

URBAN SPACES IN SPANISH CRIME FICTION: (UN)FRAMING THE CITY ON SCREEN AND IN COMICS

Dir. : Diane Bracco (EHIC) et Thomas Faye (CeRes)

Université de Limoges

Numerous studies have evoked the intertwined destinies of comics and cinema. Sometimes they remind us that comics and cinema use the same tools and the same metalanguage (L. Cuñarro and J. E. Finol), sometimes they stress that they “ils empruntent [...] les mêmes voies d’expression”¹² while reminding us that “leur langage est essentiellement différent”¹³ (T. Groensteen, 2005). They also share a particularly strong interest since the mid-twentieth century in the worlds of crime fiction. Such a predilection can be explained by the fact that these visual media lend themselves to the representation of the atmosphere, particularly urban, characteristic of the genres of detective fiction (J. Madrid), *noir* or thriller.

As (audio)visual writings, they imply what Pascal Bonitzer designates as the “exercice d’un droit de regard”¹⁴ by the spectator/reader, as well as an instance of control of the latter's gaze (W. Eisner) by imposing an image, a series of representations, and by guiding him towards the interpretation of what is shown. This right to look and this control are made possible and exercised by the content of the image shown itself, but also by the evocation, in the hollow, of what the image does not show and of what supposedly surrounds it.

Jan Baetens (2021) attributes the proximity between the two media to the fact that they are built on “cadrées” images, which implies by definition that they also have “hors-cadre ou hors-champ”, without failing to point out that “le statut de cette zone autour de l’image réalisée n’est pas du tout le même”¹⁵. He thus establishes the frame as a structuring element of audiovisual and comic languages, and as an inescapable factor of meaning in cinematographic, televisual and iconotextual fictions.

In the cinema, it is embodied in the shot, rigid and materially constrained; in comics, it takes shape in a more flexible way in the multi-frame (T. Groensteen, 1999). In all cases, it calls out to the viewer/reader and sets itself up as a unit of meaning, at once homogeneous on the surface and traversed by complex dialectics: by imposing limits on representation, it creates a space within which it draws its cohesion from the relationships it makes possible between the elements it encloses (P. Fresnault-Deruelle, 1975), while in turn giving them meaning. It is therefore an essential link in the structuring of the sequential arts (cinema, television productions, comics), in which it is capable of creating the illusion of movement, of time passing, from a fragmentary and fragmented writing. In short, he questions the values of homogeneity and continuity of representation, influencing perception. Its apprehension must therefore be paradigmatic and syntagmatic, thus varying from the static representation contained in the frame, to the inscription of the latter in the semiotic continuum that unites it to the elements that surround it.

However, the sequencibility specific to these two media does not play with the frame in a similar way (J. Baetens, 2021; T. Groensteen, 2005), since comics are built on gaps that are undoubtedly deeper than in cinema or television productions. We will therefore have to think about the frame and the processes that lead to its configuration, both from the point of view of its internal composition and the place it occupies in the generation of the sequence. These processes will first be material: the frame and the framing, its cutting, its modelling, its format (more or less “élastique”¹⁶ [B. Peeters, 1998] depending on the medium), what it includes or excludes will depend on the film, its analogue or digital treatment, the limits of the screen (P. Bonitzer;

¹² “use [...] the same means of expression”.

¹³ “their language is essentially different”.

¹⁴ “exercise of a right to look”.

¹⁵ “framed”, “an off-frame or off-screen”, “the status of this zone around the image produced is not at all the same”.

¹⁶ “elastic”.

D. Villain), the limits of the page or the plate (J. Baetens, 2021), the materiality of the broadcasting medium which informs its contours and therefore its contents. It will then be a question of narrative processes, since the construction of the frame aims to ensure that the viewer/reader "reconnaitre avant qu'il analyse"¹⁷ (W. Eisner), obliging the director or author to "'voir' pour le lecteur"¹⁸ (and, in fact, also for the viewer), i.e. to make a selection of the narrative peaks to be represented. These peaks must be part of a scenographic and narrative continuity reconstituted by the cooperation of the spectator/reader in the act of assembling and editing the narrative unit. The processes will also be aesthetic, since they are based on choices of composition of the frame and the image, which combine concern for the visual and construction of the narrative. Finally, they will be rhetorical, in that the choices mentioned above will, around the frame, participate in strategies of tension between what is shown and said and what is hidden and not said, between what is constructed and what is to be constructed (we will think of the closure that McCloud evokes in comics, as an ellipsis generating meaning, but we will also think, in cinema, of the dialectic of *cadre/cache* established by Bazin and extended by Bonitzer). This plays with the expectations and frustrations of the spectator/reader, who is forced to submit to the frame and to imagine its contours, its context, its off-frame.

We would therefore like to direct the apprehension of the frame as a structuring element of audiovisual and comic media towards a reflection on the stakes of an aesthetics of fragmentation, in order to question in particular the principles of continuity, rupture, constraining or liberating margins, closure, and openness in the creation of the fictional universe.

In light of these considerations, we intend to examine the representations of the Spanish city through the prism of crime fiction in the audiovisual media and comics. The atmospheres of mystery, suspense and anguish created by Spanish directors, cartoonists and authors exploit the intrinsic visual potential of crime-based genres, derived from an international detective literature that is both inspired by and dependent on the imaginary of the Hollywood noir of the 1940s and 1950s, which gives pride of place to the urban motif. The profusion of crime stories published each year, projected on screens or distributed via digital platforms suggests that the crime thriller and (neo)noir (J. Memba, 2019), which are omnipresent in very contemporary visual and audiovisual creation in Spain, call for figuration and representation through the image, as confirmed by the abundant transmedia circulation from literature to cinema, television and/or comics. The most eloquent example is undoubtedly that of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's detective, Pepe Carvalho, whose urban adventures have been the subject of multiple film adaptations since the end of the 1970s (*Tatuaje* by Bigas Luna, *Asesinato en el Comité Central* by Vicente Aranda, *El laberinto griego* by Rafael Alcázar, *Los mares del Sur* by Manuel Esteban) and television (TVE series; *Olímpicamente mort* by Manuel Esteban) and continue to be transposed into comic books (*Tatuaje* and *La soledad del manager*, co-written by Bartolomé Seguí and Hernán Migoya). More recently, the very popular Baztán trilogy by Basque author Dolores Redondo has been simultaneously adapted for film, financed and distributed by Netflix, and transposed into comics by Ernest Sala. The urban element here has more to do with the idiosyncrasies of the villages and small towns of deepest Navarre than with the great metropolises, but it becomes significant when it is set against the natural landscapes to express the permanence of local superstitions.

It is clear that the crime genres, popularised in Spain by the eminent detective novelists of the democratic transition (J. Paredes Núñez) and renewed by the arts and letters since the beginning of the 21st century (À. M. Escribà and J. Sánchez Zapatero¹⁹, R. Higuera Flores and J. L. López Sangüesa), give the urban space a predominant role in the registration of a certain human and social reality. Filmmakers and comic strip authors appropriate the city and its imagination, summoning it, stylising it, fragmenting it, (re)inventing it on the screen or on the page, exploring through images the etymological link between the city (*polis*), the detective story - understood

¹⁷ "recognises before he analyses".

¹⁸ "'to see' for the reader".

¹⁹ Cf. the numerous works published by researchers at the University of Salamanca on Spanish criminal literature and cinema, coordinated by Àlex Martín Escribà and Javier Sánchez Zapatero. URL : <https://www.congresonegro.com/publicaciones/>

here in the broadest sense - and the political. If Madrid and Barcelona remain two undeniable poles of criminal spatiality in these productions (Barcelona cinema of the 1950s, *quinqui* cinema, Raúl Arévalo's *Tarde para la ira*, *Antidisturbios* by Isabel Peña and Rodrigo Sorogoyen, also director of the film *Que Dios nos perdone*), many films, series, graphic novels and comic strips decentralise their plots, anchored in other Autonomous Communities, whose local realities they allow us to explore, such as the Basque Country (*Todo por la pasta* by Enrique Urbizu, *El silencio de la ciudad blanca* by Daniel Calparsoro, *Las oscuras manos del olvido* de Felipe Hernández Cava y Bartolomé Seguí, the *Yo* trilogy by Antonio Altarriba and Keko), Navarre (adaptations of the Baztán trilogy by Fernando González Molina or Ernest Sala for the comic adaptation, *Muerte en San Fermín* de Alejandro Pedregosa y José Carlos Sánchez), Galicia (Miguel Conde's *O sabor das margaridas*, *El desorden que dejas* by Carlos Montero) the Valencian Community (*anción de atardecer*, de Jordi Pitarch y Carlos Tosca), the Canary islands (Jorge Coira's *Hierro*) or Andalusia (*7 vírgenes*, *Grupo 7* and *La isla mínima* by Alberto Rodríguez, *Toro* by Kike Maíllo, *El Inocente* by Oriol Paulo, *Brigada Costa del Sol* by Pablo Barrera and Fernando Bassi). Although it is coloured differently according to the location chosen and the identity markers displayed, the city as a criminogenic space is never reduced to a simple setting: seized as a character in its own right, it is an "agent de la fiction"²⁰ (J.-Y. Tadié) in that it motivates the acts of the investigators, victims and murderers who emanate from it, individuals from all social backgrounds who embody and prolong its dysfunctions.

It is precisely the way in which directors and authors seize the city as a represented space and diegetic construction that unfolds through a space of representation –the filmic space or that of the vignette, the strip, the board– that will be analysed here: we will be particularly interested in the framing favoured by these creators to materialise the views they take of the urban microcosms of Spain, in the light of the dialectic of monstration and occultation inherent in the concept of the frame. The study of the dialogical relations between the frame and the off-frame, the field and the off-field or the off-view shows visual truncations, narrative suspensions, effects of emptiness that solicit the invisible, unusual framings that focus attention "sur les zones mornes ou mortes de la scène"²¹ (P. Bonitzer, 1985). The aim is to examine the functioning of the frame as a constitutive element of a visual grammar specific to each language –cinema or television, comic strip or graphic novel– and centred on the composition and representation of the city, at the intersection of aesthetic perception and cognitive construction. We will look at the variations of the frame and the (de)framing in order to show how these visual –or audiovisual, as these objects also use sound– and narrative processes generate meaning and catalyse the values of the Spanish city in the construction of the discourse that underlies criminal fictions.

Although this publication does not exclude the study of transmedia adaptations as a creative phenomenon, it cannot be reduced to the latter. Authors may choose corpora from only one or other of the media mentioned in this presentation, in order to focus on its specificities.

Contributions should be written in French, Spanish or English and will appear in a forthcoming issue of the journal FLAMME. Authors should send a proposal of about one page by 31/03/2022 to the project coordinators, Diane Bracco (diane.bracco@unilim.fr) and Thomas Faye (thomas.faye@unilim.fr). The scientific committee's response will be communicated before 15/04/2022. Papers should be sent to the above email addresses by 15/10/2022. The publication is envisaged for early 2023.

²⁰ "agent of the fiction".

²¹ "in the mute or dead zones of the scene".

Scientific committee

Jean-Paul Aubert (Université Côte d'Azur)
Jan Baetens (Université catholique de Louvain)
Cécile Bertin (Université de Limoges)
Pascal Bonitzer (réalisateur, scénariste et essayiste)
Nicolas Couegnas (Université de Limoges)
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Lucia Quaquarelli (Université Paris Nanterre)
Myriam Roche (Université de Savoie Mont Blanc)
Bertrand Westphal (Université de Limoges)

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