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V for *Vivienda*, V for *Viñeta*: Residual and Residential Politics in Spanish Comics and Graphic Novels\*

Ryan Prout

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# V for *Vivienda*, V for *Viñeta*: Residual and Residential Politics in Spanish Comics and Graphic Novels\*

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## Introduction: Social Housing History and a ‘Francoland’ Perspective

There has been significant work in contemporary Hispanism on the process of gentrification in Spanish cities. I am thinking, for instance, of a number of articles and book chapters on José Luis Guerin’s film *En construcción* (2001), about the remaking of El Raval, in Barcelona, and the impact of property speculation and development on local communities.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, less attention has been given to how the built environment, and housing in particular, figures both in contemporary comics culture, and in films and other visual media from the second half of the twentieth century, and this, despite the fact that in Spain—as in much of Europe—the questions of where we live and of the marketization of shelter, have never been more political. A proposal I make here is that we need to look more closely at how housing policy has been reflected in Spanish visual narratives.

As an example of seemingly incidental reference to social housing policy in narrative film, I point to Juan Antonio Bardem’s *Calle Mayor* (1956). José Suárez’s fake romancing of the Spanish everytown’s most prominent unwed woman, Isabel, played by Betsy Blair—a fugitive in Francoist Spain from McCarthyism—includes simulated interest in scoping out the charms of a

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\* I have borrowed the first part of the title from V de Vivienda, the name of one of the Spanish citizens’ action and advocacy groups that came into being in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. The group works to change policy on evictions, and to hold the public authorities to their obligation to honour the constitution’s recognition of dignified housing as a right.

1 See, for example, Scott B. Kissick, ‘Barcelona as Urban Palimpsest: Architectonic Memory and Structural Violence in José Luis Guerin’s *En construcción* (2001)’, *Romance Quarterly*, 63:3 (2016), 124–30; and Antonio Sánchez, ‘*En construcción* and *El cielo gira*: The Representation of Space in Contemporary Spanish Cinema’, in *Seeing in Spanish: From Don Quixote to Daddy Yankee—22 Essays on Hispanic Visual Cultures*, ed. Ryan Prout & Tilmann Altenberg (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 43–58.

new build apartment block on the city's still unpaved and undeveloped outskirts. Juan, Isabel's false suitor, takes notes as they amble around the inside of a still unfinished building, his duped love interest projecting plans for matrimonial bliss on the views from unglazed windows and the still sketchy layout of the happy home. The implication, in this story about deception and false appearances, is that just as Juan's interest in Isabel is a shell, and her projections of a married life with him are built on sand, so too the new housing developments that were going up in the first concentric suburbs around Spanish cities were an artifice, a falsified social project not really intended for the putative beneficiaries (Figures 1a & 1b).

Querying the sincerity of the purported purpose of new housing developments seems to have been a meme of critical engagement with the Spanish authorities in the late 1950s, exemplified in Honor Tracy's travel writing about Spain. In *Silk Hats and No Breakfast*, her account of a journey made in 1955 to regions of Spain she considered to have been neglected previously by English visitors, Tracy turns her attention to the countryside, but also records changes to the built environment. A writer of fiction as well as a journalist, in her Spanish travelogue Tracy combines the novelist's eye for distinctive human character traits with the dogged persistence of a reporter. Looking for the reality of Franco's welfare state, as opposed to the blueprint for it, she is curious to see for herself where and how people live in the cities. In Cádiz she secures an interview with the Delegación Provincial de los Sindicales and is rewarded with a guided visit to what she calls 'the *viviendas*':

These are the working class housing estates that are going up at a great pace in many parts of the country [...] My escort knocked in a peremptory way on the door of one of [the flats] and we were at once admitted [...] It probably was no worse than than many council houses in England and the rent was only a hundred and twenty-five pesetas a month; but the tenant did not seem to belong to the working class [...] I wondered how many more of [the flats], put up for the workers with such fanfare, were in fact housing the officials of the Party and their friends.<sup>2</sup>

Tracy finds a later part of her excursion around Cadiz more authentic. Leaving behind her official guide, she says:

[I] wandered into the quarter where the people really do live, with the crumbling walls and the missing windows, the screaming children and

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2 Honor Tracy, *Silk Hats and No Breakfast: Notes on a Spanish Journey* (London: Methuen, 1957), 43.



Figure 1a

Screen capture from *Calle Mayor* (dir. Juan Antonio Bardem, 1956).  
The unpaved road leading to a new build site.



Figure 1b

Screen capture from *Calle Mayor* (dir. Juan Antonio Bardem, 1956).  
Facades, architectural and interpersonal.

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the starveling dogs [...] I sat for a while in a café where terrible figures that Goya might have painted visited the tables one by one.<sup>3</sup>

For this traveller from Dublin in the 1950s, the contrast between the phony comforts of the *viviendas* and the more familiar, and authentic squalor of a typical scene from ‘Francoland’, demonstrate that Spain’s pretensions in the 1950s to creating something akin to the welfare states that were emerging in northern Europe were hollow and false.<sup>4</sup>

Academic opinion seems to agree, largely, with the circumspection of this traveller from the 1950s. Reviewing housing and welfare in Spain from the Civil War to the 2010s, José María Cardesín finds that ‘between 1950 and 1980 Spain boasted the highest rates of urban growth of the future EU’ and that ‘the strongest urban growth in Europe was not accompanied by the construction of the welfare state that characterized the system of Bretton Woods’. However, the same author also remarks that the programmes established by the Franco regime’s Instituto Nacional de Vivienda were responsible for the construction of more than half a million homes between 1940 and 1970, ‘[o]ffering affordable rents, targeting state workers or employees of large companies’.<sup>5</sup> Reaching any absolute conclusions about the worthiness of social housing policy in this period is complicated further by the sharp changes in direction that occurred under the Franco regime. In the 1940s, rent control was extremely strict, which favoured tenants; by the 1960s schemes similar to the right to buy programme established by the Thatcher Government in the UK in the 1980s were in favour.

The boundaries between metropolitan housing stock that predates democracy and what has come since are being blurred by the campaigns to remove from the urban fabric the plaques that indicate buildings that were put up under the auspices of the Instituto Nacional de Vivienda (INV) (1939–1977). The sheer number of these, and the effort required to remove them, suggests that Honor Tracy’s impression that the *viviendas* she saw were merely show homes was not entirely accurate. In 2016, Inmaculada [Ada] Colau, the mayor of Barcelona, put unemployed people to work in order to fulfil provisions of the Ley de Memoria Histórica by tasking them with identifying for removal all the INV plaques that they could find.<sup>6</sup> In

3 Tracy, *Silk Hats and No Breakfast*, 45.

4 I have borrowed the designation ‘Francoland’ from Antonio Muñoz Molina, ‘En Francoland’, *El País*, 13 October 2017, <[https://elpais.com/cultura/2017/10/10/babelia/1507657374\\_425961.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2017/10/10/babelia/1507657374_425961.html)> (accessed 10 October 2018). Muñoz Molina describes the re-emergence of the Black Legend in reporting outside Spain of the friction there between neo-nationalist and constitutionalist aspirations.

5 José María Cardesín, ‘City, Housing and Welfare in Spain: From the Civil War to Present Times’, *Urban History*, 43:2 (2016), 285–305 (pp. 288, 305 & 290).

6 Anon., ‘Ada Colau echa mano de un centenar de parados para limpiar Barcelona de placas franquistas’, *ECD Confidencial Digital*, 30 March 2017, <<https://www.elconfiden>

just one neighbourhood of Barcelona, nearly three hundred of the offending plaques were found. By taking away evidence that buildings were originally constructed to provide affordable homes, what exactly is it that is being historically remembered? By forgetting the original purpose of these constructions as social housing, does it not, if anything, make it easier for new owners to turn out long standing tenants and repurpose social housing as short term holiday lets and Airbnb apartments, a phenomenon that is occurring across Spain's cities? The value of legacy social housing from the Franco era has become entangled with the struggle between neo-nationalists and their opponents, too. Somatemp, a group opposed to neo-nationalist separatism in Catalonia, has said of the INV plaques:

Son tantas que dejan en evidencia la caída en picado de la vivienda de construcción oficial durante la Democracia. Pero la excusa es que les molesta el yugo y las flechas.<sup>7</sup>

While housing is arguably politicized in all national cultures, Spain's post-industrial history of social housing-stock that developed largely outside the framework of a welfare state, lends particular nuance to the meanings and values associated with homes and houses. In the sections that follow I look at recent reassessments of housing policy in Spain, by economists and activists, that find significant continuity between the frameworks established under the dictatorship and the structures that continue to determine what Spain's housing stock looks like today.

I then turn to *13, Rue del Percebe*, Francisco Ibáñez's long running comic strip, begun in 1961, that narrates the fortunes of a microcosm of Spanish society seen through the removed fourth wall of an apartment block, one whose layout looks similar to that of a Franco era city centre *vivienda*.<sup>8</sup> The intention of looking first at *13, Rue del Percebe*, and then, in the final section, at Paco Roca's *La casa* (2015) is to bring into conversation two forms of sequential art—a comic strip and a graphic novel—that also convey in juxtaposition the continuities and profound changes between what housing meant in visual print culture in the 1960s and what it means today.<sup>9</sup>

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[cialdigital.com/articulo/politica/Ada-Colau-centenar-Barcelona-franquistas/20170329195628084878.html](http://cialdigital.com/articulo/politica/Ada-Colau-centenar-Barcelona-franquistas/20170329195628084878.html)> (accessed 1 May 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Anon., '¡Increíble! Colau utiliza a los parados para localizar las placas con el yugo y las flechas', *Somatemp. Catalanitat és Hispanitat*, 29 August 2016, <<https://somatemp.me/2016/08/29/increible-colau-utiliza-a-los-parados-para-localizar-las-placas-con-el-yugo-y-las-flechas/>> (accessed 1 May 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Francisco Ibáñez, *13, Rue del Percebe (edición integral)* (Barcelona, Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Paco Roca, *La casa* (Bilbao, Astiberri Ediciones, 2015). Further references are to this edition and will be given in the body of the article.

## The Persistence of ‘FrancoLand’? New Economist and Activist Readings of the Autochthonous Roots of the post-2008 Housing Crisis

In 2011, *Españistán, de la burbuja inmobiliaria a la crisis*, Aleix Saló’s promotional video for his graphic novel *Españistán: este país se va a la mierda*,<sup>10</sup> the first volume in what elsewhere I have called his Troika Trilogy of comics,<sup>11</sup> was taken up across the spectrum of Spanish media outlets as a user friendly interpretation of the roots and causes of Spain’s experience of the post-2008 financial crash. Saló makes prominent in his analysis the introduction by José María Aznar in 1998 of legislation that liberalized property development (La Ley del Suelo de 1998):

Año 1998. Aznar [...] tuvo una aparición del dios del neoliberalismo que le reveló en primicia la nueva Ley de suelo [y] su fórmula era simple: si aumentamos el terreno urbanizable y convertimos el mercado del suelo en un negocio superrentable para los empresarios, se multiplicarán las inversiones, se construirán más casas, y como habrá más oferta, bajarán los precios y los jóvenes podrán por fin comprarse una vivienda.

Y así fue.

Se hizo realidad el Spanish Dream y todos fuimos felices en el país de la gominola.

Vale. Quizá no fue exactamente así.<sup>12</sup>

In the two volumes of architectural and economic analysis that followed *Españistán*, namely *Simiocracia*, and *Euro pesadilla*, Saló situates the fallout of the financial crisis in Spain within a panoramic history of urban and agricultural development—since the beginning of human society—and within global patterns of boom and bust.<sup>13</sup> While the sweep of this perspective is impressive, it neglects an analysis more tightly focused on Spain’s twentieth-century economic history that could locate connections between policies and practices developed during the dictatorship and Spain’s particular vulnerabilities in the democratic era to the ripple effects of the 2008 global financial crisis. Commingling approaches to housing in visual print media from periods before and after the Transition, as I aim to

10 Aleix Saló, *Españistán: este país se va a la mierda* (Barcelona: Glénat España, 2011); Aleix Saló, *Españistán, de la burbuja inmobiliaria a la crisis*, 25 May 2011, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7P2ExRF3GQ>> (accessed 1 May 2018).

11 See Ryan Prout, ‘From Boom to Bubble and Bust: Comical Economics in Aleix Saló’s Troika Trilogy’, *International Journal of Comic Art*, 16:1 (2014), 458–76.

12 Saló, *Españistán, de la burbuja inmobiliaria a la crisis*.

13 Aleix Saló, *Simiocracia: crónica de la gran resaca económica* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2012); and his *Euro pesadilla: alguien se ha comido a la clase media* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2013).



do in this article, addresses the gap, or gutter, in the sequence of Saló's narrative trilogy, and also discovers the latency of Francoism as it makes itself felt in post-crisis housing policy. What happened in the gaps between 13, *Rue del Percebe*, the Transition, and the period that unfolded from the 2008 financial crash? Read as legitimate historical sources and in dialogue, Saló's visual economic history and the other visual print media studied here enable the dynamic transfer and multidirectional memory that allow us to see continuities around and under the transition, as well as the closures that it putatively demarcates.

Born in 1983, Saló's perspective can perhaps be explained in part by the fact that he belongs to a generation for which the regime is not a lived history; whether this detachment accounts for the success with which his narrative penetrated Spanish media is more moot. Leaving aside this speculation, however, they are questions about the legacy of twentieth-century housing policy that I want to develop here in order to understand why housing and homes have figured in Spanish comics and graphic novels since the 1960s, and Francisco Ibáñez's 13, *Rue del Percebe*, to the 2010s and Paco Roca's *La casa*. Why should it be that, as Paco Roca has suggested, 13, *Rue del Percebe*, a comic strip about *housing* should be 'nuestras *Meninas* [...] una de las imágenes más icónicas y reconocibles del tebeo español'.<sup>14</sup>

To approach this question I am looking at the work of Emmanuel Rodríguez and Isidro Hernández in *Fin de ciclo: financiarización, territorio y sociedad de propietarios en la onda larga del capitalismo hispano (1959–2010)*, as well as Carlos Pereda's analysis of the tensions between housing rights and the property business, and Raquel Rodríguez and Mario Espinoza's analysis *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda: más allá de las contradicciones del modelo inmobiliario español*.<sup>15</sup> These three analytical perspectives share the view that while the housing crisis in Spain and what has happened to the country's economy since 2008 reflect global patterns, the precise way in which the crash unfolded in Spain was conditioned by policies hatched in the 1950s that have never been subject to root and branch revision. Pereda writes that, in general, '[l]a política de

14 Quoted in José María Robles, 'Así sería hoy la España de "13, Rue del Percebe"', *El Mundo*, 23 January 2018, <<https://www.elmundo.es/papel/historias/2018/01/23/5a60de4ae2704edb3b8b45a9.html>> (accessed 24 January 2018).

15 Emmanuel Rodríguez López & Isidro López Hernández, *Fin de ciclo: financiarización, territorio y sociedad de propietarios en la onda larga del capitalismo hispano (1959–2010)* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2010); Carlos Pereda, '1,7 millones de desahucios: el negocio inmobiliario se antepone al derecho a la vivienda', *Colectivo Ioé: Intervención sociológica*, 2018, <<https://www.colectivoioe.org/index.php/publicaciones/show/id/68>>, 1–24 (accessed 3 September 2020); and Raquel Rodríguez Alonso & Mario Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda: más allá de las contradicciones del modelo inmobiliario español* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2018).

vivienda mantenida en España [...] se ha orientado más a asegurar el negocio financiero-inmobiliario que a proteger el derecho a la vivienda'.<sup>16</sup> Rodríguez Alonso and Espinoza Pino point to the seamless continuities between housing policy under Franco and subsequent democratic administrations:

Si algo no hizo la era democrática respecto de la vieja dictadura fue innovar en material económica y en políticas de vivienda, permaneciendo apegada a una herencia que resultó profundamente nociva.<sup>17</sup>

They situate these uninterrupted housing policies alongside a production model that was also less changed between the dictatorship era and democracy, in the 1980s, than one might suppose from the perception that the Transition entailed a radical and wholesale departure with the past: 'La flamante democracia Española insistió en el modelo productivo legado por el franquismo'.<sup>18</sup> López Hernández and Rodríguez López identify '[d]eficiencias del modelo de acumulación español' that they trace back to the 1950s and an industrial base imbalanced between very large oligarchichal companies and smaller, under-capitalized, businesses.<sup>19</sup> Their analysis also reminds us that the 2008 housing bubble was by no means Spain's first experience of such a phenomenon and that a similar boom-bust cycle occurred in the 1970s when, in the space of three years—1970–1973—400,000 new homes were built and prices rose more steeply than they had in the entirety of the preceding decade. As in the 2000s, this bubble preceded a crash and by 1978 more than a million Spaniards were unemployed.

Read in tandem, these economic approaches to the history of Spain's post-industrial housing policy illustrate that continuities between the regime era and democracy are an effect of cultural as well as of legislative legacies. Rodríguez Alonso and Espinoza Pino note that

[...] el régimen de Franco manufacturó con tesón aquello que podríamos denominar como una 'cultura de propietarios' [...] Para ello era fundamental promocionar la familia y el hogar como elementos constitutivos del orden social, haciendo de estos los principios ideológicos de las políticas de vivienda.<sup>20</sup>

The 'tsunami de cemento [que] inundó todo el suelo del Estado' and which flowed from the cultural normalization of the shift in housing policy in the

16 Pereda, '1,7 millones de desahucios', 1.

17 Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda*, 19.

18 Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda*, 46.

19 Rodríguez López & López Hernández, *Fin de ciclo*, 15 & 150.

20 Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda*, 19–20.

1950s served also to cement a very strong bond between social and kinship structures, and the structure of the housing market in Spain.<sup>21</sup>

325 Franco's minister for housing in the 1950s, José Luis de Arrese, when interviewed by the newspaper *ABC*, summed up this fusion of culture and policy when he said that '[e]l ideal es que cada familia sea propietaria de su hogar'.<sup>22</sup> Between 1950 and 1981, the rental market in Spain shrank from 51 percent of homes to 21 percent. Thus, Arrese made this comment as Spain was turning from a country that had a similar division between rented and owner-occupied homes as countries elsewhere in Europe to one  
330 that would, by the 1980s have the highest rates of ownership—82 percent—and the smallest rental market of the EU15. Having tied family to property, when property crashed, family structures would also be tested to destruction, and it is no accident, therefore, that we see in Spanish sequential art, as in other media, a concern with housing, from the 1960s  
335 on, and with the vulnerabilities of the family to the vagaries of the boom-bust property cycle.

Pereda underscores that housing is considered a fundamental right by the institutions of the EU and attributes to the difference between Spanish and European perspectives the fact that European legislation has been more  
340 supportive of those facing eviction in Spain than their own successive governments' legislation.<sup>23</sup> 'Frente a los modelos desarrollados en el norte de Europa', say Rodríguez Alonso and Espinoza Pino, 'la política de vivienda en España ha sido eminentemente fiscal y pobre en medidas habitacionales', an observation the authors link to the fact that by the  
345 beginning of the 1980s the rate of owner-occupation in Spain was already almost double the figure for northern European countries such as Holland and Denmark.<sup>24</sup> This greater concentration of the owner-occupier sector has made housing in Spain far more insecure at times of crisis and during the bust part of boom-bust economic cyclicity. The authors of *De la especulación al derecho de la vivienda* suggest that this insecurity is only  
350 exacerbated by the fact that social policies have not kept pace with the entrenchment of wealth inequalities.<sup>25</sup>

355 It is for this reason, perhaps, that the story of housing, in comics and the graphic novel, is one in which thematic continuities between the 1960s and the present come easily to the surface. Reflecting on the publication in 2016 of a compendium version of *13, Rue de Percebe*, Carles Geli remarked that

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21 Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda*, 50.

360 22 Redactor de *ABC*, 'El problema de la vivienda es inmenso y desgraciadamente tardará mucho en resolverse' [interview with José Luis de Arrese], *ABC* (Seville), 9 February 1958, pp. 29–30.

23 Pereda, '1,7 millones de desahucios', 6–7, 21.

24 Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda*, 26.

25 Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda*, 137.

‘España no está hoy mucho más lejos que la que reflejaba [Ibáñez] el 6 de marzo de 1961 cuando estrenaban la revista *Tío Vivo* su primer 13, *Rue del Percebe*’, and the strip’s author, when asked what the location would be like in a contemporary setting, says ‘en el fondo, sería lo mismo y yo tendría los mismos problemas para llenar estos agujeritos’.<sup>26</sup> Antoni Guiral, the editor of the series, is also moved by this comic strip about housing to muse on the unchanging nature of Spanish society since the 1960s: ‘Aunque [el comic] sea un espejo deformante, creo que hay mucho de lo que éramos. Quizá de lo que seguimos siendo’.<sup>27</sup>

A peculiarity of the Spanish housing sector that is overlooked by Saló, but reiterated by analysts like Rodríguez Alonso and Espinoza Pino, is the very tight integration and mutual dependency of the tourist industry, finance, and the construction business: when one lapses, the others are pulled down far more sharply than might be the case in an economy that was not so much in thrall to ‘un monocultivo de cemento aderezado con turismo e impulsado por las finanzas’.<sup>28</sup> While other vestiges of Francoism may have been thrown off, for successive governments since that regime, the failure to revamp housing policy and to undo the pernicious interlocking of tourism, housing, and construction, has meant that ‘lo importante era engrasar la máquina de la construcción y el cement’.<sup>29</sup> A corollary of this monoculture and its associated sectorial triad conjoining the fate of families in their homes to the tourist industry and finance is the paradox summed up by the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca in its slogan ‘Casas sin gente, gente sin casas’.<sup>30</sup> As the number of homeless people in Spain has risen, so has the number of inhabitable but unoccupied living spaces.

Already by 1950, 5.2 percent of Spain’s housing stock was unoccupied. By 1981 this figure had risen to 33 percent. Rarely noted as a marker of the Transition to Democracy, the emergence of the second home or additional family property was a significant phenomenon, a fact that gives some additional political context to Roca’s *La casa*. Unoccupied and unsold, the second home in *La casa* would be an addition to the half a million new and unsold homes that existed in Spain in 2014, effectively making SAREB, the organization set up to manage the *parque de viviendas*, Europe’s largest estate agency.<sup>31</sup>

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26 Carles Geli, ‘“13, Rue Del Percebe”, inmueble rehabilitado’, *El País*, 16 March 2016 <[https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/03/15/catalunya/1458069688\\_114162.html](https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/03/15/catalunya/1458069688_114162.html)> (accessed 1 May 2018). Ibáñez’s remark referred to here is quoted in Geli’s article.

27 Quoted in Robles, ‘Así sería hoy la España de “13, Rue del Percebe”’.

28 Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda*, 42.

29 Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda*, 25.

30 Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda*, 23.

31 Set up in 2012, SAREB (La Sociedad de Gestión de Activos procedentes de la Reestructuración Bancaria) is more commonly known as Spain’s ‘banco malo’. It ingested many bad property debts allowing the losses of corporate financial organizations to be

A 2011 census found that there were 3.4 million empty homes in Spain and that 84 percent of them were in a good enough state of repair to be inhabited.<sup>32</sup> The spectre of the empty home, then, looms over the Spanish housing sector both as a reminder of spaces emptied by eviction, and as a testament to decades of policy that has completely failed to match supply and demand. Ibáñez talks about facing the same difficulties today as he did in the 1960s when confronted with creating original content for the unchanging frame *13, Rue del Percebe's* five storeys, but a more accurate representation of the structure for today might be one that was entirely evacuated of human content.

### ***13, Rue de Percebe: 'Nuestras Meninas'***

In the earlier strips that comprise the complete series of *13, Rue del Percebe*, a recurring subtheme concerns a couple who grow old waiting for an apartment to become available in Ibáñez's microcosm. The squeeze on available living space in the 1960s is evident in many of the regular features of the strip. Every available space in the building is turned over to accommodation, including the attic and the lift. Even the sewers are given over to rented accommodation. Emerging regularly from the storm drain in front of Number 13, Don Hurón fights a constant battle with inconsiderate pedestrians overhead and rodents and other invaders below ground. As José María Robles notes 'Don Hurón residía allí en régimen de alquiler, lo que confirma que la presión inmobiliaria ya existía a principio de los 60'.<sup>33</sup>

Although *13, Rue del Percebe* presents an affectionate view of the strip's denizens, it can hardly be said that its representation of housing in Spain's cities reflects policies that were enormously successful. It would have been difficult for the regime to censor this aspect of the comic, given the fact that its own ministers addressed housing as a problem that needed to be solved. Instead, the censors intervened over the indefatigable scientist who lives with his hapless but charming monster, (clearly modelled on Frankenstein's creation in the James Whale films [1931 & 1935]). The authorities were more attentive to theological niceties than they were to Ibáñez's comic depiction of housing stock bursting at the seams: 'la creación sólo puede ser obra del Altísimo'.<sup>34</sup> The monster maker's flat is eventually taken on by a tailor. In the interim, the vacant flat becomes a space where Ibáñez plays with the misrepresentation of accommodation by vendors and landlords. The same space evacuated by the censor's banishment of

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socialized. The equivalent of €12,830 debt burden was moved to every Spanish family unit (Rodríguez Alonso & Espinoza Pino, *De la especulación al derecho a la Vivienda*, 57).

32 Pereda, '1,7 millones de desahucios', 6.

33 Robles, 'Así sería hoy la España de "13, Rue del Percebe" '.

34 Ibáñez, quoted in Geli, ' "13, Rue Del Percebe", inmueble rehabilitado'.

Franco-Frankenstein is filled with another thorny theme for the regime: substandard living spaces and a housing stock that does not live up to the promises made by those in the Ministry of Housing (formed in 1957) to fix the problem. Ibáñez's block often resembles a zoo and the reader has the sense that the human occupants are contained as much as housed in the building. The animals even share the humans' rebellious streak. A parrot adopted by the elderly pet enthusiast turns out to like squawking profanities. When she ties its beak shut it takes to writing protest graffiti on the walls of her flat. Contemporary geopolitical developments enter Ibáñez's world too. A visitor surprised by seeing a dog flying circuits around the old lady's head received the explanation that the animal had grown accustomed to such an orbital existence as a space dog.<sup>35</sup>

Don Hurón is not the only character whose circumstances indicate 'la presión inmobiliaria'. Doña Leonor, a landlady, comes up with ever more ingenious schemes for fitting more and more subletters in her apartment. For example, for an exceptionally tall subtenant she finds accommodation by making holes in a wall through which his legs and feet can protrude when he goes to bed. In *El Mundo's* updating of the strip for the 2010s, her apartment has become an Airbnb destination, an acknowledgement of the encroachment on people's domestic spaces of Spain's tourist industry.

In *El Mundo's* millennial remake of Ibáñez's apartment block, the familiar characters from the 1960s have been replaced by Uber drivers, hackers, neo-hippies, and the dubious grocer by a trendy pop up business. The story populates the new version of the address with personalities who represent the clichés of a hi-tech, made-over, and repurposed urban environment. This leads some of the readers who post comments on the story to conclude that the remake is rather less in touch with the gritty realities of Spanish city dwelling than was the original. Whereas the characters who populate Ibáñez's imagined complex and its surroundings would recognize their updated selves in the post-crisis era through the continued struggle to find accommodation against a back-drop marked by a shortage of adequate housing, they might be baffled by the addition to the residential landscape of problems such as the commonplace eviction of tenants and home owners, abandoned and half-built developments, and apartments turned over to the sale of hard drugs. The many missing aspects of the remake signal the difficulties a contemporary analogue of Ibáñez's would have in conjoining social critique and comic strip humour. Unopinante asks '¿Y los okupas? Y los enganches eléctricos ilegales? Y los narco pisos? [...] Pues anda que no

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35 The strip that includes the flying dog dates from 1962. The first Sputnik launched in 1957 and Laika, the first Soviet space dog, was the occupant of Sputnik 2, also sent into orbit in 1957.

falta ahí realidad social y de la buena además'.<sup>36</sup> In a similar vein, La Fan underscores the discrepancy between *El Mundo's* affectionate reloading of Number 13 and the more expansive realities of urban developments:

485 [...] falta el funcionario judicial y el desahucio en directo. Y el 13 Rue del  
Percebe debería ser Urbanización Percebe fase 1 y 2, con la vista del  
descampado y los esqueletos de la fase 3 rematados por el cartel del  
idílico aspecto que tendría que tener, piscinas y pistas de padel  
incluidas.<sup>37</sup>

490 Where the readers' forum and the original article converge is around the  
fracturing of community. The repopulated building in *El Mundo's*  
temporary remake is much less obviously a cross section of society than was  
Ibáñez's original cast of characters

495 A more effective contrast to the original *13, Rue del Percebe* might be  
Paco Roca's *La casa*. The verticality of Ibáñez's strip cedes to the  
horizontal format of Roca's graphic novel, the layered portrait  
orientation snapshot of the strata of a community giving way to the  
landscape orientation of a family album. Juxtaposing the two narratives  
500 makes a counterpoint between the busy social interactions going on in  
*13, Rue del Percebe* and the heart-wrenching loneliness of the elderly  
father figure in the opening frames of *La casa*: a figure who forgets his  
own routine, also seems forgotten by the sorts of routines that lend  
familiarity and shape to the narrative in Ibáñez's strip.

505 Between them, the two titles show us though their focus on housing a  
society that has become progressively atomized and privatized, the problem  
of how to find living space yielding in the later narrative to the question (for  
some) of what to do with unoccupied living space. While both narratives  
might be regarded as representing in microcosm issues of national  
510 significance, the sweep of *13, Rue del Percebe* and its facility for capturing  
many simultaneities in a present moment gives way to a concern with  
memory, and to a single family.

### 515 ***La casa: Atomization, Emptiness, Memory***

The Spanish translation of Richard McGuire's *Here*, Daniel Torres' *La casa: crónica de una conquista*, and Paco Roca's *La casa*, all published in 2015, (re-)introduced to the sequential art marketplace in Spain an exploration of the inscription of architectural, family, social, and economic histories in the

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36 Various authors, Readers' Comments appended to 'Así sería hoy la España de "13, Rue del Percebe" '.

37 Various authors, Readers' Comments appended to 'Así sería hoy la España de "13, Rue del Percebe" '.

more modest spaces of the home.<sup>38</sup> By the time Torres' 600-page graphic history appeared, he had been working on the book for seven years and links its genesis directly to the financial crisis of 2008 and the dramatic fallout it had for a Spanish housing market that had become an enormous speculative bubble. A panel that merges, within a mandala, a cave-man scene and astronauts floating above earth in a space station illustrates the encyclopaedic scope of Torres' perspective.

Compared with Torres' book, Paco Roca's is far more localized and tells an intimate history informed by social history, if not by historical memory. Roca outlined in a 2016 interview how this graphic novel is one of his most personal projects, prompted by the death of his father:

Writing *La casa* was for me a kind of exercise in memory restoration [...] I wanted to do it [...] when I felt lost inside the turmoil of all those feelings [...] Normally, you try not to think too much about who your reader is going to be, but in this case, I did and I realized that the person I was making the graphic novel for was me.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps it is because Roca figured himself as his own reader that he creates alter egos both for himself and his family members in the graphic novel. In the story he becomes José, who is born three years later than the biographical Paco Roca, but is clearly the same character. His *alter ego* and older brother, Vicente, and younger sister, Clara, return to the second home their family built, beginning in the 1970s, in the Valencian countryside. In the process of fixing up the house for sale, their interactions and memories bring to life a family and social history that bridges three generations, only one of which spent the majority of its adult life living under dictatorship.

Uncovering the construction of the house uncovers the construction of a modern Spanish family, and, possibly, what is disavowed about intergenerational transition. Roca's *alter ego* comments that '[s]i viniese uno des estos programas tipo quien vive aqui saldrían espantados. No llegarían a saber que criterio estético tienen los dueños de la casa' (*La casa*, 17). The house has served as a repository for everything that did not fit in to the family's main home, from souvenirs from Toledo to members of the older generation. When Paco and his siblings leave home, his elderly parents spend more and more time, alone, and without visitors, in this liminal second home space, out of sight and out of mind. A family tree organized

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38 Daniel Torres, *La casa: crónica de una conquista* (Barcelona: Norma, 2015); Richard McGuire, *Aquí*, trans. Esther Cruz Santaella (Barcelona: Salamandra Graphic, 2015).

39 Quoted in Ryan Prout & Roberto Bartual, 'Wrinkles, Furrows, and Laughter Lines: Paco Roca in Conversation at the Lakes International Comic Art Festival', *International Journal of Comic Art*, 20:1 (2018), 510–23 (p. 516).



around a central motif of a small figure laying bricks makes visual the intertwining of the two narrative strands about construction.

*La casa* can also be seen as an effort by Roca to give his father a voice and a narrative. The page with which the novel opens—completely devoid of text—  
565 has become an exemplar of how effective purely visual storytelling can be. A process of small accretions and subtractions tells us everything we need to know about the old age of Roca's father, his increasing senility and senescence, and then his disappearance from his own routines. This series of panels also tells us that his is a story, until now, untold either in images  
570 or words.

The everyday life of Roca's father was largely invisible to history not only because of Franco and the legacy of the regime, but also because of class. For democrats and dictators alike, his career in blue collar work on an assembly line, and as a delivery man, and as a messenger for an advertising  
575 company, was unexceptional. There is little sense in *La casa* of Roca's father having suffered oppression outside his limited means, though the flashbacks to his childhood reference hunger several times.

The father's modest social status is touchingly codified in *La casa* through his fetishization of the pergola he wishes to build onto the back of the holiday home, so that his family can dine *al fresco*, under a trellis supporting sinewed vines, in emulation of a scene at his boss' house that had epitomized the high  
580 life for him. Posthumously, Roca's avatar and his siblings complete this project and its visual description includes a typically inventive and engaging visual device of the sort that distinguishes Roca's work (Figure 2a). The pergola construction sequence of panels is interrupted by one that simulates the flat pack instructions for step by step pergola assembly. As well as introducing an element of visual humour to the story, this device also comments subtly on the democratization for Roca's generation of what had been a fetish object for his father's.  
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While Roca makes a joke of the book's usual landscape format, noting that it confounds booksellers and buyers alike, the album, or memory strip, orientation allows him to run two interconnected sequences alongside each other.<sup>40</sup> For example, Vicente, the elder brother, describes to his own son in the upper sequence how he and his siblings eventually stopped coming to the holiday home, while the lower sequence depicts the busy, and then  
595 dwindling family activity, around the house in the 1980s (Figure 2b). Speech bubbles suture the gutters suggesting that the contemporary narrative provoked by the house reconciles the history to which it belongs with the present.  
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40 Quoted in Laura Barrachina, *La hora del bocadillo*, '“Las casas” de Daniel Torres y Paco Roca', RTVE Radio 3, 9 January 2016; available online at <[https://mediavod-lvlt.rtve.es/resources/TE\\_SHORABO/mp3/9/3/1452357908039.mp3](https://mediavod-lvlt.rtve.es/resources/TE_SHORABO/mp3/9/3/1452357908039.mp3)> (accessed 10 August 2020).

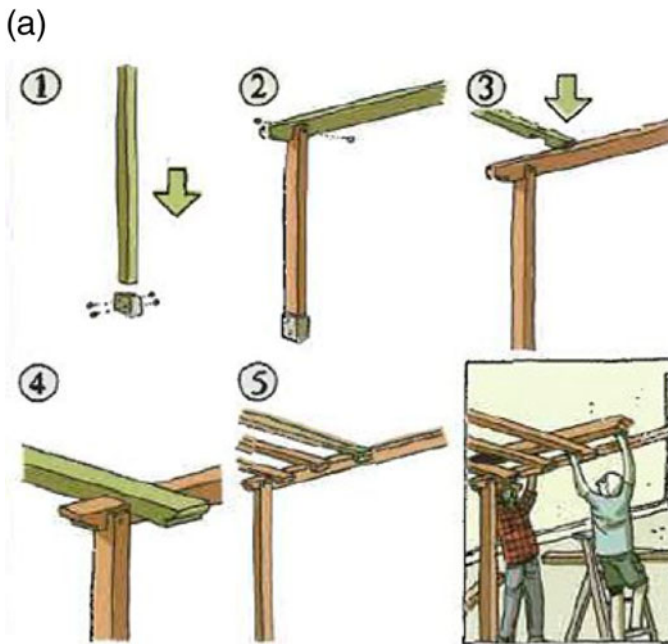


Figure 2a  
Paco Roca, *La casa*.

Building the democratized flat-pack pergola.

Reproduced by courtesy of Paco Roca, Astiberri Ed. Española, Fantagraphics Ed. Americana.

Unlike the use of montage in *La casa*, Roca's excursions into diagrammatic forms represent a technical feature without a ready analogue in fiction film. We see that his avatar in *La casa* imagines the process of fixing up the house as coterminous with a process of throwing into a dumpster not only all the material clutter in the second home, but also the memories the individual objects represent. This diagram also describes the movement from an economy of objects to one of experiences. The third generation are uninterested in the Scattergories game that turns up in the garage: they have a digital version on their smart phones. But the inverse of this worldwide fire sale of everything in the material dimension, except real estate, is the conversion of homes and houses into casino chips—shelter having become one of the few properties for which a digital replacement does not exist. Thus, the siblings in *La casa* find themselves facing the quandary of what to do with the house they have inherited and how to detach its value as a property from the storehouse of memories it also represents.

Between the two chronological sequences, and between the frames, then, there are other shifts besides those of political transition specific to Spain. The virtual world has been busy, meanwhile, eviscerating the material one. In an interview with RTVE, Roca reflects that whereas his father used the project to

(b)

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Colour online, B/W in print



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Figure 2b

Paco Roca, *La casa*.

Two channels of horizontal narrative run in parallel.

Reproduced by courtesy of Paco Roca, Astiberri Ed. Española, Fantagraphics Ed. Americana.

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build a second home to make sense of his life, his own sense of purpose comes from writing and drawing books, a transition that represents not only social mobility, from working class to urbane metropolitanism, but also one from material to discursive value.<sup>41</sup> When Roca's avatar and his family decide to sell up, their gesture is scarcely comparable to the determination of Spanish local authorities to erase from urban space any evidence of the construction work of the INV.

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Vicente says: 'Vender esto es como deshacernos de nuestro pasado', but José counters: 'No necesitamos esta casa para acordarnos de papa' (*La casa*, 121). Yet, leaving aside Roca's graphic novel and the reluctant equation made between author and protagonist, as if he were afraid of the book being a social document, the closing up of the house and its sale represents further shuttering of some of the continuities between the Franco era and what came next, which sits less comfortably with the dictates of historical memory and with the notion that the post-2008 crisis (which is what problematizes the sale of the house) had nothing to do with the housing policies and tourism-finance-construction triad established under Franco.

41 Barrachina, *La hora del bocadillo*, "Las casas" de Daniel Torres y Paco Roca'.

VIDA

## Barcelona: Chabolismo 4.0

Poblenou acoge uno de los asentamientos chabolistas más grandes de la ciudad, donde decenas de familias malviven en unas pésimas condiciones higiénicas sin recibir ayuda del ayuntamiento



Barracones cerca de la Torre Glòries en Barcelona / LAUTARO CEGLIA

ARCHIVADO EN: BARCELONA, VIVIENDA, POBLENOU

### LO MÁS LEÍDO

1. Una farra en urgencias del Parc Taulí acaba con diez sanitarios sancionados



2. "Los catalanes son una mierda" o "el fascismo de los españoles"



3. Un granadino recopila 440 artículos xenófobos de Torra: "No estáis solos"



Figure 3

Screen grab of story in *Crónica Global*, 18 May 2018, about the return of *chabolas* to Barcelona.

A man of modest means and from a fairly humble background was able to prosper between the 1950s and 1970s, to build a second home, and to raise children in sufficient security that one of them has been able to develop his talents as an artist. By the same token, the emptiness of the house speaks to the shocking statistics that sit behind the paradox of *gente sin casa y casas sin gente*. The father's generation were part of the process that began to deform the Spanish housing sector, including through the acquisition of second homes. Does this *vivienda* fit simply either with the narrative that would excoriate 'Francoland' and all its works, or with another one that locates some elements of social welfare in the pre-transitional past?

In this juxtaposition of *13, Rue del Percebe* and *La casa* we have seen that visual culture in Spain has reflected continuities in the shortcomings of housing policy and that in the course of the transition to Spain's post-2008 crisis era, the teeming heterogeneity of Ibáñez's metropolitan microcosm cedes to a privatized and singular space belonging to a paradoxical housing landscape where there is both an expansion of homelessness *and* grossly underused capacity that society owns but cannot access. Dialogue with the new approaches of Spanish activist economists has given an empirical base to the argument that this set of circumstances is rooted in pre-democratic policies that have become culturally embedded and remain unreformed.

Without making explicit the connection, *La casa*'s technical and narrative features acknowledge the intertwining of the histories and the construction of the prototype Spanish family structure and Spanish residential politics.

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By way of conclusion I want to end with an image (Figure 6) from what was a headline story in *Crónica Global* in May 2018.<sup>42</sup> The *chabolas* that were such a shameful reminder of the dictatorship's failed economic and housing policies are back. Where do they come from: 'Francoiland', CT-land, or Democracyland? Perhaps the answer is that they come from the past, the transitory period, and from the present. The boundaries between these temporal territories are porous, as I have suggested in this article by reading comics and graphic novels as texts reflective of social history, and alongside the recent work of Spanish economic historians who re-evaluate the legacy and longevity of Francoist housing policy. In the apparent permanence of bricks and mortar there is also to be found the fluid transfer not only of economic values but also of political and moral values.

The *viviendas* that Honor Tracy saw as a Potemkin village have endured. The façade without backing is instead, perhaps, the edifice built upon *idées reçues* that too neatly compartmentalize recent Spanish history into discrete blocks. By contrast, a multidirectional approach, one that can be developed by studying visual print media, uncovers that Thatcherism already existed, *avant la lettre*, in Francoist housing policy, and that Francoism survives in the post-crisis and neo-liberal approach to how one of our most basic requirements—the need for living space—should be met.\*

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42 Arturo Esteve, 'Barcelona: Chabolismo 4.0', *Crónica Global*, 18 May 2018 <[https://cronicaglobal.elespanol.com/vida/barcelona-chabolismo-glories-4-0\\_142337\\_102.html](https://cronicaglobal.elespanol.com/vida/barcelona-chabolismo-glories-4-0_142337_102.html)> (accessed 18 May 2018).

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