

# Urban Terror: Exploring Mobility and Dread in Contemporary Horror Films Set in Madrid

**Vicente Rodríguez Ortega**

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid  
[vrortega@hum.uc3m.es](mailto:vrortega@hum.uc3m.es)

## **Abstract**

Contemporary Spanish horror films have increasingly focused on the theme of mobility within Madrid's urban fabric, using the city's dynamic and often disorienting environment to amplify tension and fear. This presentation examines how these films portray the complexities of movement in Madrid, intertwining physical and psychological dimensions of mobility.

Films such as *Verónica*, *Malasaña 32*, *La Abuela*, and *El Bar* depict characters navigating through the city's labyrinthine streets, isolated buildings, and interconnected spaces, which serve as metaphors for the characters' inner turmoil and societal anxieties. The depiction of Madrid's urban specificities accentuates the sense of entrapment and the inescapability of horror, emphasizing the interplay between space and dread.

*Verónica* uses the densely populated, yet claustrophobic apartment blocks of Vallecas to underscore the protagonist's sense of isolation amidst a changing and menacing cityscape, while *Malasaña 32* situates its horror within an eerie neighborhood, highlighting the tension between the old and the new, the familiar and the uncanny. *La Abuela* further explores these themes by setting its story in an apartment where familial bonds and personal history become sources of dread, reflecting on how personal spaces within the urban environment can turn menacing. *El Bar* introduces a different angle by trapping its characters in a central Madrid café, where the city's bustling exterior contrasts sharply with the claustrophobic, paranoia-filled interior, emphasizing themes of social tension and survival.

These settings are not merely backdrops but are integral to the films' narratives, reflecting the city's ability to both protect and alienate its inhabitants. Through horror, these cinematic works offer diverse perspectives on the multifaceted nature of mobility in Madrid, using the city's urban fabric to explore deeper themes of fear, isolation, and the unknown. They provide a commentary on how urban mobility shapes and is shaped by psychological and societal tensions, contributing to a nuanced understanding of Madrid's socio-cultural landscape.

**Keywords:** Cinema; Horror; Madrid; Urban Space; Mobility

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## BIO

Vicente Rodríguez Ortega is Senior Lecturer at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. He has published articles in *Television & New Media*, *New Media & Society*, *Studies in European Cinemas* and *NECSUS*, among others, and over twenty book chapters. He is the co-editor of *Contemporary Spanish Cinema & Genre* and the author of *La ciudad global en el cine contemporáneo: una perspectiva transnacional* and *Spanish Horror Film and Television in the 21st Century*. His interests include digital technologies and representation, videographic criticism, contemporary Spanish media and film genres. He is member of the research group *TECMERIN* (Televisión-cine: memoria, representación e industria) and editor of *Tecmerin. Journal of Audiovisual Essays*.