

The Spanish Quinqui Film: Delinquency, Sound, Sensation, by Tom Whittaker,

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Tom Whittaker's *The Spanish Quinqui Film: Delinquency, Sound, Sensation* seeks to theorise the sociological, political and criminological significance of the films that made up a brief, but visceral cycle produced in Spain during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Whittaker's book situates the *quinqui* films within the broader context of Spain's transition to democracy, adding 'to a now substantial body of scholarship in Spanish cultural studies that has challenged the dominant narrative of the transition as one of civil liberties and celebration' (19). Furthermore, as the title suggests, the book engages with sound studies as a lens through which these ideas might be explored, offering analysis of aspects of *quinqui* film production, exhibition and reception.

Claiming to be 'the first major study of these films in English' (although Jorge González Del Pozo's translated and edited collection, *Quinqui Film in Spain*, was also released in 2020; see González Del Pozo 2020), the book takes some time to introduce the reader to the historical landscape in which the *quinqui* cycle of films was produced. In particular the focus is on the socio-political and economic factors that contributed to a growth in juvenile delinquency during the 1970s in and around Spain's larger cities. It is upon these young delinquents, and the reality of their lived experience, that the *quinqui* films cycle reflects. And in doing so Whittaker notes that many of the films also comment on reactions to this delinquency – by the police, by the media, and by the

wider society of the time. He refers to a moral panic that grew up around the young criminal element, rooted as much in their simple existence, as it was in any particular crimes they might have committed. This introduction is a fascinating and detailed account of the *quinqui* film's birth in a country going through significant transition.

Whittaker notes that the term *quinqui* 'derives from "quinquillero" or "quincallero", a derogatory term that was originally used to describe "mercheros", a nomadic ethnic group from Spain that eked out a living by collecting scrap metal' (2). During Spain's rapid economic expansion, internal migration to the large urban centers increased drastically, to a point where high rise shanty towns, or 'chabolismo vertical' were hastily and poorly constructed to accommodate this new urban underclass. The term *quinqui* became associated with this marginal group, and when Spain's 'economic miracle' faltered in the early 1970s, it became synonymous with a rapid growth in crime and juvenile delinquency.

Whittaker's analysis of *cine quinqui* explores 11 films from the cycle. The term 'cycle' is used over genre, and Whittaker refers to Amanda Ann Klein's (2011) suggestion that a cycle is limited to a production period of 5 -10 years and contains films largely defined by their topicality. The book suggests this is a more useful framework for considering not only the inception of *cine quinqui* but also its clamorous reception, both positive and negative, by Spanish cinema audiences at the time. Whittaker also notes that the *quinqui* film cycle, in common with other film cycles discussed by Klein (such as the American gangster film of the 1930s and the Blaxploitation films of the 1970s) has existed somewhat outside popular and academic discourse to date, suggesting that this

may be the result of the 'deviant subject matter' often associated with these film cycles (10). In this regard, the *quinqui* films that Whittaker discusses deliver on the promise of deviance, but the twist is that the narratives are largely drawn from real events: news reports, police files and direct interviews with the juvenile delinquents involved. And taking this reflection on reality a stage further, the films often made a point of using non-professional actors, employing young offenders living in the barrios where the films were shot, and where events like those they depicted took place.

The book is split into five chapters, each of which closely analyses a sample of *cine quinqui* to explore the cycle. Particular emphasis is placed on the sensorial aspects of the films, with a focus on the soundtrack. Noting that the films are often based on real events and that they employed juvenile delinquents as actors, Whittaker suggests a blurring of the distinction between the lived *quinqui* experience, and that depicted in the film cycle. He argues that sound is a key factor in this blurring process; from the familiar (at least to the contemporary audience) sound of a stolen Seat 124 hurtling down the street, to the pervasive wail of police sirens, these are sounds that invade personal and domestic spaces, which are prevalent in the contemporary soundscape, and which easily transition between the real world and that depicted in *cine quinqui*. Music is also a factor in this, with Whittaker noting in Chapter 5 how popular rumba artists like Los Chichos would feature on film soundtracks, and a process of cross-pollination would result in the music promoting the film, just as the film would embed the music in the lived experience of the *quinqui*.

Perhaps most interesting from a sonic standpoint, though, is the discussion of location sound, which relates to both the exhibition of the films in the 'cines de barrio' (neighbourhood cinemas), and the recording of the voices of the delinquents who acted in the *quinqui* films. The book notes on a number of occasions how the audience in these local cinemas would respond vocally at film screenings. For example, at one screening of José Antonio de la Loma's *Perros callejeros* (1977) in the barrio of San Ildefonso on the outskirts of Barcelona, there was cheering and booing and applause at scenes of violence (12-13). That the film was shot on location in La Mina, a barrio on the other side of the city, created not only a geographical connection for the young people watching the film, but also a tangible sonic link between their experience of the film soundtrack and their everyday existence. The voices and dialogue of the actors reinforces this even further, since the *quinqui* films sought an authenticity in the dialogue that relied at least in part on the co-operation of the non-professional actors in order to give some insight into the particular slang used on the streets.

As Whittaker notes, the 'direct sound' recording of dialogue added another level to this authenticity. Carlos Saura's *Deprisa, Deprisa* (1981), for instance, adopted a 'direct sound' recording process for some of the scenes featuring the young delinquent cast. This recording process, undertaken at the moment of filming rather than as part of the dubbing process in a studio after the fact, locates the young actors' voices very specifically in the geography and temporality of the filming locations. As Whittaker notes, the *quinqui* film often paralleled reality so closely that the blurring would have a negative impact on the young delinquents who acted in the films. Following the release

of *Deprisa, Deprisa*, for example, a number of cast members were subsequently arrested for robberies mirroring scenes in the film (146).

The Spanish Quinqui Film: Delinquency, Sound, Sensation offers a fascinating insight into a cycle of films that was, as Whittaker suggests, 'a truly popular cinema' (6), involving films that were informed by, as much as they reflected on, the lives of the juvenile delinquents living in the barrios.

Cormac Donnelly

Liverpool John Moores University

cormac@restrikestudios.co.uk

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