

## URBAN AESTHETICS OF MADRID AS A CINEMATIC SETTING IN QUINQUI CINEMA

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### KEYWORDS

*Quinqui cinema*  
*City*  
*Setting*  
*City and cinema*  
*Narrative*  
*Aesthetics*

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### ABSTRACT

*This research analyzes cine quinqui and its representation of the city through an interrelational narrative approach. The study develops the characteristics that articulate an urban mode of representation associated with cine quinqui. A sample of cine quinqui films is selected to examine the construction of the city, highlighting the typological and topological differences of their settings in the films Deprisa, deprisa, Navajeros, Chocolate, and Maravillas. These films reflect a Madrid undergoing architectural and real estate expansion, where vacant lots appear as a constant element. The creation of the quinqui character is intrinsic to the city they inhabit, but paradoxically, they have no place within it. This thesis will feed much of the dystopian aesthetic of cine quinqui during the Transition period by depicting a city that harbors a youth disconnected from the preceding generation.*

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Received: 28 / 02 / 2025

Accepted: 18 / 06 / 2025

## 1. Introduction

The quinquí cinema of the late 1970s and early 1980s was derived from the genres of drama and action. It is argued that this cinematic genre represented urban space in distinctive ways. The work under discussion distinguished itself from other genres by placing significant emphasis on the relationship between characters and environment, with a view to influencing the audience's perception of real urban spaces. "In summary, it can be stated that this prevalent genre sought to address, predominantly in the form of biography or pseudobiography, the experiences and challenges faced by marginalised adolescents" (Castelló, 2018, p. 114). In this manner, the cinematic works belonging to the "quinquí cinema" genre captured and transformed the urban image, history and culture, showcasing a harsh and frequently violent reality during a specific historical period. "The success of the quinquí cinema cannot be understood without its context - the Transition - as well as the phenomenon of the "destape" (the post-Franco liberalization of media and cultural expression) or, in another field, the emergence of social movements related to identity claims" (Imbert, 2015, p. 59). "Cinema, in particular, will begin to experience this significant change in November 1977 with the abolition of censorship after a period of forty years" (Leal, 2018, p. 96). This is the first instance in which marginality and the depiction of underprivileged classes have been depicted in national cinema without subterfuge to pass censorship.

These films sought to explore the social phenomenon that emerged from urban development plans initiated during the 1960s, and their role in the construction of housing estates on the periphery of major cities. Housing estates are characterised by a high population of young people who exhibit antisocial behaviour patterns. These individuals often perceive themselves to be surrounded by a hostile environment and are motivated by a desire for perceived freedom, although this concept was not yet fully understood at the time. This unreflective search for freedom manifested in a rebellious and non-conformist behaviour, ultimately culminating in a similar denouement to that observed in the films in which they appeared (Olaiz, 2016, p. 125).

Cinematography, by creating urban atmospheres through the use of light, colour and visual composition, has been demonstrated to construct scenarios that capture the tension and dynamism of life on the margins of society, generating specific psychological and social effects on the viewer (Muttaqin, 2023, p. 8). However, as Antoniazzi (2019) observes, "through films, we can only achieve a partial and fragmentary vision of a city; a vision that, moreover, varies according to the places and attributes of the city selected by the filmmakers" (p. 5). In this context, the study of quinquí cinema and its aesthetic representation of the city of Madrid facilitates a more profound exploration of this relationship, enabling an analysis of how film narratives accentuate the typological and topological distinctions of the selected urban settings, thereby offering a distinctive perspective on urban reality.

### 1.1. Genesis of the Quinquí Cinema

The films *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1970) and *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) are regarded as innovative and seminal narratives in the field of international filmmaking in the early 1970s (Sánchez Noriega, 2015). The two films under scrutiny both focus on marginalised, rebellious and at times destructive youth, either towards themselves, as in *Easy Rider*, or against society, as in *A Clockwork Orange*. It is pertinent to observe that the films in question depict young people within the age range of twenty to thirty years, thereby accentuating the generational discord with societal norms, exemplified by the urban milieu depicted in *A Clockwork Orange* or the deconstructed and euphoric road trip portrayed in *Easy Rider*.

Concurrently, Spanish cinema has witnessed an upsurge in narratives that accentuate violence as a defining trait of the younger generation. A notable exemplar of this phenomenon is the film *Who Can Kill a Child?* (Narciso Ibáñez-Serrador, 1976) is a cinematic work that reflects a key symbolism of the emerging quinquí cinema genre, in which violence perpetrated by adolescents and even pre-adolescents is presented as a social threat. In the theoretical context of late Francoist cinema, the sexualisation of adolescence in the commercial cinema of the period has also been highlighted, with films such as *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* (Goodbye, Stork, Goodbye) (1971) and *El niño es nuestro* (The Kid is Ours) (1973), both

by Manolo Summers, which depict young people organising themselves outside their parents and authority figures of previous generations.

The late 1970s saw the emergence of juvenile delinquency as a prominent theme in film, as evidenced by notable productions such as *La Coreia* (Pedro Olea, 1976) and *Street Warriors* (1977), directed by José Antonio de la Loma. The latter constitutes the point of departure for a series of cinematic narratives centred on the cinema quinqui genre, wherein themes such as sexual aggression, social inequality, juvenile violence, and even castration are explored. These narratives are set within the context of low-budget action films characterised by a high degree of violent content. While the film provides a fictional representation of empowerment for the underclass, which is often disregarded or depicted in a paternalistic manner during Franco's regime, its portrayal has the potential to be sensationalist and lucrative. Notwithstanding this, De la Loma's realistic and crude approach, which ingeniously blended fiction with semi-realistic facts, ensured its box-office success. This landmark film provided a significant source of inspiration for other filmmakers, encouraging them to approach the genre from diverse perspectives. The success of this endeavour was predicated on the notoriety of its protagonists in the early days, who were young men with criminal records and who were frequently featured in the crime sections of the press, such as the renowned "Vaquilla".

In relation to the indebtedness of the narratives of cinema quinqui to the feature film *A Clockwork Orange*, it is evident from the comparisons between the film directed by De la Loma and that of Kubrick that there are notable differences in terms of the aesthetic limitations of the former and the neo-baroque style of the latter (Purić, 2017, p. 493). These filmmakers have divergent trajectories and, in general, prove challenging to compare. Nevertheless, the depiction of juvenile delinquency as a captivating element in cinematic narrative has consistently drawn audiences to cinemas over the years. It is evident that one of the distinguishing features of the Stanley Kubrick-directed film is its anempathetic soundtrack, a narrative element that has been replicated. In one particular scene, the protagonist utilizes a substantial phallic sculpture to perpetrate murder against one of his victims, while Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra* resonates as a musical backdrop. This resource will also be employed in the moments of action in the early film *Street Warriors*, in which the scenes of violence are accompanied by rumba and funk music.

It is evident that in the ensuing years, the quinqui film was solidified as a distinct genre, largely due to the contributions of filmmakers such as Eloy de la Iglesia, who was recognised for his unconventional approaches and his capacity to engage the audience. De la Loma and De la Iglesia have been accused of "capturing through neo-realist fiction the situation of those young people who made crime their raison d'être in a world that was progressively opening up to capitalism" (Vega, 2019, p. 2). De la Iglesia had previously attempted to emulate Kubrick's film with *Murder in a Blue World* (1973), a science fiction feature that already exhibited numerous aesthetic-narrative coincidences.

In relation to the urban landscape, these films frequently depicted and interrogated architectural structures and urban landscapes in a manner that accentuated the social and economic tensions of the era. According to López (2020, p. 4), the act of narrating a city cannot be regarded as a quest for an immaculate record, as was initially perceived by documentary filmmakers and scientists. Instead, it is a narrative that emerges from particular experiences. The present research focuses on cinematographic scenarios, evaluating the aesthetic representation of these spaces, not only through their location, but also in relation to their characters and actions. As Alvarado and Escobar have observed, "the cinema that has as one of its main scenarios a concrete city, rewrites and redescribes it from the universe of its characters" (2019, p. 380).

## 1.2. City and Film Aesthetics

When analysing the city and its representation in quinqui cinema, it is important to understand how urban aesthetics and the various forms of beauty it encompasses are perceived and disseminated globally. According to Ronconi (2020), "In the history of the writing subculture, cinema played an important role in global diffusion" (p. 23). In this sense, quinqui cinema not only serves as a vehicle for disseminating marginal narratives but also exposes the unique aesthetics of urban spaces in Madrid and other cities, capturing the rawness and beauty of life on the margins.

Aesthetic experience, as defined by González Moratiel (2018, p. 10) as “an intense pleasure derived from watching or listening, so intense that it can be difficult to turn away from”, is evident in the depiction of these urban spaces in quinquí cinema. These places, which often serve as settings for narratives of tension and conflict, reflect the social conditions of the time and invite viewers to experience the city through the different dimensions of beauty elaborated on by Tatarkiewicz: “aptness, ornament, attractiveness, grace, subtlety, sublimity, and the concept of dual beauty applied to architecture and the arrangement of public spaces such as squares” (2001, pp. 191–205). It would be interesting to study how quinquí cinema uses the city’s architectural and spatial elements to capture beauty.

It is also interesting to note that “the beautiful immediately produces a feeling of joy and pleasure; the sublime, on the other hand, first paralyses vital forces and produces a feeling of affliction, followed by relief and an emotion that generates joy” (González Moratiel, 2018, p. 47). Film scenarios function not only as sites of aesthetic pleasure, but also as places that generate contradictory feelings of attraction and repulsion, joy and desolation. In this way, they reflect the complex realities of the marginal lives they portray.

In quinquí cinema, the city is presented not only as a backdrop, but as a substantial element of this eminently urban narrative approach. As Vega (2019) points out, “relegating a part of the population at clear risk of exclusion, with economic and social problems, to a specific physical space —suburbs or slums— prevents the construction of habitable neighbourhoods based on principles of social integration” (p. 4). This spatial segregation generates environments that are inhospitable and devoid of basic resources, and it also reinforces the dystopian nature of the settings in quinquí cinema.

Furthermore, in large urban areas, the intensive appropriation of natural resources and common goods is associated with unequal usage patterns that exacerbate social and spatial disparities (Merlinsky & Serafini, 2020, p. 13). In quinquí cinema, marginal spaces are not merely places of poverty and degradation, but also of resistance and adaptation in the face of adversity. The contemporary city therefore faces a new aesthetic, which attempts to reconceptualise these spaces of marginality through urban art and other forms of cultural expression. González Moratiel (2018) suggests that this new aesthetic “is perhaps not as formalist as the preceding one, but more complex” (p. 58), indicating that urban art and its depiction in the cinema quinquí transcend conventional notions of beauty to convey the authenticity and reality of life on the margins.

The square, for example, is presented by Mazzariello (2020) as a “dynamic and democratic space” where people build relationships and maintain collective memory. This contrasts with the marginal settings frequented by the protagonists in order to socialise. Aertsen (2023) emphasises that the interiors of these characters’ family homes are frequently “crowded spaces” lacking in both space and privacy, and that the neighbourhoods they hail from offer no public areas for gathering.

Interestingly, the rise of cinema quinquí coincided with the decline of traditional cinemas and the proliferation of video clubs. This shift in modes of cultural consumption, as observed by Doğu and Sönmez (2017), is indicative of a broader process of urban transformation. “Beginning in the 1970s, with the regeneration of buildings and the advent of television, cultural structures became either less visited, losing their cultural value, or were demolished and replaced by tall apartment blocks” (p. 76). This phenomenon changed not only the way cinema was consumed, but also the urban landscape that emerged alongside the rise of the cinema quinquí. It captured the complexity of life on the margins and revealed how processes of social exclusion and urban transformation can shape a particular aesthetic that challenges conventional notions of beauty and liveability in big cities.

## 2. Methodology

A narrative analysis approach has been adopted to study the city as a setting for the cinema quinquí genre. This approach, proposed by Seymour Chatman (1990), focuses on the settings and other elements of the story in relation to them. This method enables us to understand and compare the depiction of various spaces, and the discourse conveyed through their configuration. In the first phase, a dozen representative films were screened based on previous selections from various sources, including the Fotogramas digital publication “Los Mejores Films de Cine Quinquí” by Ricardo Rosado (2021), the monograph “Fuera de la Ley: Asedios al Cine Quinquí” (Florido-Berrocal et al., 2015), and the Spanish film platform FlixOlé (no date). After viewing films from the cine quinquí genre directed by filmmakers

active during the Transition: Eloy de la Iglesia, José Antonio de la Loma, Carlos Saura, Montxo Armendáriz, Gil Carretero and Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón. It was determined that Madrid was the most common urban setting, so a sample of contemporary films was made, featuring diverse filmmakers and styles, and mainly located in Madrid. This is therefore a narrative analysis incorporating the formal elements of characters, settings and events, to which we have added those original and distinctive elements that characterise the urban spaces of quinqui cinema.

## 2.1. Aims

This article analyses the aesthetic representation of Madrid in quinqui cinema, focusing on the construction of urban settings and their relationship with characters and actions. The study examines how these representations reflect and reinforce discourses on precariousness, urban identity, and the processes of social transformation that occurred during the Spanish Transition. The article hypothesises that quinqui cinema has a particular aesthetic that is integrated into the construction of the city. It suggests that these marginal spaces create their own distinctive aesthetic by drawing on the concept of the quinqui.

The specific aims of this research are:

1. Highlighting the importance of the metropolis as a setting for quinqui cinema during the Spanish Transition.

It explores how the representation of Madrid operates within thematic film narratives. As Adam (2016) indicates, “cinema locativo has to take the geographical specificity of places as a fundamental parameter in order to construct experience” (p. 30). The following objective therefore seeks to:

2. Identify patterns in city representation, as well as its most emblematic scenarios.

The aim is to highlight the urban spaces of Madrid, such as its streets, squares, neighbourhoods, and monuments, that are used in the cinema quinqui genre, as well as to emphasise the aesthetic and narrative differences in the representation of Madrid within this genre by various authors. This will be achieved by considering the profiles and appearance of the characters, as well as their actions in the architectural and symbolic locations traceable in each film.

3. Detect parallelisms in the aesthetic and narrative constructions of urban settings in Madrid in the selected cinematography.

This objective will explore similarities in visual aesthetics, the use of urban space, and the themes addressed. As Llorca (2019) indicates, “the study of the filmed city has two different starting points” (p. 186), the first of which is the study of the film text itself and the second of which is “analysing the city as an urban phenomenon” (p. 186). The interplay between representations of the city will be examined. The question of whether there are specific “stylistics” that allow Madrid to be easily identified in the context of quinqui cinema will be addressed.

## 2.2. Narrative Analysis Model, Sample and Selection of Scenes

To conduct this study of the depiction of Madrid in quinqui cinema, a selection of representative films from the beginning of the 1980s has been chosen. This period was pivotal for the aesthetic development of the city within the context of the Spanish Transition. The exhibition includes four films by renowned Spanish filmmakers: *Navajeros* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980), *Chocolate* (Gil de los Reyes, 1980), *Maravillas* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1980) and *Deprisa, deprisa* (Hurry, Hurry) (Carlos Saura, 1981). These films were chosen for their authorial diversity and narrative approaches, which are relevant for analysing how urban spaces are constructed in the subject matter.

**Table 1. *Deprisa, deprisa*: fragment of the analysis frame**

|          | CHARACTER (GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL) |                           |             |                    |        | SCENARIO         |      | EVENT  |
|----------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------|------------------|------|--------|
| SCENARIO | AGE                              | SEX, GENDER, ORIENT. SEX. | TEMPERAMENT | SOCIAL-ECON. LEVEL | ASPECT | SPACE / FUNCTION | TIME | ACTION |
|          |                                  |                           |             |                    |        |                  |      |        |



|   |             |   |                            |          |                   |  |                  |                           |
|---|-------------|---|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|--|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | -18,<br>-18 | Female,<br>woman,<br>straight.<br><br>Male, man,<br>straight. | Melancholic,<br>phlegmatic | Low, low | Casual,<br>casual | Indoor, cafeteria<br>/ Gastronomic,<br>sociable                                    | Day,<br>evening. | Working,<br>seductive     |
| 2 | -18,<br>-18 | Female,<br>woman,<br>straight.<br><br>male, man,<br>straight  | Melancholic,<br>phlegmatic | Low, low | Casual,<br>casual | Indoor,<br>discotheque /<br>Drinking,<br>substance use<br>dancing -<br>socialising | Evening          | Conversation<br>, dancing |

Source: Own elaboration with information taken from scenes of the film "Deprisa, deprisa": Own elaboration with information taken from scenes of the film "Deprisa, deprisa" (1981).

Data were collected relating to characters, scenarios and events. This analysis includes the identification of the architectural and landscape characteristics of Madrid, as well as narrative factors such as the locations of scenes and the times of day at which they occur. The interaction between the characters and these environments is also considered, as this can provide a deeper understanding of how space is used as a narrative tool. The qualitative approach focuses on aspects that are difficult to quantify but fundamental to understanding the aesthetic and symbolic impact of Madrid as a setting in quinqu cinema. From each film, eight scenes were selected that portrayed a variety of spaces, such as interiors and exteriors, and day and night scenes, depicting recognisable locations in the city. At least one scene depicting the main character(s)' home was also included to provide a comprehensive overview. Table 1 shows a sample of the analysed scenes, which in this case correspond to the film *Deprisa, deprisa*. Next, narrative elements related to the scenarios that characterise this film genre are examined. For example, spaces that are not conventionally places of sociability, such as cemeteries, are converted into locations that are, as will be seen in the case of *Navajeros*.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Films

##### 3.1.1. *Chocolate (Gil Carretero, 1980)*

Magda (Paloma Gil) is a dark-haired underage girl and the girlfriend of Jato (a young man with blonde curls who is barely in his twenties). Given her liveliness, warmth and expressiveness, she would have a sanguine temperament, just like Jato. Meanwhile, Muertes, who is also dark-haired and of good character, would have a choleric temperament because of his independence and leadership qualities. He is an inseparable friend of Jato's and, over time, also of Magda's. The quality of the construction elements, spaciousness, and solemn decoration of Magda's family home point to a medium-to-high socioeconomic level. Meanwhile, Jato contributes to his parents' finances by selling marijuana. The contrast in socio-economic purchasing power between Magda's family and Jato's, as well as Muertes', who seems to have survived adolescence independently, adds depth to the narrative. The scene in which the ambassador's daughter and the count's son converse with Jato and Magda in the Manuela café in the Malasaña neighbourhood while boasting about their knowledge of cannabis clearly illustrates the widespread use of the drug across different classes and social spheres in Madrid. Magda's parents, played by Encarna Paso and Agustín González, embody the typical perspective of a concerned, sometimes desperate and powerless older generation who oppose the freedom displayed by the protagonists.

The three friends generally dress casually but thoughtfully, except for Muertes, whose appearance deteriorates towards the end of the story due to severe withdrawal symptoms. Muertes' possible homosexual or bisexual orientation is suggested given his activity as a prostitute for both sexes. The story is set in "a corrupt society where politicians and high society abandon Spanish youth to their fate or exploit them for immoral youth prostitution" (López Sangüesa, 2017, p. 91). Throughout the plot, all

three characters engage in prostitution at some point. In this sense, the Madrid portrayed is a city where nightlife, drugs and prostitution go hand in hand.

The bars in Malasaña that operated as key meeting places during the contemporary *Movida Madrileña* are used to depict Madrid's nightlife in the story. Examples include the exterior shots of the *Vía Láctea* and *Café Manuela*, both of which were iconic meeting places during *La Movida* (Mendo, 2017; Pérez, 2021).

The film features more outdoor than indoor sequences, both day and night. The interiors of cafés, bars, and nightclubs look natural, as do Magda's parents' house and Jato's mother's shack. However, the Muertes' room is built on a set. Whenever the protagonists consume heroin, the bathrooms are also natural (Robles, 2016, pp. 288–289).

Atocha Station is a transit hub during the day, with people regularly moving on from there by taxi, public transport or rental car to various locations in Madrid. It is there that the trio take advantage of the car park to steal a car, thus reversing the intended use of the space. Not all transit spaces experience the same fate in the story. The Plaza de Malasaña, also portrayed during the day, serves as the setting for the casual dialogue between Magda and Jato about their friend Muertes's state as they move around the city. Conversely, the old Casa de Correos in Puerta del Sol is depicted as a prison where Muertes experiences severe withdrawal symptoms in the basement. Historically, this place was used to imprison and torture opponents of the regime. Thus, emblematic Madrid spaces are integrated into the plot, either by reversing their usual function through subversive action or by providing a setting for the protagonists' emotional connections.

Creativity is also expressed through cooking, with stews that the couple learn to make when they start living together. Magda and Jato's dream of living in a country house is realised when they move into a rural property in poor condition. This scenario offers a dichotomy between town and country: the former is presented as idyllic through the protagonists' eyes, while the town is portrayed in a negative light by the omniscient narrator, especially during nocturnal activity.

### **3.1.2. *Navajeros (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980)***

El Jaro, played by José Luis Manzano, is a fair-haired teenager with a boyish face. His gang comprises three other boys of a similar appearance, one with straight hair, and two young men with dark complexions, one of whom is a Gypsy. They all look underage and are neatly, if casually, dressed. Their youth is offset by the maturity of Mercedes (Isela Vega), an attractive prostitute in her forties who is in love with Jaro. There is also Oteiza (José Sacristán), a journalist of a similar age who is fascinated by El Jaro's misdeeds. These two characters represent the generation of these young people's parents, who grew up during the dictatorship. In the same age bracket is policeman Jara (José Manuel Cervino), who condemns the boys' criminal acts and rebelliousness. The story encompasses both middle-aged perspectives: one admiring and one censuring the quinqui character. Using the characteristics proposed by Hippocrates (Schmidt, 2010) to analyse scenes with the main characters, El Jaro would have a choleric temperament, while Mercedes would be phlegmatic (calm, reliable and diplomatic), meaning they complement each other without conflict. Through their relationship, we can infer El Jaro's heterosexuality, as he is also involved with Toñi (Verónica Castro). The text also portrays non-normative sexualities, such as a gang member's colleague who has left a life of crime to work as a male escort for men who frequent the Luna cinemas.

As for interior scenes, only the exterior of El Jaro's house is portrayed, and Mercedes' flat is shown as the only domestic setting. The same is true of the rest of the gang, whose residences are not shown. Among the interior spaces, the brothel or anything related to prostitution — as occurs indirectly with Mercedes' house — seems to be the least confrontational space for El Jaro and his henchmen. Even entering the bar where El Marqués (Enrique San Francisco) operates is a transgression for the protagonist with dire consequences. Thus, the interior space belongs to adults and entering it is a breach on the part of the quinqui character. Conversely, Codesido-Linares et al. (2022) argue that *Dog Warriors* established the organised criminal as the quinqui's lethal enemy (p. 130), which is demonstrated by the violent aggression El Jaro suffers at the hands of El Marqués, a significant hashish trafficker. The street and exterior scenes are the opposite of interior scenes in terms of belonging. “The chance encounter

between El Jaro's gang and the police inside the shopping centre is yet another example of how hostile it is for the quintessential quinqui to enter a sanctuary of emerging postmodernism" (Vega, p. 9), which could include notable buildings and spaces intended for the middle classes.

The film situates emblematic scenarios in central Madrid, reversing their function. While the Gran Vía is a public space for transit and consumption, for the protagonist gang it becomes fertile ground for stealing from members of the public, even in broad daylight. The robberies captured in the film include a night-time attack on an El Corte Inglés shop window: "The snapshot provides a metaphor of singular significance for understanding how the quinqui subvert the dynamics of consumption in the urban centre where the symbols of capitalist modernity are concentrated" (Vega, p. 7). Jaro's mother is known to work as a prostitute in the back areas of Gran Vía, which are shown in various states of degradation. The gardens of El Retiro Park, one of Madrid's public recreational spaces, are subverted as they are used by El Jaro and his gang as a refuge for overnight stays, as well as being the scene of confrontations with other gangs in the evening. While the protagonists sleep in the park, other juvenile delinquents attack peaceful couples enjoying the gardens until El Jaro and his gang confront and defeat them. This passage highlights the quinqui's sense of territoriality and his commitment to defending these spaces to maintain his leadership in central Madrid, which operates as a hunting ground for the gang. In the process, the environmental, aesthetic and educational function of the park as a public space is subverted (Lorca, 1989, pp. 108–109).

The media response in Spain to the objective insecurity experienced by the post-industrial working class in cities — due to unemployment, deteriorating material conditions, and underdeveloped social benefits — arguably promoted subjective insecurity among the middle classes. This implies a hardening of class divisions and further fragmentation of the world of work (Torres, 2015, p. 72).

Although the gang operates in central Madrid, it uses the South Cemetery as a refuge where it can forge bonds and plan its activities. The cemetery, which does not operate exclusively as a place of mourning and home to the deceased, is also a "social differentiator and the location of the final residence of the deceased, a symbol of status within the local community" (Larosa, 2011, p. 6). In the story, the cemetery is presented as a place where the gang members can plan and debate. In this way, the conventional use of the space for mourning is subverted to make way for celebration and socialisation.

**Figure 1.** El Jaro's gang dancing in the cemetery



Source: Scene from the film *Navajeros* (1980).

In terms of creativity, it is worth noting that the extradiegetic soundtrack playing during the night-time robberies in the city centre and the movements of the protagonists suggest choreography or a performative dance as they appropriate these spaces. Similarly, during the fight in El Retiro Park, the soundtrack, movements and staging resemble a dance. Even when the group escapes after robbing the brothel in Calle Espíritu Santo and flees across the rooftops, they end up going back out into the street and invade a ballet class in the process, jokingly joining in. Thus, bodily movement is presented as an artistic expression in the urban environment.



### 3.1.3. *Maravillas* (Gutiérrez Aragón, 1981)

Maravillas (played by Cristina Marcos) is a teenager with shoulder-length blonde curls. She is independent, determined and dominant, and would be considered to have a choleric temperament (Trestini et al., 2012). At the beginning of the story, her boyfriend is played by an adolescent Miguel Molina. He is dark-skinned and dark-eyed and has a calm and optimistic temperament. Maravillas' father, Fernando (played by Fernando Fernán Gómez), is unable to manage the family finances, so she is responsible for the household. He is addicted to printed pornography, and his daughter and friends try to help him overcome it. Among the characters, no sexualities other than heterosexuality seem evident.

The spaciousness of the rooms and the quality of the building materials in the interior locations suggest that Maravillas' home was once the residence of a wealthy family. In contrast to the Quinqui family's humble origins, Fernando used to work as a renowned photographic portraitist for the city's intellectual elite. His home is neither located on the outskirts nor in the overcrowded buildings of poor neighbourhoods. It is a family that has fallen into disrepair due to the father's negligence. The variety of scenes filmed in different parts of the house demonstrates a desire to explore this space. The kitchen, hallway, living room and the protagonist's bedroom, which has large windows and curtains on at least two walls, are all featured. It looks like a decent flat that hasn't been renovated in decades. The living room has floral upholstery and walls adorned with decorations that would have served as backgrounds for portraits or photographs. There are also some plants. The room is large and divided by an archway. The care taken in the artistic direction is evident. "The most evident characteristic of Gutiérrez Aragón's cinema can be defined (...) as a dialogical relationship between the most immanent and documented reality, impregnated with highly recognisable environments, spaces, and objects, and its fictionalisation" (Sánchez Noriega, 2015, pp. 35–36). The decontextualised film set design enhances the mystical elements of the story.

Other interiors are shown, such as the synagogue during a celebration filled with song and food, and the interior of El Corte Inglés de Callao. It is there that Chessman boycotts his job interview as a men's suit salesman by deliberately setting fire to new trench coats with cigarette ends while waiting for the interviewers to respond. As in *Navajeros*, these department stores seem to be the source of the characters' rebellion in this narrative.

As for exterior locations, the Madrid Film Office website (no date) highlights the districts of Centro (Gran Vía), Moncloa-Aravaca (Plaza de España from the Torre de Madrid) and Tetuán (Plaza de Picasso) as contributing to a mosaic of urban settings.

**Figures 2.** Maravillas balances on the Torre de Madrid.



Source: Scene from the film *Maravillas* (1982).

Once again, the wasteland serves as a meeting place, albeit not in the southern part of the city or among the housing estates. This time, Maravillas meets his friends in a wasteland in the Prosperidad neighbourhood. In the background, the Casona, also known as the Casa Grande, can be seen. It is still standing in what is now the Plaza Sagrado Corazón de Jesús.

Figures 3 and 4. Open field in the Prosperidad neighbourhood, Madrid 1980.



Source: Scene from the film *Maravillas* (1982).

Prostitution, and in this case child prostitution, features again as a narrative element and is linked to the decadence of Maravillas' boyfriend's father. The father and son come into conflict as the father is afraid of the boy. This could be interpreted as the generational divide evident in the majority of quinqu cinema stories. Generally, the desperation of a generation of young people without positive role models is expressed. At the same time, drugs do not play a significant role in the plot, and the protagonists' desire is for stolen jewellery. There are no weapons, only signs that they have been used, such as when the car arrives at a wasteland with a shot driver and a dead man inside.

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Among the creative and distinctive elements, acrobatics and balancing stand out, such as walking along the edge of a wall at the top of the Madrid Tower, for example. Acrobatics against an urban backdrop are a recurring theme in the story, contributing performative elements and offering a creative outlet for bodily expression, providing insight into the feelings of young people in their current situation.

We should also highlight the architectural aesthetics and dialogical references that link the story to the first half of the 20th century, adding further nuances to the subtext. For instance, when Fernando tells Miqui about important figures from his past in the photography studio, he recreates a scene set in 1950s Madrid featuring individuals who lent their names to some of the city's most notable streets and landmarks: "Ortega y Gasset, Hemingway, Dr Marañón". The Casona in the Prosperidad neighbourhood was constructed in the 1930s, and the vintage aesthetic of the car that enters the scene with the building as a backdrop brings it closer to that bygone era frequented by Maravillas and his gang.

### 3.1.4. *Deprisa, Deprisa* (Carlos Saura, 1981)

Three young men in their early twenties — Pablo, Meca and Sebas — and Angela, a seventeen-year-old, get together to carry out robberies after Angela starts a relationship with Pablo. Pablo has fair hair and light eyes, while Meca and Sebas have brown hair and dark eyes respectively. Angela also has brown hair and eyes. Their temperaments can be categorised as follows: Meca is sanguine (warm, friendly and exaggerated); Sebas is choleric (impetuous, dominant and wilful); Pablo is phlegmatic (calm, reliable and placid); and Angela is melancholic (analytical, self-disciplined and hard-working). In terms of economic resources, Angela stands out positively since, unlike the others, she has a job as a waitress at the beginning of the film. However, she abandons this to join the gang's criminal activity. While their costumes do not differ substantially from those in other films analysed, it should be noted that the male members of the gang have particularly unkempt complexions with outbreaks of late-onset acne. They

appear to have a very poor diet or harmful lifestyle. It is perhaps worth noting the director's decision not to disguise this aspect with make-up or effects, which lends an air of naturalism to the film.

There are no other characters in the film who offer generational contrast, except for Pablo's grandmother, whom he and Angela visit in her village to give her a television. However, this scene is anecdotal and has no further development. There are also no features related to prostitution or sexualities outside the heterosexuality of the main couple.

Many films in the quinqui genre explicitly explore or highlight the socio-economic background that gave rise to it. They point to problematic living conditions and urban exclusion in peripheral neighbourhoods as key factors in this process (Aertsen, 2023, p. 119).

Shots of the characters' homes correspond to the Vallecas area, and in an iconic scene, the characters ride on horseback through the Carabanchel district. They also visit the Cerro de Los Ángeles in Getafe, where they share confessions about their first robberies. Meanwhile, the bar where they meet and the flat where they organise themselves are located in Villa de Vallecas, as is the last home of Ángela and Pablo. According to the website created by the FIC-MATUR project, Saura's film depicts the first robbery in which Ángela participates as taking place in Alcobendas, in the north of the city, in San Sebastián de los Reyes. The robbery at the climax of the film, in which Pablo is shot and wounded, takes place near the Plaza de Ventas in the La Guindalera neighbourhood. Thus, the neighbourhoods where the protagonists socialise and live are in the south, while the areas where they commit crimes are in the north.

Other scenes that contribute to a particular construction of the romantic aura that pervades the plot are the desert spaces where they burn their cars, the wastelands where they practise shooting and the barren landscapes that the engaged couple find beautiful (Redondo, 2023, p. 99).

The film portrays Pablo's home, which he soon shares with Angela, as well as the apartment in Villa de Vallecas that they move to with the proceeds of the robberies. The difference between the two residences is emphasised: the first is claustrophobically small, dark, aged and chaotic, while the second is spacious, modern, bright and organised. The second residence is spacious, modern, bright and airy. It is in the latter that Pablo slowly dies after being shot, and where Angela tries to use the money from the robbery to save him. The socio-economic improvement that the criminal acts have brought to the couple catches up with them at the first slip. With the loot on her shoulder, Angela goes out into the open to lose herself. An affluent domestic life may be an unattainable dream for the quinqui character, while the plot of land is a space of sociability and belonging.

**Figure 5.** Open space in Vallecas, Madrid 1980.



Source: Scene from the film *Deprisa, deprisa* (1982).

In the section on urban creativity, the performative elements displayed when Ángela disguises herself to carry out robberies are notable. This represents a rite of reaffirmation as an equal member of the gang, in a context of inequality that the Spanish Transition still represented. Initially, Sebas is

reluctant to accept her, as the story shows. Pablo, on the other hand, is happy to see her introduce herself before carrying out the gang's criminal activities. The discotheque that they frequent provides a filmic backdrop for the dance. Once again, Angela uses dance to express herself through simple rhythmic movements.

Regarding the characters' use of diegetic music, we observe the moment when Meca deliberately plays music in the bar to create an appropriate atmosphere and support Pablo's approach to Angela. These actions portray a creative and playful approach to bodily and musical expression.

### 3.2. Global Analysis

#### 3.2.1. Narrative Analysis

Notes were taken on the stylistic and narrative constants in these films during the screenings. A table of recognisable narrative elements of the quinqu theme was created to help identify discursive patterns and conventions in the construction of common scenarios.

**Table 2. Quinqu cinema: characteristic narrative features**

| <b>CHARACTER/S<br/>AND<br/>HABITUAL<br/>PRESENCES</b> | Mediterranean<br>and Caucasian<br>(fallen angel)<br>appearance | Full male<br>nudity                                      | Underage<br>prostitute                                  | Good-hearted<br>prostitute                       | Generational<br>contrast  | Unemployment<br>/ lack of<br>education                                |
|---|--|--|---|--|---|---|
| <b>ACTIONS</b>  | Pursuits /<br>running away                                     | Pursuits /<br>motorised<br>escapes.                      | Actions<br>related to<br>non-<br>normative<br>sexuality | Drug<br>use/trafficking:<br>marijuana,<br>heroin | Romance<br>carnality /  | Conflict with<br>authority  |
| <b>SCENARIOS</b>                                      | Climatology:<br>eternal<br>summer                              | Indoors:<br>aged<br>housing,<br>self-built<br>dwellings, | Exteriors:<br>urban<br>public<br>spaces,<br>wastelands  | Rural / urban<br>dichotomy                       | Wealthy<br>houses<br>(contrast),<br>penitentiaries,<br>markets,<br>pharmacies<br>(drugs),<br>vehicles<br>Discotheques | Early self-<br>technology<br>plans of the late<br>1970s and<br>1980s. |

Source: Own elaboration with data taken from the viewings in 2024.

Table 2 was created to highlight a series of recurring narrative elements in several representative films of the quinqu cinema genre, identifying those that appear frequently in their plots. It highlights the typical profiles and situations of these films. However, to gain an in-depth understanding of both the general functioning of the city and that of a specific city in this fictional universe, a detailed analysis of its various narrative elements was necessary.

The analysis of the feature films in the sample revealed that quinqu characters tend to be somewhat younger than men, with an age range spanning from adolescence to the early twenties. The city is thus projected as markedly youthful. Female protagonists tend to exhibit melancholic characteristics, while male protagonists tend to exhibit choleric characteristics. In both cases, these are well complemented by a phlegmatic partner or companion. The depiction of these characters in the countryside as objects of desire also varies. The full nudity of El Jaro and Muertes in *Navajeros* and *Chocolate*, respectively, together with the films' narrative features related to homosexuality, position them as objects of desire



for a diverse gaze. However, neither Ángela nor Maravillas display particularly exacerbated erotic clothing or non-verbal language in their respective feature films.

The portrayal of the prostitute with certain Oedipal traits is common in depictions of urban juvenile delinquency, dating back to Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. In this case, her presence is evident in both *Navajeros* and *Maravillas*. Other aspects related to prostitution appear in *Chocolate*, although *Deprisa, deprisa* is anomalous in this respect. There is also no character who grew up during the dictatorship and is scandalised, condemned or, on the contrary, fascinated by this type of juvenile delinquency. This generational contrast does not arise in the film directed by Saura as it does in the others. The only scene in which this contrast appears is when Pablo and Angela visit his grandmother, who lives modestly in the village, enjoying the occasional luxury that her grandson provides. A similar scene occurs in *Chocolate* when El Jato visits his mother and younger siblings to give them money. The focus of *Deprisa, deprisa* is on the protagonist band, with an emphasis on the character of Ángela. There is not a single character representing authority, the police or the public. The narrative focuses exclusively on the gang and, specifically, the couple, who are neither censured nor judged within the story. The setting is centred on Vallecas, the neighbourhood of the gang, and the south of Madrid, with occasional excursions to other locations. In this way, the outskirts are emphasised as the preferred Madrid enclave for these characters.

Madrid is portrayed as a violent city, but the depiction varies from story to story. While some character is always assaulted and killed, the level of violence ranges from the virtual absence of weapons in *Maravillas* to armed robberies resulting in fatalities in *Deprisa, deprisa*. In *Navajeros*, there is a mixture of bladed weapons and firearms, with the former prevailing. In *Chocolate*, there are no firearms, and violence is concentrated in thefts and heroin consumption and withdrawal. These films offer a sacrificial act of closure. In *Maravillas*, Chessman seems to finally surrender; in El Jaro, El Jaro attempts suicide by facing the gunman unarmed; Muertes sacrifices himself for Jato and Magda; and in *Deprisa, deprisa*, Pablo could be said to sacrifice himself for Ángela, because if they surrender, he gains a hospital stay, but they lose the loot and their freedom.

### 3.2.2. Assessment of Differential and Creative Factors

The features identified as manifestations of urban creativity relate to performative and musical expression, and in some cases, culinary expression. In terms of editing, soundtrack and choreography, the night-time robberies and morning fights of El Jaro and his gang are presented as a kind of dance. The robberies in *Deprisa, deprisa* provide a space for Ángela's act of cross-dressing, while the high altitude of certain buildings in the city provides an opportunity for acrobatics in *Maravillas*. *Chocolate* generated the fewest of these traits, but it also pointed to some differential aspects.

The creativity and artistic expression in quinqui film narratives transform the city into an emotional stage that effectively evokes emotion. While inferring the quinqui's lack of belonging and his relegation to the margins of society — a circumstantial space that he can build on at any moment in a rapidly expanding city — the traits of urban creativity link his presence to a character who expresses himself by adopting cultural elements from a scenario that both invisibilises and marginalises him. These traits contribute to the rise of the quinqui throughout the narrative, although most stories have a tragic ending.

## 4. Conclusions and Discussion

The wasteland is presented as one of the few spaces, if not the only one, where the quinqui character can truly belong. Of the four films, *Chocolate* is the most diffuse in this respect. In this film, Jato and Magda's place of belonging is the countryside. However, in most of these stories, the wasteland is also a plot of land in the process of construction. In order to maintain access to this space, the quinqui character would have to assimilate into a society whose rules he desperately tries to subvert. Thus, the creation of the quinqui character is intrinsic to the city that he inhabits, yet he has no place in it. This idea would influence much of the dystopian aesthetic of Transition cinema, depicting a city harbouring a youth disconnected from the previous generation, from which it receives neither support nor resources.

At the same time, these films reflect a Madrid undergoing architectural and real estate expansion, in which wastelands are a constant feature. Motorised vehicles are a regular narrative feature and



underline the magnitude of distances. The speed at which stolen cars are driven marks the pulse of an expanding city. Furthermore, in *Deprisa, deprisa*, trains operate as an intriguing leitmotif and cars are sacrificed in a rite of incineration after each robbery.

As quinqu cinema narratives are replicated, characters are introduced with diverse characteristics relating to gender, physical traits, and socio-economic background, conveying the idea that the quinqu spirit extends to urban youth. Among the male characters, two characteristic physical profiles emerge: one with an angelic appearance, as exemplified by José Luis Manzano or José Antonio Valdelomar, in contrast to the other conventional profile with markedly Mediterranean features, exemplified by Ángel Fernández Franco or Jesús Arias Aranzueque. In terms of costumes, the characters are characterised by flared jeans, polo shirts, and denim and corduroy jackets. Meanwhile, female characters tend to wear dresses, except in stories where they exhibit greater agency, such as in *Maravillas* and *Deprisa, deprisa*, where their style is similar to that of their male counterparts. Helmet haircuts are common in both cases. According to the quinqu characterisation, any son or daughter of the working, middle or even upper-middle classes can be a quinqu. The use of colloquial language, which is particularly evident in *Dog Warriors*, diminishes progressively in subsequent films.

Typically, the plot concludes with the sacrifice of the quinqu protagonist, who, despite their criminal background, becomes a hero in their quest for wealth or, at least, economic improvement. This final sacrifice may allow other characters in the gang to live their love freely, as in the films *Chocolate* and *Colega* (Pals), or it may simply portray drifting delinquents and/or drug addicts who end up dying, sometimes leaving an unborn child behind – as in *Navajeros* and *Street Warriors*. Interestingly, the same does not happen when the weight of the plot falls on a female character; she tends to emerge relatively unscathed at the end of the story.

In terms of creativity, three of the analysed films exhibited narrative traits related to corporal expressivity, diegetic music and performativity, presenting the quinqu cinema as a narrative genre in which the urban setting is fundamental and linked to urban creativity through various implicit and explicit manifestations.

## 5. Acknowledgements

This publication forms part of grant JDC2022-049248-I, which is funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and the European Union's "NextGenerationEU" programme.

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