this counter-informational quality that made Calabuig one of the most prominent witnesses to the changes taking place in that Madrid of the resistance in the last years of the Franco regime and the first years of Spain's transition to democracy. Calabuig approached the city as both a foundation and a subject. It was not merely a pretext for telling a story, nor was it a set; rather, it was itself the object of study. In his projects, looking at Madrid involved analysing the profound social and political transformations that were taking place in the city. For Calabuig, the Spanish capital, immersed in a dynamic of constant changes during the late Francoist period and the transition to democracy, could hardly be represented in static or unambiguous terms. It is therefore unsurprising that he found painting inadequate to capture all its complexity. For this reason, the projects he conceived in relation to the city were characterised by two basic ideas that gave rise to a complex way of conceiving of the urban environment: using film as a tool for counter-information; and advocating collective authorship. Notable among these projects was the film he made before joining the Colectivo de Cine de Madrid: *La ciudad es nuestra* [The City Is Ours] (1975), a documentary with a collaborative approach whose main objective was to portray the grassroots movements in three neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Madrid: Pozo del Tío Raimundo, Barrio del Pilar and Orcasitas.

2. BACKGROUND TO *LA CIUDAD ES NUESTRA*

In the early 1970s, Calabuig began moving away from painting in favour of the so-called *environments*, multimedia installations that in his case were marked by a clear interest in reflecting on urban space.[4] An example of this was *Un recorrido cotidiano* [An Everyday Journey] (1971), which he described as a work that aimed to reflect "the conditions […] of everyday urban life, the repressions

and clashes suffered daily in […] a city, in transit" (1971a). The proposal's introductory statement described the comings and goings of a worker on his obligatory, unchanging journey from home to work and back again. His day began at half past six in the morning in Vallecas and ended at half past nine in the evening in the same place (Calabuig, 1971b). The purpose of *Un recorrido cotidiano* was to offer a critical view of the alienation experienced by workers in the city. To this end, Calabuig created a dark, labyrinthine route that the installation's visitors would have to follow. Along the route were displayed a series of objects and projections, all accompanied by a soundtrack comprised of raucous city noises. The alarming effect of the experience was intended to trigger a reflection on the relations of oppression and inequality created in the urban environment. Due to the capacity of this *journey* to agitate the visitor, it is unsurprising that Calabuig presented the installation as a "total spectacle" (1971b).

After this first experience with multimedia installations (or *environments*), Calabuig began to see audiovisual media as more effective for capturing the urban environment. He was interested not only in the cinematographic representation of the city, but also in the capacity of cinema to generate possible ways of "city-making".[5] Thus, in the early 1970s, he made an audiovisual production that documented everyday life, under the title *La edad del ocio y la herramienta* [The Age of Leisure and Work] (1974).[6] As Calabuig himself explained, this short film arose out of his interest in filming urban space and exposing the living conditions of workers (quoted in Benito, 1976: 59). In the film, the claws of a bulldozer loom threateningly over the people: in the Metro, in the streets and in the workplaces (Figure 1). This menacing representation was intended to unmask the reality of the so-called "age of leisure", which was not for everyone but would only be enjoyed by those of a certain social class. As Calabuig said about this film: "The 'world of leisure', associated with the life of people

who get up at six in the morning to go to work and come back tired eight, ten or twelve hours later, is a lie" (quoted in Benito, 1976: 59). *La edad del ocio y la herramienta* was thus presented as a critical continuation of the argument introduced in *Un recorrido cotidiano*, as well as the first explicit demonstration of Calabuig's use of film as a tool for counter-information and protest.[7]

After this short film, in the spring of the following year Calabuig shot his first medium-length documentary, *La ciudad es nuestra*, another counter-informational protest film, in this case related to the lack

Figure 1. Tino Calabuig, *La edad del ocio y la herramienta,* 1974. Courtesy of Tino Calabuig

of services in the working-class neighbourhoods of Madrid. This film not only showed Calabuig's interest in exposing the living conditions of the workers, but also his constant concern with establishing partnerships with the residents of neighbourhoods on the city outskirts. As researcher Alberto Berzosa points out, "Calabuig always maintained a great interest in collaborating […] with the neighbourhoods, residents' associations and youth organisations that energised the political life of Madrid's periphery; this was the seed that gave rise to the project" (2015). The film depicts the important grassroots movements that had developed in Madrid's hardest-hit neighbourhoods before Franco's death. Calabuig chose three areas—Pozo del Tío Raimundo, Barrio del Pilar and Orcasitas—as examples of these grassroots processes that were developing in the same way in other neighbourhoods of the city, and also around other urban centres of the country.[8] This documentary was constructed on the premises that conditioned all of Calabuig's work: to seek a new form of expression, in this case in the audio-visual medium, and to document it collectively. This article thus explores how *La ciudad es nuestra* was filmed, how that filming was the product of a group dynamic, and how Calabuig conceived of the film's exhibition in a way that could encourage debate about the possibility of social change.

3. A TOUR OF THE OUTSKIRTS OF MADRID

The film begins with a journey, a drive in a car from the centre to the periphery, as if we, the viewers, were taking our own trip from a central location to the outer suburbs of Madrid. The story previously constructed in *Un recorrido cotidiano* now seems to take to the streets to show the lives of many other people who, like the worker in that earlier production, start their day in Vallecas at half past six in the morning. After the opening credits, the documentary's journey begins with a city map of Madrid that shows the location of the three aforementioned neighbourhoods. A fade to black then takes the viewer inside a tunnel that leads along the A6 motorway to the Arco

de la Victoria ("Victory Arch") in the city's Moncloa district, a symbol of Franco's power built as an "imposed memory" to honour the regime and commemorate the Battle of Ciudad Universitaria.[9] It is not surprising that Calabuig should choose to begin his documentary in this provocative way, with an example of symbolic appropriation by the Franco regime that contrasts with a title (The City Is Ours) expressing a desire for the appropriation by the people of the places in which they live. The shot of the Arco de la Victoria is followed by different shots of the Plaza de Cibeles, the Gran Vía, the Puerta de Alcalá and other places in the city centre that could not logically form part of an actual route through the city, a fact that reveals Calabuig's interest in showing emblematic places associated with the popularised image of a modern and prosperous Madrid promoted in other parts of the country and abroad. Shortly afterwards, in the context of these scenes of the centre of Madrid, the Arco de la Victoria reappears. But a fade to black and another tunnel lead the viewer to a new, very different destination: Pozo del Tío Raimundo, an impoverished neighbourhood in the south of the capital that the viewer recognises from the city map shown in the film for informational purposes.[10]

Although it would not be logical to take the Moncloa road to get from the centre of Madrid to Pozo del Tío Raimundo, Calabuig decided to juxtapose these two spaces of the city in order to emphasise the contrast between them. This juxtaposition reflects the "centre-periphery" conflict, or more precisely, the conflict between the Francoist government and the resistance of those who fought to improve their living conditions.[11] The contrast is further accentuated by the comparison of the asphalt of the streets in the centre with the dirt roads that still muddied some neighbourhoods on the periphery. However, the images of the centre take up only a few brief minutes of screen time, as the documentary quickly moves on to the neighbourhoods to show these three areas of Madrid in detail, from the inside. Challenging the traditional definition of the city based on its limits, which favours the perception of a periphery defined by the centre, in Calabuig's documentary the outskirts have as much to say as the central areas of the city. For this reason, these spaces are presented from the inside, as territories that create an environment of collective learning about the conception and construction of the spaces in which their residents live.[12]

The film is also enhanced by a collaborative approach to filmmaking itself, with a form of narration that gives leading roles to the locals who take part in the film. This approach was the reason why Calabuig created his documentary using the testimonies of residents who belonged to the residents' associations that he believed were playing a fundamental role in the demand for services to improve their living conditions (quoted in Benito, 1976: 59). *La ciudad es nuestra* was intended to reflect what the people in the streets were calling for: to this end, Calabuig embraced a form of direct cinema that would allow people to express their opinions spontaneously. The voices of several residents lead us through the streets of the neighbourhood, describing the various hardships they have been suffering for years, while others take advantage of their participation in the film to argue for counter-information, pointing out the need to use other media that are not "at the service of the administration, but of the people".

4. COLLECTIVE AUTHORSHIP

The documentary arose out of a group exhibition on seven Madrid neighbourhoods: Puerto Chico, Orcasitas, Palomeras Altas, Palomeras Bajas, Barrio del Pilar, Moratalaz and San Blas. The exhibition was held in early 1975 at the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid (COAM) under the title *Madrid en sus barrios: aproximación a la problemática socio-urbanística* ("Madrid in Its Neighbourhoods: An Approach to the Social Urban Planning Issue").

As indicated in the exhibition catalogue, these locations were chosen because the neighbourhoods—as enclaves with a distinct physical and sociological existence—were key to understanding the larger entity of the city (Various Authors, 1975). The intention of the exhibition was to analyse the urban reality through residents' associations that had played an essential role in calling for improvements to the urban environment. The exhibition was supported by research based on documentation provided by the different associations. As a complement to the display, Calabuig proposed the creation of what would later become *La ciudad es nuestra*. To this end, he wrote a document addressed to COAM titled *Sobre los barrios y las asociaciones de vecinos de Madrid* ("On the neighbourhoods and residents' associations of Madrid"), in which he explained that his intention with the film was to "study and disseminate the activities of residents' associations, [...] their form and operation, [and] how and why many of them have become truly democratic organisations" (1975). In the same document, he also detailed questions concerning the work method, such as his intention to carry out "surveys" in order to "get directly to the sources [...] by personally meeting the [...] witnesses to these processes" (1975). Once the proposal had been examined, according to Calabuig, the COAM's Culture Commission agreed to co-finance the project, with Calabuig himself covering the rest of the cost (quoted in Blázquez, 2014).[13]

Regarding the participatory nature of *La ciudad es nuestra* and the collective construction of the story by its contributors, researcher Alfonso García Cañadas points out that "the residents of the neighbourhoods actively participated in the filming of the work, providing contacts and explaining what they wanted to be shown in the film about their living conditions" (2021: 317). Moreover, this collective creation is explicitly promoted in the documentary's opening credits, with a caption stating that "the authors and protagonists of this work are the residents' associations of Madrid: Pozo del Tío Raimundo, Orcasitas, and Barrio del Pilar, with the support of Federación de Asociaciones de Vecinos de Madrid [Federation of Residents' Associations of Madrid]." After this initial note declaring beforehand the collective nature of the documentary, a second caption specifies the names of those who have carried out the different tasks, including "direction, direct sound or still photography". In a way, these credit titles distinguish between an authorship associated with the social struggle and a more technical authorship, which, although differentiated, would form part of a collectively authored project, as Calabuig himself defined the film as a "collective work" in which the roles of one and the other were advantageously vague and interchangeable (quoted in Benito, 1976: 60) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Shooting of *La ciudad es nuestra*, 1975. Photography by María Miró. Courtesy of Tino Calabuig

5. SHOWING *LA CIUDAD ES NUESTRA*

Although *La ciudad es nuestra* was not a clandestine film, due to its counter-informational nature it was exhibited discreetly. Calabuig even initially changed its title when he registered it for editing, calling it *La estética urbana* [Urban Aesthetics], a neutral title with no apparent social or political overtones. According to Calabuig himself, *La ciudad es nuestra* was a title that contained a public call in defence of the commons and was inspired by Salvador Allende's last speech, which the filmmaker explained he had heard at a documentary screening (quoted in Blázquez, 2014). In that speech, Allende proclaimed: "They have strength and will be able to dominate us, but social processes can be arrested neither by crime nor by force. History is ours, and people make history." Calabuig took up this last idea, a message that he decided to use as the documentary's title and declaration of intent: as a plea for the participation of the people in the construction of history and the places in which they live. With this same idea in mind, he wanted *La ciudad es nuestra* to be screened in many more places than those where it was filmed. For him, it was essential to exhibit it in locations where the living conditions were similar but where the residents had not yet reached the level of awareness of those in the neighbourhoods featured in the documentary, not so that they would be able to see the problems they already knew about, but so they could be shown a possible solution. In this regard, Calabuig himself explained in an interview:

> You can't go to a suburb, photograph the mud and show it to its residents, because they are seeing it every day. What you have to show them is the alternatives to the mud they are stepping in, and these possibilities and options are just what we are seeing in the film from beginning to end. The management and control of the self-government of the city and its own living conditions not only transcend the realm of urban planning but extend to areas such as society, culture, health, and education; in short, all the activities and services that a neighbourhood needs. (Quoted in Benito, 1976: 60)

The documentary was exhibited in other contexts through its distribution via alternative channels, such as the Federación de Cine-Clubs. As researcher Xosé Prieto Souto points out, the film was rented "in the early 1980s by residents' associations, trade unions, public agencies and political organisations, particularly but not exclusively those associated with the Spanish Communist Party" for screening in different parts of the country (2015: 385). The exhibition of the film in other places acted as a stimulus for the conception of other urban imaginaries, while also fostering the replication of the kind of mutual support between residents' associations shown in the documentary. In addition to informal contexts, the film was also screened in more specialist contexts. As Calabuig explained in the aforementioned document *Sobre los barrios y las asociaciones de vecinos de Madrid*, his aim in showing the film was to reach "a wide audience", as the documentary was intended for "both specialist and non-specialist audiences" (1975).

The film was shown at various cultural centres in Madrid, such as the headquarters of the German Institute, where it was screened on the initiative of the COAM's subcommittee for urban planning advice. It was also shown at national film festivals, including its selection for inclusion in Almería's first independent film festival in 1975, an event for which Calabuig, together with a group of independent filmmakers, wrote a manifesto advocating the creation of networks for the production, distribution and exhibition of alternative cinema (CCA, 1975: 56-57). At this festival, Calabuig met Josep Miquel Martí Rom, who worked for the Central del Curt, the biggest distributor of independent films in the country. As a result of this meeting, in addition to its inclusion in the catalogue of films distributed by his own group, the Colectivo de Cine de Madrid (1976:

CALABUIG WAS ONE OF A NUMBER OF FILMMAKERS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE DISSEMINATION OF COUNTER-INFORMATION DURING THE LAST YEARS OF THE FRANCO REGIME AND THE FIRST YEARS OF THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY, OFFERING IMAGES OF THE MADRID OF THE TIME THAT SERVE TODAY AS A COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE IMAGES BROADCAST BY OFFICIAL MEDIA OUTLETS

3), *La ciudad es nuestra* was added to the Central del Curt's catalogue (1976: 10). Martí Rom recalls that the documentary was one of its most widely distributed films (1980: 106; 2014), and was even screened internationally, specifically at the Mostra Internacional de Cinema de Intervenção in Estoril, Portugal, organised by the Centro de Intervenção Cultural in 1976 (Mateo Leivas, 2018: 118-119).

The presence of this documentary at independent film forums, both in Spain and abroad, served as inspiration for other audiovisual projects by Calabuig, as well as by other documentary filmmakers who were also interested in the power of community association networks. It is also worth noting that Calabuig, like other filmmakers who are encouraged to make a sequel to their films in order to track the evolution of what was previously documented,[14] made a follow-up piece in 1986 showing the transformation of the neighbourhoods in *La ciudad es nuestra*, although this footage remains unedited in his personal archives (quoted in Blázquez, 2023). In any case, with or without a sequel, Calabuig's interest in the neighbourhoods did not wane and its latent presence is evident in all of his subsequent productions. It is thus unsurprising that some participants in *La ciudad es nuestra* would take part in other documentaries by Colectivo de Cine de Madrid, such

as the then-president of the Orcasitas residents' association, Félix López Rey, who reappears in the collective's film *Amnistía y Libertad* [Amnesty and Freedom] (1976). But it is equally unsurprising that many of the images from *La ciudad es nuestra* would be reused in Calabuig's later work, such as his documentary *Tiempos de transición* [Times of Transition] (2003), or that other filmmakers such as the collective Terrorismo de Autor would recycle excerpts from the documentary for their film *La memoria es nuestra* [Memory is Ours] (2020), a film about the history of Barrio del Pilar through the collective memory of its residents. In this way, by integrating footage from *La ciudad es nuestra* into later works, these images recall and at the same time rewrite—from the perspective of the present—those moments of political and social upheaval experienced in the 1970s in the neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Madrid, as key pieces not only in the context of the neighbourhood's causes of that time, but also those of today.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The documentary analysed in this article illustrates Calabuig's interest in denouncing the living conditions of urban residents. He was one of a number of filmmakers who contributed to the dissemination of counter-information during the last years of the Franco regime and the first years of the transition to democracy, offering images of the Madrid of the time that serve today as a counterweight to the images broadcast by official media outlets. Herein lies the vital importance of his work, which provides a new perspective on the emergence of a different imaginary of that time and place. This article also reveals how he embraced the audiovisual medium early on as a tool that could operate on social and political levels. With his interest in grassroots processes that favoured cooperative dynamics aimed at pursuing social and political transformations, Calabuig applied these principles in many of his projects. His

creative strategy—characterised by the use of film as a tool for political intervention and by its aim of collective authorship—inspired reflection on the power relations established in the city while at the same time proposing new ways of inhabiting it.

It is pertinent to conclude this article with a brief reflection that can situate Calabuig's filmmaking practice in relation to the present day: an epilogue that considers the recent appearance of his audiovisual work in various film screenings and exhibitions at different institutions.[15] From a critical perspective, the last ten years has seen a resurgence of counter-informational filmmaking practices that have moved from the alternative sphere to find their way into general programming at various cultural institutions. In this way, they have begun to form part of the framework of historical and cultural narratives related to the late Francoist period and the transition to democracy, opening up new avenues of study that include social actors different from those who have been the protagonists of the official narratives for decades.[16] The inclusion of *La ciudad es nuestra* as part of this compendium of counter-narratives is particularly valuable as it is one of the few audiovisual testimonies to the neighbourhood movements in Madrid in the mid-1970s.

Moreover, since the image plays a fundamental role in the emergence of new imaginaries, the institutional recovery of projects of this kind about Madrid also serves to enrich debate on how to conceive of the city in the present. The early 1970s was a time for the development of proposals for community living. The possibility not only of their conception but also of their imminent realisation in light of the progressive weakening of the regime led to the intensification of many calls in support of the basic rights of the people. Calabuig's work during those years documents this mobilisation of a society which, in contrast to the alienation present in *La edad del ocio y la herramienta*, sought to create a strong social fabric that would enable them to demand better living conditions, as is shown in *La ciudad es nuestra*. Conceiving of Madrid during the late Francoist period and the transition to democracy through Calabuig's work as a filmmaker, and inserting it into the framework of existing narratives, not only contributes to the development of a different imaginary, but also—once it is incorporated into that collection of histories—facilitates a dialogue with the different visions of Madrid that were constructed in the 1970s, making this collection of stories about that historical moment a key tool for understanding and conceiving of the city in the present. ∎

NOTES

*   This research has been carried out as part of the research project: *"Fotoperiodismo y Transición española (1975-1982): la fijación y circulación de los acontecimientos a través de la prensa gráfica y su relectura memorística"* (PID2020-113419RB-I00), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

1. This desire was soon made manifest: as early as 30 March 1939, at the first session of the Madrid City Council, the new mayor, Alberto Alcocer, called upon the people of Madrid not to rest for a moment until the city was "a capital worthy of the new Spain, One, Great and Free, of the imperial Spain forged by the Generalissimo, by the Army, by the Militias and by the rearguard by dint of steel, by dint of blood and sacrifice." In: "Actas de la sesión municipal del 30 de marzo de 1939", Archivo de la Villa del Ayuntamiento de Madrid. For more information about this desire to symbolically recover Madrid during the dictatorship, see Box (2010).

2. In his article "Du Madrid du franquisme au Madrid de la *Movida*", Bernard Bessière discusses the suspicious relationship that Franco always maintained with the Madrid associated with the Republican resistance. He also explains how the Franco regime sought to break up that association with sweeping changes to the urban landscape of Madrid. Some notable examples

were the changes to street names, the organisation of an increased number of parades with an ideological focus in public spaces, and the construction of monuments intended to honour the regime, such as the Arco de la Victoria in the Moncloa district (2008: 131-150).

3. Colectivo de Cine de Madrid was a group project with counter-informational aims, active from 1975 to 1978. In addition to Calabuig, Andrés Linares, Adolfo Garijo and a fluctuating number of other contributors also took part. This group sought to use filmmaking to document facts that were being ignored by official media outlets.

4. In the words of the art theorist Simón Marchán Fiz: "The term *environment* […] implies *a space that envelops the man and through which he can move and develop* […] It is not a reproduction, but the establishment of a reality in a spatial situation" (2012 [1972]: 261).

5. One could speak of "city-making" as the intention of improving the living conditions of the people in the urban environment. For anthropologist Michel Agier, the city is a "never-ending process" in which "city-making" becomes a "right to the city", in which the city is an environment and a way of life, and not just a defined place in a given area (2015: 210).

6. This footage can be found in the compilation *Varios rodajes (Tino Calabuig)* belonging to the film collection of the Filmoteca Española. Some of these recordings of the city were screened at the Galería Vandrés and the Galería Buades in 1974 (APSA, 1974; Various Authors, 2008: 234).

7. During his years in Madrid, filmmaker Iván Zulueta also recorded the movements of the people in the urban space. He did so from his flat in Edificio España, filming the city from his terrace with his Super-8 camera. Zulueta used this same overhead view as part of a collective initiative proposed by Eugeni Bonet and Miguel Gómez, the audiovisual project *En la ciudad* [In the City], an invitation to reflect on the urban environment. Zulueta chose to portray Madrid in 1976 through the repression of a protest in Plaza de España and to denounce police repression by following the final shot with the news that appeared the next day

in the newspaper: "Two young people killed in the course of two demonstrations" (Bonet and Gómez, 1976; Molina Foix, 2010).

8. Although the changes being called for in these neighbourhoods bore certain similarities, the problems they faced were different. Pozo del Tío Raimundo, in the southeast of the capital, and Orcasitas, in the southwest, were self-built neighbourhoods created in the context of the chaotic growth of Madrid's outer suburbs, characterised by inadequate educational, health and transport infrastructures. Barrio del Pilar, located in the north of the city, was a neighbourhood constructed by a private developer that suffered from the excesses of speculation and the difficulties inherent to a high population density.

9. On the Arco de la Victoria as an imposed memory, see Fernández Delgado *et al.* (1982). The project to build this triumphal arch can also be considered a "place of memory", like those that the historian Pierre Nora calls "dominant", as "spectacular and triumphant, imposing and generally imposed, whether by a national authority or a constituted body" (1984).

10. As researcher Xosé Prieto Souto points out: "There is a political intentionality adopted by the director in the fact that the architectural motif most frequently repeated in this sequence is that of the Arco de la Victoria, a monument commemorating Franco's victory in the Civil War. In fact, the introductory speech stops when the camera gets as close to the arch as the filming from a car allows. The filmmaker then plays with false visual continuity. Next, we exit through another arch, which in reality is that of a bridge, which shows us, through film images of Pozo del Tío Raimundo, the other face of that victory" (2015: 383).

11. The book produced by the Orcasitas residents' association on the neighbourhood's community construction project contains images that expose this inequality between the centre and the periphery. One of these images features graffiti that reads "The parliament building never falls down, does it?" next to an image of propped-up single-family dwellings in Poblado Dirigido de Orcasitas (Martín Arnoriaga, 1986).

12. In fact, the residents' associations were actively organised to fulfil some of the neighbourhoods' demands, such as the creation of an electricity collective in Pozo del Tío Raimundo, or the collective negotiation of the design of new housing in Orcasitas through the creation of "natural" architectural models (Various Authors, 1986).

13. According to the then-president of the Orcasitas residents' association, Félix López Rey, they also contributed a limited amount of money to the production of the documentary (quoted in Blázquez, 2015).

14. For example, twenty-five years after *Numax presenta...* [Numax presents...] (1979), Joaquim Jordà filmed the documentary *Veinte años no es nada* [Twenty Years is Nothing] (2004), with the aim of portraying the evolution of those involved in the self-management of the Numax factory after they had left the social struggle.

15. Screenings in which the documentary has been seen in recent years include *La ciudad es nuestra* (CA2M, 2013), *40 años no es nada* (Sala Berlanga, 2014), *Alô alô mundo! Cines de invención en la generación del 68* (CA2M, 2015), *El poble desnonat* (La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, 2018) and *¿Pacífica y consensuada? La transición en el cine español y el cine español de la transición* (MUSAC, 2019). In addition, since 2011, the documentary has formed part of the MNCARS collection, and in recent years it has been shown in temporary exhibitions such as *Madrid activismos (1968-1982)* (La Casa Encendida, 2016), *Gelatina dura. Historias escamoteadas de los 80s* (MACBA, 2016-2017), *Poéticas de la democracia. Imágenes y contraimágenes de la transición* (MNCARS, 2018-2020) and *Cámara y ciudad. La vida urbana en la fotografía y el cine* (CaixaForum Barcelona, 2019-2020).

16. In the presentation of the seminar *Arte y Transición* at the MNCARS, it was explained that "[t]hese narratives present the transitional process as a seamless narrative, conducted with intelligence and responsibility by a group of politicians who determine (from above) the guidelines, stages and phases on the difficult road to democracy. This transition excludes from the political field other key agents of change (from below):

feminist and neighbourhood movements, workers' and students' struggles, and all those protests occurring and disseminated outside the channels of 'official culture'" (Various Authors, 2012).

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A VIEW OF MADRID AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOODS THROUGH THE DOCUMENTARY *LA CIUDAD ES NUESTRA* BY TINO CALABUIG

Abstract

This article explores the filmmaking practice of the Madrid-based filmmaker Tino Calabuig in the 1970s, work that was based on his analysis of the city of Madrid and the living conditions of its residents. It examines one of Calabuig's most important projects of that period: the documentary *La ciudad es nuestra* [The City Is Ours] (1975), a protest film providing counter-information on the administrative neglect suffered by some of Madrid's outer suburbs, such as Pozo del Tío Raimundo, Barrio del Pilar, and Orcasitas. This article analyses the film to identify Calabuig's interest in revealing the situation in these neighbourhoods and highlighting the role played by grassroots associations in collective calls for social development. It looks at how *La ciudad es nuestra* was filmed, the importance of a group dynamic in its production, and how Calabuig conceived of its exhibition in a way that would encourage debate about the possibility of social change. It also shows how the documentary, as a testimony to the neighbourhood struggles during the period marked by the shift from the end of the Franco regime to Spain's transition to democracy, constitutes a key tool for understanding the historical narratives constructed around the grassroots movements of Madrid in the 1970s.

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UNA VISIÓN DE MADRID Y SUS BARRIOS A TRAVÉS DEL DOCUMENTAL *LA CIUDAD ES NUESTRA* DE TINO CALABUIG

Resumen

Este artículo gira en torno a la obra audiovisual que llevó a cabo el cineasta madrileño Tino Calabuig en los años setenta, una obra basada en el estudio de la ciudad de Madrid y las condiciones de vida de sus habitantes. El análisis está centrado en uno de los proyectos de Calabuig más relevantes de esa época: el documental *La ciudad es nuestra* (1975), un film contrainformativo y de denuncia acerca de la situación de abandono administrativo en la que se encontraban algunos barrios del extrarradio madrileño, como el Pozo del Tío Raimundo, el Barrio del Pilar y Orcasitas. En este artículo, se analiza el film con el fin de constatar el interés de Calabuig por denunciar la situación en la que se encontraban estos barrios y destacar el papel ejercido por las asociaciones de vecinos en la demanda colectiva de mejoras sociales. En el texto, se muestra de qué modo se filmó *La ciudad es nuestra* (1975); cómo la filmación se llevó a cabo gracias a una dinámica grupal; y cómo Calabuig pensó la exhibición del film para que esta pudiera fomentar un debate en torno a un posible cambio social. A su vez, este artículo muestra cómo el documental, en cuanto que testimonio de las luchas vecinales durante el periodo en el que convergen el tardofranquismo y la transición, se constituye en una herramienta clave para pensar los relatos históricos construidos en torno a los movimientos vecinales de Madrid en los setenta.

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FILMIC SPACE, SOCIAL PROTEST AND URBAN MEMORY: IMAGES OF VALLECAS IN *QUINQUI* FILMS SET IN MADRID (1977-1981)*

VÍCTOR AERTSEN

WHERE THE CITY CHANGES NAME: *QUINQUI* AND THE OUTSKIRTS

In the period from 1977 to 1985, the film genre known as *quinqui* took Spanish cinemas by storm, telling audiences of the adventures and misadventures of street delinquents and other marginalised youth during the Spanish Transition to Democracy (Cuesta, 2009). Emerging in a social context marked by political change, economic crisis, rising unemployment and increasing drug use, this genre began as a reflection of the new forms of public violence and petty crime (purse-snatching, mugging, robbery and car theft) that swept through Spain's cities during this period and monopolised the news headlines.

Their appearance on the big screen was largely due to the "exacerbation of the new discourses" that accompanied the shift towards democracy (Imbert, 2015: 59) and the commercial objectives of the genre itself, which was defined by two different modes of representation. The first was a realist mode with leanings towards a documentary style, which sought to document a range of social issues and exhibited an interest in biographical approaches, sometimes with didactic touches in their detailed depictions of criminal activity and illegal drug use. The second was a sensationalist mode, with a propensity for addressing topics deemed taboo or shocking at that time in Spain, such as prostitution, drugs or abortion, leading to its classification as a Spanish version of the exploitation film (Cuesta, 2009).

Germán Labrador (2020: 28) defines the *quinqui* style as a socially widespread "field of forces and representations" present during the Transition in various cultural products and social practices beyond cinema, establishing a "network of meanings" that "wove together social imaginaries (i.e., representations of society), political transformations, urban metamorphoses and a very particular socioeconomic context resulting from the

crisis of 1979." Not all the films of this movement attempted to delve into "the layers of history and sociology necessary to understand their position" (Labrador, 2020: 17), as many filmmakers were content simply to exploit and *mythologise* "the *quinqui* style". However, the general attention that *quinqui* films gave to processes of spatial, economic and even legal marginalisation (García del Río, 2020) has resulted in the genre being typically understood as a counter-narrative of the Transition (Matos-Martín, 2015).

The outskirts of Spanish cities, which were undergoing intense processes of protest and transformation during this period, would occupy a central position as settings and backgrounds for the characters in *quinqui* films. Some of these suburban areas were already being explored as early as the 1950s in a few social realist films (Deltell, 2006), but unlike such one-off cases, *quinqui* films would systematically explore "the stories of the *barrio*", according to Castelló Segarra (2018: 118), bearing "witness to the extreme dehumanisation of the peripheral neighbourhoods in contrast to the hope that characterised life in the city proper." The city outskirts are presented in this genre as "the territory where the jurisdiction of the hegemonic collapses under the weight of the marginalised" (Alfeo & González, 2011: 1), offering images of what could be considered the "anomic inverse of the normative city, which directly challenges the late-Francoist dream of urban development, consumerism and integration" (Imbert, 2015: 61). The special interest that *quinqui* films took in social issues such as juvenile delinquency and drugs was thus coupled with a concern—whether explicit or implicit—with presenting the socioeconomic phenomena that caused these problems, placing the main focus of attention on the living conditions in the outer suburbs and among the marginalised classes that lived there.

In the case of Madrid, by the mid-1970s the city had two clearly distinguishable urban realms:

the central core, bounded by the city's innermost ring road (the M-30); and the outskirts, which included practically all of the former municipalities surrounding Madrid that had been absorbed by the city between 1948 and 1954. While the first was "a compact, continuous, structured and relatively well-serviced space", the second, organised into different neighbourhoods and housing projects, was "a collection of fragments of different sizes, compact inside each one but chaotic and unstructured as a whole, with serious gaps in infrastructure and services" (López de Lucio et al., 2016: 80).

The former municipality of Vallecas is one of these old urban hubs absorbed into the Spanish capital to form part of "Greater Madrid" (Valenzuela, 2010). Today it is comprised of the districts of Puente de Vallecas and Villa de Vallecas, although in the past it was subdivided in other ways less sensitive to its history and geographic organisation.[1] From the 1940s to the 1980s, mass migration and the proliferation of shantytowns and housing developments all over Vallecas, especially in the areas that now form part of Puente de Vallecas, would turn it into one of the paradigmatic districts of the peripheral belt around the city. As recently as 1973, despite various public and private initiatives beginning in the 1950s aimed at eradicating the shantytowns, a census of the Madrid municipal area found that 39.3% of shanties in the city were located in Vallecas, making it the district with the biggest concentration of such substandard housing, and the place where, according to Valenzuela (1975: 40), "the slum problem [had] become the most widespread and the most harmful."

This problematic situation would serve as the stimulus for the development of a new "unique and independent" identity for Vallecas (Fernández Montes, 2007: 38), replacing the historically rural identity of the district, cultivated both by the stigma imposed from the outside by inner city residents, who had come to view Vallecas as

"tarnished by a black legend of shanties, squalor, delinquency and marginalisation" (Fernández Montes, 2007: 57), and by cultural, political and social protest movements of the period within the district itself:

Immigrants from other parts of Spain with minimal education, shantytowns and precarious housing, unemployment, delinquency, drugs, local solidarity, activism by working-class priests and underground political movements, social protests, cultural associations and residents' organisations, artistic and cultural events with a social purpose... all formed an explosive cocktail that would crystallise in the early 1980s with the emergence of an internal identity that was forged in Puente de Vallecas but aspired to include the whole district (Fernández Montes, 2007: 71).

Given its situation and its marked identity, it is hardly surprising that Vallecas in general, and particularly some of its more representative neighbourhoods such as Pozo del Tío Raimundo and the various areas of Palomeras, would become recurring points of reference in Madrid's *quinqui* films at that time.

MAPPING *QUINQUI* FILMS SHOT IN VALLECAS

It is undeniable that cinema establishes complex and productive relationships with the field of geography. According to Teresa Castro (2009: 10), films articulate "a particular way of seeing and looking at the world, a visual regime" that has a strong affinity with the practice of cartography. This "mapping impulse", as she calls it, is especially evident in three "cartographic shapes" that are typical of cinema. Establishment shots, like panoramas, offer the observer a complete picture of the location. Like maps, high-angle shots and aerial shots can offer an abstract view of the geometric organisation of a place from their elevated position. And montages, in a manner similar to an atlas, effectively create a collection of images of a space articulated by a common discourse. All these practices "contribute to the shaping and structuring of geographic imagination—and to the transmission of geographic knowledge—through images" (Castro, 2009: 13).

Based on this premise, the objective of this article is to analyse the use of different areas of the districts known today as Puente de Vallecas and Villa de Vallecas as locations in various *quinqui* films of the late 1970s and early 1980s and the consequent audiovisual representation of those areas. To this end, the analysis focuses on images or audiovisual forms that express the "mapping impulse" identified by Teresa Castro (2009: 10) as typical of the *quinqui* genre and of special relevance to the processes of formation of the urban imaginaries associated with the neighbourhoods of Vallecas.

This study builds on a series of contributions by other authors who have taken an interest in exploring the relationship between *quinqui* and the outskirts of Spanish cities, whether considering the types of peripheral spaces most commonly featured in these films (Alfeo & González, 2011; Olaiz, 2016) or examining specific examples of characters' relationships with the spaces in question (Whittaker, 2008; Bloch-Robin, 2013). However, this article differs from these other studies because it focuses on a specific area (Vallecas), giving special attention to the geographical identification and urban characterisation of the real locations shown in the films, which I consider to be an original approach.

This research has been conducted using two complementary methodologies. First, with the aim of ensuring an effective analysis of the relationships between territory and narrative (Hallam, 2014; Aertsen *et al.*, 2019), detailed research has been carried out to identify the filming locations for *quinqui* films shot in Madrid.[2] The analysis of these images has made it clear that *quinqui* films function as historical archives, in the form of an audiovisual inventory of the different

neighbourhoods on Madrid's outskirts in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Based on this research, the five most relevant films featuring images of Vallecas have been chosen: *Hidden Pleasures* (Los placeres ocultos, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977), *La patria del 'Rata'* [Ratsy] (Francisco Lara Polop, 1980), *Navajeros* [Knifers] (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980), *Chocolate* (Gil Carretero, 1980) and *Faster, Faster* (Deprisa, deprisa, Carlos Saura, 1981). All these films are set in the same period they were filmed, i.e., at the historical moment when protests calling for improvements to the living conditions in the neighbourhoods shown on screen were at their peak. The results of this identification and geolocation have been compiled in the form of a digital map available online for consultation.[3]

The second research method adopted involved a textual analysis of all the films selected in order to identify the strategies of representation used to depict these spaces and to explore the urban realities and experiences expressed through those depictions. The meanings given to each film by the use of these real and recognisable spaces of Madrid are also considered. As will become evident in the following sections, the images of Vallecas offered by these films explore an urban reality in transformation, whose characteristics are emphasised by the strategies of representation chosen by the filmmakers, which in the process turns the footage into an extraordinary document of protest and urban memory.

QUINQUI FILMS FUNCTION AS HISTORICAL ARCHIVES, IN THE FORM OF AN AUDIOVISUAL INVENTORY OF THE DIFFERENT NEIGHBOURHOODS ON MADRID'S OUTSKIRTS IN THE LATE 1970S AND EARLY 1980S

WHEN THE NEED IS PRESSING: THE SHANTYTOWNS

The protagonists of all five films selected for this study either come from or live in one of the neighbourhoods that were built in Vallecas out of need, urgency or speculation during the years of the Franco dictatorship as a consequence of the processes of absorption of successive waves of migrants and the subsequent plans aimed at solving the problems of public housing in the city (Image 1). Their construction, in any case, was the product of various processes. On the one hand, the housing shortage and a lack of public policy gave rise to self-building on unlawfully appropriated subdivisions using low-quality materials, resulting in vast working-class neighbourhoods of low-income housing, and shantytown settlements on the city outskirts (Valenzuela, 1974). In the mid-1950s, the government began implementing a series of public housing construction plans in an effort to eradicate the slums, giving rise to a variety of settlements and housing estates, some of which were intended to be temporary, such as the "neighbourhood absorption units" (*Unidades Vecinales de Absorción*, or UVAs), while others were permanent, like the *Poblados Dirigidos* (Sambricio, 2004; López Simón, 2018). On the other hand, private companies became fully involved in the construction of working-class housing as of 1957 with the *Plan de Urgencia Social* (PUS), which established a system of "coordinated urban development" (Valenzuela, 1974) aimed at reducing the costs to the public purse through contributions of private capital to the solution of the housing problem (Burbano Trimiño, 2020).

Several of these neighbourhoods are shown in *Navajeros*, which is probably the *quinqui* film that offers the most explicit analysis linking juvenile delinquency to the living conditions in the urban periphery. In the middle of the film there is a break in the narrative flow produced by a montage sequence showing the journalist
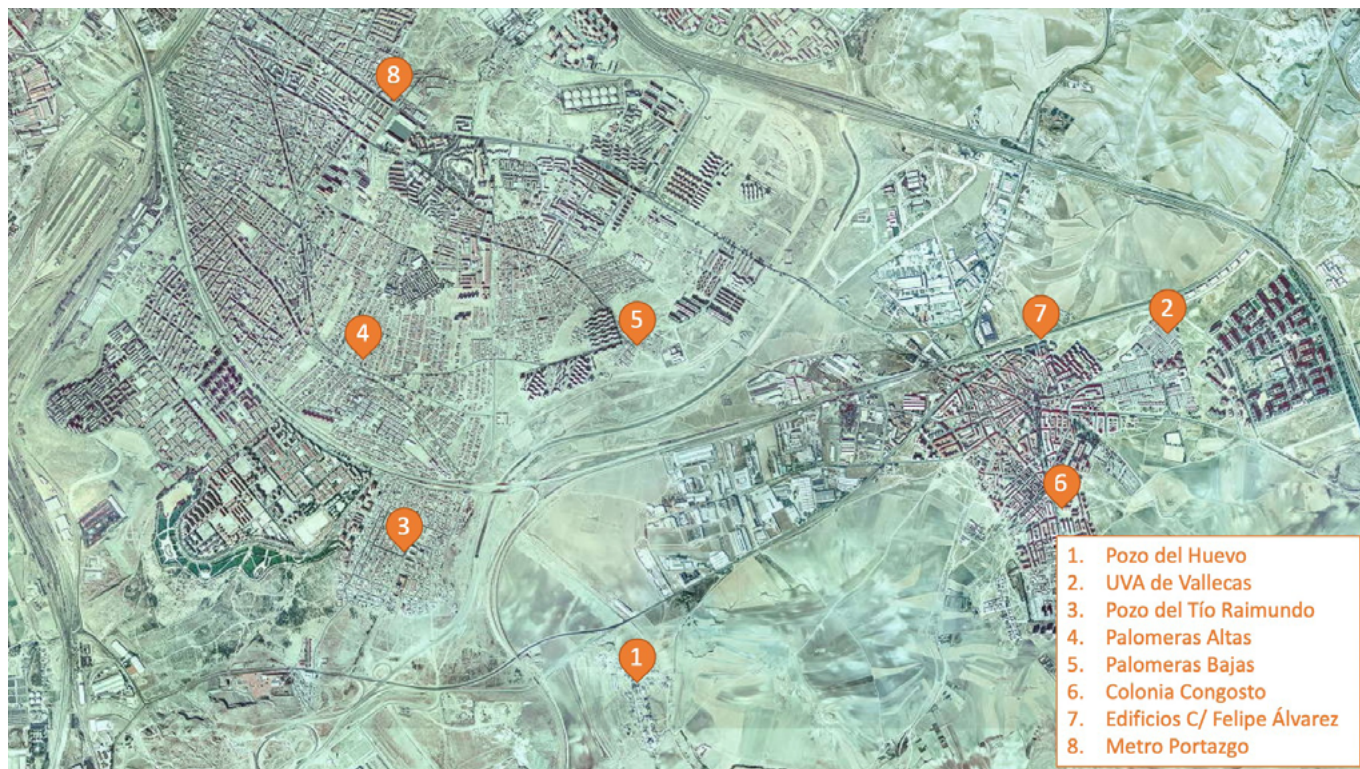
Image 1. Aerial photo from 1980 showing the area of Vallecas, with some of the neighbourhoods and locations mentioned in the article. Map source: Nomecalles (Institute of Statistics of the Community of Madrid). Prepared by author

(played by José Sacristán) visiting different parts of what today is the district of Puente de Vallecas in order to see El Jaro's place of origin firsthand. Although the sequence revolves around his search for one particular neighbourhood, it is presented as a kind of atlas of peripheral areas in which the images enact a process of discursive homogenisation of the different spaces shown, whose problems and deficiencies are depicted as identical.

Despite their diversity, all these neighbourhoods are characterised by their peripheral status in the context of the urban and socioeconomic fabric of Madrid, where "separation from the city (not in terms of distance or a physical barrier, but in terms of difficulties of access to the larger urban structure) and the negative values associated with their marked physical precariousness" (Arredondo, 2005: 101-102) condition the existence of their inhabitants. The concepts of distance (separation, isolation) and precariousness (deficiency,

deterioration, shortage) are extremely important for the analysis of how the spaces of Vallecas are represented in *Navajeros* and the other films.

The sequence begins with images of the shantytown of Pozo del Huevo (Image 2), which developed spontaneously in the 1950s near the motorway from Villaverde to Vallecas, along with the nearby settlement of La Celsa. The images clearly display the fragility and inadequacy of the housing, built between high voltage electricity pylons with a notable absence of municipal services. A series of wide shots around the perimeter underscore its isolation in a lifeless field stretching to the horizon, with the hilltop of Las Barranquillas looming in the background. The image makes it clear that this muddy, squalid location would hardly be conducive to the personal and social development of its inhabitants.

Many of the original residents of this settlement were relocated to the former UVA in Vallecas, the housing project featured next in the

Above. Image 2. Pozo del Huevo in *Navajeros*
Below. Image 3. Vallecas Neighbourhood Absorption Unit (UVA) in *Navajeros*

montage (Image 3). Built as a temporary measure in 1963 with the aim of providing alternatives to the shantytowns, the precarious nature of these so-called "neighbourhood absorption units" ultimately turned them into a kind of "planned slums" (Capel, 1975: 60). This is made clear in the image shown in the film, whose foreshortened perspective highlights the uniformity of the prefabricated geometric shacks that comprise the UVA and the limited size of their liveable space. Stretching out before them is an unpaved road and a plot of undeveloped land dominated by stunted trees concealing the National Motorway No. 3, which crosses immediately behind without any traffic control or safety measures.

Most of the montage images that follow take the spectator towards the northern boundary of Vallecas' Pozo del Tío Raimundo neighbourhood, "an archetype of the shantytown hub of immigration in the 1950s" (Valenzuela, 1974: 623), and of the movements formed by local residents to call for improvements to public services and living conditions.[4] Its informal growth on the other side of the Madrid-Zaragoza railway line, which initially helped keep it free from municipal oversight, conditioned its subsequent isolation so that together with the adjacent neighbourhood of Entrevías it formed a triangular island surrounded by train tracks on all sides. Until 1994, the closest Metro station was Portazgo, the last station on Line 1, located 2.5 kilometres from the nearest point of the Pozo neighbourhood. Moreover, despite the omnipresence of railway tracks, the neighbourhood would not be served by Madrid's commuter rail service until 1996, when a *Cercanías* station was built at this intersection between the two neighbourhoods. These are significant distances, especially when the route to these stations ran through undeveloped areas where rainy weather would turn the roads to mud that would stick to the residents on their way to the station, revealing their origins and increasing their stigmatisation (García-Nieto, 1987).

It is precisely at the pedestrian bridge that joins the two neighbourhoods where Eloy de la Iglesia places his camera (Image 4). The shot underscores their location "on the other side" of the tracks, while the elevated perspective shows the homes sinking into the depression of the land that rises again behind them, reinforcing the sensation of isolation. The elevated perspective also offers a broad view of the tangle of squalid dwellings that stretch on to the horizon, and a gentle pan leads the spectator's gaze from Pozo to Palomeras, highlighting the topographical proximity of the two neighbourhoods and their physical separation as a consequence of the transport infrastructure, which dominates the image, tracing a scar across

Image 4. Pozo del Tío Raimundo in *Navajeros*

Image 5. Pozo del Tío Raimundo in *Chocolate*

the urban space. The incessant movement of buses and cars observable on both sides of the bridge reveals not only the hustle and bustle of the district, but also the importance of these vehicles for bridging the distances that separate it from other more established areas of the city.

The isolation of Pozo del Tío Raimundo is similarly highlighted in an establishment shot in *Chocolate* (Image 5) in which El Jato (Manuel de Benito) and El Muertes (Ángel Alcázar), two friends who moments earlier proudly acknowledged their Vallecas roots, go to visit El Jato's mother there. The location chosen once again stresses the isolation of the neighbourhood, although in this case with a shot taken from its easternmost end. The scenery could be mistaken for rural if it were not for the little houses packed tightly together in the background and the vast stretch of barren land in the foreground. The railway tracks appear again as a defining element of the composition and of the urban experience of the neighbourhood, with the hostility of the infrastructure underscored by the invasive noise of a train that seems to be approaching but never arrives. Between the tracks and the houses is a vast "no man's land" where we can see the earthworks for the construction of the future M-40 motorway, whose original design included the location of a large clover-shaped in-

terchange over Pozo del Tío Raimundo, a "mechanism that came to be customary as an expeditious way of eliminating substandard housing" (López de Lucio, 2012: 178), but which due to pressure from local residents would end up only imposing on the edge of the neighbourhood.

The film also introduces the spectator to the adjacent neighbourhood of Palomeras Bajas, which forms part of the district of Vallecas. In a later scene, El Jato is shown driving a motorcycle down the old avenue of Palomeras Bajas and a parallel street, both of which have since disappeared from the map. Pan shots in both cases reveal the provisional nature of the physical environment, a network of asphalted roads with unfinished pavements, dilapidated houses and undeveloped plots. In any case, it is in *La patria del 'Rata'* that we can find the most eloquent images of Palomeras Bajas, the home neighbourhood of El Rata (Danilo Mat-

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THE RAILWAY TRACKS APPEAR AGAIN AS A DEFINING ELEMENT OF THE COMPOSITION AND OF THE URBAN EXPERIENCE OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, UNDERSCORING THE HOSTILITY OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE

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tei) and his childhood friend (Javier Viñas), and a place notable in the 1970s for having the greatest concentration of substandard housing in Madrid (Valenzuela, 1975).

The sequence begins with a brief montage which, like the one in *Navajeros*, offers a snapshot of daily life on the edges of the neighbourhood, where the shantytowns are most in evidence: children playing football, women washing clothes, men playing cards and goats grazing on the grass around whitewashed houses and asbestos shacks built on unpaved ground. The shots include one of a woman filling a washing bowl from a public fountain—a significant image for a neighbourhood that had no running water until 1975 (García-Nieto París, 1987).

The series of images comprising this small atlas of the neighbourhood culminates with an eloquent shot showing the protagonists walking down one of the main streets of Palomeras Bajas, occupied today by Javier de Miguel Park (Image 6). The camera pans across the scene, and then an upward tracking shot expands the field of vision to offer a glimpse of the geometric organisation of the space. Its frontal composition highlights the rows of houses stretching to the horizon on both sides of the road, with no other buildings in sight

despite the wide perspective offered. This image is thus highly effective in showing the reality of a spontaneously constructed neighbourhood where the only evidence of urban planning is to be found in the spaces left for some transit areas and the alignment of the buildings (Valenzuela, 1974: 609). It is also made clear that the area contains practically nothing but dwellings and roads, as the pavements are scarcely serviceable, the public facilities are non-existent and a leafless tree peeking out from behind a wall is the only sign of nature. The public space available is designed to serve the simple function of facilitating pedestrian and vehicle traffic, for which purpose it has been paved. But the *monofunctionality* of the urban design does not prevent it from being used by the local residents for other purposes (in fact, it may actually encourage it), as evidenced by the children playing and the adults chatting on a roadway intended for cars. In this way, the shot reveals the value of cinema as a means of documenting a space that has since disappeared and the ways its inhabitants lived and moved around in it.

There are also signs in the image of the lack of services and utilities in the neighbourhood. The area had no sewerage system, as can be seen from

Image 6. Palomeras Bajas in *La patria del 'Rata'*

THE SOCIAL LIVES OF THE CHARACTERS IN *QUINQUI* FILMS TAKE PLACE IN VACANT LOTS, DISUSED PLOTS OF LAND AND OTHER RESIDUAL SPACES LOCATED ON THE MARGINS OF THE CITY

the very rudimentary roadway. Cleaning services for public spaces are also notable for their absence, which explains the presence in the shot of local women cleaning their section of the road. On the other hand, the marked absence of trees contrasts with the plethora of haphazardly arranged wooden posts holding up the power lines that began being installed in some homes at the end of the 1950s, "after repeated requests were made and a significant sum of money was paid" (García-Nieto París, 1988). The wires criss-cross the sky in a tangle that should raise safety concerns, weaving a kind of spider's web in which the residents appear to be trapped. Fittingly, it is precisely at this location that El Rata and his friend discuss the lack of job opportunities for them and the other young locals, forcing them to look for other less honest ways of making a living.

As the urban anthropologist Manuel Delgado points out (2011: 73-74), although social morphology has the last word on urban development "in relation to what a particular built-up area is for and what it means," it is an established fact that "the physical stimuli elicited by a projected environment are able to trigger certain patterns of behaviour or at least predispose [inhabitants] to them." In the case of the peripheral areas described above, their deficiencies will obviously shape the living conditions and possibilities of those who live there. In this sense, Arredondo (2005: 101-102) notes that the physical precariousness of such environments "characterises the inhabitable space (the dwelling), the services and functions external to it related to living needs, and an external space that lacks the capacity to meet the

community's needs for social engagement." When they are shown, the rooms inside the protagonists' family homes are presented as small, cramped and lacking in privacy. And the neighbourhoods they live in lack public spaces that could facilitate human interaction. As a result, the social lives of the characters in *quinqui* films take place in vacant lots, disused plots of land and other residual spaces located on the margins of the city, where they can "recreate social hubs based on the gang as a micro-community to compensate for the deficiencies of the family model" (Imbert, 2015: 61).

This is what happens to the protagonists in *Navajeros*, the youngest characters in the films analysed here, and it is thus unsurprising that they are also the characters most marked by feelings of rootlessness and social exclusion. In the absence of a family home or an urban environment with public spaces to facilitate social interaction and give meaning to everyday life (Borja, 2003), their reality has been relegated to a series of residual spaces where they can at least roam freely: an open space located inside the Nuestra Señora de la Almudena cemetery, Madrid's biggest graveyard, and two places located in the interstices between city and countryside: an island of shanties and an industrial complex. Located outside the production processes and consumer flows that govern the established city, these are the only spaces they are permitted to enter without coming into conflict with other uses or having to spend money. In these urban corners the marginalised can find a space where they are able to socially interact.

WHEN PLANS GO AWRY: PRIVATE DEVELOPMENTS AND SETTLEMENTS

Beginning in 1957, various stimuli were introduced in the form of subsidies and loans for the urbanisation of rural areas (Betrán Abadía, 2002) to encourage the private sector to get involved in construction projects, including "major complexes", with the same aim as the public projects to

relocate the largest possible number of people in the shortest possible time (Valenzuela, 1974: 643). Although they offered some improvements, they were far from the ideal solutions that the Franco regime boasted they would be. The quest for the optimal use of space at the lowest cost meant the use of cheap materials that inevitably affected the quality of the housing. Construction projects were developed without any broader urban planning scheme, "conceiving of the buildings as isolated entities, without seeking to fit them into a wider community network" (López Simón, 2018: 189-190). In most cases, this resulted in neighbourhoods which, like the shantytowns, lacked public infrastructures such as pavements, lighting and street furniture, not to mention schools, medical clinics or other basic services.

Miguel (Tony Fuentes), the young protagonist in *Hidden Pleasures*, is also from Palomeras, as he announces the first time he meets Eduardo (Simón Andreu). But unlike El Rata, Miguel is from Palomeras Altas, an area located in the east end of the district closer to the Avenida de la Albufera, the arterial road along which the planned growth of the community would be organised. This explains why the two neighbourhoods shown in the film are characterised by the coexistence of self-built low-income housing and private developments. Miguel's girlfriend Carmen (Beatriz Rossat) lives in a house on the

street known today as Calle Guillermo Pingarrón (Image 7), whose seven-storey buildings loomed over a row of white bungalows (where Plaza Roja de Vallecas is located today). Despite being a planned development, it is striking to note that this street is also unpaved, even in the areas closest to the buildings. Miguel's house, on the other hand, although forming part of a larger cluster of substandard housing, is located next to the San Agustín complex (Image 8), a group of buildings constructed by a private developer but of equally "low quality" (García-Nieto, 1987) and just as cut off from the city, which is why public transport constituted one of the key demands of local residents during the Transition (Pérez & Pérez, 1998). It would not be the only demand in a neighbourhood whose urban environment "was characterised by the concrete and dirt of roads streaked with the black shadows of the power lines" (Pérez & Pérez, 1998), features that Eloy de la Iglesia's camera captures very clearly.

Much like the setting in *Navajeros*, the obvious deficiencies of their environment forces the youths of these neighbourhoods to seek out alternative spaces where they can socialise, with vacant lots and nearby derelict buildings being the preferred options. But in the case of *Hidden Pleasures*, these residual spaces are given a more negative connotation, highlighting the tensions they introduce into the urban and social fabric

Image 7. Palomeras Altas (Calle Guillermo Pingarrón) in *Hidden Pleasures*

Image 8. Palomeras Altas (San Agustín neighbourhood) in *Hidden Pleasures*

of the city. Nes (Ángel Pardo) and his group of friends from the neighbourhood spend their days smoking and scheming amid the rubble of a partly demolished shanty on the street Calle Guillermo Pingarrón. As they stagnate in this space for social interaction, the urban void is presented here as a prison sentence for the young people of the district, a place where they seem to be forced to take refuge and shut themselves in due to the lack of opportunities offered in the neighbourhood, resulting in increasingly marginalised codes of behaviour.

Miguel aspires to improve his situation and integrated into the dynamics of the established city, as indicated by his initial desire to study "accounting and general culture" and the enthusiasm with which he accepts the job Eduardo offers him. And his aspirations are also reflected in the locations where he spends time with his girlfriend. Instead of resorting to the nearby vacant lots to find an intimate moment, they share their time on the borders between their neighbourhoods and other more established areas of the city they hope to become a part of. Their first meeting is near the Portazgo Metro station, nearly two kilometres away from Miguel's house, at the more consolidated end of Avenida de la Albufera, next to the Vallecas football stadium. A little while later we see them on their way to the only urban green space available in the whole district in those days, the nearby Azorín park. Eloy de la Iglesia's choice of these two locations not only speaks volumes about the characters, anchoring their desires for social mobility to the spaces where they live, but also proves consistent with the urban fabric and the options available in those years to Palomeras residents. This active search for options on the neighbourhood limits contrasts with the stagnation of Nes and his friends in the residual spaces of the neighbourhood, whose characterisation as places of doom is underscored in the second last scene of the film, when for the first time we see Miguel enter a large vacant lot with his bro-

ken-down motorcycle, where he will end up receiving a beating from Nes and his gang.

The housing projects built with private money in the peripheral neighbourhoods play a central role in *Faster, Faster*, a film that gave the *quinqui* genre its aesthetic legitimacy (Cuesta, 2009). The image Carlos Saura offers of these neighbourhoods also highlights their systemic deficiencies, as he uses establishment shots to emphasise the isolation and squalor that characterised them in this period.

The first residence shared by Pablo (José Antonio Valdelomar) and Ángela (Berta Socuéllamos) is introduced with a pan shot taken from a point at what today is known as the Entrevías Lookout, displaying a clear mapping impulse with its totalising view of the location, taking the spectator from the skyline of the established city—with glimpses of the Telefónica Building and the skyscrapers surrounding the Plaza de España—to the northeast end of the Almendrales neighbourhood, and specifically, the housing project of the same name located in those days in the Mediodía district. Along the way, the spectator's gaze will pass over a broad stretch of middle ground where different train tracks and motorways converge, dominating the visual space while fragmenting the physical space.

The protagonists' next home, in a privately built residential block located at the northern end of Villa de Vallecas (Image 9), is shown twice with an establishment shot taken just "on the other side" of a railway track along which a train is rushing towards the camera, helping to emphasise the division of the space (Bloch-Robin, 2013: 70). The passing train gives rise to a pan shot that gives special attention to the physical conditions of the environment while seeking out the protagonists' residential block: with no pavements or asphalt, streetlights or benches, the various constructions are built on a barren stretch of ground whose emptiness is broken up only by a few children playing and some parked cars. If a

true public space is capable of "fostering the social redistribution of goods and services, facilitating social relations and giving meaning to everyday life for all groups" (Borja, 2003: 221), the introductory image offered by Saura here reveals the dismal failure of this project as a site for coexistence and civic development.

This failure is expressed verbally in the film itself in another scene where the protagonists, after committing one of their robberies, get out of a car at a location on Calle Congosto (Image 10) in the very heart of Villa de Vallecas, between the Virgen de la Piedad community, built in 1964 with private capital, and the neighbourhood of Congosto, built in the early 1970s. Despite being adjacent to the centre of the former municipality, the lack of paving, organisation or any sign of street furniture once again offers an image of a provisional urban development where the public space functions interchangeably as a parking lot, a site for improvised play and a route for pedestrian traffic. But on this occasion, the location chosen by Saura offers him another chance not only to depict the inadequate living conditions of these projects on Madrid's outskirts, but also to provide a glimpse of the residents' movements that were fighting at that time for local improvements, as reflected on a huge placard hanging between two of the buildings, which reads: "The residents of this neighbourhood ask not for pity but for justice." It is an affirmation that could easily be hung up in any of the neighbourhoods discussed above.

This offers clear evidence for Germán Labrador's (2020: 35) argument that "the *quinqui* style formed part of a rich field of underground forces running through the margins of institutional politics and vast areas of everyday life," establishing various nodes or "chronotopic hubs" such as prisons or working-class neighbourhoods, in which "the *quinqui* style joined in solidarity with a whole range of alternative political energies." However, as Labrador himself would note, "in essence, *quinqui* films introduce us to marginalised youth act-

ing independently of the usual battles and forms of political action in the working-class districts" (Labrador 2020: 37). The analysis described in this article reveals how these battles, or at least the living conditions that gave rise to them, emerge in the films of the period through the depiction of the environments where the protagonists come from or where they live, as the lives portrayed are among the consequences of the social and urban development crisis that the residents' movements were protesting against.

Indeed, in the same years when these films were made, the resident protests in these and other neighbourhoods on Madrid's outskirts forced the government to implement the Neighbourhood Redevelopment Program (*Programa de Barrios en Remodelación*), an operation of unprec-

Above. Image 9. Buildings in Villa de Vallecas in *Faster, Faster*
Below. Image 10. Congosto de Villa neighbourhood in Vallecas in *Faster, Faster*

THE BATTLES OF THE LOCAL RESIDENTS, OR AT LEAST THE LIVING CONDITIONS THAT GAVE RISE TO THEM, EMERGE IN THE FILMS OF THE PERIOD THROUGH THE DEPICTION OF THE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE THE PROTAGONISTS COME FROM OR WHERE THEY LIVE

edented dimensions that ran from 1978 to 1985 (López de Lucio, 2012). Introduced as "a response to an explosive situation created over several decades, in which the government's lack of sensitivity caused the problems to fester and grow and the solutions to become increasingly more difficult and costly" (Vinuesa et al., 1986: 87), the operation would involve the complete demolition and new construction of housing and facilities in 30 historic slum areas of Madrid, including Pozo del Tío Raimundo, the Vallecas UVA and the various areas of Palomeras. In addition, a range of isolated actions were taken in other neighbourhoods on Madrid's outskirts with the aim of improving their infrastructures and services.

In this way, in their efforts to bring images to the big screen of the neighbourhoods of Vallecas and other peripheral areas of Madrid that had been stigmatised due to their physical and social precariousness, the *quinqui* genre not only documented the living conditions in these spaces, linking them to other social issues explored in these films, but also created an exceptional testimony to a Madrid that was on the verge of disappearing. Just a few short years after these films were made, the Madrid landscapes they captured would be completely transformed, turning the images the films contained into valuable historical records.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the sensationalist inclinations of their focus on the juvenile delinquency that proliferated in Spanish cities during the period of the Spanish Transition, many *quinqui* films reflect an explicit interest in exploring or at least reflecting the socioeconomic context that gave rise to it, pointing to the problematic living conditions and social exclusion of the outer suburbs as one of the key factors. This objective is clear in the *quinqui* films shot in Vallecas, which often feature —albeit briefly—establishment shots or montage sequences that expose the isolation and deficiencies of the neighbourhoods where their rootless protagonists live and interact.

This article has offered a critical analysis of the images of the neighbourhoods of Vallecas present in five iconic *quinqui* films made in Madrid, in each case considering the strategies of representation used to highlight the peripheral status of these areas, as well as the living conditions and limited possibilities of those who live in them. A combination of textual analysis and spatial analysis has been essential for this study, taking an approach to all the images analysed in which the precise identification of the filming location has been understood to be a question of primordial importance in the process. This exploration has taken in Madrid neighbourhoods as meaningful and significant as Pozo del Huevo, the Vallecas neighbourhood absorption unit (UVA), Pozo del Tío Raimundo and Palomeras, as well as several private housing developments in the Villa de Vallecas area. The identification of the specific locations where the footage was filmed can help explain the aesthetic choices made by the directors in the presentation of the neighbourhoods where their characters come from, making it possible to evaluate the depiction of these settings as real, dynamic, inhabited spaces. At the same time, their detailed geographical location on the Madrid map facilitates a better understanding of the discursive scope of the images offered, situating them in specific, recognisable historical urban contexts.

The analysis of establishment shots and montage sequences in these films has also sought to

evaluate the "mapping impulse" of the film medium, whereby, according to Teresa Castro (2009), cinematic images contribute to the creation and transmission of geographical knowledge. Such images reveal the history and characteristics of the locations and their effects on the people who live there, which in turn can provide opportunities for a critical reflection on the urban environment, as *quinqui* films set in Madrid do. But also, as records of the physical and social environment of the neighbourhoods where they were filmed, the images serve as important historical documents of these locations, most of which subsequently underwent profound transformations. Taken together, the images in the five films analysed here constitute an audiovisual inventory of the different types of peripheral neighbourhoods that existed in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Vallecas, one of the most representative areas of Madrid. In this context, the identification and analysis of the locations aims to contribute to the "archive city" (Roberts, 2015) of Madrid and to the development of practices related to its urban cultural memory. ∎

NOTES

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1   To facilitate comprehension, the geographical references used throughout the article use the name Vallecas or the names of the current districts into which the historical area of Vallecas are divided, although from 1970 to 1987 the area was organised very differently, also divided into two districts but with differ-

ent names—Vallecas and Mediodía—and geographical boundaries.

2   I would like to thank the members of the GeoCine research group at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid for their help with the process of identifying and georeferencing some of the filming locations, as well as Le Grimh (https://grimh.org/), Andrés Palomino (photographer) and José Molina Blázquez (Vallecas Todo Cultura) for their contributions.

3   An interactive version of the map (in Spanish) can be consulted at the URL: https://geocine.uc3m.es/mapa-quinqui/

4   For more information on the urban and social evolution of Pozo del Tío Raimundo, see the documentary *Flores de luna* [Night Flowers] (Juan Vicente Córdoba, 2008). See also Campillo (2021).

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FILMIC SPACE, SOCIAL PROTEST AND URBAN MEMORY: IMAGES OF VALLECAS IN *QUINQUI* FILMS SET IN MADRID (1977-1981)

Abstract

This article analyses the use and filmic representation of the neighbourhoods of the Vallecas district in five *quinqui* films shot in Madrid in the period from 1977 to 1981. Specifically, it explores images shown in *Hidden Pleasures* (Los placeres ocultos, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977), *La patria del 'Rata'* [Ratsy] (Francisco Lara Polop, 1980), *Navajeros* [Knifers] (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980), *Chocolate* (Gil Carretero, 1980) and *Faster, Faster* (Deprisa, deprisa, Carlos Saura, 1981). Establishing shots and montage sequences that present the protagonists' neighbourhoods in each film are subjected to both spatial and textual analysis, considering the strategies of representation, the urban realities and experiences expressed through them, and the meanings given to each film by the use of these real and recognisable spaces of the city. It is argued here that taken together, the images in these films function as an audiovisual inventory of the different types of peripheral neighbourhoods that existed in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Vallecas, one of the most representative areas of Madrid. At the same time, they serve as support for a critical analysis of the space and as documents of cultural memory.

Key words

Cinema and City; *quinqui* films; Urban Periphery; Madrid; Vallecas; Madrid in Film; Spatial Representation; Filming Locations.

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ESPACIO FÍLMICO, DENUNCIA SOCIAL Y MEMORIA URBANA: IMÁGENES DE VALLECAS EN EL CINE QUINQUI MADRILEÑO (1977-1981)

Resumen

Este artículo analiza el uso y la representación fílmica de los barrios de Vallecas en cinco películas de cine quinqui rodadas en Madrid entre 1977 y 1981. En concreto, explora las imágenes presentadas en *Los placeres ocultos* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977), *La patria del 'Rata'* (Francisco Lara Polop, 1980), *Navajeros* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980), *Chocolate* (Gil Carretero, 1980) y *Deprisa, deprisa* (Carlos Saura, 1981). Combinando análisis espacial y textual, en cada caso se ha revisado los planos de situación y las secuencias de montaje en los que se presentan los barrios de los protagonistas, atendiendo a sus estrategias de representación, las realidades y experiencias urbanas que se expresan a través de ellas y los significados que aporta a cada producción el uso de estos espacios reales y connotados de la ciudad. En su conjunto, se defiende que estas películas funcionan como un inventario audiovisual de las diferentes tipologías de barriadas periféricas existentes a finales de los setenta y comienzos de los ochenta en Vallecas, una de las áreas más representativas de la ciudad, actuando las imágenes, a la vez, como herramienta de crítica espacial y documento de memoria cultural.

Palabras clave

Cine y ciudad; cine quinqui; periferia urbana; Madrid; Vallecas; Madrid en el cine; representación espacial; localizaciones de rodaje.

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THE BORDERSCAPE IN A STREET FILM: MADRID IN *PRINCESSES**

FARSHAD ZAHEDI

1. INTRODUCTION

Still swept up in the enthusiasm of the turn of the millennium, in an article published in 2008, Ángel Quintana described *Princesses* (Princesas, Fernando León de Aranoa, 2005) as an emblematic example of stylistic changes in Spanish cinema. The author approaches the film, along with other examples, as an example of Spanish cinema's return to realism, and its abandonment of the "limbo of postmodernity" (2008: 251). Quintana observes this return to realism as a move away from the pastiche tone, so fashionable in the 1990s, which, in his opinion, "removed cinema from its context". However, he warns that this return to realism should not be seen as a return to modern cinema, or in *stricto sensu* as a return to neorealism, but rather as "something epidermal [...] a timid realism" marked by a disdain for the political causes that may lie behind social phenomena (2008: 254). The new realism, in Quintana's view, adhered to a hy-brid model of organising the narrative of reality within the structure of film genres.

The passage of time has proven that *Princesses* was not a sign of the abandonment of postmodernity. The "timid realism" put into practice in the film was in fact a distancing from the modern realist model—marked by what Deleuze once called the predominance of the time-image over the action-image—and an approach to the new spatial portraits of postmodernity (Jameson, 1991). In this sense, as Kyle Black's reading shows, Fernando León de Aranoa's film was one of the multiple responses of Spanish cinema to the accelerating changes that Spanish society was experiencing in "its passage from modernity to postmodernity" (2011: 82). The portrayal of Madrid amid its shift to the status of global city was a cinematic reaction to the social consequences of Spain's integration into the European Community to become "an attractive destination for many people from other countries who have been left without as many re-

sources and opportunities as Spain offers" (Black, 2011: 82). Two decades after the death of the dictator and the establishment of democracy based on the principles of the modern Nation-State, the country found itself immersed in the processes of globalisation and their indispensable effects, such as immigration and multiculturalism. It now had to deal with what Jürgen Habermas (2000) called a "post-national constellation": a scenario shaped by the constant flow of capital and human mobility. It is a space marked by a sense of both excitement and fear, triggered by individual freedoms and by contact with the Other. The old borders were fading away and, in turn, new borders were multiplying.

Spanish cities have become the most visible face of the impact of this scenario of globalisation and the constant crossing of invisible borders. *Princesses*, in this sense, offers a filmic reading of the border spaces of Madrid in the wake of the impact of globalisation and its social effects in the form of multiculturalism and migration. The city has become a place of social antagonisms, divided between urban islands and by the invisible borders between multiple centres and peripheries. It has metamorphosed into a realm of permissiveness as well as a place of conflict. *Princesses* is a portrait of this double-faceted urban landscape: the global city of spectacle and consumption, but also of pathological references and stigmatised localities. The film's reading of Madrid is strengthened by its accompaniment of wandering bodies constantly crossing borders. In short, the filmic space takes shape as the characters move over a new phenomenological map of the city's borders.

IN THIS ARTICLE I INTEND
TO EXAMINE POSSIBLE SPATIAL
REFLECTIONS AND PORTRAYALS
OF MADRID IN THE FILM

Most of the excellent studies on *Princesses* address issues related to the representation of gender and migration (Black, 2011; Van Liew, 2012; Lobo, 2013; Sanjuán-Pastor, 2013; Murray, 2014). In this article, I intend to examine possible spatial reflections and portrayals of Madrid in the film. The basic research question is how the global city, with its multiple borders, appears in the film. Or, to put it another way: how the mobility of the characters in the creative geography of the film creates a filmic space and responds to the dominant imaginary of the city. By *filmic space*, I mean the result of aesthetic strategies used to portray the characters' experiences on the urban terrain. In the case of *Princesses*, this space is created by the inter-urban journeys of the subaltern, border-dwelling characters and their daily negotiation with the codes of the global city. Like a kind of street film with a disruptive urban art style, *Princesses* challenges the dominant discourses on the city. In this way, like many other Spanish films that addressed the psychosocial changes in Madrid during this period, it highlights the inconsistencies and contradictions of official discourses on the city during the structural shift towards globalisation. This portrait—and hence the hypothesis of this article—can be understood precisely in the gap that the film creates between reality and fiction, and in the mere fact of adding a new phenomenological layer to the official cognitive maps through narratives of the border dweller.

The aforementioned urban borders are part of this filmic landscape. In this sense, in the following sections, I intend to contextualise the film in relation to theories of urban fragmentation and border studies: cinematic and literary fiction's response to the discourses and policies that create, legitimise, and displace borders. Seen through this lens, *Princesses* offers a useful case study as an example of artistic expressions of an important historical moment.

2. THE QUARTERED CITY AND URBAN BORDERS

The theory of urban fragmentation, as Ricardo Gómez Maturano (2014) points out, has a long history dating back to the 1980s. The phenomenon has been called by different names, but all of them refer to a process of "aggravation of social inequalities, of non-solidary forms and regroupings by affinity" (Mari-France Prévôt Schapira, quoted in Gómez Maturano, 2014: 12). In other words, social segregation translates into spatial fragmentation in a city of closed enclaves with their own cultural codes. A process of isolation that Richard Sennet (quoted by Goldsmith, 2000: 41) in the 1970s described as an urban phenomenon whose result is "not only a lack of sympathy for the inhabitants of the other enclave, but a lack of information and a misunderstanding [of the Other]". Contact between urban enclaves is (ideologically) mediated and largely stereotyped:

> When groups learn about one another only by means of distant, indirect, vicarious experience—through what they read or hear, or much worse, through what they see on television—they have shallow understanding, based only on superficialities. Living in separate neighborhoods, they are unable to learn to develop, to be tolerant, to work things through, to compromise. (Goldsmith, 2000: 41).

The question posed here is how *Princesses* responds to and represents the borders of a globalised Madrid. Filmed in a period that can be understood as the end of the economic boom of the 1990s and just prior to the advent of the financial crisis that would accelerate the process of the multiplication of urban borders, the filmic representation of the city in *Princesses* underlines the tensions of centre/periphery, inside/outside, which remained intact despite the policies of official representation that tried to show the opposite. In this sense, the film follows in the footsteps of León de Aranoa's earlier feature, *Barrio* (1998), organising narratives within the filmic structure in the style of disruptive performance art on the urban landscape. The question of landscape is key to understanding this type of filmmaking, as it attends "to the landscape both *in* and *as* performance" (Moyo, 2017: 25, emphasis in the original). In other words, and following Moyo's argument once again, the street film is a kind of cinema in which the urban landscape is part of the content and, at the same time, part of the context of the filmic narrative. But this symbiosis of content and context must necessarily be complemented by images whose connotation is analogous to any other urban performance art that aims "to encourage the public to experience the everyday landscape of the city differently [...] making the presence of marginalized groups in the city, such as migrants, more tangible and visible" (Les Roberts, 2018: 4). Undoubtedly, this street art ultimately suspends the urban political cartography for a moment by making visible and questioning the invisible boundaries between different spaces in the city. Performance art here is first and foremost a phenomenological charge of the urban space and its ideologically created borders presented as neutral and natural. This translates into making publicly available an emotional and empathetic portrait of the subjects of a radical otherness, migration, xenophobia, and prostitution (Moyo, 2017: 25). By visibilising and humanising the Other, the street film essentially constitutes a tacit challenge, and one not necessarily free of ideology, against the great discursive machinery of spatial creation—and differences—of the postmodern city.

Princesses begins with the urban journey of Caye, one of its main characters. Through some objective shots, the spectator is confronted with a series of images from the window of a moving vehicle on one of Madrid's ring roads: blocks of buildings, industrial estates, and shantytowns. These shots are intercut with the image of Caye in a taxi, to imply that they are from her point of view. The film thus begins with Caye, a prostitute

in Madrid, looking at an urban landscape devoid of any architectural landmarks. It is a borderland, between the countryside and the city, built up or abandoned. This character's gaze is taken from a vehicle in motion on a Madrid ring road, an invisible and at the same time geographically marked border between the city centre and the periphery. Caye—whose name is a homophone of the Spanish word *calle*, referring to the urban public space known in English as "street"—is on a work-related journey. She has been invited to a hospital by a group of male friends as a birthday present for a patient.

The prologue to *Princesses* expresses the film's vision of the city. Various perspectives may potentially be adopted to analyse this vision, ranging from a formalist perspective to studies of gender or class representation, but what is also worth exploring here is the portrayal of border space in this prologue and throughout the film. It is a space that gives rise to different representations of gender and sexuality, as well as class and race. This space in the film is corporeal and allegorical: Caye, as Sanjuán-Pastor argues, is an impossible *flânuese*, who "is not in the public space, in the street, but is part of it" (2013: 62). Her female body is a possible signifier of the public sphere. As Susan Hayward argues with reference to imaginaries of *fin de siècle* Paris, the prostitute's body "becomes the symbol of both the danger and the promise of the modern age [...] As the *erotic* public woman, she is prosti-

tute [...] the site where capitalism and sex unite. Literally, the public and private spheres come together in that intercourse; she is a conduit of pleasure but also of filth" (2000: 24-25, emphasis in the original). Similarly, in León de Aranoa's film, the women protagonists represent this aforementioned promise and danger. They are part of the city's public sphere. They represent Madrid in all its historical complexity of the moment of change.

Princesses was filmed in the midst of major changes in Madrid as it entered the era of neoliberalism and globalisation. It was a period of profound changes to the economic structure that affected the anatomy of Madrid and other European cities. These were the years in which Madrid was moving towards the post-Fordist city: an industrial reorganisation with centrifugal tendencies of urban expansion. In the city centre, the last traces of the traditional neighbourhood were disappearing and, at the same time, new headquarters for corporate business and financial activities were appearing in the vicinity of the government institutions. A new social class was settling in gentrified areas near the financial centre. The historic centre was becoming a city of spectacle, an object of consumption for citizens and tourists. At the same time, outside the borders of the ring roads, residential developments were expanding everywhere in the proximity of the industrial estates, with suburbs of substandard housing and empty, abandoned spaces.

Film stills 1 and 2. *Princesses.* Caye's POV shots

The global city is not the city without borders. Peter Marcuse and Roland van Kempen's seven socio-spatial divisions of the postmodern city expose a new pattern in urban development (2000: 253). For these authors, the global city is divided by the new urban boundaries into zones of interest such as "citadels, gentrified neighborhoods, exclusionary enclaves, urban regions, edge cities, ethnic enclaves and excluded 'racial' ghettos" (2000: 253). Marcuse and van Kempen acknowledge that their model may be more applicable to some globalising European cities than others (2000: 253). In an earlier study, Marcuse explores the story of the quartered, divided and insular city (1989). Life in each division is totalised, independent, and emancipated, so that each division is isolated from the other: "on the one hand, walls, literal or symbolic, prevent people from seeing, meeting and hearing each other [...]. On the other hand, within the walls life can be lived in its totality: places of residence, of work, of recreation, of socialization, [...] whether it be the citadel, the edge city, or the excluded ghetto" (Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000: 250). Urban geographers point to economic structural change as the main trigger of this spatial reorganisation: change that "produces both extreme wealth and extreme poverty, con-

centrated power and concentrated powerlessness, ghettoization and citadelization, and not by accident: the decrease at the one end is in large part the result of the increase at the other" (2000: 251).

In the film, soon after the prologue we are confronted with one of these enclaves less favoured by globalisation, a kind of pseudo-ghetto of exclusion, where Caye lives and works together with other prostitutes. The sequence depicts this urban corner using wide shots from the points of view of Caye and her fellow prostitutes from inside a hairdressing salon. Shots of foreign-born prostitutes looking for clients in a small tree-lined square are interspersed with the looks and comments of the Spanish prostitutes from inside the salon. The shop window is a border between inside and outside, which for Olga Lobo is "a real glass border that compartmentalises the space between a here of the 'autochthonous' prostitutes, and a there [outside] of the immigrants, the 'others'" (2013: 8). But this otherness is what the inhabitants of both sides of the glass border share: the social status of Spanish prostitutes is an otherness, which they share with the immigrants in the square. The difference is what Kyle Black calls "the double otherness" (2011: 87) suffered by the outsiders, the non-Spanish. The criticis-

Film still 3. Princesses. The hairdressing salon window

ms made by Caye's colleagues in the salon further highlight the vulnerability of the group, both inside and outside, and express the film's political stance on the dominant discourses of the moment, linking issues of immigration and racism to the laws of the market and competition. The salon window divides two seemingly separate but ultimately linked and communicating worlds.

Of all the interior spaces in the film—hospitals, houses, bars, nightclubs, shops, and a phone booth—the hairdressing salon is the most political. It is the place of shelter for women, but it is also a perfect stage for the reproduction of media and social debates. This space—whose invisible border, the glass of the shop window, functions as a screen from which to watch, control, and at the same time project ideas—is also a space where power can be exercised and surveillance conducted. Although in itself a space of negotiation and conflict, the salon is a transitory place, as a boundary between the public and the private. It is a place where a *de facto* national border is constructed through discourse and debate (Schimanski, 2013; 2015). The square outside the shop window is an arena of constant negotiation and interaction between migrant prostitutes, neighbourhood passers-by, police, and NGO volunteers. This produces and provokes important debates inside the salon and generates a binary basis of us/them that gives an identity to the inhabitants of both sides of the glass border.

But the hairdressing salon is not the only intermediate, transitional space in the film. Almost all the other interiors—except for Caye's two houses, hers and her mother's—are public and private spaces of transition. In this sense, Zulema's flat, referred to as a hot-bed flat, is noteworthy; during the day, she occupies it as a place of work and rest, and at night it is the home of an immi-

Film still 4. *Princesses.* The shop windows

grant family. Zulema, the film's co-protagonist, works as a prostitute to support her son in the Dominican Republic. The friendship between Caye and Zulema provides more important clues to consider some of the film's allegorical layers. Their relationship is also ambivalent: while competing in the labour market, they are friends who help and admire each other. The fate of both is similar: they suffer from emotional instabilities and project their desires onto an uncertain and inaccessible future. Zulema has serious problems of abuse and mistreatment by a man who presents himself as a policeman and asks her for free services in exchange for promises to secure a residence permit for her. Zulema's negative response to this man's abuse leads to problems. She is physically and psychologically assaulted by this pathological character. At one point in the film, Zulema manages to cross the glass border and enter the hairdressing salon. Her entrance changes the texture of the dominant discourse, as it now becomes a space of contact and multicultural negotiation.

The glass windows mark an important boundary between the interiors and exteriors in the film. In addition to the aforementioned hairdressing salon window, the glass walls and windows of bars, restaurants, and cars generate border aesthetics for the film narrative. Filmed mostly

Film still 5. *Princesses.* The shop windows

from the inside, from the interiors of transitory spaces, the characters in the film project their hopes and dreams onto the exteriors through point-of-view shots. Predominant in this respect are subjective shots of Caye looking outside through the glass barriers, expressing her hopes and her profound, repressed desire to cross the social borders for good. It is as if, again considering the film from Hayward's perspective, Caye were this intimate and public body of transition, a representation of desires and fears of a changing city (2000).

The film, however, has a far from an optimistic view of the future of its characters and their deep longing for a certain quality of life: in a scene when Caye and Manuel meet for a date in a restaurant, Caye confesses her private desire to enjoy a normal life, and to be able at last to integrate into the established codes of urban behaviour. For Caye, the mere idea of a decent job and a boyfriend who comes to pick her up after work is a symbol of happiness—and her greatest wish. The illusion does not last long, as the viewer is then confronted with one of the most shocking scenes in the whole film: Caye is subjected to unconscionable violence by a stranger in the restaurant's toilets.

3. WANDERING BODIES, BORDERSCAPES

The new urban reorganisation is an ongoing process. The global city is an urban landscape in utter turmoil. Urban development breaks down physical borders but multiplies symbolic borders in a continuous, endless process. Inhabiting the post-Fordist city means a constant crossing of borders, whether physical or symbolic, real or imaginary.

The city of enclaves is a space that is constantly constructing invisible borders, which in turn gives rise to constant negotiations (Lazzarini, 2015). The border is of course a human construction, as a space of passage, but also as a marker of differences. It is no mere accident that border studies in the last decade have shifted the focus toward studies of border construction and bordering. Beyond examining physical borders, the issue under study now is the ongoing process of social negotiations that construct and maintain borders, while at the same time questioning and challenging them. Borders are symbolically markers of difference. They are structured by discourse and ideology, but they are also grounds for resistance and disagreement in a living and ongoing process.

In addition to the aforementioned glass borders, in *Princesses* the portrayal of these urban borders can also be found in the film's exterior locations. There are basically four urban enclaves depicted in the film: the underprivileged neighbourhood, the street market, the central streets of Madrid, and the abandoned industrial estate. Four separate urban islands, with their own codes and boundaries. They are examples of an urban fragmentation that addresses and supports the film's vision of the inherent dynamism of spatial segregation in the Spanish capital in its definitive transition towards the global city.

The film's vision of the quartered city is completed by Caye's and Zulema's constant movement across invisible borders. Apart from the incessant sound of mobile phones that prompt the protagonists to experience urban mobility for work reasons, urban journeys outside of work also involve crossing the borders between Madrid's different islands. It is here that we, together with the characters, cross different borders, some invisible and others hypervisible. Caye and Zulema's first journey takes place when the friends go shopping at a street market with products that are exotic to Caye because they come from overseas, but to Zulema they are familiar, everyday objects that bring back memories. The flea market as a space created by and for the working class, immigrants, and the underprivileged has its own laws and codes of behaviour. It belongs to the same enclave where the friends live. It also forms part of the film's creative geography, with editing techniques that place it close to the Latin bar of Zulema's acquaintances, and to the neighbourhood of the phone booth where she calls her family and can communicate with her son. The street market, the Latin bar, and the phone booth collectively constitute a subaltern space, but at the same time a familiar and comfortable place,

marked by human emotions and feelings of solidarity. In the film, this space is created in symmetry with the hairdressing salon and the square in front of it, which is also a place of vulnerability and marginalisation.

The film's biggest border crossings occur when Zulema and Caye, alone or together, have to leave their marginalised enclave to travel to the consumerist city. This is where they may come into conflict with the urban codes of the city's central island. On their journeys to the centre of Madrid, both women try to camouflage their radical subalternity in order to enjoy the pleasures of consumerism. Even so, they are sometimes confronted with signs that remind them that they do not belong to this enclave. The constant crossing of urban borders highlights the process of border-making in the quartered city. The film also underscores the fact that the global city is also the city of hypermobility, turning urban space into a constant border crossing: "borders, originally meant to separate and create distinctions, end up being constantly crossed and become a means for uniting through passage and movement" (Lazzarini, 2015: 182). The postmodern city creates new, sometimes non-conformist and rebellious border crossers. Urban space thus itself becomes a borderscape.

Film still 6. *Princesses*. The street market

Despite the multiplicity of isolated enclaves, the boundaries between centre and periphery in *Princesses* are visible and tangible in the everyday lives of the subaltern characters. In their daily confrontation with the dominant power of the city, Zulema and Caye learn new negotiation tactics, or what Michel de Certeau calls "the art of the weak" (quoted by Schimanski, 2015: 99). Tactics here are nothing more than small, everyday gestures. Caye teaches Zulema how to defend her rights, and Zulema shows Caye her tricks to attract and provoke customers, lends her a T-shirt, and takes her to the flea market to buy cheap clothes. Another example is the scene in the perfume shop where Caye takes advantage of the opportunity to perfume herself with a free sample. On another occasion, Caye intervenes in Zulema's conversation with the abusive man to save her. But these negotiation tactics are not always enough to get ahead. In a hotel in the city centre, Zulema is mistreated by the man who had promised to obtain her residency papers. And upon receiving the news that she is HIV-positive, she visits him once more to transmit the disease to him. This is the end of Zulema's career in the global city. She leaves Spain to rejoin her family in her home country. Caye accompanies her on this last border crossing at the airport.

The characters in *Princesses* are inhabitants of the periphery, beyond the confines of the ring roads, the physical borders of central Madrid. They are economically vulnerable, and their cinematic portrayal exposes a *modus vivendi* on the threshold of exclusion. The characters' physical contact with the urban fabric in turn results in the spectator's sensory contact with a Madrid in a process of transformation. In this sense, the prostitution area in an abandoned industrial estate has a core presence in the film and deserves a separate mention. It is an urban island with an intermediate position inside and outside the confines of the global metropolis with its corresponding laws and codes. Frequented by Zulema, it is a refuge and workplace for prostitutes. The scene in the abandoned industrial estate has no dialogue. It is accompanied by a Manu Chao song calling for a human vision of this space of radical otherness, a space emptied of all dignity.

The abandoned industrial estate, as an enclave on the border between the countryside and the city, is close to what the geographer Joan Nogué calls "the residual space" (2009; 2011). For Nogué, the residual space is an urban space in disuse with

Film still 7. *Princesses.* The abandoned industrial estate

Film still 8. *Princesses.* The consumerist city

clear marks of the past. This category includes vacant lots, abandoned industrial estates, disused railway stations, empty spaces between motorways, closed roads, railway tracks leading nowhere, and shut-down factories. In general, these are public, open spaces, empty and deteriorating. They are places that have lost their urban significance and are waiting to be given a new meaning. They are pathological spaces that stand as a sign of the obsolescence of modern discourses of the Fordist city. Usually located on the margins of the global city, their time of glory has passed, and they have fallen into decay and neglect. Because of the uncertainty they project, they are intermediate spaces in no man's land that for different reasons (but mainly because of radical changes to the economic model) have been left out of the dominant geographical and urban discourse. As Nogué points out, they have acquired a particular photogenic quality for urban cinema and novels, above all because they elicit from the observer a "sensation of bewil-

derment, sometimes of chaos and in any case of astonishment" (2009: 106). For this reason, inside and outside the filmic narrative, this space becomes a place of social exchange, or of negotiation in the proximity of marginalised housing developments that run the risk of becoming pseudo-ghettos of exclusion. For Nogué, by materialising the negation of the metropolitan space of the globalised city, this space is a polemical space where the urban dream places its deepest fears:

> [They] are *terrains vagues*, enigmatic places that seem condemned to an exile where they impassively contemplate the dynamic circuits of production and consumption from which they have been removed and to which some—not all—will one day return. Many of these spaces—and their corresponding landscapes—were generated in the form of negative externalities by the modern industrial city, a city closed in on itself and indifferent to its own external image. These barren spaces between motorways have often served as rather gloomy

and funereal settings for action films and crime novels. (2009: 111, emphasis in original)

It is not by chance that this repressed aspect of the postmodern city returns again and again to urban narratives and film screens. Marcuse and van Kempen (2000: 259) point to the brownfield as an industrial space abandoned by basic changes to the production model, when business parks find new locations that are economically or ecologically more favourable. The phenomenon is not new, but the processes of globalisation have accelerated the formation of this space emptied of its content (2000: 259). Part of this space that finds no other residential or cultural use becomes an abandoned space, a desolate landscape, which for Nogué is a landscape without glory, a ruin without splendour, a residual, ruined space, "a diaphanous expression of the spatial disorder inherent in the territorial marginality of the system and its supreme representatives" (2011: 7). They are spaces that in Nogué's view awaken in the spectator "nostalgia and melancholy, albeit in small doses. The melancholy of decline, the sadness of abandonment" (2011: 7).

The image of prostitutes in the background of an abandoned industrial estate conveys to the spectator a sense of fear, rejection, melancholy and existential emptiness identified by Nogué. This desolate space is also a place of contact and negotiation between subaltern subjects: while one juggles on abandoned train tracks, others negotiate at car windows with the clientele, against a background of fights and jeers from the crowd. This abandoned space, in the film, is a showcase of the past glory of modernity. It is a postmodern portrait of an intermediate place par excellence, where the public, the private, and the intimate intermingle. A place inside and outside the law of the city and its dominant discourse.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Filmic cartography, like any other map, is a source of knowledge and conquest of space. The filmic

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THE BORDERSCAPE IS THE CHAOTIC SPACE OF INTERSECTING LIMINAL IDENTITIES. POSTMODERN CINEMA OFTEN ADDRESSES THIS CHAOTIC SPACE

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map functions through the corporeal and emotional exploration of the image surface. The tacit knowledge provided by film invites the viewer to rediscover—and sometimes reconquer—the mapped space. Considered a postmodern street film, it has the capacity to generate a filmic map that reconfigures urban maps through the telling of hidden stories, highlighting the pathologies of urban topography. In this way, the filmic cartography of the city can generate new emotional maps that produce empathy for, closeness to, and knowledge about the marginalised space and the subjects that inhabit it.

In this sense, the filmic map offered by *Princesses* underlines the urban islands of Madrid, marked by the symbolic borders of spatial segregation. The global city is an antagonistic microcosm. The constant and perpetual mixing of identities confers on this city the quality of a borderscape: a place where, as Chiara Brambilla's puts it, it is not only "a matter of dis-locating and re-locating borders" but of "the multiplication of border forms, functions and practices through their distribution and proliferation in a variety of social and political arenas" (2015: 15). The borderscape is the chaotic space of intersecting liminal identities. Postmodern cinema often addresses this chaotic space. Schimanski and Wolfe define the borderscape and the liminal identities that inhabit it in the following terms:

A relational identity is linked not simply to place, or to ideological or legal designations. Nor is it relegated to a temporal limited transition outside daily life, as in narratives of liminality. Rather, it is an aspect of the conscious and contradictory never-ending experience of contacts among cul-

tures, at both the external and internal borders of a state. Identity is produced in the chaotic network of relation and not simply by filiation. It does not receive any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates in a number of different directions simultaneously creating a "fluid identity", a "scape". (2013: 246)

Princesses reflects these aforementioned "fluid identities". Its filmic space, created by the techniques of editing images of Madrid at a certain historical moment, is the place of negotiation of dramatic characters with a spatial interpellation. While the film responds to a historical need for alternative representations of the city, the physical contact of these characters with the fragmented metropolis turns them into perfect fluid identities, inhabitants of a borderscape. In the style of street art, the film thus conquers public space to generate disruptive performance art, thereby challenging the hegemonic pedagogy of the consumer city. The mobility of the characters between urban islands results from a denial of the subaltern space to which they belong and the identity that this confers on them. In some cases, such as Caye and Zulema's urban journey to the flea market, mobility inevitably ends with the exploration of third spaces, thresholds of contact with the Other. The third space for Homi Bhabha was where the liminality of the characters resists their spatially remarked otherness. This intermediate space is "a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha, 1990: 211).

In other cases, Zulema and Caye's movements to other urban island spaces end in confrontation and conflict with the other. One example is when the friends travel to the city centre of consumerism and encounter the unspoken laws of spatial segregation. As Schimanski and Wolfe propose, like any other art, cinema of this kind can itself become an integral and aesthetic part of the memories and imaginaries of the borderscape and thus develop the capacity to facilitate a liminal space of negotiation of identities (2013: 243). Film has the capacity

to visibilise differences, such as the structure of urban borders. The hairdressing salon in *Princesses* is a clear example of this: the political discourse of the inside creates a reactive identity, structured on the otherness of the inhabitants outside. Finally, there is the sensory effect of the film in blurring the official urban map, to approach the other in terms that Stavros Stavrides calls "a threshold space" (2016): a spatial and cartographic claim showing the shadow zones, devoid of ideological glory, but the habitat of invisibilised communities.

NOTES

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THE BORDERSCAPE IN A STREET FILM: MADRID IN *PRINCESSES*

Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the portrait of Madrid in *Princesses* (Princesas, Fernando Leon de Aranoa, 2005). At an intersection between studies of film space, urban geography, and the recent border studies, the theoretical framework of this paper is applied to a film that was considered a symptom of aesthetic changes in Spanish cinema at the beginning of the new millennium. The film offers a critical reading of Madrid in the midst of substantial changes toward globalisation by focusing on its invisibilised and marginalised urban spaces and their inhabitants. An important feature of the film is its exploration of subaltern characters who cross the city's invisible borders in their day-to-day negotiation with the spatial interpellation. The main focus of this paper is therefore on examining the relationship of this film portrait with different urban islands and their corresponding borders.

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EL PAISAJE FRONTERIZO DE UN CINE CALLEJERO: MADRID EN *PRINCESAS*

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es explorar el retrato del espacio urbano en la película *Princesas* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2005). En una intersección entre los estudios del espacio fílmico y la geografía y las fronteras urbanas, el marco teórico de este artículo aborda una nueva visión a una de las películas que fue considerada un síntoma de cambios estéticos del cine español al inicio del nuevo milenio. La película procede a una lectura crítica de Madrid en pleno cambio sustancial hacia la globalización, poniendo de relieve los espacios urbanos invisibilizados y marginados. El rasgo importante de la película es su aproximación a los personajes fronterizos que atraviesan las fronteras invisibles de la ciudad en su negociación cotidiana con la interpelación espacial. De ahí que el enfoque principal de este estudio sea examinar la relación entre este retrato fílmico con las diferentes islas urbanas y sus correspondientes fronteras.

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(UN)KNOWN MADRID IN THE CINEMA OF CARLOS VERMUT. PARODY, IDENTITIES, DISTRICTS, AND EDGES*

MARTA GARCÍA SAHAGÚN

LUIS DELTELL ESCOLAR

INTRODUCTION

Kevin Lynch proposes that the construction of a city's image requires several essential urban and landscape elements among which the most important are: "districts", "edges", and "landmarks" (Lynch, 2014: 16). Thus, it is no surprise that cinematographic representations of specific cities form a sometimes obvious and explicit cannon transmitted by specific "landmarks" or places of reference—such as, for instance, the Eiffel tower, the Coliseum, and the Statue of Liberty—that configure said city's public image or what Lynch (2014:17-17) terms its *imageability*. However, there is also a deeper, socially based, literary and cultural cannon relating certain film genres with particular spaces, as is the case with cine noir and San Francisco, or the American frontier lands of the so-called Wild West and Westerns (Fernández Santos, 2014). Thanks to these visual icons, and to the characters peopling these stories, a "collective territorial worldview" is created (Gámir Ortueta and Manuel Valdés, 2007: 169). In the case

of Madrid, this worldview is established through images of Puerta de Alcalá and Gran Vía and either their direct literary environs or filtered via the medium of farce (Ríos Carratalá, 2002; Castro de Paz and Cerdán, 2011). Indeed, from early films such as in *Clarita y Peladilla van al football* [Clarita and Peladilla Go to the Football] (Benito Perojo, 1914) to the works of Pedro Almodóvar, the farcical has been a defining feature of films set in Spain's capital. A good example of this is the homage to *La revoltosa* (Ruperto Chapí, 1897) in *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls Like Mom* (Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón,1980). In fact, the great success of Peladilla, Spain's answer to Charlot, lies in how he transformed Charles Chaplin into a pure-bred Madrileño attending one of the first 'derbis' (a Spanish league football match) in Spanish history (Vales Fernández, 1997). Thanks to these strategies relating the spatial and cultural environments it is easy for us to identify particular films with their cities: San Francisco with *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), Paris with *Irma la Douce* (Billy Wilder, 1963), and Madrid with

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios, Pedro Almodóvar, 1988).

Carlos Vermut (Madrid, 1980) takes a radically different approach to the representation Spain's capital. Three of his feature-length films and one of his shorts are set in Madrid, however, this director chooses to avoid the urban landmarks and literary tropes of traditional Spanish cinema-farce and, instead, constructs an urban representation of the city completely at odds with expectations. In Vermut's cinema, spatial clichés are diluted and although his characters live in central "districts" and confess to liking the city, they in no way either evoke or bring to mind the characteristic model of Madrid's previous on-screen representations. Of course, although it is possible to identify the urban settings used in this director's work, he shies away from showing us the most recognizable locations, those "landmarks" referred to by Lynch. The streets, the homes, and the bars, where the action develops could be, in principle, located anywhere, in any city. Nevertheless, the director's choice is far from irrelevant: Madrid functions as a recipient where discourses about identity can take place while at the same time, by playing with foreign references, the director presents a new reading of the city's spaces. Intertextuality, a particular trademark of this director, enables us to travel from the Spanish capital to dark, and/or exotic locations, offering a subtext comprising elements that the audience must interpret in order to find their meaning:

> The thousand different ways of acting and living in a defined—and defining—society, come together in a constant play between the utopian and the multiple, possible factual realities [...]. This is most clearly apparent in the context of cultural hybridisation (due to immigration, for example), but it also happens in more or less homogenised spaces as, in principle, Madrid is for a Madrileño (Del Río Castañeda, 2020: 24).

It is precisely from this academic perspective that analyses of Carlos Vermut's cinema tend to proceed, above all, recurring to concepts of intertextuality—due to the continual appearance of references to other cinema, music and literature in his films (Barranco, 2015; Bustos Segarra, 2016)—and cultural hybridisation—because of the *tromp l'oeil* created by Vermut's characteristic mixing of Spanish and Japanese identities (Gutiérrez, 2019). However, thus far, there has been no attempt address the use of space and location in Vermut's cinematography, specifically in his representation of Madrid.

Vermut sets his films on Spanish territory introducing insights into the meaning of Spain and its customs both in the dialogue and through his plots. We find ourselves in familiar territory: the homes of the Spanish middle classes and Madrid's streets but with the insertion of references to the unknown that transport us into mysterious and sinister realms. Thus, we find two distinct readings of space: one, more real, defined by known places with which we can identify, and another more fantastical—and sometimes terrible—which emerges from the precise way that the director decides to tell his story.

The cultural anthropologist, Edward Hall (1995) once said that to explain the artistic quality of photographic images, we need the presence of two apparently similar concepts: visual conventions and conventional vision. Vermut's cinematography uses visual conventions to bring us closer to his characters and their stories, but they are also there to be reinterpreted so creating a subtext rich in metaphors that succeeds in sealing Vermut's identity as an artist and impregnating his work with his own personal style. Furthermore, due to the lack of typically recognisable elements of the city, the importance of space in his films is, in the end, greater than we might initially suspect. He draws the audience nearer to his characters and stories through his more conventional uses of space—showing us surroundings that while well-known are not entirely well-defined—and this, in

turn allows the fantastical element contained in the second reading to take flight. Thus, the multiple layers of interpretation enabled by his plots ultimately distance them from that simple, conventional vision.

Carlos Vermut's work is characterised by, among other things, the telling of extraordinary stories in environments and frameworks that seem every day, and in many cases, would be best described as domestic. His characters roam the city, go to bars, cafes, and interact inside their homes. Each one has their own problems enabling the audience to relate to them through their every-day-ness. Nevertheless, the director takes a story-telling perspective that, in each case, produces a fantastical tale, one of science fiction, with superheroes, or magic; a tale that is sometimes dark, often tragic. Speaking about his attraction to the boundary between reality and fiction, Vermut comments: "I enjoy the point at which the fiction we have become accustomed to confronts reality; I find it fascinating. When a person who happens to be a superhero suddenly responds realistically," (Numerocero, 2012). This duality, the coexistence of the credible and the incredible in this Madrileño director's work brings it a special quality: his narrative method blurs the singularity of cinematographic genres fusing several meanwhile, at the same time, presenting us with everyday contexts in which the city has a central role.

For this analysis we have chosen four films by Carlos Vermut: the short *Maquetas* [Models] (2009) and three features: *Diamond Flash* (2011), *Magical Girl* (2014), and *Manticore* (Mantícora, 2022). The feature film, *Quién te cantará* [Who Will Sing to You] (2018), and various other shorts and video clips will not be considered here, nor will we examine Vermut's extensive work as a comic book artist. Additionally, this article will address primarily the representation of Madrid's external spaces thus, interiors will only be considered where particularly relevant. The four films chosen here all contain multiple plotlines

and narratives, structured as what McKee (2009) terms "miniplots", and while all are filmed in Madrid, their main focus is not the metropolis itself but rather social and ethical problems—in some cases real and in others, imaginary. Moreover, the last two features discussed here, deal with themes that are unquestionably controversial and disturbing.

We feel that each of the four works selected for this discussion individually provide a potential avenue through which to explore Vermut's aesthetic treatment of urban space. The first two, *Maquetas* and *Diamond Flash*, do so through parody, where this is understood as a comedic strategy with sometimes serious intent. The remaining two features, *Magical Girl* and *Manticore*, on the other hand, offer a re-reading of Madrid as a city of "edges" and "districts" following the model proposed by the engineer and urban planner, Kevin Lynch.

PARODY: *MAQUETAS* AND *DIAMOND FLASH*

Last century, in the nineteen eighties, Linda Hutcheon, explored parody's powerful attraction for postmodern artists. For them, this particular literary device seemed to offer both a critical fascination as well as a creative driving force and the first two of Carlos Vermut's works considered here can be understood as the legacy of this postmodern trend. *Maquetas* and *Diamond Flash* are, first and foremost, although not uniquely, parodies of other texts: horror films and those of the superhero genre. These parodies, however, are not characterised by direct mockery, but rather by a disquieting "distancing":

Parody, then, in its ironic "trans-contextualisation" and inversion, is repetition with difference. A critical distance is assumed between the background text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signalled through irony. But this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive. The

pleasure of irony's parody comes not from humour in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual "bouncing" between complicity and distance (Hutcheon, 1985: 14).

Maquetas, filmed in 2009, is a short, fake documentary. It was awarded the judges' grand prize at the 7th Notodofilmfest and, according to the director, Nacho Vigalondo, who headed the judging panel that year, the film won because it "laughs at and takes a swipe at sentimentality; because it laughs at us," (El Mundo, 2009). In essence, the film is a collection of testimonies from people in various locations all of whom experienced a traumatic event in which they lost something or someone. Throughout this short film, Vermut reuses—that is, he parodies—the tone and structure of a TV report. One participant, a man, tells of how he used to play in the Boadilla football team and that on the day of his tragedy he took a bus to Puerta Bonita (a well-known educational centre in the city) to lead a training session with some local kids. While this character is telling his story, we get a view from the San Isidro bridge showing us the banks of the Manzanares covered in snow. After this man, two women speak, and we learn both have gone through similar traumas: one lost a husband, the other a daughter, in inexplicable circumstances. Finally, the enigma is resolved: in all cases, tragedy was unleashed due to an attack by some kind of gigantic monster: a beast in the style of King Kong or Godzilla. The last scenes of the film show a city made of card—a model—being ravaged by a three-headed dragon breathing fire from its mouth obliterating buildings and other structures in its path. The final frame displays a message: "Every time a gigantic monster attacks a city, thousands of people become anonymous victims. This is a homage to each and every one of them."

The Madrid of *Maquetas* in no way resembles that of previous cinematographic representations; it is not the Madrid of farce, rather it is a vision of Madrid that directly references the model it aims to parody: that of a North American or Japanese city devastated in a gigantic-monster movie. Vermut could have chosen to decontextualise his story completely; however, he does quite the reverse. He locates one of his characters on the baroque San Isidro bridge, something that Kevin Lynch would term a "landmark", that is, a highly recognisable, visible place (Lynch, 2014). Thus, the director clearly wants to tell us that his story is set in Spain's capital, yet, neither the plot nor the tone is what the audience expects in a film about Madrid, leading to this disquieting "distancing" we mentioned earlier.

In his first feature film, *Diamond Flash*, Vermut revisits parody as a strategy. The film contains several different stories joined by a common thread: the mysterious superhero for whom the film is named. The film's production budget was a mere 20,000 Euros, which the director once commented caused him "hell on earth" and lead him to think he "would never make a film ever again" (Medina, 2017). *Diamond Flash* tells of the conflicts faced by five women: Violeta (Eva Llorach), whose daughter has disappeared; Elena (Ángela Villar) who is in love with the superhero (Miquel Insua) but immersed in a toxic relationship with her abusive boyfriend; Juana (Ángela Boix), whose job it is to detain and look after a group of kidnapped girls in a hotel on the outskirts of Madrid; Lola (Rocío León), Juana's girlfriend who is intent on avenging her missing sister; and Enriqueta (Victoria Radonic), leader of a criminal gang who spends her days in a bar talking to strangers. Interiors are not the central topic of the present discussion; however, it is worth noting this last space is recognisable as Madrid's Picnic bar in Malasaña.

The film, shot in Madrid, mostly comprises interior scenes: "his [Vermut's] friend's homes and almost nowhere else," (CENDEAC, 2013). The exteriors show the hustle and bustle of the capital's streets overlooked by its characteristic balconies. According to the Madrid Film Office, filming took place in Madrid's Central district although we

can also identify several streets in the Arganzuela district (Martínez Ros, 2014). During the search for her daughter, we see Violeta at a bus stop and recognise several of Madrid's characteristic EMT vehicles as they pass by. We also watch Violeta crossing one of the bridges in the Madrid Río park, right next to where one of *Maquetas's* fake interviews was shot. These elements redirect us, inevitably to the streets of Madrid, but not as much to Lynch's "landmarks" as to his "districts", that is, those places where domestic or family life takes place. It is here that Vermut's brand of representation becomes even more intriguing since far from evoking the staging of farce or indeed, the dissident cinema of the nineteen fifties, it presents Madrid's most distinctive, modern districts. Thus, "districts" lose the meanings they have traditionally been assigned in Spanish literature and cinema allowing them to evolve into other spaces.

What Vermut achieves in *Diamond Flash* is a film that itself becomes a self-reflection on the superhero genre and, above all, the ways in which Madrid is represented. It is about examining "art as art", examining the form itself, and this, according to Linda Hutcheon, is precisely one of the revelations of parody as an aesthetic strategy: "Parody can be used as a self-reflexive technique to point to art as art, but also to art as a phenomenon inescapably linked to its aesthetic and even social past," (Hutcheon, 1993: 8). In *Diamond Flash*, Vermut talks about Madrid and its traditional districts, but at the same time, the film distances itself from the prevailing customs concerning the representation of such locations in the Spanish capital.

"EDGES" AND "DISTRICTS": *MAGICAL GIRL AND MANTICORE*

In 2014, Carlos Vermut's, *Magical Girl* premiered; a film that, to date, is his most highly acclaimed. The film won the Concha de Oro and the Concha de Plata for best director at the San Sebastián Inter-

national Film Festival. It was nominated for seven Goya awards, winning one for the Best Leading Actress, and eight Feroz prizes, of which it won four: once again winning Best Leading Actress in addition to Best Supporting Actor (José Sacristán); Best screenplay; and Best poster art. Here too we have a film with several interrelated storylines: that of Luis (Luis Bermejo), a father who wants to give his sick daughter, Alicia (Lucía Pollán), an *anime* inspired costume but lacks the money to buy it; that of de Bárbara (Bárbara Lennie), a young woman with psychiatric problems who finds herself driven to do something she doesn't want to for money; and that of Damián (José Sacristán), a teacher who has just been released from prison. As its director readily admits, this is a film in which blackmail has a central role: in this mesh of interwoven stories, several characters find themselves forced to resort to some form of financial coercion (Cursos de verano Complutense, 2015). The film was shot in the Community of Madrid and Segovia, although with regards to the latter, the only location used was the old prison, La Cárcel, currently a museum and cultural centre. Within Madrid, filming took place in the Central district, as well as the Salamanca, La Latina, and Usera districts (Madrid Film Office).

In *Magical Girl* the audience can distinguish the social status of the film's characters through the city districts they move around or live in. Thus, while Bárbara has a home in the comfortable Salamanca neighbourhood, Luis has a tiny flat at the entrance to his building in La Latina. The bar (Bar Villablanca), where Luis and Damián meet at the end of the film, and the garage where we see Damián's friend giving him a gun are locations in Usera. Luis travels on public transport, Bárbara by car, and Damián walks everywhere. The interior decoration of the characters' homes is also indicative of their social differences: Luis is unemployed, and his dining room is very modest in comparison to that of Bárbara and her husband, meanwhile, Damián, alone and recently out

of prison, lives in sparsely furnished rooms devoid of any decoration.

As in his other work, this Madrileño director avoids showing us any of the standard urban or scenic "landmarks" to clue us into any specific "districts" and, once again, these spaces appear in tones that are entirely uncharacteristic of the city's representation in popular cinema-farce. As we mentioned, the locations through which Vermut's characters pass reflect the city's social strata. Bárbara seeks the help of her friend, Ava, who lives in a luxury chalet on the city's outskirts, and eventually ends up at Oliver Zoco's mansion in Castillo de Viñuelas in the North of Madrid (Tres Cantos). Luis roams the streets of La Latina, goes to public spaces like the bookshop or the bar underneath his building. He crosses paths with Bárbara only when he decides to rob the jeweller's shop that happens to be situated on the ground floor of her apartment block on Claudio Coello street. Damián, starting life afresh after getting out of prison, follows Luis as he goes about his daily routine (bookstore, home) and finally settles scores with him in a very traditional Spanish bar (Bar Villablanca). In this way, these Madrid districts define the film's characters as much as they provide their contexts and, at the same time, help to justify the events that happen to them.

Perhaps the most meaningful space in the film is the one we never actually see: "the black lizard's room", in Zoco's mansion on the outskirts of Madrid. The mansion is separated from the urban sprawl by an "edge", a green boundary comprising a forest of holm oaks. Shot in Castillo de Viñuelas, this location is the setting for, perhaps, the film's most relevant monologue concerning Spanish identity; the baroque paintings of nobility adorning the walls of the mansion's principal room giving it additional emphasis. Against this backdrop, the sadistic pimp, Oliver Zoco first asks Bárbara whether she enjoys bullfighting—she claims not to—before continuing his speech:

I don't much like it either. But it's curious that it should be Spain where bullfighting is particularly popular. Can you guess why Spain is a country in eternal conflict? Because we can't decide whether we're a rational or an emotional country. The Nordic countries, for example, are cerebral countries. However, the Arabs and the Latinos have accepted their place on the side of passion without a guilt complex. They, to a man, know which side they are on. Spaniards, are balancing, teetering, right in the middle. That's how we Spaniards are, like a bullfight. And what is a bullfight? The representation of a fight between instinct and technique. Between emotion and reason. We have to accept our instincts and learn how to grapple with them as if they were a bull, so they don't destroy us (Aquí y Allí Films, 2014).

Spoken in the mansion isolated behind its "edge", the limiting cordon of trees, this monologue produces a distancing in the film's representation of Madrid. The words of this dark, cruel character, Oliver, describe something popular, something Madrileño, but they invert its meaning. There is nothing there of farce, or of the kindness of the characters populating traditional, *género chico* theatre. Nevertheless, this is not the first time we are treated to such an open discussion about Spanish culture and society in this feature. Spain is present in the discussion throughout, via the city of Madrid. As Del Río Castañeda comments: "Carlos Vermut made *Magical Girl*: a feature film with an English title referencing Japanese culture, to talk about Madrid," (2020: 21). It is ubiquitous in the film's dialogues, from bulls to sport—as Damián notes: "not being a football fan is a mortal sin in this country,"—from the King's speeches and corruption to education cutbacks. We also find an exploration of sociocultural issues through food, as when Ava allows Bárbara to see her without bringing churros, or Bárbara's choice whether to drink a coffee liqueur or a rioja wine. In addition, there are references to specific cultural icons. For example, where Luis holds back from selling his

copy of the book *La Colmena* [The Hive] because it was written by the Noble laureate, Camilo José Cela; or alternatively in the choice of text he uses to extort money from Bárbara: the Spanish Constitution. Then, of course, there is the film's theme music, *Niña de fuego* [Fire Girl] sung by Manolo Caracol which, interestingly, has given its name to the film in several other countries so underlining its Spanish subtext and, indeed, highlighting it against the international connotations of its English title, *Magical Girl*. Madrid materialises in the film's dialogues and images, but it always keeps its distance. We see the city through the windows of Luis's home in a scene reminiscent of the compositions more characteristic of Vermut's short films: the individual with their back to us, facing the metropolis. Likewise, we find direct references to certain meeting places such as Humilladero plaza, the Pedro Salinas Library in Puerta de Toledo, or the San Gabriel Hospital. What is more, we also recognise real locations such as the bookshop, Librería Juanito in General Vara del Rey plaza and the bar, Taberna de la Copla. Nevertheless, the most recognisable public place in the film, is one of very little cultural or touristic interest: the pedestrian bridge over the M-30 motorway in the Fuencarral-El Pardo district which also brings to mind certain scenes in *Diamond Flash* during the search for Violeta's daughter. However, "as it is for the characters, the audiences' understanding of the Madrid represented is incomplete, partial, and full of holes," (Del Río Castañeda, 2020: 24).

In this work, Spanish culture and Madrileño tradition co-exist harmoniously with continuous references to Asian culture; a feature that provides the alternative second reading of the film. For the most part, these references seem to pivot around Alicia's world: her nickname among her peers is Yukiko (those of her friends being Makoto and Sakura); her room is plastered with *anime* cartoons; her theme tune is the song *Haru Wa Sara Sara* by Yoko Nagayama; and she wants a Megumi 'Magical Girl' costume, however, we also find

them in the film's other two storylines. Bárbara's dress sense, for instance, is very specific—no collars and baggy trousers—clearly inspired by Japanese styles and she even uses a parasol when she visits Ava. Similarly, at one point in the film, she cuts herself in the middle of her forehead in a way that reminds us of the gemstone worn by the manga character, *Sailor Moon* (Naoko Takeuchi, 1991) and, just before she meets Luis, she drinks a cocktail of that name. In the same way, when Damián goes into a grocery store whose Chinese owner speaks perfect Spanish, he insists on being told how to say "thanks" in Mandarin.

Vermut plays with the duality of two distinct cultural identities to distinguish the two ways of understanding the same story. On one hand, there is the social drama centred on a father's need to satisfy the desires of his terminally ill daughter and on the other, a film about a magical woman (who cannot get sick) who is saved by her guardian angels, as Ava calls Bárbara and Damián. It is a fight between the fire girl and the magical girl; a battle right off the pages of a graphic novel or comic book. It is also a film combining a Spanish reality with a Japanese tale. From these two readings, comes a subtext about the duality present in Vermut's cinema in which the city functions as the context, but, at the same time, as a tool to reinforce the reality that brings us closer to his characters. It is for this reason that Vermut finds it unnecessary to show Madrid as a splendid city full of "landmarks", great avenues, well-known monuments, and art; rather it is a location that acts as a nexus for Spanish identity. The city works precisely because it is known by its least familiar images, by its everyday existence, and in the daily life of its inhabitants: by its visual conventions. Thus, we are shown a space that the audience is both ignorant of and familiar with at the same time.

Manticore is the most complex of Carlos Vermut's works so far and some of the issues with which it deals are so sinister and degraded that

their discussion is highly problematic. The film's subjects include paedophilia, abuse, and suicide—or attempted suicide—themes that, of course, never appear in Madrileño cinema-farce. In this film, the director employs several "landmarks" such as the Prado Museum and the Spanish Film Archive. However, the way in which this is done is far removed from the aesthetic of farce where these locations would provide a stereotyped, easily recognizable representation of Madrid. Carlos Vermut uses each of these two "landmarks" only once during the film, to demonstrate how Julián, the film's central character, tries to fit into the commonplace, or at least, normality. These two visits to "landmarks" have great narrative significance. The sequence in which Julián meets his girlfriend, Diana, at the Doré cinema (Spanish Film Archive) and the city-centre strolls taken by the couple are reminiscent of the work of Jonás Trueba, another Madrileño director whose films attempt a move away from cinema-farce. Here, the Spanish Film Archive is not presented as an authentic or traditional location but rather, simply as a place to meet. On the other hand, when Julián visits the Prado Museum, particularly his tour of the gallery containing Goya's 'Black paintings', despite the fact that the Prado is one of the most visited museums in Spain, this is not a moment for sightseeing but an opportunity to step into Julián's universe: that of the artist who creates monsters in the solitude of his home. Antonio Buero Vallejo wrote a few lines of verse dedicated to these works by the Aragonese painter which could very well be applied to the gargoyles and manticores created by Julián: "Now the gloomy twilight/ devours all colour/ daubed on the dirty plaster" (Buero Vallejo, 1994: 20). Far from being a visit to an urban "landmark", this trip to the art gallery seems designed to thrust us into the darkness that developed in the homes of both Goya and Julián.

The film narrates the story of a young, single man, Julián, who designs avatars for video games. Julián's particular project is creating a three-dimensional computer model of a monster something like the ancient manticore, a mythological chimera with a human head on the body of a quadruped animal. One day, while he is working, Julián has to save his ten-year-old neighbour from an accidental fire. After this encounter, Julián gets on with his life; he tries to complete his monstrous creation and also meets a woman, Diana, with whom he establishes a relationship. However, Julián harbours a compulsion to paedophilia which leads him to make a 3D model of his young neighbour. Eventually, Julián decides to leave his home and his neighbourhood to live on the outskirts of Madrid so as to be free of temptation. However, the company he works for discovers the virtual avatar of his young neighbour and Julián is fired. When Diana also finds out about Julián's compulsions she is horrified and leaves him. As a result, Julián goes to his neighbour's home, manages to trick the little boy into letting him in and then drugs the child. However, at the point when it seems Julián is about to abuse, or kill, the youngster, he throws himself off the balcony. The film ends with Diana caring for Julián who, although he survives his self-defenestration, is now quadriplegic—a strange kind of manticore.

Throughout, the film entirely avoids any kind of scenic or rose-tinted vision of the city; apart from those already mentioned there are no "landmarks", and even the "districts" depicted are far from pleasant and welcoming. Madrid is, like the plot, dark and violent. The film's clear intention is to demonstrate how Julián abandons the centre of the city, that is, his "district"—and the city's "landmarks"—to place himself at the "edge" of the metropolis. He flees from his desires—which he finds next-door to his Madrileño home—and withdraws to the outskirts beyond the massive city ring-road which comprises a protective border or, in Lynch's words, "edge". Julián himself is aware of the need to place himself, to isolate himself, at the very limits of the city.

As in Vermut's first films, Madrid and the continual references to its streets and neighbourhoods become the substrate of plausibility on which they story rests. Thus, Vermut uses the Madrileño essence not as a typical, commonplace representation but as an anchor to tether what amounts to his most unsettling plot to date. The most frightening aspect of this film is that Julián could be any citizen, any Madrileño.

TO CONCLUDE

The duality and the metaphors of Vermut's cinematography are, as Hall might say, coherent statements containing sufficient information to read what is being explained through experience itself, requiring time and an understanding beyond visual conventions in order to process their true meanings. All this occurs at the deepest levels of reading. At first, the director lays out a simple premise: a number of stories intermingle in Madrid, a well-known location, and a set of characters we can identify with. In this way, we get an initial impression of the story that is both credible and realistic. Yet, the intertextuality generated by references to other cultures and aesthetics—above all those of Japan—enables us to interpret these same stories from another perspective. This in turn, affects our perception of the film's genre giving us the impression that we are dealing with science fiction, a fantasy film, or one about superheroes. Vermut's storytelling technique is key to developing this, at times, parodic tone.

In the films discussed here, the majority of scenes take place indoors—nearly always inside homes or other domestic spaces. It is here that we get to know more about the living standards of a character or come to identify with what they eat or cook, recognise behaviours and aspects of everyday life. The interiors of various Madrid locations such as bars and bookshops, the city's streets with their bus stops and walkways, also bring us closer to Vermut's characters—through a shared identity—and this enables us to empathise with them and feel their conflicts with them. In terms of exteriors, as we have seen, Carlos Vermut avoids the use of recognisable "landmarks" showing us instead, a city of "districts" and "edges".

Depicted in this way, Madrid becomes the anchor that provides credibility to Vermut's stories and gives a realism to his characters and their situations. The metropolis has no protagonism as landscape, but rather as a complement to underline our closeness to Vermut's characters. This is why these films contain no "landmarks"; that is, with the exception of the Prado Museum, we do not see any of Madrid's great monuments or tourist draws. The city is constructed as a known place through the use of certain elements of visual convention, but entirely without recourse to cliché. Thus, Vermut's use of visual conventions never falls into the repetition of farce, in contrast, it generates a new way of representing Madrid.

This is, in essence, the greatest achievement of Carlos Vermut's cinematography with regards to the treatment of space: his vision of the city of Madrid is powerfully distanced from farce and popular cultural images. Without doubt, Vermut is a director with a powerful personal vision of his hometown, and, in contrast to other cinematographers, he neither uses the tropes of farce nor reinterprets them. Quite the opposite, this Madrileño director draws on parody as well as the concepts of "edges" and "districts" to describe a city that is recognisable but at the same time mysterious, even sinister at times. His is an (un)known Madrid. ∎

NOTES

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(UN)KNOWN MADRID IN THE CINEMA OF CARLOS VERMUT. PARODY, IDENTITIES, DISTRICTS AND EDGES

Abstract

This article addresses the representation of Madrid in the cinema of Carlos Vermut (Madrid, 1980). To this end, we consider four of his films: *Maquetas* (2009), *Diamond Flash* (2011), *Magical Girl* (2014) and *Manticore* (2022). This work analyses Vermut's use of duality and intertextuality, incorporating references to Spanish identity and Asian culture, to produce a two distinct readings of his works. Madrid serves as a visual convention that reinforces the first reading and allows us to approach and empathize with Vermut's characters while the second reading enriches the discourse through genre-modifying strategies that bring about a more fantastical re-interpretation of the story. In two of the films explored here, the filmmaker uses parody as a formal strategy. In all four, the director avoids the use of "landmarks"—in Lynch's words—and avoids recurring to traditional cinema-farce. Vermut shows us a recognizable city, but one that is also completely different from its traditional representations in Spanish Cinema.

Key words

Carlos Vermut; *Diamond Flash*; *Magical Girl*; *Manticore*; *Maquetas*; Madrid; Locations; Filmic space.

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MADRID (DES)CONOCIDA EN EL CINE DE CARLOS VERMUT. PARODIA, IDENTIDADES, BARRIOS Y BORDES

Resumen

En este artículo se aborda la presencia de la ciudad de Madrid en el cine de Carlos Vermut (Madrid, 1980). Para ello, se realiza un recorrido por cuatro de sus películas: *Maquetas* (2009), *Diamond Flash* (2011), *Magical Girl* (2014) y *Mantícora* (2022). Se analizan teniendo en cuenta la dualidad e intertextualidad que utiliza el director para aportar distintas lecturas a su texto, incorporando referencias a la identidad española y a la cultura asiática. Esto hace que la ciudad sirva como convención visual para reforzar una primera lectura, la que nos permite empatizar con los personajes y sentir cercanía, mientras que la segunda enriquece el discurso a través de un enfoque que modifica el género cinematográfico y aporta un ingrediente fantástico y lejano a la interpretación de la historia. En dos de estos films el cineasta utiliza la parodia como estrategia de formal. En los cuatro, el director renuncia a utilizar «hitos» urbanísticos, en palabras de Lynch, y no repite los modelos castizos del sainete. Vermut dibuja así una ciudad reconocible pero completamente distinta a la representación tradicional que hace de ella la cinematografía previa española.

Palabras clave

Carlos Vermut; *Diamond Flash*; *Magical Girl*; *Mantícora*; *Maquetas*; Madrid; Localizaciones; Espacio fílmico.

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FILM AND CHANCE. A LIFE IN CINEMA ON THE STREETS OF MADRID

Interview with

FERNANDO MÉNDEZ-LEITE

FILM AND CHANCE
FERNANDO MÉNDEZ-LEITE, A LIFE IN CINEMA ON THE STREETS OF MADRID*

ELIOS MENDIETA
LUIS DELTELL ESCOLAR

Fernando Méndez-Leite (Madrid, 1944) is one of the most well-rounded cinematographers of the Spanish film world. Here, we use the word cinematographer in its broadest sense, since Méndez-Leite has not only directed and produced but is one of the few men to have held so diverse a selection of the official posts in the Spanish film industry. Méndez-Leite, current president of the Spanish Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences [Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas], has also worked as a university professor, and critic; he founded and directed the Community of Madrid School of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts [Escuela de Cine y del Audiovisual de la Comunidad de Madrid: ECAM]; he produced for TV creating a documentary series about Spanish cinema; was president of the Spanish Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences [Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales: ICAA], and, yes, he is also a screenwriter and cinema director.

Méndez-Leite enrolled in Madrid's Official School of Cinematography [Escuela Oficial de Ci-nematografía: EOC] in the academic year 1967-1968, although, like many others—among them Juan Antonio Bardem—he didn't graduate. In Méndez-Leite's case, it was his involvement in anti-Franco militant activity that took him away from his studies. He joined Spain's national TV broadcaster, Televisión Española (TVE) at the time when this station was a key testing ground for young cinematographers—Josefina Molina and Pilar Miró also spent parts of their careers with this public broadcaster—and worked on a number of programmes. Once Spain returned to democracy, he created and directed *La noche del cine español* [Spanish Cinema Night], a documentary series that was, without any doubt, the very first televisual space to properly contextualise Spanish cinema.

For almost twenty years, he taught in the department of Cinema at Valladolid University and, in addition, during the 1990's he opened the ECAM. He was, as we mentioned, the director general of ICAA, a post he held for three years

Image 1. Fernando Méndez-Leite at Café Gijón, Madrid

during which time the Spanish Cinema Academy instituted the Goya awards.

His first feature film, *El hombre de moda* [Man of Fashion] (1980), premiered to great acclaim at the San Sebastián festival. This film presented Madrid as a city in a process of evolution as Spain made its transition to democracy. Three years later, he brought to the screen what has been considered the most important television adaptation of Leopoldo Alas Clarín's *La regenta* [The Female Regent]. Starring Carmelo Gómez, Aitana Sánchez-Gijón, and Héctor Alterio among others. This ambitions TVE production was the last in a series of great classics adapted for TV in the cathode-ray era. A case of quitting whilst ahead.

Méndez-Leite has never stopped writing, particularly film criticism, but above all, he maintains a reputation as an excellent and enthusiastic filmgoer. Jorge Luis Borges once said he was not proud of the books he had written, but rather of those he had read, and with Fernando Méndez-Leite we can speak not only of the films he has made, but also of those associated with him, and those he has helped produce or inspired through his vocation as a teacher, as a mentor, or as an academic.

For this interview we arranged to meet at the quintessentially Madrileño Café Gijón, a favourite haunt of cinematographers ever since it first opened. Located on Recoletos Boulevard, Café Gijón has hosted some of the most significant creative geniuses of the last and, indeed, this century: artists of various genres, from painters, to sculptors, to writers, and of course, cinema directors. We felt it to be a suitably iconic location for this appointment with our interviewee, the Spanish Cinema Academy's current director, and, as we mentioned, someone who's contributions to Spanish cinema would be hard to better. ◼

We chose Café Gijón because we thought it would be a comfortable place to meet—close to the Spanish Cinema Academy—and, we have just realised, it's also not far from the old location of the Official School of Cinematography!

Yes, I love that it's only some three hundred meters from the door of the Cinema Academy, on Zurbano street, to the entrance of the old Official School of Cinematography, which used to be housed in one of the mansions on Monte Esquinza street. Who would've thought, six decades later, I'd still be working in the same place, on the very same block, here in Madrid. I'm continually struck by the thought that I'm here, where everything started, one step away from the Official School of Cinematography where I spent my first year. Then, of course, we left to go to a new location in Madrid's University City, when they inaugurated the building on [Dehesa de la] Villa street.

It has been said many times that the EOC was an important meeting place in seventies Francoist Madrid.

For sure, I remember well what it felt like to go to the EOC each afternoon, above all in that first year, at the same time as I was doing fifth year Law. In the mornings I'd go to University City, to the faculty, and in the afternoons, I'd go to the mansion where the Cinematographic school was based. I lived nearby, you see, I had a place next to the Palacio de los Deportes, and from there I'd walk down Goya street and then up Génova street, feeling an immense sense of fulfilment and happiness, thinking about how, at that moment, I was where I wanted to be, studying what I loved and having a great time. It was an intense feeling—of achievement. It was very related to the geographic space where it all took place, to Madrid, and that decadent old mansion, that perhaps wasn't the best place for a film school, but where we all certainly lived as if it were the best place.

Lucio Blanco has said that when the school moved from Monte Esquinza to its location in University City it improved technically but lost something emotionally.

The old location had masses of character. I recall the most complicated shoots were done in the school's main entranceway, you see, the mansion had many floors; there were classrooms on the upper floors and below there were several function rooms and offices. The great staircase in the entrance that gave access to the first floor was used as the backdrop for practical work, above all, for films set in past eras. Perhaps it wasn't very practical, but it was exciting to enter the building and find yourself right in the middle of a film shoot. It was another world; totally different to what you saw on the streets of Madrid. All that changed when the school moved to University City. There, the school started to fragment because of politics and administrative issues. But also, because of the people. I've always believed it's people who make projects, and I think it was never going to be the same, having someone like Carlos Fernández Cuenca—a man of the cinema—in charge of the school compared to when the school's administration was taken over by people with clearly political intentions.

One of the ideas you have put forward is that cinema schools are schools for friendship.

I don't think I framed it in exactly those terms, but, yes, without doubt, that's the idea. They are centres where students come together in class, in rehearsals, and other work, but also in bars, cinemas, and in an infinity of casual conversations. In all these contexts, shared interests flower, as do skills, and friendship is built on those foundations. I absolutely remember with total clarity the feeling that in school we all learned from other classmates, from everyone, I mean, from Antonio Drove, Ramón G. Redondo, Manolo Matji, and all the other students on the course. Someone might talk to you about a book you hadn't heard of, and

that's how you'd get into a new author; or they might mention some film or other that was very good but that you hadn't liked and then you'd go see it again with new eyes. The personal likes and styles of each student generated a flow of ideas. It was something very creative.

That creative feeling was something I also experienced constantly over the many years I spent as a teacher in the Cinema department in Valladolid, and also, interacting with the students at ECAM. The truth is, looking at the careers of students from ECAM or the Catalan Advanced School of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts [Escuela Superior de Cine y Audiovisuales de Cataluña: ESCAC] who've gone on to make films or series, you realise their teams are made up of people they met in film school. All of them have advanced in the profession together, creating two circles: one in Madrid with ECAM as its focus, and another in Barcelona around ESCAC. Circles that, for sure, sometimes cross and enrich one another.

The Official School of Cinematography was a product of Francoism set up to pursue a particular ideological necessity, but it failed, since so many of its students were radical—or at least determined—opponents of the regime.
It's commonplace to say the EOC was a nest of reds, and it's true [he laughs]. Above all, at the time I was at the school it was very politicised, you see, the social environment was very intense. It was 1968 and, from an ideological perspective, it was a time which left a significant mark on society. It was always the case, even before it was the EOC—when it was still the Institute of Cinematographic Research and Experiment [Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas: IIEC], that is, in the era of Martín Patino, Saura, Borau, and Camus—the school was already very politicised and involved in several significant confrontations. One of the first graduates of the IIEC was Julio Diamante who was one of the leaders of the 1956 university movement and very influential in the youth politics of that

period. What happened was, it all went quiet for several years until, in the middle of the seventies, a visible germ of opposition to the regime began to grow again. And, of course, there I was, someone who'd already been a delegate at the Law Faculty, and so I was very involved in politics, I guess, leading opposition to the Francoist Spanish University Union [Sindicato Español Universitario: SEU].

Whatever film school they attended, students frequently have fond memories of the library and projection spaces.
Well, when I studied in Spain there was still very little published about cinema and what there was, was either in fairly unobtainable books or specialist journals. I don't remember the school's library being out of this world, instead, what I appreciated was that there were always so many different types of films being shown in class: double bills, and even films banned by the censors. You see, a good proportion of the teachers at the EOC were censors themselves: they banned the films and then brought them to show to us, their students, so we could learn. So, while some films couldn't be shown in Madrid's cinemas, in the EOC we analysed and admired many censored works. One memory that comes to mind following on from this story is that, in the seventies, a government minister, Sánchez Bella, called a meeting of Spanish filmmakers and as part of the meeting, he prepared a private showing of the film, *Z* (1969) by Costa-Gavras, for them. After viewing this feature—prohibited by the censors and so impossible to see in any Madrid film theatre—he told them: "This is the cinema I want you to make in Spain". It seems so ironic now.

Apart from the film showings in the school itself, the students' own love of cinema spurred them to seek out new works whether in the commercial cinemas on Gran Vía or in smaller independent community cinemas.
I remember, on the afternoons when we didn't have classes, we used to go to cinemas showing

a double bill, tracking down films we loved to see over and over again. Really, the choice was limited to films commercially distributed in Spain, there wasn't much else. There were also cinema clubs around in those days, but they had access to very little material and, also, it was in a dreadful state of preservation: rolls of 16 mm film with innumerable cuts. Of course, we went to lots of premieres, and we saw some films in commercial cinemas six or seven times.

During that period, one good thing for our generation was that, in the summer, commercial cinemas in Madrid, like the ones on Gran Vía or on Fuencarral street, would show not only new releases but also reruns. So, in the same week you could see *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, (John Huston, 1948) at Madrid's Lope de Vega and then, at Carlos III on Goya street, another film like *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942). So, we could suddenly catch up on all those forties films we'd been too young to see at the time. A high proportion of what we saw in those theatres was American cinema, important works by some of the great directors. Another important moment for the cinema-lovers of my generation happened in the early seventies, due to the work of TVE putting together film seasons for broadcast on its second channel. They showed films by Humphrey Bogart, Gary Copper, and Robert Mitchum—whole seasons showcasing great actors, but also directors like Joseph Mankiewicz and George Cukor. We knew all these directors from television, but we also learned about others like Jean Renoir and Kenji Mizoguchi. There was an entire season dedicated to Mizoguchi on TVE! I think it was in 1971 or 1972. I remember they were broadcast every Tuesday and so, on our little, black and white TVs we were able to see films by some of cinema's greats. The incredible thing is how we would all get together, maybe more than ten people at a time, in our homes to see films by Mizoguchi or Renoir on those tiny televisions.

It's true, some things were easier than they are now, for example, getting to know living directors—they were more accessible somehow. So, at the San Sebastián festival or the one in Valladolid, we could see retrospectives of some of the most revered directors and the most incredible thing is, afterwards you could have a conversation with the people themselves. There was huge respect for cinema and a great community built around films.

Was it this respect for the cinema that prompted you to create and direct the series *La noche del cine español* [Spanish Cinema Night] (1983-1985)?
Really, like so many other things in my life, it happened by chance. When the PSOE came to power, I was at home thinking about what to do. I'd just finished filming a TV-movie about *Sonata de estío* [Summer Sonata] by Ramón Valle-Inclán. It was a mini-series and the production stage had been a disaster with an infinite number of cuts and changes at the last moment. Afterwards I'd returned to television to do an art programme, but then that finished too and, so, when the new government was elected, I was at a loose end but full of ideas and hope—like so many others. We thought that with a socialist party in power, a party where we had acquaintances and even good friends, change would happen, and Spanish television would produce new things. I told myself this was the moment when I'd finally be able to do what I wanted to do: direct fiction films. I'd already done several cultural programmes on television, and they were good work, but I wanted to do cinema. However, the telephone didn't ring. Time passed and the telephone still didn't ring.

Many weeks later, the people from TVE's channel two called me. At the time the channel director was Clara Francia whom I didn't know. They told me I might be able to help them with an issue they had but didn't know how to manage. Someone at TVE had bought the rights to a heap of films made during Franco's time—films from the forties and fifties—and they didn't know what to do with them. The majority of these works

were unknown to the general public and, of course, ideologically aligned to early Francoism. Clara asked me if I could think of a way they might be broadcast, since, under the first democratically elected socialist government, it might be considered crass to rehabilitate these films steeped in such a diametrically opposed ideology. In fact, the more I thought about it, the more it depressed me. I didn't like the project one bit; it seemed like a poisoned chalice. The easy options such as selecting and recutting the films for a news-documentary style programme to be followed by films like *Las chicas de la Cruz Roja* [Red Cross Girls] (Rafael J. Salvia, 1958), at that time in the eighties just seemed frightful to me. Without a doubt, proposing to re-release films from the forties was counter to what would be expected under a socialist government. Fortunately—by chance again—I accepted the challenge more because it meant a secure income than out of interest. After ten to twelve days shut up in a room with a Moviola machine watching all those films, I made a discovery: these films told the story of my life, my childhood, and my adolescence! And, as the next logical step, if this was the story of my life then it was also a narrative of the lives of every Spaniard, or, in a generic sense, of Spanish life under Franco. So, when I discovered these films from the forties I'd not yet seen, I felt as if I was regaining some part of that era.

Would it be right to imagine that many of the films from that decade, by young directors of the time such as Rafael Gil and Juan de Orduña, wouldn't have been well-known or had perhaps even had been lost?

The majority of the films were unknown or had been forgotten. And, of course, as they were from the forties, I hadn't seen them, since they were not part of the repertoire shown in commercial cinemas or in the cinema clubs. I hadn't seen—nor had practically anyone of my generation—films like *The Nail* (El clavo, Rafael Gil, 1944), *La pródiga*

[The Prodigal Woman] (Rafael Gil, 1946), or *El destino se disculpa* [Fate Apologises] (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1945); that type of film was still unknown. At the time, I knew much more about Spanish cinema of the fifties: all those classic Madrid comedies like *Manolo, guardia urbano* [Manolo The Traffic Policeman] (Rafael J. Salvia, 1956), *Las chicas de la Cruz Roja* [Red Cross Girls] (Rafael J. Salvia, 1958), and *El tigre de Chamberí* [The Chamberí Tiger] (Pedro Luis Ramírez, 1957), since I'd seen them as a child, and knew them very well, and, also, they had been among those shown on double bills. I can't even remember how many times I saw *Manolo, guardia urbano* or *Historias de la radio* [Radio Stories] (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1955)! But, seen one after the other, watching them on a Moviola machine from nine in the morning without a break until seven at night, I realised this type of cinema had barely been shown or analysed and that Spanish life under Franco was part of Spanish cinema. By design or default, whichever, it was undeniably there. From that point I started my project of telling the story of Francoism through Spanish cinema. Luckily, I was given a free reign. Fernando Lara helped me a great deal throughout the whole process. We divided up the interviews, he did the more political ones while I did the more cinematography-based ones.

The interviews you did for *La noche del cine español* comprise a very valuable body of material for researchers of the history of Spanish cinema, and those interested in Francoism in general, both because of the depth they go into as well as their length. Indeed, some of the EOC's students feature in the series.

Yes, the original recordings of those interviews have been preserved. I remember we recorded on Thursdays and Fridays—Fernando Lara on one day and me on the other. They were very long interviews encompassing the whole period from 1939 to 1975, with the idea of cutting them down later and presenting sections relevant to the

themes dealt with in each chapter of the series. And they weren't all strictly about cinematography. For example, we interviewed Marcelino Camacho, Alfredo Di Stéfano, Alfredo Mayo, Fray Justo Pérez de Urbel. I even managed to get an interview with Ramón Serrano Suñer! I had to work hard to convince him; before he agreed to do that long interview, I remember how much I had to persevere until he felt he could trust me. Without a doubt, like I said, Francoism was embedded in those films, and from there came the original concept for the whole series. Rummaging around a bit in the testimonies of those cinematographers, actors, and politicians—some open supporters of Franco, others dissidents—a living story came together about what those first decades of Francoism had been like. It was incredible to be able to interview those characters as living witnesses, although, well, they were already very old by then.

It grieves me to see how the memory of Spanish cinema is being lost. A year ago, when Mario Camus died, I felt a great loss, not just because of the sudden absence of a good friend, but also because with him died an important layer of memory about Spanish cinema—and, if you ask me, I'd say part of Italian and French cinema memory too. I believe, *La noche del cine español* helped immeasurably to ensure that the part of the memory of those decades—the forties, fifties, and sixties—hasn't been lost.

Not long after *La noche del cine español* you were named as the director general of the ICAA, what do you remember about that time?
They were three intense years. Neither my time as director in the ICAA in the eighties nor my involvement in the ECAM in the nineties were personal projects, rather they were both fruit, once again, of chance. Chance! I wouldn't have lifted a finger to enter politics, or to go into the Ministry of Culture, but, suddenly, I found myself being offered the director general-ship and further-

more, the offer came just at the moment a film project I was working on—something I'd invested with all the passion, time, and money possible—was about to go under. It was a film called *La mujer en la luna* [The Woman in the Moon], but unlike Fritz Lang's film of the thirties it wasn't about rockets and planets, but about a real woman. She was a counter figure to *El hombre de moda* [Man of Fashion] (Fernando Méndez-Leite, 1980). In fact, shortly after finishing that film, I met with Pilar Miró after a showing of *Gary Copper que estás en los cielos* [Gary Cooper Who is in Heaven] (Pilar Miró, 1980), and I asked her what she was going to do next to which she replied: a film about a man. She asked me the same and I told her: a film about a woman. That film became *La mujer en la luna*, but in the end I had to drop it for a variety of reasons both big and petty; it's one of my greatest professional regrets. I think it would have sent my career in totally different direction. After that excursion, returning to the question, it all began with a phone call from the minister, Javier Solana—just after Pilar Miró resigned—who offered me the job of director general of the Institute of Cinematography. I was taken aback. I talked to my then wife and my friends, and after debating it with my nearest and dearest, and thinking about it a great deal, I accepted. It was an exhilarating experience; I dedicated my heart and soul to the job and enjoyed myself doing it.

At the time, my biggest interest was in revitalising the Spanish film industry which was just then emerging from oblivion. While the Union of the Democratic Centre [Unión de Centro Democrático: UCD] had been in power during the transition to democracy, Spanish cinema was a disaster, but I liked the policies Pilar Miró had put in place and agreed with them. What's more, personally, it gave me the only good reason to abandon *La noche del cine español*, which didn't show any signs of ever finishing. Every day, I'd discover more things and so the show would carry on; there never seemed a way to put a final full stop to it.

Despite everything it wouldn't have been a bad idea to continue with the programme.

I left a lot of material already recorded, a team with two stupendous directors who did things really well. Furthermore, there were two good assistants working on *La noche del cine español* with Fernando Lara as advisor. I think it could have carried on for many years if I hadn't been given such a tempting offer with the ICAA, just at that moment.

The eighties were a period full of changes for Spanish cinema.

Yes, absolutely they were. And, you know, in my first year at the ICAA, I believe I had a great deal of luck. That was when they released films like *El viaje a ninguna parte* [Voyage to Nowhere] (Fernando Fernán Gómez, 1986), *La mitad del cielo* [Half of Heaven] (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1986), *27 horas* [27 Hours] (Montxo Armendáriz, 1986), *La guerra de los locos* [War of the Mad] (Manolo Matji, 1986), and *Tata mía* [Dear Nanny] (José Luis Borau, 1986). The appearance of those films made it very easy to be director general and support Spanish cinema.

That first year as director general, in addition, coincided with the first year of the Goya awards.

Yes, after a few months in post as director general, the first Goya awards were presented in the Lope de Vega theatre on Gran Vía and *El viaje a ninguna parte* was a big winner. Fernando Fernán Gómez swept the board winning Best Film, Director, Screenplay, and more. Unfortunately, the actor-director didn't come to the gala and the ceremony was born amidst controversy due to his absence. But well, the King and Queen were there, and we were treated to a showing of *La aldea maldita* [The Ddamned Village] (Florian Rey, 1930) which had been very finely restored by the Spanish Film Archive [Filmoteca Española].

Generally, it was a very lively time for Spanish cinema. Pedro Almodóvar became an international phenomenon almost overnight, and this was very important, indeed key, for all of Spanish cinema. I had a small, but direct, role in all that as I explicitly supported the Almodóvar brothers in their endeavour to form their own production company. They'd made the film *Matador* [Killer] (Pedro Almodóvar, 1986) with Andrés Vicente Gómez and I really encouraged them to take the leap and form El deseo so they themselves could produce *Law of desire* (La Ley del deseo, Pedro Almodóvar, 1987). I remember, a short time after I'd joined the Ministry we took *Matador* to New York for a Spanish Cinema week, and while we were there, seeing the amazing response to the film—and to Carmen Maura—betting on Almodóvar became an obligation. I remember people would stop us on Fifth Avenue! At New York airport I told Agustín Almodóvar we needed another film from Pedro by October, and he replied saying they had a project, but the screenplay was at an early stage and because they were trying to get their production company off the ground everything would take time. They weren't ready to take anything to the commission. I insisted strongly that there had to be a new film from Pedro before Christmas, and I asked that they present whatever they had—in whatever state it was in—to the commission. And I promised I'd champion them. I knew, a new film from Almodóvar at that moment would help all of Spanish cinema. I've always been an advocate of this way of doing things; I favour a, let's say, proactive politics, one that prevents any good project being left by the wayside.

The ECAM is another of the institutions you've dedicated your time to over the last decades.

Genuinely, its foundation was also a matter of chance. At that time, I was finishing the soundtrack for *La regenta* and I was trying to get a film project of the ground—it was called *La mujer que ganó la guerra de España* [The Woman Who Won the Spanish Civil War]—and it was very close to my heart. The screenplay was set in San Sebastián during the three years of the Civil War, and it was

about a family of women—from the right of the political divide—who lived with the rear-guard. It was a story very loosely inspired by my mother's youth; the three main characters were my mother, my grandmother, and my great grandmother, who took refuge from the 'red terror' [terror rojo] among the rear-guard. The story begins with a prologue about Madrid under the Popular Front [Frente Popular] and ends with an epilogue after Madrid was taken by the Nationalists in 1939. It was a hugely ambitious project, and I was really keen to take it on, you see, I thought it was very interesting to explore the world of the rear-guard, of the women who became our mothers. But it was never to be. It was a difficult period.

And, in that disappointing context, I was offered the opportunity to found and direct the school. In fact, it was an idea Jesús Martínez León and I had talked about several years before at the request of—if I recall correctly—the General Society of Authors and Editors (Sociedad General de Autores y Editores: SGAE) and, the bank, Caja Madrid. We gave them a presentation of our plans and they accepted the draft proposal—and paid us—but then we heard nothing more. I then became involved in producing *La Regenta* and was shooting outside of Madrid for a long time; meanwhile, funding for ECAM was being negotiated with SGAE, the Autonomous Community of Madrid, and the Cinema Academy. And then, they made me a firm offer of the school's directorship. It was a fabulously exciting project; I couldn't refuse.

When the ECAM was set up, at its inception, did you have in mind something similar to the Official School of Cinematography?
Yes, but we realised quickly that times had changed. Some things, like the division into specialisms that, yes, we preserved from the old EOC. In addition, for example, we thought it wise to keep the course duration to three years. And, as it had been then, we felt practical work was of central importance to learning. We also kept the entrance exam

since the number of applications was immense. In the end, we felt things had changed, and neither the cinema nor the students of the sixties were the same as in our time. However, it's true, we had the model of the EOC in mind, if only as the seed.

Change would seem logical, after all, four decades had passed.
Yes, and we also had to deal with the whole process of technological transformation. For example, for the editing specialism, I remember talking to Pablo del Amo who was, at the time, indisputably the number one editor, respected throughout the industry for his filmography, and, one morning, I remember Del Amo told me his specialist course wouldn't cover the new Avid editing programme. I tried to explain to him that while I felt it was important for students to edit using Moviola, they had to have training for and be aware of Avid, since even then, digital editing was becoming the norm. For sure, Almodóvar, for example, still edited analogue film, and I too had used Moviola for *La regenta*, but, by this point, there were very few cinematographers using traditional methods. I insisted he take account of this processes of change from analogue to digital by teaching both methods, since although Moviola could give students the necessary background, in the future, they would have to work with Avid. Pablo roundly refused to listen and so I couldn't work with him. It was tough, but we needed to adapt to the technological change that was already in motion.

Even so, in general, we were very fortunate with our teachers. I would go as far as to say they were very good teachers. Did you know, in the directing specialism, we started out with none other than Montxo Armendariz and Víctor Erice.

How do you see the future of cinema schools? Would you like to make a prediction?
I think these schools have been an all-round success. The other day, in San Sebastián, I was talking with some of the staff at ESCAC—friends of

mine—and they were telling me cinema and the shows being made nowadays can't be understood without ECAM and ESCAC. And I agree with them. These schools continue to have a future, and I believe the only problem is that the student body and what they want to do have changed so much. What people enjoy in cinema has changed radically. I remember an anecdote Santos Zunzunegui told me shortly after he'd given the first session of his History of Cinema course. He'd shown his students *Days of Hope* (L'espoir) by André Malraux (1940) and after class, one of his students approached him and said that, if this was the type of film they were going to be shown, he wouldn't be coming again.

And after so many years, here you are, back in the same district and in another of Madrid's grand houses.

Curiously, the Academy's current headquarters is another mansion; they've been there since 2007. The building is extraordinary, and it enables us to carry out all sorts of activities. As you know, I've been with the Academy from its first moments: since its birth—around 1986-1987—when I was director general at ICAA. Before the project had been fully implemented, the members of the Academy's provisional council came to the Ministry and to the ICAA asking for funding to help get the Academy project going. I, as director general, was the one who was there to receive the council members and I remember clearly how I had to organise their first grant of ten million pesetas—no small sum in those days. Many years later, I preside over the institution I helped create. It's the reason behind my whole life [he laughs].

What is day-to-day life like at the Academy?

There's a lot of work to do! But luckily, I've inherited the Academy in a good state of repair; its well organised, with a brilliant technical team, and practically everyone working there does a good job, they have so much knowledge and skills. All that really helps and makes everything flow. Even so, there are many tasks to do, because we organise such an array of projects, and I have to take a fairly active role. Really, I'm very happy to pitch in as I think it's worth it, and the previous team who built the Academy, without a doubt, placed it in a very good position.

How are your current residency projects going? Are you happy?

Yes, I am. I believe everything is turning out well. They are the source of lots of interesting work. We've finished three residencies already; the film *La maternal* [Motherhood] by Pilar Palomero (2022) came out of one of them, and the reviews

Image 2. Fernando Méndez-Leite during the interview at Café Gijón

are good. I've been at meetings with our residents and, I feel, all the students are happy. It's a feeling I get when I'm at the Academy too, that everyone employed there is happy, they work well and are very competent. There's a very convivial atmosphere; it's a pleasant place to work.

We've talked about your training and love of cinema, but barely touched on your cinematographic work.

Like so many other things, my films have also been the fruits of chance [he laughs]. Even one of my most recent projects—a documentary about Carmen Maura—landed in my lap by chance after an unexpected phone call. I've tried to make films, but there I think I've often had bad luck and I haven't managed to pull it off. It's not something I dwell on, but, for sure, it's a note in the chapter about my life's frustrations.

Luckily, we've been able to enjoy some that came to fruition like *El hombre de moda*.

Yes, but the ones I've finished have come about only after major difficulties, and in general, I've not been able to do things as I would have wanted. Sincerely, I believe there are aspects of the figure of film director I just don't have, or I don't know how to perform. I don't seem to know how to move in that terrain, and I don't know why this is, because I've been able to acquit myself well in so many other, seemingly equally complex, roles. I'd say, it's much more difficult to be the director general of the ICAA, of a cinema school, or to stay on good terms with government ministers like Esperanza Aguirre or Miquel Iceta (to name some examples), than to be a film director; however, I've managed to do all those things well and have had good luck. Yet, when I have to sell my own artistic vision—and it's something that keeps happening to me—I don't do it well and I tend to be hit by bad luck. Perhaps it's something to do with my character or personality, or a guilt complex, or impostor syndrome. I have quite extreme cases of both.

I've always thought: "What am I doing here? He's so much cleverer than me!" I've always suffered from impostor syndrome. I remember how, when I first came to the School of Cinematography [EOC], listening to my fellow students made me think I should just head back to the Law Faculty.

But works like the *La Regenta* (1995) series, or the feature *El hombre de moda* (1980) speak for themselves about the fine work of the director behind them.

That shows I can do these things [he laughs]. But I believe they could have been done better with a little more luck. I'm very pleased with *La Regenta*, although it's always the case that, in a film, you have to make sacrifices and you regret not having gone with various suggestions as you might have wanted to in the beginning. Last winter I saw the show again and I thought there were many things that were well done. For sure, there are things I'd change, I'd cut some scenes, but, in general, I'm proud of the result.

There are some scenes in *La Regenta* that are really accomplished and well-constructed. I think a great deal about the excellent work of Gil Parrondo. With very little to work with, he managed to create all the atmosphere required to transform the novel into film. Of course, the most difficult aspect of the whole process was to condense Clarín's original work. I'm particularly fond of the second episode in the series where much of the main plot is developed.

On the other hand, *El hombre de moda* is a film that, seen today, I think reveals its humble production budget, but it's also a good representation of Madrid society in the sixties. So yes, the film was made under conditions of extreme poverty and hardship. I was working in television at the time, and I'd requested a special dispensation but they'd refused me and so we had to shoot in any gaps or down time the actors and the team had. It was a very complex shooting schedule. We had so few resources to work with I remember one

afternoon—it was right here at the Café Gijón—I was desperately searching for a new actor to replace someone who'd just quit. That was when Pep Munné walked in, and I went over to him, and I begged him to join us the following day to perform a small role in our film. He had to play the brother of Xabier Elorriaga's character and they didn't look remotely alike. Luckily, Pep said yes! Those were the conditions we were working under.

One of the greatest elements of *El hombre de moda* is the dialogue between this work and your other passions, such as literature.

Yes, the dialogue between cinema and literature is evident in much of the European cinema of the seventies. But the inclusion of literary references is difficult to accomplish in a feature film without it coming across as fake or pedantic. That was where my experience as a teacher was very handy. I'd been teaching for a while when I did that film, I'd done thirteen years at the department of cinema in Valladolid. I had a great deal of knowledge about the world of teaching, about how students respond, and the difficulty of placing literary references in film is all about how they fit into the framework of the whole film, and I think it came out well. Literary—or cinephile—references in feature films often feel out of place, but I don't think that's the case in *El hombre de moda*.

Your latest features are once again about cinema: cinema within cinema. The documentaries such as *El productor* [The Producer] (1990), a film about the producer Elías Querejeta, or those about the actresses Ana Belén (*La corte de Ana* [Ana's Cut] 2020), and Carmen Maura (¡*Ay, Carmen!* [Oh Carmen!] 2018) that we mentioned before.

Yes, as I said, some projects have come about by chance, and others through my friendships with the people around which they're based. I feel happier about some than others, but yes, all of them contain cinema within cinema.

You have so much experience as a cinema critic and writing for a range of publications, based on this, how do you see the state of cinema criticism today with respect to that of previous eras?

Dreadful. It's a touchy subject. I've always been and will continue to be a critic and write about cinema. I think the current lack of good criticism is to do with the crisis in publishing. Many titles will force you into a small niche and impose publicity and commercial conditions that are increasingly absurd. When I wrote for *La Guía del Ocio* and *Fotogramas* they'd often phone up with a job and they'd ask about the star rating you were going to give the film: if you said you might give it four stars they'd give you the job, but if you told them you were thinking of giving it only one star, they'd withdraw the offer. I believe there's no point in criticism that isn't free, wide-ranging, and deep. Despite my age and my back pain, I'm still hugely enthusiastic and, when its festival season—Cannes, San Sebastián, Valladolid, Venice—I read all the newspapers and other publications I can get my hands on. But sadly, I find many of the films that get awards—the ones that get talked about—aren't of much interest. So, I don't feel I can rely on the film criticism I read.

To finish, Fernando, have you always been passionate about Spanish cinema?

As a child, and growing up, I loved Spanish cinema. I adored going to movie theatres to see any film that was showing. I tell you; I have no idea how many times I saw *Manolo, guardia urbano* or *Historias de la radio* [Radio Stories]. Then, after my time at the EOC I felt a little alienated from Spanish cinema, but I still went to see all the films I could. Of course, some of the films produced in the sixties were pretty horrendous. That was a time when, if I went for dinner with friends, I used to be the only one who'd seen the majority of films produced in Spain, and, naturally, there was more than one occasion when I'd be ranting about one of other of those features because they most-

ly struck me as irritating and not simply from the political point of view but also from a social and moral perspective. No doubt about it, among my circle of friends, I was the one who'd seen most Spanish films and, I think, at the same time, I was the one who maintained the most critical discourse about them.

That's why, the one thing I'm not on board with is the mythologising trend apparent in much of the research on Spanish cinema. Spanish cinema is, undoubtedly, hugely interesting as a source of knowledge about, and as a reflection of the society that produced it. However, this doesn't imply that all Spanish filmmakers and all of their works were uniformly brilliant. It's a prickly topic, but I think, in some instances, the story constructed by certain young researchers and critics, is a misleading one. I don't think it should be a problem to say that one or other Spanish film is bad—or even terrible.

This said, contemporary Spanish cinema is in a magnificent position. For sure, there have always been excellent films, even in the most difficult periods of Franco's dictatorship, and many more since the transition to democracy. I am so lucky to be presiding over the Academy now, at the current time when there are so many marvellous films being produced like those of Rodrigo Sorogoyen and Carla Simón. I think the near future is very promising. I am in no doubt that Spanish cinema is in fine health.

We say our goodbyes at the door of Café Gijón on one of Madrid's few rainy afternoons. He walks off down Recoletos Boulevard towards Colón Plaza, in the direction of the Cinema Academy. We wait for a few seconds for the rain to stop in the restaurant's awning, just enough time for one of the Gijón's waiters to come out and ask us: "Was that the new director of the Cinema Academy?" Yes, it was Fernando Méndez-Leite a man whose fifty years in Spanish cinema were shaped by chance. ∎

NOTES

FILM AND CHANCE. FERNANDO MÉNDEZ-LEITE, A LIFE IN CINEMA ON THE STREETS OF MADRID

Abstract

Fernando Méndez-Leite is a cinema director, screenwriter, and teacher. He was a student at the Official School of Cinematography (EOC) in Madrid. He directed *El hombre de moda* (Man of Fashion, 1980) and the RTVE show *La regenta* [The Female Regent] (1995) based on the novel of the same name by Leopoldo Alas Clarín, among other works. In addition, he founded and was principal of the Community of Madrid's School of Cinema and Audio-visual Arts (ECAM) and, since 2022 has been director of the Spanish Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences.

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PELÍCULAS Y AZAR. FERNANDO MÉNDEZ-LEITE, UNA VIDA DE CINE EN LAS CALLES DE MADRID

Resumen

Fernando Méndez-Leite es director de cine, guionista y profesor. Fue estudiante de la Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía de Madrid. Ha dirigido *El hombre de moda* (1980) y la serie de RTVE *La regenta* (1995) sobre la novela homónima de Leopoldo Alas Clarín, entre otros trabajos. Fue, además, fundador y director de la Escuela de Cine y del Audiovisual de la Comunidad de Madrid y es desde el año 2022 director de la Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas de España.

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MADRILEÑO SPACE: ANOTHER PROTAGONIST IN THE FILMIC NARRATIVE

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| 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 "desarollismo" 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 Vallecas 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

1. 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?

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?

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 element 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?

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 concepts 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?

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?

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 uto-pia 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?

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 Jaurrieta

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 its 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. ■

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 though 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 Walter 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. ∎

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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.

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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.

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Referencia de este artículo

VANISHING POINTS

ASHES OF THE FUTURE: NOSTALGIA AND RUINS IN CYBER NOIR NARRATIVES

PABLO SÁNCHEZ BLASCO

SOMEBODY ELSE'S AUTHENTIC MEMORIES

The first of the many contradictions associated with film noir has always been the lack of a clear definition of a corpus of films, or at least some requirements that would limit the films deemed to belong to the genre. In his comprehensive book on film noir, Noël Simsolo defines it as a "nebula" arising from a "collective unconscious" related to the loss of identity (2007: 17). The Spanish scholar Jesús Palacios denies the existence of a consensus on its nature and describes its legacy as a challenge for film writers (2011: 9). Heredero and Santamarina note its "extreme referential, diegetic, stylistic and dramatic dispersion" (1996: 11), while Gonzalo Pavés calls frankly for a reformulation of the methodology employed in research on the topic (2003: 175).

This debate over what film noir is or is not points to the second great contradiction associated with the genre: the shadow of nostalgia that looms over its entire legacy, perhaps precisely because it is a ghost that cannot be reduced to definitions, a group of films that only becomes more elusive the more one tries to categorise it, or perhaps because it is characterised by a narrative always inclined towards past events (Ponce, 2011: 39). Since the detective films of the 1960s like *Harper* (Jack Smight, 1966) and *Tony Rome* (Gordon Douglas, 1967), neo-noir and nostalgia have always been two constantly interconnected entities, the term "nostalgia" here being understood as "the feeling arising from the desire to return to a time, a place, a person, an object, etc., of a past time, which is perceived as ideal [...] and which in the present moment is beyond our reach" (Muñoz Ocampo, 2013: 20-21).

This connection has not waned in recent years. Today, according to Matthew Cooper (2021: 2), "contemporary Hollywood cinema turns most eagerly to nostalgia for its primary source of power," and neo-noir is no stranger to this tendency. In

films from different countries such as *Long Day's Journey into Night* (Bi Gan, 2018), *The Dry* (Robert Connolly, 2020), *The Kid Detective* (Evan Morgan, 2020), *It Snows in Benidorm* (Nieva en Benidorm, Isabel Coixet, 2020) or *The Little Things* (John Lee Hancock, 2021), we can find a fascination with the theme of nostalgia that goes even further than mere iconographic reverence (Andrade, 2010: 4), embedding the longing for the past in the psychological make-up of the films' detectives.

In each of these films, the investigator's retrospective journey serves as an excuse for an encounter with his past, and with personal traumas that find their ideal trigger in a crime. This idea has always been present in the genre. As Laura Silvestri (2021: 107) explains, the detective's investigation traditionally leads him to a moral re-evaluation of his own past, while at the same time exposing "the impossibility of return" and confronting him with "the irreversibility of time". The films mentioned above expand on this idea by making the investigator the subject of his own investigation, both detective and victim in the case he is trying to solve. His confrontation with the mystery constitutes a recognition that first and foremost concerns his own personal or romantic life.

This redefinition of the archetype (still anecdotal, but previously unidentified) reuses the blueprint of film noir to offer a first-person exploration with melodramatic affinities. The crime genre is thus given an introspective dimension that is more evident in subgenres such as the so-called cyber noir film, specifically in two big-budget movies: *Blade Runner 2049* (Denis Villeneuve, 2017) and *Reminiscence* (Lisa Joy, 2021).

THE CRIME GENRE IS THUS GIVEN AN INTROSPECTIVE DIMENSION THAT IS MORE EVIDENT IN SUBGENRES SUCH AS THE SO-CALLED CYBER NOIR FILM

As established by Jesús Palacios (2011: 188) and expanded on by Madrid Brito (2015: 569), the cyber noir subgenre is defined as:

> a singular combination of retro-futurism and neo-noir, which finds its point of departure and arrival in a peculiar postmodern sensibility, where time frames (past, present and future, not necessarily in that order) are fused and confused, generating a pervasive, ominous feeling of ironic nostalgia and nostalgic irony. Retro and Neo pair up and Cyber Noir is born (Palacios, 2011: 188).

The old and the new coexist in pessimistic visions of a near future based on the depersonalisation of the human being, conflict with technology and increasing social inequalities. Since their inauguration with *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), these films have incorporated nostalgia as a prominent feature of an aesthetic universe "replete with vestiges and remnants of a past that refuses to die" (Palacios, 2011: 189), a reality that has reached the future without completely shedding the traces of its past, often to the discontent of its inhabitants. As Pérez and Zufiaur point out, "although the objects theoretically belong to the future, there is actually nothing new" (2021: 427) in Scott's *Blade Runner*, as its designs incorporate the notion of time in the deliberate dilapidation of the settings.

Adding the original nostalgia of the whole neo-noir cycle to this "eternally rainy, foggy and melancholy urban landscape" (Palacios, 2011: 205) and, finally, to the new characterisation of the detective described above, the aforementioned films heighten the feeling of loss of a past that is always slipping out of reach. Their stories portray sullen individuals whose yearning for the past reflects their lack of confidence in a future that has confirmed all our worst fears.

An analysis of *Blade Runner 2049* and *Reminiscence* reveals an explicit meditation in both films on the power of nostalgia, a postmodern awareness of their precursors in the genre and even a commentary on the current crisis of the cinema

screen. Both films were released in the last five years and both claim their space as innovative variants of the so-called "nostalgia film" (Cooper, 2021: 35) that dominates Hollywood production today.

BLADE RUNNER 2049

It is difficult to forget the first images of the original *Blade Runner*: that nightscape of a metropolis "whose expanse disappears into the horizon" (Pérez and Zufiaur, 2021: 425), peppered with bursts of flame, reflected in an enormous human eye. Just as Luis Buñuel had done in his short film *An Andalusian Dog* (Un perro andaluz, 1929), Ridley Scott's eye served as a stimulus to transform our gaze and discover a new world of digital images. With *Blade Runner*, a new concept of science fiction was born: a murky, romantic pastiche combining the solitudes of the film noir of the 1940s and 1950s with the unexplored universes of futuristic speculation.

From *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984) to *The Matrix* (Lilli Wachowski and Lana Wachowski, 1999), all cyber noir owes something to *Blade Runner*, yet no one had proposed a sequel

until *Blade Runner 2049*. This sequel recaptures some of the sense of wonder inspired by Scott's film. However, it begins quite differently, with a prologue on a protein farm cloaked in fog and surrounded by desert plains. Despite being set several decades after the first film, the surprisingly humble cabin where the replicant Sapper Morton (Dave Bautista) lives contains several 20th-century objects that stand out. These items "do not merely have an incidental presence", but "engage with the sense of yearning that the audience may exhibit in response" (Cooper, 2021: 35-36). Specifically, they are his reading glasses, the casserole dish boiling on the stove, the armchair and, most importantly, the piano that we associate with Deckard's (Harrison Ford) love story in the first film.

Instead of evoking the future with images shot in the present, this prologue takes us to the past through the film's futuristic universe. In *Blade Runner 2049*, old objects no longer pile up in corners like debris from a bygone era; instead, they mark a trail of meanings that viewers need to follow. Detective K's (Ryan Gosling) investigation begins with bones and leads him down a path of ruins and ashes marked by a child's old sock and a wooden horse. Nostalgia is present now not

Image 1. *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)

only in the aesthetic, but also in the journey taken by the main characters.

Blade Runner 2049 makes a greater effort to maintain the genre's functionality than its predecessor. While Deckard investigated forward, into the future, to find the replicants who had escaped from the off-world colony, K investigates into the past to identify the corpse found in Morton's garden. K studies lab tests, checks police files, interrogates witnesses and travels to various locations that curiously include a junkyard, a child labor factory and a city abandoned due to radiation. In other words, settings belonging to the same iconography of the old, of the lost, of significant or existential ruin.

The replicant's outward journey clearly takes a retrospective direction. But so does his inner journey. In fact, the sequel updates the psychological principles that distinguished the androids in Scott's film, who defined themselves through dreams and fantasies, like the galloping unicorn later recreated in the form of origami. Conversely, Villeneuve constructs their identity through memories. "If you have authentic memories, you have real human responses," Dr. Stelline (Carla Juri) explains to K in her lab. If you know your past well, you can inhabit the present, even locked in a glass bubble, as she has done since she was a little girl.

Memory constitutes an "essential part in the process of creating one's own identity" (Galán León, 2021: 38). K is aware that he is a replicant, but at the same time he acts with the sensitivity of a human being. Ana Stelline's hyperreal memories have created emotions in him that are also real and condition his behaviour. The professional investigation thus becomes personal and the detective also plays a client role. This shift changes the investigator archetype and its function in the plot. Instead of being guided by standard procedure, the protagonist is blinded by his initial findings and follows them with a recklessness that is almost fatal for the outcome of the story.

> IN *BLADE RUNNER 2049,* OLD OBJECTS NO LONGER PILE UP IN CORNERS LIKE DEBRIS FROM A BYGONE ERA; INSTEAD, THEY MARK A TRAIL OF MEANINGS THAT VIEWERS NEED TO FOLLOW

The detective's nostalgia in *Blade Runner 2049* also expands into romantic terrain, in the form of K's virtual partner, Joi (Ana de Armas). Compared with the replicant Rachael (Sean Young) from the 1982 film, Joi represents an even more conservative female type, "a domestic slave who responds successfully to the emotional needs of men" (Sáez, 2017). Her character embodies the idea of machines that are more human than humans, but at the price of reproducing old conventional views of the role of women. For K, Joi is not only a potential romantic partner or an object of desire, but a "fantasised image based on the traditionalist era of the American dream" (Joaquin, 2021: 186). Only at the end of the film, when he stares at her billboard, does K realise that he has been constructing an illusion.

This persistent nostalgia of the detective in *Blade Runner 2049* even affects the emblematic character of Rick Deckard. In the first film, Deckard inherited the hallmarks of the hard-boiled detective: solitary, independent, disillusioned but at the same time idealistic, a laconic, sarcastic, hopeless romantic. The Deckard that Villeneuve reconstructs is much closer to the sensibility of our times; he reappears before us as a myth in a pop-culture context with which he tries to identify. "I like this song," he will tell K as Elvis Presley sings on a holographic stage.

In the Deckard of the sequel there is an overlap of the nostalgia for the 1982 film (and the modern cinema it represents today) with the personal nostalgia of the character himself. At the climax of the film, Wallace tempts him by "offering him a replica" of his beloved Rachael "to restore his

enjoyment and set aside his pain" (Joaquin, 2021: 194). This "sinister" image appeals to us then with the power of the past, explicitly doubting the potential of the sequel to match the seductive power of the original. It is a nostalgia, in this case, for a cinema that today is in critical condition, haunted by falling audience numbers and shut-down theatres; a nostalgia for the screens and images of the past, and thus for the settings of its most iconic stories.

For all these reasons, *Blade Runner* and its sequel *Blade Runner 2049* end up being opposite experiences insofar as their conception of time is concerned. Thirty-five years after the first one, we find ourselves with a vision of the future that is no more advanced than the one we glimpsed in 1982. Pessimism and disillusion seem to have increased since then, and our world view is marked by an even greater yearning. At the end of *Blade Runner*, the replicant Roy Batty invited us to reconsider existence as a miracle to be enjoyed. At the end of *Blade Runner 2049*, the plot settles for the reunion of a father and daughter, with the hope of restoring basic family relationships so that new strategies can be planned.

In short, *Blade Runner 2049* is an innovative example of cyber noir, where nostalgia dominates the images both in aesthetic terms and in its narrative techniques.

REMINISCENCE

The central idea of *Reminiscence*, the directorial debut by Lisa Joy (who also wrote and produced the film), seems to be inspired by the most memorable sequence in *Soylent Green* (1973). The classic directed by Richard Fleischer ranks as one of the most obvious precursors to the cyber noir subgenre, a detective story set in a future of misery and desolation. Although Palacios does not include it as cyber noir because of the "complete absence of meta-generic complicity with the viewer" in the film (2011: 125), *Soylent Green* anticipates the pessimistic portrait of the future, the use of a crime fiction plot, the classical archetype of the detective and the nostalgia inherent to neo-noir.

In the future it depicts (curiously, the film takes place in 2022), the elderly can visit euthanasia clinics that provide them with a transition to their "home". Lying on a stretcher, they watch a projection of images "drawing on a past when it was still possible to enjoy the flora and fauna" (Ortega, 2018: 113), as a kind of overdose of beauty that accompanies their final moments. It is as if the return to that ideal world of nostalgia were able to cause their deaths, or in other words, as if death itself were symbolised by their immersion in images belonging to another world and another time.

This concept reappears in the future depicted by Lisa Joy. As a result of technological advances, human beings can experience their memories in an immersive film screening. Since "the essence of nostalgia is not the memory of what is lost or its absence but the desire to return to it" (Muñoz Ocampo, 2013: 20), the experience becomes addictive as it allows the viewer to forget that outside the memory screening room, climate change has transformed the planet: the oceans have flooded the cities, economic inequality has continued to increase, night has replaced day and, in short, reality no longer holds any appeal for humankind.

Reminiscence is thus a film explicit in its aim to portray nostalgia as a disease of our times. The protagonist's voice-over is very clear in this regard, with observations such as "the past doesn't haunt us [...], it's us who haunt the past", "nothing is more addictive than the past" or "nostalgia's become a way of life". The film is both science fiction and cyber noir, and yet it shows little interest in either. In relation to the former, the story basically takes place in indoor settings at night, especially the office where Bannister (Hugh Jackman) and Watts (Thandiwe Newton) do their business. Apart from a few digital panoramas of urban geography, we barely explore
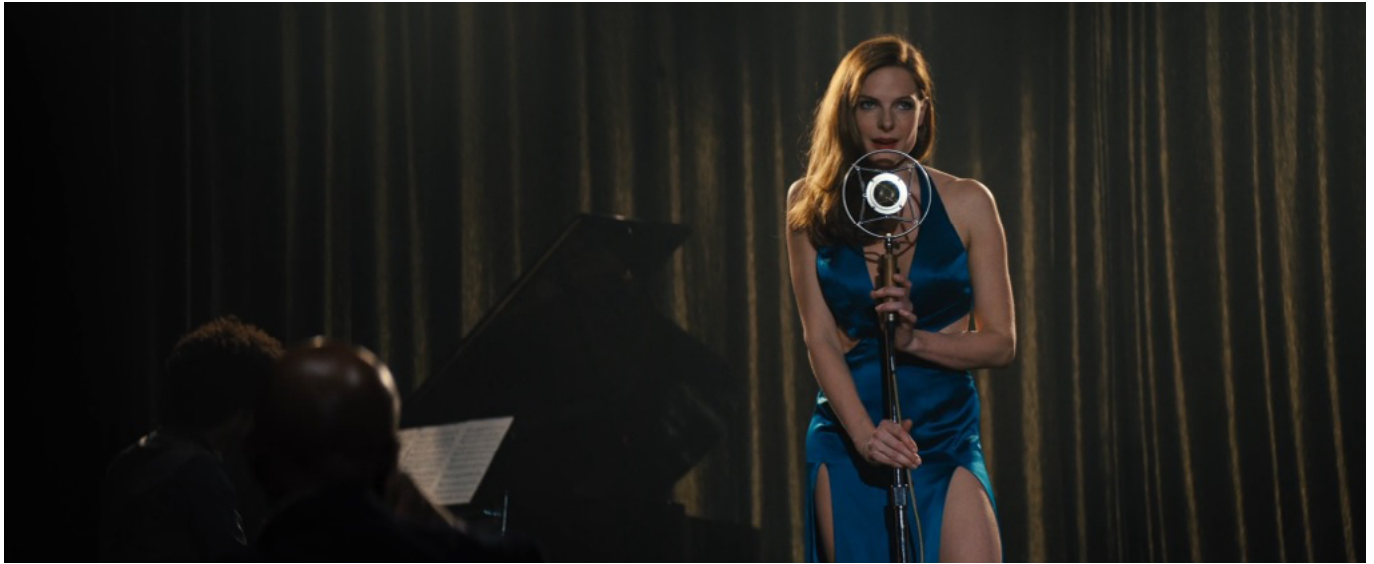
Image 2. *Reminiscence* (2021)

the details of the future world it depicts. In relation to the latter, *Reminiscence* adopts the detective procedure of the crime film in order to project its story back in time. Although it begins in a present tense supported by a voice-over, an ellipsis immediately transports us to the realm of memory. The enigmatic Mae (Rebecca Ferguson) has disappeared without a trace. Her love affair with Bannister has been cut short and, without knowing it, for several minutes we have been witnessing the detective's memory. The rest of the film will follow this investigation, which will use Bannister's own memories and those he extracts from witnesses to fill in the gaps and give a new meaning to this absence.

While seeming to be impeccably faithful to the neo-noir canon, in reality *Reminiscence* subverts its resources to privilege the love story over the detective story. The film does not narrate a crime fiction plot that incidentally brings about a catharsis for the protagonist; instead, the crime fiction plot serves as an instrument to explore the secrets of his love story.

The retro aesthetics of *Reminiscence* serve a similar purpose. Lisa Joy's film evokes a future inspired by the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, the same era that produced film noir and legendary films such as *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) and *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946). However, the plot twists also reveal this aesthetic to be a farce, as Cyrus Boothe (Cliff Curtis) has studied Bannister's tastes and designed a performance aimed at controlling him. The song Mae performs on stage and her clothing, attitude, manner of speaking and mysterious nature are all intended to present her as a weak-willed femme fatale, an irresistible "masochistic-paranoid male fantasy of the exploitative and sexually insatiable woman" who at the same time acquiesces to male domination (Žižek, 2011: 372).

As Martín Cerezo argues, "in every literary narrative there are theoretically two texts coexisting, the text we read and the text that the criminal tried to make us read" (Martín Cerezo, 2006: 54). But in the case of *Reminiscence*, there would be three. The first is a nostalgic neo-noir story designed by Boothe to seduce Bannister; the second is a neo-noir story of smuggling and blackmail, which Bannister investigates and which the audience must follow; and the third is the love story between Bannister and Mae, which he cynically imposes on the film in accordance with "our ten-

dency to construct systems of thought to suit our emotional needs" (McCausland and Salgado, 2021).

In this way, the crime fiction plot of *Reminiscence* is not only directed towards the past through nostalgia but also unveils the artifice of that nostalgia and its conformist effect on the character. In the end, Nick Bannister falls in love with a hologram, just as the replicant K does in *Blade Runner 2049*. His reduction of the love object into a mere male illusion confirms the impossible nature of his return to his noir origins. Just as the femme fatale can never be fully humanised, the noir genre will never be able to reconstruct the atmosphere and meaning of those classic films.

In contemporary cinema, the parameters have faded and stories collapse under the impossibility of their telling. As Carlos Losilla recently asked, "if we no longer pay attention to stories, how can we create images that rebel against them?" (2021: 23) The images in *Reminiscence* sink under nostalgia and repetition without finding more than a spurious satisfaction in their hollow forms. In the final scenes, Bannister passes through the curtain that separates the present from the past, or reality from fiction, and merges with the imaginary Mae in an elusive fourth dimension that can be identified in a way with neo-noir, which, despite enormous efforts, "embodies what is never a 'modern film noir', but its ghost, which is ultimately the case for all classical genres" (Losilla, 2011: 66).

The images that Bannister handles depart from reality and are transformed into a representation of a perverse nostalgia for him and his loved ones. The final decision to stay in the dream underscores the risk of idealising our past and breaking the ties that connect us to reality. Bannister himself compares his tale to Orpheus's journey to rescue Eurydice, just as Eugenio Trías does with the story of Scottie and Judy in the classic *Vertigo* (2016: 37). However, unlike Hitchcock's film, Bannister does not lose Mae but embraces the illusion of her existence in a spectral, unreachable space.

Lisa Joy's film thus uses the crime film model to explore the toxicity of a certain nostalgia without daring to (or managing to) escape from it. It turns the detective into a victim of the past who brings together disparate fragments to construct a story to suit him, completely transgressing the foundational archetype of the detective as one whose "function is to confirm all the discourses used as a refuge and protection for those who do not want to see their ideas threatened" (Silvestri, 2001: 43).

PURSUING THE PAST

The analysis of these two films confirms that Denis Villeneuve and Lisa Joy both use the aesthetic and narrative resources of neo-noir, and more specifically of the cyber noir subgenre, as defined by Palacios and Madrid Brito. However, they also add meaningful variations that bring their work closer to another corpus of films (of which *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *The Dry* are emblematic examples) in which the detective's investigation eschews the usual implications of noir to become an expression of a feeling of nostalgia, of an "internal or external contemplation of what has changed and what has been lost to time" (Cooper, 2001: 43) in their lives.

In *Blade Runner 2049*, the discovery of a corpse allows K to confront his childhood memories and uncover the identity of his parents, the special nature of the replicants and his relationship with the missing Deckard. Meanwhile, the detective in *Reminiscence* obsessively evaluates his memories in order to make sense of the failure of his roman-

IN SHORT, BOTH FILMS MANIPULATE THE USUAL STRUCTURE OF THE DETECTIVE STORY WITH THE AIM OF OFFERING A REFLECTION ON MEMORY AND MYSTERY IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

tic relationship with the elusive Mae. Bannister uses the crime story to delve into his feelings and ascertain the boundaries between truth and lies in the memories of their relationship.

This paradigm shift is especially significant if we compare the characters of K and Bannister with the detective in the film *Soylent Green*, the precursor to the cyber noir genre. In that 1973 picture, nostalgia is always expressed through Sol Roth, the old man played by Edward G. Robinson. As a symbol of a world that has now disappeared, Sol passes on his memories of a life filled with light in contrast to the darkness of the cyberpunk world. But this nostalgia does not apply to his friend Detective Thorn (Charlton Heston), as Fleischer depicts him as a pragmatic, savvy man immune to idealisations and fantasies, an analytical individual capable of getting to the truth by "putting together what is normally kept apart" (Silvestri, 2001: 36).

In contemporary film noir, detectives have resigned themselves to a chaotic world that makes them prone to self-doubt, as "while before the world had a meaning (one defined by fate), even if it could not be understood, now this meaning has disappeared, and total irrationality reigns" (Andrade Boué, 2010: 9). Added to this today is a second level of meaninglessness resulting from the crisis of the cinematographic image, from "the way contemporary cinema has collapsed as a collective illusion and the repercussions this has had on the collapse of cinema itself" (Losilla, 2021: 34). In Villeneuve's film, this appears as an exploration of its ties to the first *Blade Runner* and the longings of the type of cinema it represented. In Joy's film, it emerges as a critique of the contemporary omnipresence of nostalgia and the development of conservative stories to satisfy our desires.

In short, both films manipulate the usual structure of the detective story with the aim of offering a reflection on memory and mystery in human relationships. This raises the question of whether this small corpus of works should be added to the list of modalities reviewed and expanded by Cooper in his study of nostalgia films (2021: 44). These are contemporary neo-noir films in which the detective's investigations represent a first-person nostalgic impulse aimed at resolving existential questions. It is a category of films associated in some cases with the modern "anti-thriller" (García Vidal, 2015: 575) and in others with the "metaphysical" detective story (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 2). In any case, it is an interesting movement worthy of study that vindicates nostalgia as one of the main traits of the detective in film noir. ∎

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ASHES OF THE FUTURE: NOSTALGIA AND RUINS IN CYBER NOIR NARRATIVES

Abstract

The cyber noir genre was born in 1982 with the release of *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), the first of many films to fuse the resources of classical film noir with dystopian science fiction. Since then, there have been numerous variants of this modality in which the investigations of the noir detective take place in a dehumanised world that raises questions about the goal of technological progress. Focusing on *Blade Runner 2049* (Denis Villeneuve, 2017) and *Reminiscence* (Lisa Joy, 2021), this article analyses the current evolution of a genre influenced by the nostalgic obsession affecting Hollywood today. These are two films in which neo-noir's nostalgia for its precursors is harmonised with a personal nostalgia represented by the detective's exploration of the past. This analysis confirms that both films could be classified as a new form of the contemporary nostalgia film.

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CENIZAS DEL FUTURO: NOSTALGIA Y RUINAS EN EL RELATO *CYBERNOIR*

Resumen

El género *cybernoir* nace en 1982 con el estreno de *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), la primera de muchas películas en fusionar los recursos del cine negro clásico con la ciencia ficción distópica. Desde ese momento, han llegado a los cines numerosos exponentes de esta modalidad donde las actividades hermenéuticas del detective *noir* se aplican a un mundo deshumanizado que llega a cuestionarse la meta del progreso social y tecnológico. Tras el estreno de *Blade Runner 2049* (Denis Villeneuve, 2017) y *Reminiscencia* (Reminiscence, Lisa Joy, 2021), este artículo analiza la evolución de un género influido por el pensamiento nostálgico que afecta hoy en día a Hollywood. Se trata de dos películas donde la nostalgia del *neonoir* por sus modelos se armoniza con una nostalgia íntima que simboliza la actividad retrospectiva del detective. Su análisis fílmico confirma la pertinencia de incluir ambas obras como una forma novedosa del llamado cine de la nostalgia actual.

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DISOBEDIENT GHOSTS: AN APPROACH TO MOTHERHOOD AND SINGLEHOOD IN *CURSED MOUNTAIN*

MARÍA AIMARETTI

INTRODUCTION

What social anxieties are conjured up by the presence on screen of an "impotent woman" (whether this refers to infertility or simple incompetence)? What fears are precipitated by her inability to gestate, to raise, to love children? What quality of roughness is incorporated into the imaginary of motherhood by the presence of women who *do not become mothers* or those who when they do—to conform to tradition, or out of carelessness or resentment—turn into absences, shadows, ghosts, or even threats? What other meanings, linked to the dominant gender discourses and sensibilities, might emerge from oblique or subversive readings of classic Spanish films?

Based on these questions, and as part of an investigation dedicated to mapping the imaginary of motherhood and the figure of the mother in classical Argentine and Spanish cinema, this paper explores the representation of motherhood

as obsession, impotence and traumatic absence through the figure of the single woman, using Antonio del Amo's *Cursed Mountain* (Sierra Maldita, 1955) as a case study. To this end, it offers a description from the perspective of cultural studies, cultural history (Martín Barbero, 1987; Burke, 2006), gender studies and classical film studies (de Lauretis, 1996; Scott, 1996; Monterde, 1995; Gámez Fuentes, 1997; Arocena Badillos, 2005; Lozano Estívalis, 2010; Benet Ferrando, 2012; Rosón Villena, 2016) of the conditions that shaped the film. It also offers a visual analysis to examine the story and *mise-en-scène*, considering the dialogue within the sociocultural context and the tensions of meaning that arise in its own textuality.

This study turns the focus away from the bright, comforting glow of the bourgeois mother (domestic, marriageable, flawless, house-proud, upright and sexless), and from the vibrant tenacity of the epic historical matron (brave, hardworking, self-sacrificing, and strong), and even from

the tragic voluptuousness of the desiring mother (sexualised, eroticised, full of doubts and contradictions). Its focus instead is on the representation of motherhood as failure and impossibility, embodied in the figure of the unmarried woman who wants but is unable to have children, who—according to the normative paradigm that imposes equivalence on the terms "woman" and "mother"—has not accomplished *what she came into this world for*, and is therefore a frustrated, *failed mother*. The purpose of this analysis is to delve into an unexplored area in readings of del Amo's film, which have usually focused on the male characters and their relationship with the environment. Moreover, although the focus of this study is on *Cursed Mountain*, in the conclusions a dialogue is established with other films, made around the same time and forming part of the same corpus, which also explore the problem of being a single woman, such as the Argentine film *Para vestir santos* (1955) by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson and *Calle Mayor* (1956) by Juan Antonio Bardem.

MIRRORS: WOMEN TETHERED WITH FACES IN MOURNING

By forcing women to return to the home, confining their identities solely to their role as mothers and implementing natalist policies through various mechanisms of promotion and control, the Franco dictatorship imposed a rather rigid model for the female, who was expected to commit to the regeneration of Spain obediently and productively. Living a sort of "domestic exile", as Susana Tavera García (2006) describes it, women in the early years of the Franco regime found themselves *tethered*—constrained, limited—to a counter-revolutionary transformation movement that emphasised the regulation of gender relations and compulsory motherhood. However, in the 1950s (when the film studied here was made), this model became somewhat more flexible due to the sociopolitical, legal, cultural, and institution-

al changes that occurred when the regime abandoned its initial policy of economic autarky. As Spain rejoined the world stage, forging economic partnerships with the United States and participating in international organisations, the female workforce grew, and from 1953 to 1961 the legal equality of women was debated and their political, professional and labour rights were protected by law (Tavera García, 2006: 258).

Despite these advances towards greater social and gender justice, being a single female continued to be conceived of as a drama (Gil Gascón and Gómez García, 2010), since it implied not only a disruption of the norm and disobedience to the political, legal, moral and religious mandate, but quite simply the cancellation of one's own subjectivity: "The language that places women outside of motherhood is negative: barren, sterile, fruitless... terms that can be applied to the earth, to nature [...]; the woman is essentially useless if she does not account for what gives her social meaning within the male symbolic system: she is simply not a woman" (Lozano Estívalis, 2000: 47).

At the same time, over the course of the 1950s cinema also experienced a moment of transformation, both in terms of the industrial production system—which was contracting—and in relation to the classical model of representation, which was destabilised as forms of *auteur* cinema began to emerge. Forms of co-production and independent production were developing and new cadres of technical and artistic professionals were appearing, while at the same time the world of mass media was being reorganised with the arrival of television. It was a period of transition and of paradoxes, in which surviving models coexisted with transformed elements, combining residue of the past with a newly emerging present.

The following section contextualises *Cursed Mountain* in this moment of epochal changes (in both social and aesthetic terms), while at the same time interrogating a specific area of the imaginary of motherhood depicted in it, with attention to the

representations of the single female, expressed in the *mise-en-scène*, the system of characters and the iconography. In the film, motherhood appears as a latent or explicit social obsession and moral compulsion on a personal level, and its opposite, sterility, as a phantom and an indelible stigma. And yet, the semantic contradictions provided by the film reveal a modality in its manifestation or depiction of the single woman: a variant referred to here as *phantasmatic disobedience*.

DANCE OF DISOBEDIENCE

Produced by Almasirio, at the time a young studio established in 1953 by Sirio Rosado Fernández after he left UNINCI (Unión Industrial Cinematográfica), *Cursed Mountain* premiered at the Callao cinema in Madrid on 30 January 1955 and was one of the most outstanding titles of the (short-lived) production company due to its visual quality and the acclaim it received. In fact, it won the Círculo de Escritores Cinematográficos awards in the categories of Best Film, Best Supporting Actor (José Guardiola) and Best Original Story, and it received the San Sebastián Award for Best Spanish Film and an Honourable Mention for José Guardiola, resulting in a positive critical reception. Its director was the communist filmmaker Antonio del Amo, who had worked for the cinematographic service during the Spanish Civil War, producing newsreels and revolutionary propaganda in defence of the Republic. After the war ended and he had served time in prison, del Amo took up writing film history and theory and was one of the first professors at the Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas. He rejoined the industry thanks to the mediation of the filmmaker Rafael Gil, who had been saved by del Amo during the war, and who now used his influence so that del Amo could return to work in cinema under the Franco regime (Benet Ferrando, 2012: 178).[1]

While the 1950s were a decade marked by the transition of models, and therefore by the coexistence of contrasting elements (attempts at neorealism and *auteur* approaches mixed with conventional, superficial proposals), Antonio del Amo's ability to adapt to the context, along with the sheer variety of his work (ranging from realism and *costumbrismo*), seems to reflect the coexistence of two simultaneous tendencies in his filmmaking. One is more ambitious and experimental, involving a personal quest for a high-quality cinema, which may even touch on social issues. The other is more commercial, aiming for entertainment, which he would develop after *Cursed Mountain* with the help of the child actor and singer José "Joselito" Jiménez Fernández. In relation to the first tendency, Jean Claude Seguin (2012) identifies *Cursed Mountain* as part of a trilogy that also includes *Day by Day* (Día tras día, 1951) and *The Sun Comes Out Every Day* (El sol sale todos los días, 1956), pointing out that in *Cursed Mountain* the director manages to merge the Spanish cultural tradition with a neorealist aesthetic.[2]

The film stars the Spanish actors Rubén Rojo (who had recently returned to the country after pursuing a successful film career in Mexico) and Lina Rosales (in her only major leading role) as Juan and Cruz respectively.[3] The young couple are in love, but they belong to two neighbouring villages in the mountains of Almeria that have a tense relationship: Puebla de Arriba, where Cruz lives with her father, is cursed by a legend that the land and all women born there are barren; so the men go to Puebla del Valle, where Juan was born, to find brides to marry and have children with. According to Aida Antonino-Queralt, the scriptwriter José Dibildos decided to set the film in the Andalusian countryside because of proven cases of sterility in the high mountain villages due to climatic factors; while the stage designer, Eduardo Torre de la Fuente, justified the choice because he wanted to show the tradition of identifying the

marital status of the local women by their clothing (Antonino-Queralt, 2019: 219-220).

Despite the gossip, envy, suspicion and resentment between the two villages, the couple get married and build their home in Puebla de Arriba, where Cruz is incessantly harassed by Lucas (José Guardiola), who wants to have her for himself. Juan, Cruz and Lucas, together with a group of coal workers, spend a long season in the Sierra, the place of origin of the curse, which is said to have been caused by a ghost woman known as the *Niña Negra*, who was raped there, abandoned and eaten by wolves. One night, Cruz is chased by Lucas and another man who are attempting to rape her, but she manages to escape on her own; she finds Juan and tells him that she is pregnant.

Carlos Heredero has identified the film as belonging to an extensive, heterogeneous Andalusian corpus (some mythical, others less so), which, although representing an active trend in Francoist cinema, connects with a tradition developed in the years of the Second Republic, albeit not in a homogeneous or regular way. Indeed, the recovery of this movement "[...] followed a wandering, complex path that would lead to the hegemony finally conquered by the conservative vacuousness of folkloric Andalusianism. Along the way, this rough, zigzagging path seems full of somewhat confused efforts, frustrated attempts and timid transitional discoveries that do not follow one after another in a linear or chronological manner, but rather frequently emerge in parallel with more superficial references of a musical or purely ornamental nature in its portrayal of the Andalusian setting" (Heredero, 1993: 260). On the other hand, Pablo Pérez Rubio (2012) draws attention to the anomalous nature of the film, which evades both *costumbrismo* and a cliched presentation of folk music traditions and offers a (rural) drama revolving around desire that from the very beginning establishes an atmosphere of tension, violence and bleakness (both visual and dramatic) expressed in the natural setting and social spaces,

the characters, and their customs and ways of relating. Finally, Vicente Benet places this film in a broader series that use a stylised form of melodrama tinged with realism to show the persistence of the overflowing passions, hatred and atavistic violence of the rural world, as the opposite side of modernity, making clear "the need for restraint that can only be guaranteed by an authority that ensures order" (Benet Ferrando, 2012: 262).

THIS FILM SEEMS TO USE THE LEGEND TO GIVE METAPHORICAL FORM TO THE SOCIAL FEAR AND ANXIETY OVER CONTROLLING WOMEN'S BODIES AND REPRODUCTIVE CAPACITY, AND TO REPRESENT/EXORCISE A PARTICULAR DEPICTION OF SINGLEHOOD

Shifting the frame of reference to the recent past (the 1920s)—a decision suggested by the censors who reviewed the script[4]—and placing it in a rural-folkloric context, this film seems to use the legend to give metaphorical form to the social fear and anxiety over controlling women's bodies and reproductive capacity, and to represent/exorcise a particular depiction of singlehood. It is precisely in the physicality of their bodies, in mourning since their birth, that the female inhabitants of Puebla de Arriba are presented as "failed" women by their very nature. However, there is a ray of hope for them: Cruz, who as one of *las cobijadas* (the cursed women dressed in black shawls and with eyes lowered who pray in the church for fertility) repeats the myth, overcomes it and then breaks its effect, lifting the curse. Like the *Niña Negra*, Cruz also suffers sexual harassment, but she protects her honour, and even more importantly, the life that she carries inside her, avoiding the danger by hiding in a cave in the Sierra. She is the first woman in many years to conceive a child and, although nobody knows it, she will protect

Figura 1

her pregnancy even at the cost of her life. Would it not be possible to read in the union of these two villages, through the unborn child, an evocation of Spain's fratricidal civil war? Could these *women-in-mourning* be interpreted in relation to the many women who were cursed, neglected, discriminated against and despised for having been loyal to Republican Spain? In addition to the figure of redemption in the sacrifice of one for all the others (already suggested in the film title itself), is it possible to see in Cruz the materialisation of

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WHILE THE WOMAN ANCHORS AND AFFIRMS HERSELF THROUGH HER CHILD, RATIFYING HER PRESENT AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES, HER IDENTITY AND CONNECTION TO A LARGER GROUP, THE SPINSTER, THE BARREN WOMAN, IS REPRESENTED AS A SHAMEFUL BODY, MARKED BY DEATH AND LACK, WHICH IS WHY IT MUST BE WRAPPED IN DARK CLOTHES: IT IS A SIGN OF WARNING AND DISGRACE

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social expectations in relation to the maternal imperative for the women of the post-war era: repopulate and reunify the Nation?

In Puebla de Arriba there are two female types defined by their reproductive destiny. While the woman anchors and affirms herself through her child, ratifying her present and future possibilities, her identity and connection to a larger group, the spinster, the barren woman, is represented as a shameful body, marked by death and lack, which is why it must be wrapped in dark clothes: it is a sign of warning and disgrace. Here there is no individuality, specificity or personality, but only a homogeneous community of women who have been ill-fated, denied, removed from the marriage list, stripped of the possibility of conceiving children, and therefore annulled as potential human beings. They thus "go down to the Virgin of Puebla del Valle to plead for the blessing of a mother's pain" because they know that this is their only way of escaping deletion and of giving their lives meaning. These girls, suffocated by the pressure of convention, weighed down by a curse for which they bear no responsibility, are—like the *Niña Negra*—ghosts, spectres, desiring bodies

that are alive but veiled: bodies whose eyes are practically the only part of them that is visible, eyes that watch with interest, with hope, but also with greed and envy.[5]

On the other hand, the ones who control Puebla de Arriba are the women of Puebla del Valle, the ones who were able to get married and give birth, but also the "sour, bad-tempered witches" who could not marry, but who, having been born in Puebla del Valle are not cursed and therefore hold a certain symbolic power and authority over *las cobijadas*. They are capable of doing, of commanding, of speaking, and also of insulting and belittling the ones in mourning: there are no relations of sisterhood, empathy or friendship between the two groups; only hierarchy, asymmetry and control.

And in between the two groups, leaving *las cobijadas* but not able (yet) to join the matrons of Puebla del Valle, is Cruz, whose body throbs with the promise of a reconstruction, as a sort of new Eve who will regenerate Puebla de Arriba: "You will be the first ones," the priest tells them (in an affirmation somewhere between a hope and a command). Indeed, in this refoundational expectation, the epic action of raising their house up out of the ruins, of lifting it physically, morally and spiritually with their own arms and strength, with no other help than that of a few children and the priest, expresses the *burden of female identity* that

women under the Franco regime knew so well. It was the burden of the constant pressure from the government and from society to make *New Spain* a reality, the responsibility for the moral mission and civic obligation of being virtuous, complete and devoted mothers, dedicated to a single task carried out in the domesticity of the home (Osborne, 2012: 10; Nash, 1996; Juliano, 2012).

Clearly, the film's storyline draws on and updates the Judeo-Christian biblical narrative, as the relationship that women establish with God occurs in a context of conflicting ideas linked to reproduction, gravitating around a body that in essence does not belong to them, and whose only permitted action is acquiescence. Citing Marcela Navarro, María Lozano Estívalis points out that in biblical texts motherhood is an institution of power that is managed by men in the name of God, reducing the visibility of women to their bodies. Under the patriarchal system, as a sign of status, motherhood implies rivalry rather than solidarity between peers. Indeed, the definition of females "is reduced to their presence as generative bodies on which the masculine divinity acts. Their personhood revolves around the interests of their offspring according to a hierarchical social dimension that is imposed on the female experience [...]. The history of these women is told through the typical annunciation scenes, that is, compositional schemes of repetition with three elements: a) the

Figura 2

sterility of the woman; b) the divine promise of a child; and c) the birth of the child as the fulfilment of the promise" (Lozano Estívalis, 2000: 102).

To explore the disputes over the bodies of single women (their repression, oppression and stigma) and to identify the gestures of courage and insubordination in their relationship with desire (always postponed), it is worth analysing the film's powerful wedding party scene. After the Catholic ritual (the first time that the village priest has married a woman from that place in a long time), the couple hold a party to which everyone has been invited. However, despite the fact that everyone goes to the main square, no one shows a spirit of celebration. There is no happiness or rejoicing; instead, the atmosphere is tense, full of fear, and even with a kind of funereal mood given that many of the girls must always be dressed in black from head to toe, covering their mouths and smiles.

At the suggestion of the chaplain—who sees in the couple the possibility of realising his vocational dream of putting an end to the widespread superstition of the *Niña Negra*—the couple begins the celebration with a beautiful traditional dance, with a choreography that alternates between the couple and the group. In the couple's dance sequences, they wind together ribbons that are pulled out from a pole with a tree branch at the top

Figura 3

PLAYING IN THIS WAY WITH AN INTERTWINING CIRCULARITY, THE DANCE ENCODES THE CELEBRATION OF COURTSHIP, THE ROMANTIC AND EROTIC BOND, THE WHEEL OF LIFE THAT TURNS ENDLESSLY, MULTIPLYING AND FERTILISING; DEL AMO EXPRESSES HIS AESTHETIC IMPULSE AND VISUAL AMBITION, WHICH HE COMBINES WITH AN ASPIRATION TO CREATE A DOCUMENTARY–ETHNOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT OF RURAL FOLKLORE

as a symbol of life and blessing, while in the group sequences the dancers move in a circle in such a way that the tension of the ribbons gives the impression of forming the roof of a house. Playing in this way with an intertwining circularity, the dance encodes the celebration of courtship, the romantic and erotic bond, the Wheel of Life that turns endlessly, multiplying and fertilising; Del Amo expresses his aesthetic impulse and visual ambition, which he combines with an aspiration to create a documentary-ethnographic portrait of rural folklore.[6]

However, as noted above, it is initially only the newlyweds who dare to dance, to celebrate, to enjoy their union and the promise of good fortune, while everyone else watches attentively. But the force of the music—which breaks and contrasts dramatically with the dominant silence—will gradually awaken the bodies numbed by fear and fatigue. After the first stanza, Rosa, Cruz's best friend, removes her black shawl in a brave and resolute gesture that looks as if she were untying herself, breaking free of a rope, chain, blindfold or gag, and once uncovered, she walks elegantly with an upright posture in her white blouse towards the pole, ready to join the dance.[7] She no longer stares at the ground in humiliation, but straight ahead. Her mouth is now uncovered to reveal a self-as-

sured smile. A reverse shot shows the surprise, joy and secret pride of Emilio, Rosa's boyfriend (unbeknownst to his terrifying mother), and another reverse shot reveals two more young women throwing back their shawls in unison and joining the circle. Shortly afterwards, a third woman does the same, in a gesture of evident weariness not only with the annoyance and discomfort caused by the garment but arguably with an entire oppressive system that constrains the body and curtails freedom. The alternation between close-ups of these women with their radically changing facial expressions and wide shots showing not only the group dance but all the people gathered around it, watching in total stillness (an almost theatrical motionlessness) reinforces the metaphorical

Figura 4

dimension of the scene and leaves no room for distraction, focusing our gaze on the dance and its symbolism. Sometimes the camera follows Cruz, and at other moments a dynamic backward tracking shot reveals to us all the dancing bodies. Indeed, this camera movement could be understood as the visual form acquired by the spirals and cir-

cles of life, which expand from the inside out, from the couple to the whole community.

The rest of the single women are shown smiling and excited in very tight close-ups, moving their heads and torsos in a choreographed swaying that expresses the contagious joy they are watching and of which they are also a part even though they do not explicitly join the dance. They too take off their shawls, swept up by the whirlwind of movement and song that is breaking down and disrupting the rigid system of restrictions constraining their bodies and their will… at least for the duration of a song. Hence, in view of the actions of this rebellious, spectral group of women, rather than failed motherhood their unmarried status could be described as a kind of *phantasmatic disobedience*.

Despite the joy now spreading through the community, Emilio's mother bursts into the celebration in a vehement outrage as if it were an act of blasphemy, an unforgivable transgression or the violation of a religious precept. After silencing

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Y ASÍ COMO LAS SOLTERAS SE ZAFAN DEL MALESTAR, GRACIAS AL PAISAJE Y EN EL PROPIO PAISAJE CRUZ SE ZAFA DE LA VIOLENCIA, Y ESA POTENCIA DISLOCANTE NO LA SALVA ÚNICAMENTE A ELLA. AUNQUE POR LA VÍA (TRAMPOSA) DE LA REPRODUCCIÓN, CRUZ SALVA TAMBIÉN A SUS CONGÉNERES SOLTERAS, HACE JUSTICIA CON LA NIÑA NEGRA Y, A POSTERIORI, INCLUSO TRANSFORMA A LA *BRUJA* EN HADA BUENA

Figura 5

the musicians, she overturns the banquet tables with brute force, tossing the food and drink to the floor. She then calls to her son, snatches him from the circle and abruptly takes him home. A few scenes later, she will shout angrily at Cruz: "Your wedding has upset my son. Get out, damn you!"

As mentioned above, it is Cruz's flight to the Sierra, her struggle to protect herself from Lucas's attempt to rape her, and especially her struggle to protect the unborn child she senses inside her, that will ultimately save the girls of the village, freeing them from the curse once and for all. The story suggests that the spirit of the mountain and the *Niña Negra* have protected Cruz: the telluric myth that until now has been a symbol of disgrace (precisely because it arose from the violation of a body that was deflowered, *disgraced*), that had marked a limit on the economic development of the people of both villages, is transformed by Cruz's strength and bravery. It is highly symbolic that the heroine should go into the mountain, and that among its feminine folds, cavities, hollows and tunnels she should find refuge from her aggressors.[8] And just as the single women escape from their social malaise, thanks to the landscape and in the landscape itself Cruz escapes from violence, and this dislocating power does not save her alone. Albeit by the (deceptive) path of reproduction, Cruz also saves all unmarried women, vindicates the *Niña Negra*, and subsequently even transforms the *witch* into a good fairy, as Emilio's mother changes her character and her clothes, returns to the church and prays, and instead of mercilessly and violently condemning and judging, she gives thanks to the Virgin at the baptism of the protagonists' child.

Figura 6

The film, set in Buenos Aires in the middle of the 20th century, combines *costumbrismo* and melodrama to show that while women's marital status should be a private affair (freedom of choice), it was instead a matter of public scrutiny with a concern surprisingly shared by the entire social system, which pressured and demanded of women a particular form of vital-affective behaviour. The story presents three models of single women: one traditional and conservative, another liberal and daring, and a third who is more complex, played by the film's leading actress, Tita Merello (Martina), whose character reflects the social tensions and anxieties of her time after a decade of Peronism. Indeed, her character attempts to reconcile a model of a woman who is still in debt and faithful to the past with the possibilities offered by a sociopolitical and economic present in which women had greater power and independence. Despite the fact that the protagonist sacrifices herself to continue to uphold the *whole woman* ideal necessary to the nuclear family, in the last moments of the film she commits a small but revealing act of opposition, of rejection of the status quo in which she is living. This expression of contestation, of painful and rageful non-conformity, is ambiguous but also powerful in terms of the meanings it suggests: it may constitute a mode of opposition both to the conclusion of her love story and to the system that has forced her to give up her freedom and now requires her to "get used to it". Her failed motherhood, her singlehood, could thus be classified as an *adversative sacrifice*: it is not full, it is not unconditional, it is not stoic, but rather contradictory and negative.

The film is circular, as it opens and closes with the Catholic ritual of baptism and the presentation of an infant to the Virgin of the Valley. In both cases, but especially in the ending, it is the parents and the whole community who offer the child to God and the Church. The sacrament represents not only the consecration of the child, but also of the woman, whose existence is legitimised solely through motherhood. And despite this very clear *return to order*, no less important are the narrative, aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of the celebration scene, in which the bride is eclipsed by the strength of certain women who, although spectral, give physical expression to disobedience.

VANISHING POINTS

In the same year that *Cursed Mountain* was released, on the other side of the Atlantic another active film industry produced a comparable work: in Argentina, the film *Para vestir santos* [For Dressing Saints] directed by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, which also offered a critical examination of the social significance of being a single female.[9]

Back in Spain, one year after *Cursed Mountain*, the film *Main Street* (Calle Mayor, Juan Antonio Bardem, 1956) was released to public and critical

acclaim. The film starred the American actress Betsy Blair (Isabel) and the Spaniard José Suárez and was directed by another young subversive *auteur* (like Torre Nilsson), Juan Antonio Bardem. In contrast to *Para vestir santos*, which explored the working-class world, and *Sierra maldita*, which had a rural setting, here the focus is on the middle classes and the urban *petite bourgeoisie*. Isabel is the victim of a dirty trick played on her by a local group of men who treat her with the most appalling disdain. Bardem's subtle and intelligent objective is to represent the flipside of gendered social conventions: i.e., to reconstruct the internal and external voices that harass Isabel from without and within, to depict her self-perception, her awareness of her own situation, taking a figure turned—through humour and *costumbrismo*—into a cliché, stereotype and generalisation and anchoring it in a specific body and face, in a specific identity. Isabel navigates the waters of frustration and social expectation without ever sinking into emptiness or resentment, still clinging to the vitality that gives hope, thanks to two qualities: erotic fantasy/imagination, and the curiosity of a restless, expectant gaze. These two elements nuance the characterisation of this failed mother. After a disappointment in love, the possibility of escape opens up, but the woman chooses another path. In a torrential downpour, and before the mocking gaze of the men, Isabel once again crosses Main Street, drenched but with her integrity and her dignity intact. She confronts her present with the only certain thing she has: herself, her body, her energy, her face. The last shot shows her through her bedroom window, in an ambiguous image mixing resignation with courage, shame with awareness. The fact that we do not know for sure the end of the story of this single woman is precisely her greatest victory: her failed motherhood, her singlehood, could thus be classified as *expectant waiting*, combining the senses of a curious and active gaze, driven by erotic imagination.[10]

Looking back on classical mainstream cinema, interrogating it from a gender perspective and reviewing the subversive visual and dramatic constructions in some of its films reveals paradoxes and semantic shifts from the dominant model for representing the single woman. This analysis has sought to contest the homogenising, essentialising patriarchal idea of the *failed mother* through the use of a more nuanced, tension-charged concept of *phantasmatic disobedience* that has been articulated with two others: *adversative sacrifice* and *expectant waiting*. To map the imaginary of motherhood and identify the porous nature of its context, it is essential to investigate all its dimensions and subtleties, including its opposites (sterility, the difficulty of being a mother, impotence as incompetence), considering the female bodies whose disrupted relationship with reproduction challenges the established order and reveals that women's desire, rather than having a fixed vector, moves in spirals and zigzags. ∎

NOTES

1   Despite the repressive violence and control, Benet and other researchers have pointed out the existence of fissures or cracks in the system in this context of the reactivation of the film industry after the civil war, in a kind of *silent resistance* resulting from "spaces in which a certain reminiscence of the liberal intellectual tradition survived, albeit very discreetly, along with the lingering effects of modernity in a regime that was attempting to replace it with fascist-inspired official rhetoric […]." It was thus "[a]n often clandestine world, almost always subdued, but not paralysed" (Benet Ferrando, 2012: 178).

2   Quoting the filmmaker himself, Seguín argues that "[t]he filming conditions and the demands of making a film that comes as close as possible to the living conditions of the coal workers give *Cursed Mountain* a strength and a quality that make it the best example of Spanish neorealism: 'In *Cursed Mountain* I went with the camera to the forests, the villages, the

fields of Spain. We lived among real coal workers in a mountain range. I forced the actors to learn how to handle an axe, to cut down oak trees, and if I did not go to greater extremes in the midst of the great battle I had to fight to defend the rigour of truth and realism in the filming, it was because the convenience of plaster still ruled Spanish cinema, and it would have been too abrupt to break completely with an entire custom'" (del Amo, in Seguín, 2012: 240).

3   As Quim Casas points out regarding the potential of this film and the subsequent career of the actress: "Despite her dramatic skills and her somewhat inscrutable beauty, she did not manage to become one of the outstanding stars of mid-twentieth-century Spanish cinema but instead began taking on roles of a more secondary nature in smaller productions [...]. The film did not earn the actress the recognition expected" (Casas, 2012: 541).

4   "According to the Administrative Dossier of the Ministry of Culture, the production company was warned that '[...] they must also take care to ensure that the action of the film take place in a period chronologically distant from the present day, since it is not conceivable that superstition such as that which serves as the basis for the plot of this film could exist anywhere in Spain today'" (Pérez Gómez, 1997: 344). Pérez Rubio points out that after the censorship of the original script for the film, del Amo and his screenwriters Alfonso Paso and José Luis Dibildos had to modify the project: it went from being a collective seduction by the female protagonist to a love triangle, and also several passionate scenes were deleted (Pérez Rubio, 2012: 1317). It is worth noting that in addition to this film, the young friends Paso and Dibildos, both of whom were still under thirty years of age at the time, had worked together in the early 1950s on the scripts for two other films of different genres: *Hombre acosado* [Hounded Man] (Pedro Lazaga, 1950) and *Happy Easter* (Felices Pascuas, Juan Antonio Bardem, 1954). Unlike del Amo, both were at the beginning of their (prolific) careers in film, but like him, in the years that followed they would shift towards a safer, more commercial style.

5   The association of women's bodies with the spectral is notable throughout the film, as if the anxiety of a feared, powerful and unknown alterity were negotiated there, especially on a sexual and erotic level, which explains the symbolic and physical violence perpetrated on these bodies. During a break in the work, a coal worker makes the tongue-in-cheek remark: "A woman [in reference to the *Niña Negra*], even if she is a ghost, is still a woman." And in an identical syntactic construction, another adds: "A ghost, when dressed as a woman, is three ghosts."

6   Other less stylised scenes with expressive visual compositions, such as those of the work in the Sierra—carried out by men—are more realistic. Although the director complained of budget and infrastructure problems, *Cursed Mountain* was del Amo's favourite and highest quality film (Pérez Rubio, 2012: 1317). Almería was a rather poor area of Spain in those days, with little infrastructure and quite rudimentary connections in terms of transport and communication with the rest of the country. However, given that the rugged, dry landscape in itself constituted an attractive and expressive film setting, Almería would soon become the preferred filming location for exotic or earthy action and adventure stories, for both Spanish and foreign production companies, as well as co-productions. See Aguilar (2001).

7   Some lines of the song read: "*Suene suene la guitarra,/ baile la danza del vino,/ que se casa una mocita,/ que es más bonita que un lirio./ ¡Olerelelé (…) la novia!/ ¡Olerelelé, qué rico el vino!,/ ¡Olerelelé la novia está contenta,/ porque ya tiene marido!/ ¡Ay baila baila ya!,/ ¡y no te canses de bailar!/ No se canse la mañana,/ bailen las aguas del río,/ que va a beber la paloma,/ que es más joven que aquel vino/ Luna luna de la Sierra,/ olivares del camino,/ trae dos estrellas santas,/ para su pelo estreñido.*" (Let the guitar play,/ dance the dance of wine,/ for a young girl is getting married,/ who is prettier than a lily./ Olerelelé (…) the bride!/ Olerelelé, how delicious the wine!,/ Olerelelé The bride is happy,/ because she now has a husband!/ Oh, dance, dance now!,/ and do not tire of dancing!/ Do not tire in the morning,/ let the waters of the river dance,/ the dove shall drink,

/ who is younger than that wine/ Moon, moon of the Sierra,/ olive groves along the way,/ bring two holy stars,/ for her flowing hair."

8   With respect to the film's intertextual references, both in thematic and iconographic terms, Pablo Pérez Rubio lucidly points out that "although *Yerma* is the most frequently cited reference to García Lorca (and to Andalusia) [...], it is closer to some aspects of the *Romancero gitano* (...), as also reflected in the symbology of the story: the opposition between village and mountains, moon and snow, the cave-womb, the phallic axe, the onomastics (Cruz, Juan)" (Pérez Rubio, 2012: 1318). Aida Antonino-Queralt points out that the natural settings where the film was shot place it "[...] in line with other European film styles that search for the value of real settings whose physicality is materialised in the bodies of the female characters [...]. A relationship that turns women into more than metaphors, emanations of the landscape" (Antonino-Queralt, 2019: 219-220).

9   *Cursed Mountain* premiered in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 25 July 1957 at the Atalaya cinema, which was not one of the more important cinemas in the city. The film magazine *El Heraldo del Cinematografista* rated it with an artistic value of 2 points (out of 5) and a commercial value of 2½, classifying it as "popular", and reviewing it quite negatively (Sierra..., 1957: 215). The Catholic bulletin *Calificación moral* judged it to be "only for adults" (Estrenos..., 1957: n. p.).

10 For a full review of the comparative analysis of *Para vestir santos* and *Calle Mayor*, see "Claroscuros de mujeres solteras en los cines argentino y español de los 50" in *Asparkía. Investigació Feminista (42)*, 252-288. https://doi.org/10.6035/asparkia.6776.

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DISOBEDIENT GHOSTS: AN APPROACH TO MOTHERHOOD AND SINGLENESS ABOUT *SIERRA MALDITA*

FANTASMAS DESOBEDIENTES: UN ACERCAMIENTO A LA MATERNIDAD Y LA SOLTERÍA A PROPÓSITO DE *SIERRA MALDITA*

Abstract

This work studies the representation of motherhood as obsession, impotence and traumatic absence from the figure of the single woman, addressing the case of *Sierra Maldita* (1955) which, produced by Almasirio and premiered in Madrid on January 30, 1955, was directed by Antonio del Amo and winner of several awards. Situated in the rural-folkloric environment, we suspect that this film allows, through the use of a legend and in the face of the socio-cultural changes that occurred in the mid-fifties, to give metaphorical form to social fear and anxiety regarding control over women's bodies and their reproductive capacity, and represent/exorcise, in a punctual figuration, singleness. The article places the film in the diachrony of the history of Spanish cinema and, based on visual analysis, examines the story and the staging, observing its dialogue with the socio-cultural context and the tensions of meaning that are presented in its own textuality.

Resumen

Este trabajo estudia la representación de la maternidad como obsesión, impotencia y ausencia traumática a partir de la figura de la soltera, abordando el caso de *Sierra Maldita* (1955) que, producida por Almasirio y estrenada en Madrid el 30 de enero de 1955, fue dirigida por Antonio del Amo y ganadora de varios premios. Situándose en el ámbito rural-folclórico, sospechamos que esta película permite, a través del uso de una leyenda y de cara a los cambios socioculturales suscitados a mediados de los cincuenta, dar forma metafórica al miedo y la ansiedad sociales respecto del control sobre los cuerpos de las mujeres y su capacidad reproductiva, y representar/exorcizar, en una figuración puntual, la soltería. El artículo ubica la cinta en la diacronía de la historia del cine español y, a partir del análisis visual, examina el relato y la puesta en escena, observando su diálogo con el contexto sociocultural y las tensiones de sentido que se presentan en su propia textualidad.

Key words

Spanish cinema; Women; Motherhood; Singleness; Antonio del Amo.

Palabras clave

Cine Español; Mujeres; Maternidad; Soltería; Antonio del Amo.

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DISSONANCES BETWEEN DELEGATED NARRATOR AND MEGA-NARRATOR: FOUR STRATEGIES FOR UNDERMINING THE VOICE-OVER IN *THE VIRGIN SUICIDES*

JOSÉ ANTONIO PLANES PEDREÑO

INTRODUCTION

The diverse range of complex relationships that can often be inferred from the juxtaposition of a voice-over narration and the images that accompany it can sometimes hinder the viewer's efforts to reconstruct a film's intended meaning. While some voices are in harmony with the content of the fictional framework, others hint at discords ranging from the most blatant contradictions to tiny discrepancies, from the complete absence of awareness to minor oversights, any of which result in a case of unreliable narration (Booth, 1983). A film like *The Virgin Suicides* (Sofia Coppola, 1999) highlights the extent to which audiovisual storytelling can be structured on the basis of a highly marked separation between the narrator's verbal statements and what can be inferred from the way the events of the story are depicted on screen.

In view of its complexity and the challenges posed by its narrative framework, this film merits an in-depth narratological analysis, although to help clear the ground some interpretations will also be drawn from other fields, which will be mentioned below.

The Virgin Suicides is one of the most prestigious works by its director, Sofia Coppola, and is also a landmark title in contemporary American independent cinema (Wyatt, 2018), specifically in one of its most productive genres, i.e., films that attempt to construct a *poetics of crisis* as a way of expressing the difficulty or even impossibility of progression through certain rites of passage, such as adolescence, mid-life crisis, or death (Backman Rogers, 2015). This *poetics of crisis* or *poetics of transformation* involves a reconstruction of clichés and genre conventions, but as part of a subversive operation that empties of the crisis of its meaning.

Ever since its release, *The Virgin Suicides* has been the subject of extensive discussion and debate from the perspective of gender studies. Scholars in this field have sought to explain the kinds of roles, archetypes and discourses underlying the film's representation of femininity, as well as how it reformulates the iconographic motifs of the feminine in popular culture (Bolton, 2011; Monden, 2013; Backman Rogers, 2015, 2019; Cook, 2021). Other researchers have identified a post-feminist sensibility in the film (Woodworth, 2010; Handyside, 2013; Kennedy, 2010, 2015), pointing out themes far removed from the critiques and claims of second- and third-wave feminism (Garrido-Rodríguez, 2020) because, in contrast to creative works in which gender is founded on determinations of class, race, politics or sexual orientation, Coppola's *heroines*, according to Woodworth (2010: 138), are Caucasian girls who spend their free time doing nothing (often in their underwear), shop compulsively, and exhibit a markedly passive attitude. On this basis, authors such as Small (2013: 152) argue that neither *The Virgin Suicides* nor any of Sofia Coppola's other films are explicitly feminist, although the multifaceted complexity of the design of her female protagonists justifies an analysis from the perspective of feminist theory.

A diverse range of other studies (albeit all taking a feminist approach) affirm Coppola's unique status as one of the most important American filmmakers of recent decades (Ortner, 2013; Strong, 2022), as the heir to the American New Wave of the 1960s and 1970s given the way she updates some of its main concerns (Lin Tay, 2009; Kolker, 2000), and as a director who uses the sophisticated surface of her films, permeated with seductive overtones, to articulate a criticism of the worlds in which they are set, revealing an implicit ideological foundation with an atmosphere of perplexity and alienation that undermines any hint of pleasure (Backman Rogers, 2019). A similar perspective is taken by Ferris (2021) in her mon-

ograph on the filmmaker, although with a very specific focus on fashion, defining the concept as a means of masking the identity and a source of misinterpretations between the inner and outer worlds of her characters.

These and other scholarly contributions will be cited in this article. However, they are considered only as a complement to an essentially narratological reading aimed at breaking down the complex formal device underlying *The Virgin Suicides*, a task that has not been carried out with sufficient precision in any of the studies of the film to date. To this end, this article draws on the work of Jost & Gaudreault (1995) in *Le Récit cinématographique*, making use of their concept of the *great imaginer* or *mega-narrator*, understood as the authority situated outside the diegesis who articulates the whole textual structure of the work, and consequently its effects of meaning, often referred to as the *enunciation*, *subject of the enunciation*, *enunciating entity* (Gómez Tarín, 2013: 32) or *implicit author* (Booth, 1983). This mega-narrator may delegate the task of narration upon a character, with or without a defined identity, whose location may or may not be specified in diegetic terms, and who may or may not be made visible on the screen. The interrelation of these variables allows for four possible ways of classifying the voice, according to whether the narrator exists inside or outside the fictional world (*intradiegetic* or *extradiegetic*, respectively) and whether or not the narrator takes part in the events narrated (*homodiegetic* or *heterodiegetic*). In addition, in order to identify the cognitive scope of the information that the narration offers the viewer, the limits of spectatorial knowledge can be defined based on the concept of *focalisation*, while the nature of the viewer's visual and auditory access to that knowledge can be defined using the concepts of *ocularisation* and *auricularisation*.

The theoretical parameters outlined above will be applied in an effort to clarify the discourse of the film text, i.e., the moral or ideological po-

sition or perspective taken (Gómez Tarín, 2013: 31-32). However, when the enunciative subject assigns the task of narrating a story to a character, not only does this foster a belief that the diegetic universe is represented according to that character's subjectivity, but the narrator's verbal interventions tend to become a way to clarify the overall meaning of the story. The construction of this diegetic placement is supported by three levels of representation: *staging* (the content of the image), *framing* (the types of shots and camera movements) and *sequencing* (the narrative arrangement of the images) (Cassetti & di Chio, 1991: 124-183). Theoretically, these levels should all be consistent with the narrator's enunciations. However, this consistency can be disrupted by the inclusion of *unsettling elements* on any of the three creative levels, resulting in semantic elements that are out of keeping with what is suggested by the voice-over narration. In such cases, the mega-narrator would be calling the faculties of the delegated narrator into question. In other words, the viewer would be provided with specific knowledge that exceeds the cognitive awareness of the authority responsible for telling the story.

The opening moments of *The Virgin Suicides* leave no room for misunderstanding, as the series of brightly lit images that introduce us to daily life in the neighbourhood where the film takes place, with sunlight sifting through the trees to the sound of tranquil extradiegetic music, end quite abruptly. The scene cuts to an image with cold tones while the music fades out to be replaced by the sound of dripping water; then suddenly we cut again to the vacant stare of Cecilia, one of the Lisbon sisters, framed in a medium close-up showing her half-submerged face in a bathtub filled with bloodstained water. The drastic shift in the staging, framing and sequencing, while the voice-over states blandly that "Cecilia was the first to go," foreshadows the conflict between what the narration conveys and the staging of the fictional setting.

THE LITERARY SOURCE

The Virgin Suicides is based on the novel of the same name by Jeffrey Eugenides, published in 1993,

Image 1
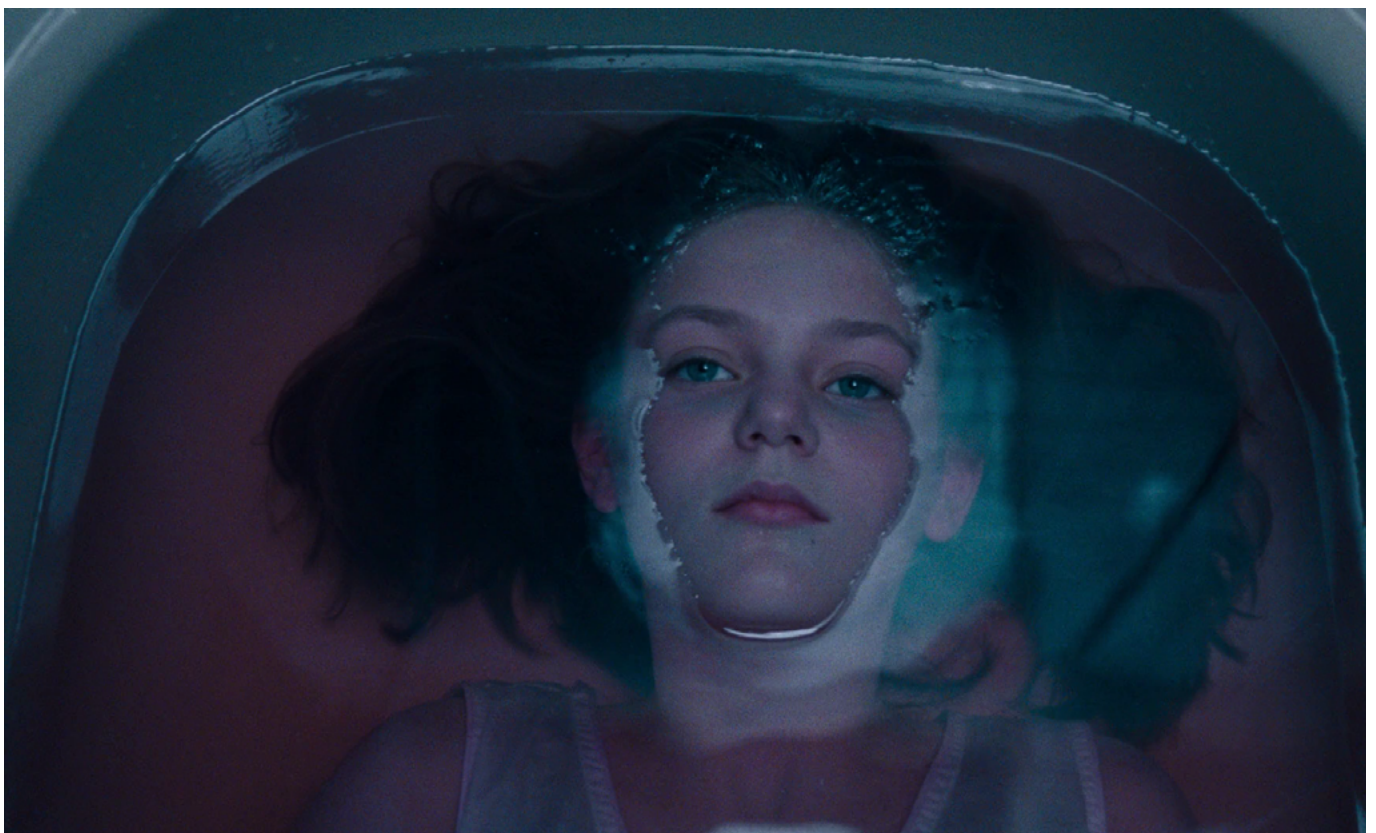
which tells the story of the suicide of five teenage sisters in Grosse Pointe, a suburb of Detroit, in the mid-1970s. The book uses an unreliable narrator (Shostak, 2009) who, adopting the first person plural, is identified as a kind of collective memory constructed out of different testimonies and thus legitimised by consensus, although in fact it is one of the boys in the story who, out of a fascinated obsession with the sisters' beauty, and without ever revealing his identity, has assumed the role of storyteller. His narration is underpinned by an irony that ultimately undermines his narratorial authority. It is not so much that throughout the narration he frankly reveals his inability to explain the suicide of the five girls, but that at no point does he become aware of the ideological framework that shapes his own discourse. Eugenides's tight control over the plural voice betrays a narcissistic deception (Shostak, 2013: 191), as in the end it is the boys' subjective impulses that pave the winding path taken by the story and vest it with its nostalgic aura. As the story progresses, what emerges is the presence of a subject of the enunciation or implicit author who endorses the male gaze (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 72).

It is clear that the narrator and those he represents have failed in their attempt to crack the mystery of the Lisbon sisters because of their limited access to their story. Through the repeated use of the first person plural, the focus of the story ultimately settles on how a narrative agent approaches and manipulates the content of the narrative rather than on the content itself. In this sense, the protagonists of the story are not really the five ill-fated teenage girls but the boys who are besotted with them (Shostak, 2013: 197-198). The narration is saturated with longing for a group of girls whose images are constructed out of the desires, fantasies and obsessions of these young males, and thus the objects of their attention are obscured by their own private dreams and delusions. Eugenides himself asserts that the *supposed* protagonists are always seen at a distance; they are mere creations of their observers, and the variety of points of view considered by the narrator render it impossible for them to exist as an exact entity (Abbot, 2018). In short, this narrative agent

> attempts to control the story, to overlay interpretations, to proclaim meanings and attribute intentions. For him, for all these boys, the Lisbon sisters are hothouse flowers, girls behind glass, with the boys as thwarted white knights. This is courtly love, with all the chasteness and objectification the term implies, and its primary purpose is not to honor or understand the Lisbons but to glamorize and romanticize the boys' own longing. (Abbot, 2018)

From this perspective, with reference to the film version, Wyatt (2018) argues that given the fact that the narrator is telling this story twenty-five years after the events occurred, his partiality in the choice of details is obvious. Some of those details are taken from the experiences of the four boys who collectively construct the story, but others come from the materials and testimonies of others. In fact, Wyatt identifies the story as being articulated around five sources: the individual personal memories of the boys; collective community memories; documentary evidence, such as diaries; interviews with key characters; and miscellaneous comments made by Grosse Pointe residents. This heterogeneity of sources, combined with the long interval between the events and their recollection, would explain why certain scenes could on close analysis be identified as exaggerated and unreliable. However, such a conclusion might be extended to any narrator navigating between homodiegetic and hetero-

THE NARRATION IS SATURATED WITH LONGING FOR A GROUP OF GIRLS WHOSE IMAGES ARE CONSTRUCTED OUT OF THE DESIRES, FANTASIES AND OBSESSIONS OF THESE YOUNG MALES

diegetic status, as is the case of the narrator in *The Suicide Virgins*, but also of the narrators in many other films whose reliability is never questioned. In the case of Eugenides's book, the incessant jumble of information and opinion, and the questions this raises as to the accuracy of the account, justifies this uncertainty. In the film, on the other hand, if we ignore its literary source and focus on its organisation as an autonomous work, there is insufficient evidence to affirm, as Rogers (2007) does, that

> the entire body of the film becomes a journey through fantastic dream and memory scapes that render the more seemingly realistic and conventional sequences equally false and provisional. Related in retrospect, every scene is coloured by the romance of memory and fantasy that is a central theme of the film. (Rogers, 2007)

In opposition to Rogers's assertion, the argument of this article is not that *all* the images are rendered false in themselves, but that the voice that articulates and interprets them is ultimately discredited through a series of textual strategies that have not been sufficiently explored, resulting in readings of the real objectives of the film adaptation that are open to debate. Shostak (2013: 181-182), for example, interrogates the cinematic apparatus on the basis that the unreliable narration of the original work dissipates in its on-screen version. In contrast with the literary medium, cinema makes use of expressive registers that impede the dominance of a verbal narration; in other words, cinema resists the appropriation of a single perspective, which in semantic terms means that the adaptation takes an ambiguous direction as it struggles to reconcile its multiple expressive devices. According to Shostak, the assignment of the enunciating voice to a single actor undermines Eugenides's proposition of an *impersonal* narrator due to the presence of a single voice and gaze, despite the use of the first person plural; it automatically creates a character, however slight that character's distinguishing features (such as

the tone, timbre, or pacing of his voice) may be. Consequently, the narrative voice in the film lacks the anonymous, collective dimension of the novel's. Similarly, Shostak points out that the abstract and even mythical representation of the Lisbon sisters, without the exposition of the original text, is short-circuited in the film by the girls' embodiment with the physical attributes of five different actresses (Shostak, 2013: 184-185). Her conclusion is that while Eugenides's text is an ironic novel offering a gendered ideological critique, its film adaptation ends up being a nostalgic romance (Shostak, 2013: 182). The film's discourse is inconsistent due to the lack of a critical distance: the camera is not attached to an identifiable diegetic point of view or perspective.

This assessment of Coppola's film is rejected outright here because the aim of the cinematic adaptation of *The Virgin Suicides* is not to generate a homogeneous discourse or to reconstruct the singular, uniform perspective of the original novel. On the contrary, the filmmaker exploits the multiple devices of audiovisual language to articulate a story that relies on the dissonances between the meanings conveyed by the voice-over, which *presupposes* the existence of a collective character with certain values and beliefs, and those offered by the mega-narrator, who is attributed with the responsibility of constructing the diegetic universe. We are guided through that universe by the voice (staging), the types of shots and camera movements chosen (framing), and the whole panoply of narrative techniques (sequencing), some of which, as they break the transparency, constitute indelible signs of the mega-narrator's activity. In this article, it is argued that these explicit signs, but also other less obvious patterns, contribute to the construction of a discourse that runs parallel to that of the voice-over, undermining the latter's authority and assumed competence. While Backman Rogers (2019: 26) puts forward a lucid argument that the film *betrays* its own narrative, the aim of this

article is to identify more clearly just how this betrayal occurs and what its implications are.

Aware of the particular status of the narrative voice in the textual body of a film, Coppola proposes a strategy that could only be implemented using cinematographic language. Like any enunciating voice to which specific images are assigned, the sound-image relationship in a film may be defined by unity and cohesion, but it also may be characterised by gaps or disparities that produce a split between one register and the other. This is observable in *The Virgin Suicides*, as the narrative voice is not the only channel in the film that conveys a meaning that here is not as unambiguous as it is in Eugenides's book, as there are other vectors of meaning resulting from the configuration of images that disrupt the perspective of the narrator's exposition. This leads to a dislocation between what we see and what we hear, or more specifically, between the voice-over narrator and some of the traces of the enunciative subject, even when the implications of those traces do not actually contradict or subvert (in appearance, at least) the factual logic posited by the narrator. Specifically, there are four devices that open up pathways of meaning running beyond the boundaries established by the verbal narration. Thanks to these four strategies, viewers are able to acquire a broader *knowledge*

of the story than that possessed by the main narrative agent.

STEREOTYPING AND IRONY

The first of these strategies involves the blatant stereotypes present in the *staging* of the sisters, which accentuates their physical beauty and evokes an inscrutable, ethereal quality while eliding the more *earthly* aspects of their personalities (Monden, 2013). This subjective, stereotypical depiction is even more obvious in the sequences where the images and their composition are intended to express the fascinated gaze of the boys. To achieve this, Coppola uses extradiegetic sound and visual elements that are childish and even ridiculous, in the purest tradition of the teen film (Hirsch, 2020). In the opening sequence, for example, the screen fills up with different handwritten versions of the film's title, presumably reflecting the way the male characters might have written it in school notebooks; these images then fade into a superimposed close-up of Lux, one of the Lisbon sisters, gazing at the camera and offering a seductive wink.

But the film also features various shots depicting the boys' mental images that take this stereotyping to the extreme of caricature. By way of example, late in the film we are offered a brief
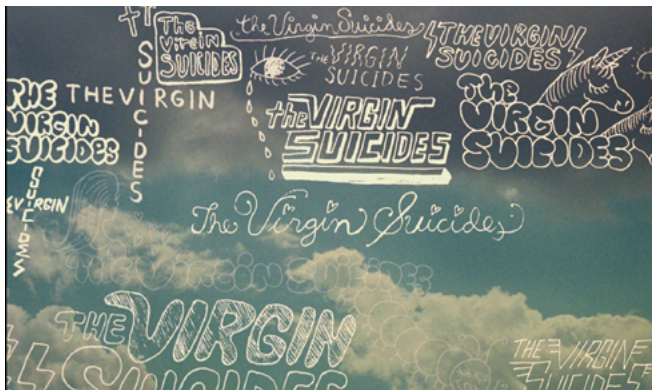
Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

Image 5

montage of daydreams juxtaposed with bizarre optical effects when the boys are reading Cecilia's diary. The scene adopts a visual and sound aesthetic characteristic of television advertising in the 1970s to highlight the sensual qualities and attractiveness of the girls, who are *exposed* in very specific situations, such as jumping, swinging, dancing, or sitting in a field. This not only underscores the subjective nature of the images and their distortion of reality, but also reveals the influence of the visual conventions of 1970s photography (William Eggleston and Sam Haskins), advertising (the Timotei and Breck shampoo campaigns), and *Playboy* magazine (Backman Rogers, 2012: 154), sources that construct an image of women defined by beauty and sensuality, but also exuding an aura of fragility and mystery.

The use of these visual motifs in both the *mental* images and the *real* images allows Coppola to play with the stereotypes, but on different levels, establishing dialectical relationships between the two temporal planes: a more distorted stereotype in the boys' fantasies of the Lisbon sisters; and a subtler yet no less eloquent stereotype of the enunciation in the staging of the fictional world. The effects of this aesthetic conception, diluted but perceptible in the construction of the whole diegesis (Wyatt, 2018), prove very different in the desolate sequence in which Lux leaves the football field where she spent the night with Trip and takes a taxi home to face her parents. It is worth noting that in this sequence, even while the same advertising aesthetic predominates, the character's despair, conveyed by an ominous blue tone, contradicts the values suggested in previous scenes and points towards a more troubled and disturbing state of affairs. This is why when the visual codes of the 1970s return to the screen, the result is not an exercise in wistful nostalgia but an interrogation of its nature, a revelation of its artificiality, and the exposure of the veil that obscures rather than enhances the gaze of the collective narrator.

The second semantic vector that serves to represent the fictional setting is the use of irony—and significant doses of black humour—in the depictions of the behaviour of the adults (Cecilia's psychologist, the priest who tries to console Mrs Lisbon, Trip Fontaine's father, the residents of Grosse Pointe), and in general in the images reflecting the suburban setting where the story takes place. The ignorance or even downright stupidity of the adults in most situations renders their actions and reactions entirely useless. Thus, for example, the frustrated efforts of Ronald Lisbon, the girls' father, to convey his passion for aeronautics to listeners who abandon him in mid-sentence, or the imaginary conversations he has out loud with the plants in the corridor of the school where he works, completely oblivious to anyone who tries to speak to him, convey a tone of acid sarcasm.

This sarcasm also emerges in the form of black humour in dramatic moments, such as when the ambulance taking Cecilia to the hospital after her first suicide attempt is leaving the Lisbon home just as her mother rushes out with a child's bathrobe but is unable to stop the paramedics, resulting in a ridiculous situation given the tragic context. Later, after Cecilia's successful second suicide attempt, we witness an incident that borders on the grotesque, when a group of neighbours are unable to pull out the wrought-iron fence on which the teenager was fatally impaled, and they decide to pull it out by tying it to a truck. The image of the vehicle dragging the fence around the neighbourhood carries a similarly grotesque overtone.

ALIENATION AND DECLINE

The two elements of stereotyping and idiotic adult behaviour, which quickly become evident to the attentive viewer, are overlooked by the narrator, who is limited to directing the story through concise, mostly superficial observations, like points in a routine report. In this respect, there are striking dissimilarities between the novel's omnipresent narrative voice and the film's narrator, whose appearances are more restricted and whose influence is complemented, and at times subverted, by the visuals. In this way, Coppola's film conveys a dissonance between the world represented and the narrative voice. Moreover, this dissonance or disconnection is identifiable in another area, where the third semantic vector operates: on the human landscape of the diegetic framework, as the personal and family relationships are marked by disaffection and alienation, both among the group of teenage boys obsessed with the Lisbon sisters and among the sisters themselves. As physically appealing as these characters may be, they all lack psychological traits that could distinguish them individually. Indeed, the four friends who are given so much screen time, and who are associated with the main narrative voice, are ul-

timately, apart from their physical features, just as indecipherable and inscrutable as the objects of their desire. Human interaction in the film is markedly cold, with very few signs of physical contact or proximity, and the conversations are short and almost always trivial. An illustrative example of this can be seen when Father Moody visits the Lisbons' home to console the family after Cecilia's suicide. During this visit, Ronald Lisbon is so absorbed in a football match on television that he barely acknowledges him, while Mrs. Lisbon, sitting in her bedroom with her back to the door, offers no more than a slight nod when the priest calls to her from the doorway. The scene then cuts abruptly, leaving no possibility of proximity between the characters.

The result is that both groups, the boys and the sisters, are presented as abstract, anonymous entities in a suburban landscape of stagnation and alienation (Hoskin, 2007: 215). This is partly the product of the girls' imprisonment in their own home, but it also reflects the mental limitations of the collective narrator. As noted above, this narrator proves incapable of deciphering the signs and unmasking an "American way of life" that has shaped both his location and his gaze within it: the narrator identifies the details of the setting, but never their larger context, defined by his community's practices, rituals and habits. The community's members are stripped of their individuality, and behind their façade of order and comfort lie hidden tensions and anxieties. It is a context that draws inspiration from Bill Owens's photographs in his book *Suburbia* (1973), as Coppola herself has acknowledged (Gevinson, 2013).

Although they only intuit their social imprisonment (which, obviously, goes beyond the confinement imposed on them by their parents), the Lisbon sisters are the only ones who dare to commit an act of rebellion so brutal that it astounds their neighbours, who are never able to understand the nature of that rebellion even with the passage of time, and who therefore car-

BOTH GROUPS, THE BOYS AND THE SISTERS, ARE PRESENTED AS ABSTRACT, ANONYMOUS ENTITIES IN A SUBURBAN LANDSCAPE OF STAGNATION AND ALIENATION

ry on unperturbed with their social customs and rituals. One example of these is the extravagant debutante ball held a year after the first death of a Lisbon sister (Cecilia), where the guests wear gas masks to neutralise the putrid smell coming from a nearby lake that has been contaminated with industrial waste. Asphyxiation is a prominent theme of the story, but the reactions to it are antithetical, as against the collective ignorance there is an attempt at revolt that will never be interpreted as such. From this perspective, as Rogers (2007) points out, the "white picket fence" world of *The Virgin Suicides* bears some resemblances to other films that reflect the contradictions of the American dream using what has been called a "suburban Gothic" style (Dines, 2012), such as *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986), *The Ice Storm* (Ang Lee, 1997), *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999) and *Little Children* (Todd Field, 2006).

It is no mere coincidence that Coppola includes several scenes that offer us a present-day view of a character whose testimony is key to the information collected and processed by the collective narrating voice: Trip Fontaine, who achieved a feat that his peers could only ever dream of by sleeping with Lux, whom he subsequently abandoned in the football field where they had spent the night. This is the fourth vector of meaning. While the novel includes interviews with various other characters, the only such interview in the film is with Trip, who is given a voice and a face. This is a crucial choice given its drastic repercussions on the meaning conveyed by the film text. According to the original screenplay, the scenes showing the adult Trip at the Betty Ford Clin-

ic telling of his romance with Lux are defined as "flashforwards". However, if we assume that these scenes are associated with the narrative action of the anonymous voice telling the story, who would also be the hypothetical interviewer asking Trip questions from behind the camera, these scenes should be understood not as flashforwards but as flashbacks, as they reveal, albeit very incidentally, the narrative circumstances under which the story is being constructed (Coppola, 2000: 41). Researchers such as Rogers (2007) explain the narration as occurring in a present that is only made visible by the appearances of the adult Trip, while the rest of the story is told in the past tense.

In any case, the voice of the main narrator stops, the story line shifts to a present elided until now and we see Trip, in 1997, who provides testimony to the narrating voice-over in the context of an interview. Returning to the past, he explains his love affair with Lux and concludes that despite

Images 6 and 7

what he felt for her, to this day he cannot explain what drove him to abandon her unexpectedly on the football field where they had spent the night together. The main narrator until now has been extradiegetic and homodiegetic, directing the story from an omniscient perspective while remaining entirely invisible. It is therefore impossible to overlook this sudden change to the structure of the narration, which now becomes intradiegetic, especially when, at the conclusion of Adult Trip's testimony, we discover that the location where he has been speaking to an off-camera interviewer is a rehabilitation centre he has been admitted to, as revealed by the interruption of a voice off-screen reminding him that it is time for his group therapy.

With just a few subtle brushstrokes, the narration informs us that this erstwhile high-school heartthrob is a living symbol of failure, decline and ignorance, as he is still unable to offer any explanation for his abandoning a sleeping teenage girl in an open field at night, even while he claims that despite having loved many women since then, none of them were like Lux, and that at least in retrospect he is content to have "tasted" a kind of love that most people will never know. The visual dissonance between the two versions of this character is striking for the evidence it offers of the ravages of time: he is transformed from

Image 8

a young, handsome Adonis admired by boys and girls alike—depicted with certain parodic touches drawing once again on teen film conventions the first time he enters the scene, underscored by the song "Magic Man" (1975) by the rock band Heart—to a pathetic individual whose looks have faded, wrestling with psychological problems in a centre for addictions. Trip's decline, his debilitated image and his ignorance can be extrapolated to the delegated narrator himself and his *frustrated* existence, especially considering that in the past Trip had been the sublimated figure representing everything the other boys longed to be. This is, in fact, the only explicit licence taken by the mega-narrator to give a *visible* face to the demise of the notion of masculinity embraced by the boys, about whose present we discover very little due to the *acousmatic* status of the narrative voice itself (Chion, 2004: 32). They are individuals doomed to return again and again to the same nostalgic bubble while time marches on inexorably and they remain utterly incapable of solving the mystery that has been consuming them since adolescence, along with the myths and idealisations that have fed it. Needless to say, the collective narrator avoids any kind of judgment of Trip's character, or the connections between his decline and the tragedy of the Lisbon sisters. If, as Backman Rogers (2015: 28) suggests, this film is saturated with the spectre of death, these brief scenes in the present should also be interpreted in terms of this looming shadow.

However, making Trip visible does more than expose the nature of those who constructed the narration with their individual perspectives and contributions; it also envisions a hopeless present and smashes the illusion (yet again, but even more clearly) that the story was ever being told from a perspective in consonance with that of the voice-over. As this article has sought to show, the enunciative subject uses certain stylistic features as strategies to offer a semantic landscape that stretches beyond the horizons of the verbal narrator.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this analysis, in accordance with its guiding objective, can be summarised as follows:

Despite its status as a landmark work in contemporary American independent cinema, serving as an exceptional intersection of debates on archetypes, roles and conflicts of femininity from feminist and post-feminist perspectives, and even as a milestone in the filmography of its director, *The Virgin Suicides* demands an exhaustive analysis of its narrative foundations in order to decipher the complex discourse it contains.

Adopting a narratological approach, this article has explored the dichotomy between the enunciating voice that structures the story and certain characteristic patterns of the diegetic framework orchestrated by the mega-narrator, but also by the formal choices that shape the textual body of any film. This dichotomy points towards the question of unreliable narration, as certain elements of the staging of this film's fictional universe employed as recurring patterns and semantic vectors undermine the reading offered by the delegated narrator, who neither mentions them nor integrates them into his reasoning.

There are four stylistic elements used in this way in the film: (1) the influence of visual conventions of the 1970s, allowing the filmmaker to play with stereotypes in the processing of memories, with certain parodic twists reflecting the adolescent nature of the male gaze; (2) irony or a kind of understated humour that emerges in response to the evidence of ignorance and stupidity in the adult characters, even in tragic situations; (3) a general alienation that turns the residents of this suburban neighbourhood into automatons devoted to their community habits but stripped of any hints of individuality; and (4) the shadow of decline looming over the protagonists' understanding of masculinity, suggesting a present with no real purpose other than the eternal idealisation they cling to.

The narratological perspective taken here offers a more effective framework for the development of an interpretative roadmap that considers previous readings of the original novel and its film adaptation, corroborating questions that have been pointed out in previous studies while challenging others. In more general terms, this article constitutes a contribution to studies of the role of voice-over narration in cinematographic language and proposes an approach to the question of unreliable narration, a concept clearly in need of further research. ∎

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VANISHING POINTS

DISSONANCES BETWEEN DELEGATED NARRATOR AND MEGA-NARRATOR: FOUR STRATEGIES FOR UNDERMINING THE VOICE-OVER IN *THE VIRGIN SUICIDES*

DESAVENENCIAS ENTRE NARRADOR DELEGADO Y MEGANARRADOR: CUATRO ESTRATEGIAS PARA DESLEGITIMAR LA VOZ RELATORA EN *LAS VÍRGENES SUICIDAS*

Abstract

Since its release, *The Virgin Suicides* has attracted scholarly interest as a landmark work in contemporary American independent cinema and as an exceptional intersection of debates on roles, representations and conflicts from feminist and post-feminist perspectives. Although the book on which it is based has been the subject of extensive analysis related to the question of unreliable narration, this aspect has not been widely explored in the case of the film, whose expressive and formal mechanisms have not been effectively identified. This article offers a reading of the film in narratological terms with the aim of dissecting its discourse, with reference to two key concepts: the *mega-narrator* or *great imaginer*, who articulates the audiovisual narrative as a whole, and the *delegated narrator*, to whom the mega-narrator assigns the task of telling the story verbally. In contrast to voice-overs that act in lockstep with the representation of the diegetic world, in this film there is a dissonance between the former and the latter arising from four semantic vectors used by the mega-narrator to undermine the voice-over's authority: stereotyping, irony, alienation, and decline. These four vectors also provide clues to the mystery of the story, despite the delegated narrator's self-declared inability to solve it.

Resumen

Desde su estreno, *Las vírgenes suicidas* es una obra que aglutina interés como hito del cine independiente norteamericano contemporáneo y como encrucijada excepcional de roles, representaciones y conflictos de raigambre feminista y postfeminista. Si bien su origen literario cuenta con análisis que delimitan el fenómeno de la narración no fiable en que se sustenta, no ocurre lo mismo con la transposición fílmica, cuyos mecanismos expresivos y formales no están lo suficientemente dilucidados. Este artículo plantea una aproximación hacia la película desde demarcaciones narratológicas con el fin de diseccionar su discurso, en virtud de las cuales recurrimos a dos nociones esenciales: el *meganarrador* o *gran imaginador*, que articula y vertebra la obra audiovisual en su totalidad; y el *narrador delegado*, al cual el primero le cede la facultad de contar oralmente la historia. A diferencia de la voz unificada con la codificación del universo diegético, lo que en este largometraje hallamos es una discordancia entre las dos figuras a la luz de cuatro vectores semánticos mediante los que el ente enunciador socava la autoridad de su *subordinado*: estereotipación, ironía, incomunicación y decadencia. Cuatro vectores que, asimismo, proporcionan las claves del enigma del relato pese a la declarada incapacidad de la instancia delegada para resolverlo.

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MEMORY, PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES AND MEMORIES IN THE FILMS OF APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL

MILAGROS EXPÓSITO BAREA

1. INTRODUCTION: AN EXPLORATION OF APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL'S CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

Apichatpong Weerasethakul is considered one of the most influential directors in contemporary Thai cinema thanks to the profound impact he has had on independent filmmaking in Thailand over the past two decades. He receives what was probably his biggest accolade at Cannes in 2010, when he won the Palme D'Or for his film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Loong Boonmee Raleuk Chat, 2010).

In all his films, Apichatpong tries to reproduce what could be described as a pattern of memory that is not just individual but collective, in an approach that has become one of his main hallmarks. According to Codó, "all of Apichatpong's films in reality form a single work, the product of a creative continuum" (Codó, 2015: 82). He has created his own universe on the boundary between fiction and Thailand's reality, which is why his work has garnered interest beyond his country's borders.

At the same time, he has developed a contemplative film style that is heavily based on the conception of or search for spirituality, but with an approach that is not steeped in Buddhist orthodoxy, but that draws on syncretism and popular folklore, both interconnected with the narrative lines that articulate the stories told in his films.

With *Blissfully Yours* (Sud sanaeha, 2002), *Tropical Malady* (Sud pralad, 2004), *Syndromes and a Century* (Sang sattawat, 2006) and the aforementioned *Uncle Boonmee…,* Apichatpong has created a series of films centred on Thailand's mysterious rainforest, in another of the director's signature themes. This choice of topic draws on the filmmaker's own memories, as he grew up with his parents, both of whom were doctors, in the city of Khon Kaen in Thailand's northeast, a region that historically has been marginalised by the nation's

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"MY FILMS ARE AN EXTENSION OF MY MEMORIES. I EVEN TRY TO INCLUDE THE MEMORIES OF MAKING THE FILMS THEMSELVES INTO MY FILMS. I TRY TO CAPTURE WHAT I HAVE EXPERIENCED. WHILE SHOOTING, I ALSO TRY TO CAPTURE SOME OF THE AWKWARD MOMENTS THE ACTORS FEEL IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA"

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political authorities. His work has attracted the interest of a wide range of critics and scholars in the fields of history and Thai studies, who discuss the portrait it offers of identity, the body, and geopolitics (Promkhuntong, 2018: 21).

Miranda argues that his films present Thailand as if it were an ecosystem whose inhabitants are ultimately narratable facts. "More than history and memory, the aim of all these pieces and films is the evocation of a habitat whose metabolism is imagination" (Miranda, 2015: 111). Apichatpong conceives of his films as personal diaries. He often inserts facts taken from the lives of his actors into his characters' stories, and he may even completely change a character based on the actor he decides to cast to play that role (his casting method sometimes involves looking for peculiar individuals in bars and restaurants) (Codó, 2015: 81). Moreover, as the filmmaker himself argues: "My films are an extension of my memories. I even try to include the memories of making the films themselves into my films. I try to capture what I have experienced. While shooting, I also try to capture some of the awkward moments the actors feel in front of the camera."[1]

In an interview with the director, when Tony Rayns asks him: "Memory is the central impulse in your filmmaking?" (Rayns, 2006), Apichatpong replies: "It may well be the only impulse! Everything is stored in our memory, and it's in the nature of film to preserve things... But I've never set out to recreate my memories exactly. The mind doesn't work like a camera. The pleasure for me is not in remembering exactly but in recapturing the *feeling* of the memory—and in blending it with the present" (Rayns, 2006). This idea clearly explains the relationship that Apichatpong establishes with his work, in both cinematographic and artistic terms, where the pleasure lies in being able to get the feeling of the memories and knowing that memory itself is the impulse behind these recollections in the present.

Apichatpong speaks of the feeling of memory as Veronica O'Keane defines it: "memory brings what we know and what we feel together and becomes the medium through which we filter present conscious and non-conscious experience" (O'Keane, 2021b: 22-23). In Apichatpong's case, he films this experience, as he plays with sensory memory through the sounds and images he combines in his films, transporting the viewer inside that memory. The memories may even be therapeutic, as Fernández and Vicens argue that this filmmaker uses "memory and memories as a means for achieving healing" (2015: 59).

2. DIFFERENT TYPES OF MEMORY AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH CINEMA

In scholarly literature, memory has been an object of study and debate in the humanities, social sciences and biology for some time; however, approaches from the perspective of film theory are quite recent. This article draws on studies of cinema and memory by Radstone (2010) and Kilbourn (2010), on the classification of different types of memory found mainly in the theories of Assmann (2008) on individual, social and cultural memory, and on Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memory" (2004).

For Kilbourn (2010), "memory" is used as a catch-all term for the process of recollection or recovery, for the form or *place* where the content of memory is stored or lost (the archive), and for the

mnemonic content itself, commonly expressed in the plural ("memories"). This vagueness is further exacerbated by the confusion and fusion of *natural* personal memory with forms of collective cultural memory. In most cases it is another way of referring to *history* (2010: 3). On this point it is important to bear in mind, as Burgoyne (2003) suggests, that memory in the traditional sense describes an individual relationship with the past, a physical, corporeal relationship with a real experience that is significant enough to inform and colour the subjectivity of the person who remembers it, in a way very similar to what Apichatpong does in his films.

History, on the other hand, is traditionally conceived of as impersonal, in the realm of public events that have occurred outside the archive of personal experience. However, in contemporary media culture, the most significant *historical* events are transformed into experiences for individual viewers. The mass media are constantly representing the past, replacing the impersonal phenomenon of history with an *experiential* collective memory (Burgoyne, 2003: 225). This is a trend in which cinema plays a crucial role.

Landsberg (2004) emphasises the way that mass culture makes particular memories more widely available, "so that people who have no 'natural' claim to them might nevertheless incorporate them into their own archive of experience" (Landsberg, 2004: 9). She refers to this idea as "prosthetic memory", whereby the new technologies of mass culture and the capitalist economy open up a world of images outside a person's lived experience, creating a portable, fluid and non-essentialist form of memory.

Landsberg also highlights the capacity of cinema to create "images available for mass consumption" (Landsberg, 2004: 176). Bergström (2015) explores this idea to argue that understanding cinema as cultural memory emphasises the role it can play in the transmission of collective histories and even in tradition, in terms of both its individual impact and its cultural functions. For this author, "cinema fulfills many of the same roles in modernity that spiritual practices—such as rituals, visions, conceptions of the afterlife, prayer, and meditation—have fulfilled and continue to fulfill across a wide spectrum of societies, serving as a connection between the individual and a larger, even transcendent, view of the world" (Bergström, 2015). Apichatpong is aware of the value of cinema for expressing experiences, memories, and even stories taken from his country's folklore that can transcend the borders of Thai culture and even transcend reality.

In her analysis of cinema and memory, Radstone (2010: 334) points out that theories of "prosthetic" memory do not need to be related solely to experiences conveyed by the mass media because, as Ben Roberts suggests, the whole of human history has occurred in the realm of a technical evolution "in which it is impossible to separate the living being from its external prosthetic technical support" (Roberts, 2006: 56). Apichatpong uses the camera to capture sounds and images in the awareness of the fact that its function is similar to the act of remembering and memory, and he also introduces photographs into the discourse of his work to serve as mnemonic elements.

Radstone (2010) divides her study of cinema and memory into four sections: memory as cinema; cinema as memory, cinema/memory; and future directions. The section of most relevance to this article is cinema/memory, in which she draws on ideas introduced in the work of Annette Kuhn (2000) and Victor Burgin (2004), who explore the perspective associated with interdisciplinary approaches to film theory and the incorporation of subjectivity into the cultural experience of watching films. With reference to these ideas, Radstone points out that the cinema/memory relationship does more than merely facilitate conceptions of memory and its processes in order to enhance our understanding of cinema, or simply shed light on memory with recourse to our understanding of

cinema: "In place of formulations that give primacy to the cinema or to memory, what emerges is a liminal conception of cinema/memory, where the boundaries between memory and cinema are dissolved in favor of a view of their mutuality and inseparability" (Radstone, 2010: 336). Cinema can thus be understood as a memory machine, driven by the persistence of sound and vision, as Apichatpong reminds us in his films and his commentary on them.

For Radstone, investigations of cinema/memory seek to answer the question: "What binds together images and sounds in personal memory with images and sounds in collective memory?" (Radstone, 2010: 336). As will be discussed below, her conceptualisation of "collective memory" is relevant to Jan Assmann's (2008) studies of communicative memory and cultural memory.

According to Assmann (2008), there are various levels for identifying different types of memory. The first of these is the inner level, where memory is a matter of our neuro-mental system, like Apichatpong's personal memories of the past in the case studied here. On the social level, memory is a question of communication and social interaction, enabling us to live in groups and communities, which in turn allows us to construct a memory. In this sense, Apichatpong's work, with the exception of his most recent film, forms part of the memory of the Thai people. The third level is that of cultural memory (Assmann, 2008: 109), which can also be related to his filmography. Assmann uses the term "communicative memory" to mark the difference between Halbwachs's concept of "collective memory" (2010) and the un-

derstanding of cultural memory adopted in this study, as a form of collective memory in the sense that it is shared by a group of people and transmits a social (i.e., cultural) identity to those people. This is why Assmann argues that in the context of cultural memory, the distinction between myth and history dissolves (2008: 113).

In Apichatpong's films, it is evident that there are no boundaries between myth and reality, as the two are interwoven in a narrative that thus becomes a form of collective, cultural memory, offering the viewer information about the past, however mundane or inaccurate it may be. That past forms part of the memories of the actors, of Thai folklore or of the director himself, while also blending elements of fantasy with real aspects of Thai culture.

As Burgoyne (2003) suggests, contrary to expectation, cinema today appears to have strengthened its cultural claims on the past. The cinematic rewriting of history has accrued an extraordinary degree of social influence and power in the contemporary cultural context. Film seems to evoke the emotional certitude associated with memory because, like memory, it is now associated with the body; it "engages the viewer at the somatic level, immersing the spectator in experiences and impressions that, like memories, seem to be burned in" (Burgoyne, 2003: 223). Apichatpong's films have been described as contemplative and immersive in the sense that the user/spectator perceives the space through sensory stimuli.

Based on this analysis of the main conceptions of memory and its relationship with cinema, this article explores the direct connections between Apichatpong's filmography and the study of memory from different perspectives, ranging from the sensory memory present in his work through his choice of sounds and images to his dabbling with biographical memory and event memory and his contributions to collective and cultural memory as a subjectification.

INVESTIGATIONS OF CINEMA/MEMORY SEEK TO ANSWER THE QUESTION: "WHAT BINDS TOGETHER IMAGES AND SOUNDS IN PERSONAL MEMORY WITH IMAGES AND SOUNDS IN COLLECTIVE MEMORY?"

3. FROM EVENT MEMORY IN *MYSTERIOUS OBJECT AT NOON* (2000) TO COLLECTIVE-CULTURAL MEMORY IN *MEMORIA* (2021)

3.1 Event memory and biographical memory

Event memory could be described as referring to the recollection of moments, places, emotions and details that have taken place in a person's life and that can be evoked clearly. For O'Keane, "event memory involves a bringing together of disparate sensory information in the dynamic living world. It is memory for what happens" (O´Keane, 2021b: 70). It could be argued that with *Mysterious Object at Noon* Apichatpong attempts an experiment based on the event memory of the Thai people and on audiovisual language itself. It is a film that straddles the line between documentary, fiction and pseudo-documentary. The filmmaker attempts to construct the film using a kind of "exquisite corpse" method, choosing people with no apparent connection to each other from all over Thailand to continue a particular story.

In his description of this film, Quandt observes an observational and notational quality in his portrait of different people, young and old, whose spoken, sung, written, and filmed responses to Dogfahr's story reveal both the rigour of popular oral storytelling and the knowledge of a modern narrative, resulting in a film that functions simultaneously as document and fiction, a portrait of a country and of its collective dream world (Quandt, 2009: 35).

One of the unique features of this film for the director's creative continuum is the way that it borrows from one of the stories told by a child to the camera. It is the story of a tiger-witch that has nothing to do with the rest of the narrative told and/or shown by the film, but that will be a prominent element in *Tropical Malady*, where it will be represented in the forest as a kind of recollection preserved in Thailand's collective memory through its native folklore.

Another of the themes present in this film that will be repeated in all of the director's subsequent feature films is the medical examination (although in *Tropical Malady* it takes a slightly different form, as a veterinarian examination). These scenes are the product of the filmmaker's childhood memories as the son of two doctors. In every case the scene posits the dilemma between medical science and the shamanic beliefs or home remedies, associated more with superstition than with science, that appear to be quite common in Thai culture. In the medical examination in *Memoria* (2021), as the film is set in Colombia, the ancestral home remedies are replaced with solutions associated with Christianity. These scenes may form part of their director's biographical memory. As O'Keane argues: "Going back to one's childhood home is like exploring childhood memory, what Gaston Bachelard called 'psychogeography'" (O´Keane, 2021b: 121). In this case, Apichatpong goes back to a place that is familiar to him and of which he has certain memories. "The magic resonance of place-evoked emotional memories goes on and on, and back and back… back to the earliest memories of the childhood home" (O´Keane, 2021b: 132). In *Syndromes and a Century*, this return to a familiar place is even more accentuated with a theme that revolves around two hospitals, one rural and the other urban. Suttisima echoes this idea when he suggests that most memories in Apichatpong's films are based on autobiographical memory considered as memory with time territories connected throughout a generation, especially by establishing a moment of his childhood as the foundation for his stories (Suttisima, 2016: 28).

3.2 Sensory memory and bifurcated time

With *Blissfully Yours,* Apichatpong tackles a completely different theme, which may possibly make it the film that has the least to do specifically with memory. The focus instead is on geopolitical issues affecting Thailand through an exploration of marginalised characters, in what is more a met-

aphor for the country's political situation than a story of the Thai people.

With this film, the director began what some authors have identified as a trilogy of bifurcations of time (Codó, 2015: 74) or temporal ruptures (Sicinski, 2018: 197). *Blissfully Yours*, *Tropical Malady* and *Syndromes and a Century* all have a clear forked structure, splitting off into two halves that function as dualities.

Set in a small town on the Burmese border, the first film tells the story of the relationship between Roong, a young woman who works in a factory, and her lover, Min, an illegal Burmese immigrant. A third character, a middle-aged woman named Orn , is also important to the story. Min suffers from a serious rash, and when the two women fail in their attempt to get him treatment at a local clinic, they prepare some home remedies to help soothe the itching caused by his condition. The first half of the film portrays the daily struggles of the three protagonists with the authorities. In the second half, the characters travel to the rainforest for a break from the pressures of their daily lives. This idyllic getaway allows them to escape their ordinary routines in a realm halfway between the sensory memory and the cultural memory that Apichatpong typically explores in his films.

Ferrari (2006) offers a comparative analysis of *Blissfully Yours* in ethnographic terms, based on the concept of "liminality" developed by Arnold Van Gennep in his book *The Rites of Passage* (1960) and subsequently taken up by Victor Turner (1964).[2] According to this theory, the characters exist on a boundary, in neither one place nor the other (much like the border region that provides the film's setting), either physically or mentally (Ferrari, 2006: 36).

Tropical Malady was partly inspired by Thai novelist Noi Inthanon's jungle adventure stories, and also by popular Khmer folk tales that are well-known throughout much of southeast Asia. These stories create various narrative threads in Apichatpong's film, fusing elements of Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, animism and ancestor worship (Lovatt, 2018: 221), all of which form part of the collective memory of the Thai people.

The story is divided into two separate but interrelated parts. The first follows a romance that develops between Tong, a young villager, and a soldier named Keng. However, halfway through the film, Tong disappears without explanation. The tone of the story then changes: the setting moves to a dimly lit rainforest in a setting filled with ambient sounds of animals, insects and birds. Keng is tracking down a shaman who has taken the form of a tiger, and as he plunges deeper into the darkness of the woods he finds that he himself is being hunted.

By breaking the horizontal axis of narrative screen time and presenting these two discrete narratives as parallel worlds, Apichatpong challenges the viewer to interweave and relate them "by imagining them as co-existing 'vertical' dimensions linked temporally through circuits of desire, memory and affective associations (Mercer, 2012: 207).

Apichatpong makes masterful use of editing here to make it seem that what we have seen in the first part of the film may or may not have been a dream. At the halfway point of the film is a shot of a bedroom where Tong is sleeping; the shot lingers a moment and then cuts to a totally different shot of Keng, in uniform, walking around a house until he comes to the same bedroom where Tong was sleeping, where he finds some photographs. Just before the cut, Keng overhears the conversation of some villagers off screen, which, as the last dialogue in the first part, serves as a kind of marker. The villagers are talking about a monster that has been stealing their cows. In one of the photos that Keng looks at, he sees Tong with another young man wearing a shirt marked clearly with the word "infantry". At this point, the screen goes black, followed by a kind of fade to white. This is how Apichatpong plays with the spectator, who is left wondering who is who and what space-time

Figures 1–4. Still frames from the film *Tropical Malady*, 2004.

continuum they exist in. He also begins playing with the characters' memories through the inclusion of photographs that could be interpreted as elements contributing to the memory and the narration.

The scene that follows confirms the definitive rupture between the everyday and the mythical. Apichatpong describes the fissure in the middle of *Tropical Malady* as producing "Siamese [non]-identical twins", and "as a mirror in the centre that reflects both ways" (Quandt, 2009: 78).

A girl approaches a soldier in the woods and asks him for help. The soldier tells her to go home and as she is walking away he sees a tiger's tail poking out from underneath her clothes. At this point it is clear that we are no longer in the world we know, as we have entered a fantasy world. At the same time, this image reminds us of the tiger-woman talked about by the children in Apichatpong's first film.

Another narrative thread emerges when one of the older women who accompanies the couple to the temple asks her friend: "Do you remember my uncle who can recall his past lives?" Here we find the seed of an idea that the filmmaker had on his mind, whose final outcome would be *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*.

There is another connection between the two films, as both include a fable or parable.[3] In *Tropical Malady*, it is the fable of the miser while in *Uncle Boonmee* it is the tale of the princess and the fish. As if borrowing the narrative concept used in *Mysterious Object at Noon*, once again Apichatpong inserts a second story into the film's main story. As Suttisima suggests:

The characteristics of storytelling are not limited [to] current stories but expanded to [go] further until they can be woven as the network of the relationship between past and present. The convergence of this place and other places lead[s] to the

basic finding showing that [the] analysis of Apichatpong's films has the perspective on "Memory" surrounding the characters. It is very interesting that such memory is shown [and] in which form, for example, flashback stories, legends, hearsays, dreams, or even the gesture of thinking. (Suttisima, 2016: 25)

WHEN THE EVENTS ARE REPRESENTED THROUGH CINEMA, THEY BECOME SHARED MEMORIES OF THE CREW, THE CAST, AND THE PUBLIC

The film ends with Keng on his knees looking up at a tiger crouching motionless on a high branch of a tree. We hear his inner voice speaking: "Monster, I give you my spirit, my blood, my flesh, and my memories... Every drop of my blood sings our song. A song of happiness... there... Do you hear it?" The protagonist is prepared to give up his soul, his body, and his memories, which means giving up everything he is.

3.3 Between personal memory and collective memory

According to Lovatt (2013), in *Syndromes and a Century* the boundaries between personal and social memories are blurred through the connection of the director's family's story to a broader sociopolitical context. The film focuses mainly on the preservation of memory after his father's death and is based on Apichatpong's recollections of the stories his parents told him about when they worked as doctors at a hospital before they got married. These interrelated memories constitute the two halves of the film: the first from the perspective of a female doctor named Toey, based on Apichatpong's mother, and the second about an army-trained male doctor named Nohng, based on his father. Each half of the film thus resonates with fictionalised traces and strange reflections of

its real-world source, as Apichatpong's memories based on his parents' recollections form an elliptical, enigmatic story involving flashbacks and circular repetitions—formal devices that are characteristic of the representation of memory in his films (Lovatt, 2013: 73).

In *Uncle Boonmee*, Apichatpong returns to the historical and cultural context of northern Thailand to make a film set in the village of Nabua but dedicated to his parents and to his actors. He chose Nabua as the strategic location for this story partly because, like Boonmee, the inhabitants of this place live with repressed memories. The village was occupied by the Thai army from the 1960s to the early 1980s as a measure to suppress the communist insurgence in the region.

On his studio's website, Apichatpong makes a statement about this film partly to express his concept for it and the story behind it:

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives is an homage to my home and to a certain type of cinema I grew up with. I believe in the transmigration of souls between humans, plants, animals, and ghosts. Uncle Boonmee's story shows the relationship between man and animal and at the same time destroys the line dividing them. When the events are represented through cinema, they become shared memories of the crew, the cast, and the public. A new layer of (simulated) memory is augmented in the audience's experience. In this regard, filmmaking is not unlike creating synthetic past lives. I am interested in exploring the innards of this time machine. There might be some mysterious forces waiting to be revealed just as certain things that used to be called black magic have been shown to be scientific facts. For me, filmmaking remains a source all of whose energy we haven't properly utilised. In the same way that we have not thoroughly explained the inner workings of the mind.[4]

Apichatpong's statement perfectly reflects all the types of memory analysed above, with which he identifies in different ways through his work.

The film recounts Boonmee's last days, when he confronts his past as a soldier, father and husband. He is reunited with his long-lost son, Boonsong, who has turned into a monkey ghost, and with his late wife, who comes back as a translucent spirit. For Apichatpong, ghosts were once real but now are not, and this constant shifting between reality and fiction makes them increasingly present in his films as an almost philosophical element (Nascimento Duarte & Bértolo, 2017).

Apichatpong establishes the recollections of Boonsong through photographs, still images that Boonsong took with his camera and that enabled him to understand the art of photography. In addition, there is also an oral tale that is told while we are shown these images, the words of the story giving them meaning; and finally, there are the images mixed in from outside the house.

A number of authors (Quandt, 2009; Fillol, 2012; Codó, 2015) have drawn comparisons between *Blow-Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966), *La jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962) and *Uncle Boonmee* for their use of photographic montages as a key element of the story, as well as an expressive device and a strategy for evoking memories.

The use of photographs in his films to intervene in the story is a technique he has used ever since his first film, where some characters use them to support their stories or look at them while other characters continue with the story within a story.

At the end of the film, Boonmee is in a cave—the same cave where he was born and where he is now going to die. He cannot remember in which of his lives he was born in this place, or even whether he was a human or an animal, a man or a woman. With still images that recall the soldiers taking pictures in *Tropical Malady* (2004)*,* the focus turns to the army capturing the monkey ghosts. Over these visual impressions, Boonmee offers a kind of epitaph-epilogue:

> Last night I dreamed of the future. I got there in a kind of time machine. The city of the future was governed by an authority capable of making anyone

Figures 5–6. Still frames from the film *Uncle Boonmee Who Recalls His Past Lives,* 2010

disappear... When they find people from the past, they project a light onto them. This light radiates images of their past onto a screen; images that come from the past to arrive in the future... Once those images appear, the people from the past disappear.

As Bergström argues, *Uncle Boonmee* offers a perfect case study for exploring how cinema, like memory, can offer a form of reincarnation or a continuation of life after death (Bergström, 2015). The photograph is given a special status as a mnemonic device thanks to the persistence over time of the past moment when the photographic image was taken, based on which a story can be reconstructed.

In *Cemetery of Splendour* (Rak ti Khon Kaen, 2015), when a number of Thai army soldiers are struck with a mysterious sleeping sickness,

they are transferred to a makeshift clinic in an old school building. The place where the soldiers are being kept is filled with memories and it becomes a revelatory world for Jenjira, a volunteer charged with taking care of Itt, a soldier who never receives any visits from his family. Jenjira makes friends with Keng, a young medium who uses her psychic powers to help loved ones communicate with the comatose soldiers. The doctors experiment with different techniques to alleviate the men's troubled dreams, including chromatherapy.

According to Apichatpong:

> The film is a search for the old spirits I knew as a child. My parents were doctors and we lived in one of the hospital housing units. My world was the patients' ward where my mother worked, our wood house, a school, and a cinema. The film is a merging of these places. I haven't lived in my hometown for almost 20 years. The city has changed so much. But when I went back I only saw my old memories superimposed on the new buildings.[5]

The protagonists of this film do much the same as Apichatpong himself did, remembering the past, its myths and its ghosts. *Cemetery of Splendour* examines how individual and collective memory can affect our perception of reality and how the stories of the past can influence the present.

Apichatpong talks about the light treatment that the soldiers undergo in an interview published on his website:

> At one point I was reading articles about brain science. There was an MIT professor who manipulated brain cells into re-enacting certain memories, via lights. He said that the findings sort of disproved Descartes' belief that the mind and the body are separate entities. This hypothesis aligned with my thinking that meditation is nothing more than a biological process. Sleep and memory can always be hacked into. [...] The lights in this film vaguely reflect this idea. They are not only for the soldiers but also for the audience as well.[6]

Apichatpong's most recent film, *Memoria*, takes the same ideas found in his earlier work and turns them up to the point that even the title alludes to the filmmaker's idea of bringing cinema and memory together.

In several interviews he gave after the film's release, Apichatpong mentions that while he was working with locals in Colombia to investigate their lives and memories he found that he began suffering from a strange condition known as "ex-

Figure 7. Still frames from the film *Uncle Boonmee Who Recalls His Past Lives,* 2010

Figure 8. Still frames from the film *Cemetery of Splendour,* 2015

ploding head syndrome", involving the imagined perception of loud noises while falling asleep and flashes of light upon waking up. The film deals with this strange condition, along with the ideas of trauma, suffering and memory.

The film begins with the protagonist, Jessica, suffering an episode of exploding head syndrome. She seeks out Hernán, a sound engineer who is able to help her identify the noise she heard inside her head. But this is just the beginning of an exploration that will take her all over the country. While setting out on her journey, her sensitivity to the noises increases until she meets up with another Hernán, this time in the jungle, who will explain to her how to explore the memory of humans, of the Earth, and even beyond. Drawing on the analysis that Chulphongsathorn (2021) offers of the film, Apichatpong's oeuvre could be thought of as an archive of memories of the world, in which the history

of humankind is interwoven with the history of the Earth or of the whole universe (Chulphongsathorn, 2021: 543).

Hernán can remember everything, and he is also able to read the memories of things and animals that he comes into contact with. He can even read Jessica's mind. It is because of this sensitivity that he lives alone in the middle of the Colombian jungle. Sleep is the one thing that allows him to disconnect from the union he has with the world around him. This character is reminiscent of Borges's Funes the Memorious.

Apichatpong chose Colombia as a setting, far from his homeland, because this country has a story similar to the one he has been telling throughout his filmography: the story of the loss of a nation's collective memory, a tragic memory that has been blocked out to forget the grim and ill-fated events that have occurred there.

4. CONCLUSIONS: MEMORY IN APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL'S CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

Apichatpong has often said that his films are based on his own memories of Thailand, and on his parents' memories, and even on the memories of his actors or of the people living in the locations where he shoots his films. However, his use of memories is complex and multi-layered, developing with the unfolding of the narratives of his feature films, shorts, and even video installations to form what could be described as a cinematic universe of his own.

His work combines cinema's ability to represent an image as an internal subjectivised experience with the notion of cinema as memory. Because, as mentioned above, film can be conceived of as a memory machine, propelled by the persistence of its sound and vision. It begins with a sensory memory to recreate a space and time—which may be familiar, within the event memory—that turns into a story for spectators through their collective and cultural memory.

His films often explore the nature of memory and its relationship with identity, culture and history, although he may use a non-linear narrative and a poetic style to explore the connections between life in the present and the experiences of the past.

In an interview with James Quandt, Apichatpong continues the analogy between cinema and consciousness, expressing the opinion that the human brain is "the best camera and projector, if only we can find a way to operate it properly" (Quandt, 2009: 178). This is an idea he has repeated in other interviews and even in his most recent master class, which he gave in Peru in June 2022.

Throughout his filmography, Apichatpong has made it clear that individual memories are the basic units of collective memory, although collective memory itself refers to the distribution throughout society of what individuals know, believe and

feel about the past, how they judge it morally and how they define it. And cinema plays a key role in the fulfilment of this mission.

As has been shown here, the work of this director is generally known for its interest in the nature of memory and its relationship with personal identity and collective history, as well as for its perspective on the history and culture of Thailand. His poetic and contemplative film style has allowed him to explore these questions in a deep and evocative way, often challenging audience expectations and creating unique and moving cinematic experiences. ∎

NOTES

1   Text taken from the filmmaker's website: http://www.kickthemachine.com/page80/page24/page25/index.html

2   Turner uses the term *liminal* or *liminal period* to refer to the state of openness that characterises the intermediate stage of a tripartite space-time. This space-time has a *preliminal* stage, a second intermediate stage (the *liminal period*), and finally a *postliminal stage*.

3   In both films there is a narrator present in the scene who becomes both an on-screen voice and a voice-over, between intra- and extra-diegetic, depending on the focalisation of the story. While we hear his monologue, the *fictionalisation* of the story is made evident on the screen.

4   Text taken from the filmmaker's website: https://www.kickthemachine.com/page80/page24/page26/index.html

5   Text taken from the filmmaker's website: https://www.kickthemachine.com/page80/page24/page26/index.html

6   Text taken from the filmmaker's website: https://www.kickthemachine.com/page80/page24/page26/index.html

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MEMORY, PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES AND MEMORIES IN THE FILMS OF APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL

Abstract

The filmography of the Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul is characterised by a constant quest to represent and interpret memory and memories, which constitute the main leitmotif of his films. A case in point is *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), in which a man is able to remember all his previous incarnations. In all of his films we can find various forms of memory, ranging from autobiographical or individual memory, for which he uses his own recollections in a manner comparable to Bachelard's "psychogeography" (O'Keane, 2021b: 121), to communicative and cultural memory as proposed by Assmann (2008), or Landsberg's "prosthetic memory" (2004). This article analyses some of the films by this director in which he combines cinema's ability to represent an image as an internal subjectivised experience and the notion of cinema as memory.

Key words

Apichatpong Weerasethakul; Cinema; Memory; Memories; Photography.

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MEMORIA, IMÁGENES FOTOGRÁFICAS Y RECUERDOS EN EL CINE DE APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL

Resumen

La filmografía del director tailandés Apichatpong Weerasethakul está marcada por una continua búsqueda de la representación e interpretación de la memoria y los recuerdos, siendo estos el principal *leitmotiv* de sus obras. Véase el caso de *El tío Boonmee que recuerda sus vidas pasadas* (2010), donde un hombre es capaz de recordar todas sus vidas anteriores. En todos sus trabajos pueden encontrarse varias formas de memoria, desde la memoria autobiográfica o individual, de donde extrae sus propios recuerdos, que se puede asemejar a la *psicogeografía* de Bachelard (O´Keane, 2021: 121); hasta la memoria comunicativa y cultural que propone Assmann (2008), o la *memoria prótesica* de Landsberg (2004). En este artículo se analizan los largometrajes de este director, donde Apichatpong combina la capacidad del cine para representar una imagen como experiencia interna subjetivada y la noción de cine como memoria.

Palabras clave

Apichatpong Weerasethakul; Cine; Memoria; Recuerdos; Fotografía.

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