

*The City in a Quarter: An Urban Village with Many Names*¹

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Malasaña is an old neighbourhood of Madrid, a quarter with character, though with many denominations. To most Madrilenians, as well as to the hipsters who live there and to tourists, the quarter is known as Malasaña. For older, retired residents of modest means it is Maravillas. Yet, its official, and least known, name is Universidad. Whatever its name, this neighbourhood is not just home to a large variety of small shops, old and new, traditional and hipster, to mainstream franchises on its fringes and small, specialized commercial spaces, old bars many without charm and innovative ones in old buildings; Malasaña is what Jane Jacobs (1961) would call an Urban Village. This article has two main goals: to show how, while maintaining some old charms, the urban village of Malasaña has been reconfigured by the new micro cultures of alternative groups, creative classes, hipsters and visiting suburbanites. It also intends to show how this bottom-up transformation connects with global trends found elsewhere. There are two major dynamic drives in this neighbourhood; one from within — the traditional, old quarter with a distinctive mix of population, the other from without — the transient (but key) inhabitants of the current service-oriented urban realm, mostly youth from other areas of the city and the suburbs and tourists. As a metropolis, Madrid is a good example of emergent practices related to the social, cultural and economic dimensions that reshape a vital, singular place of the old city. It is also a good case study in dealing with the global and local processes that shape the contemporary city.

Keywords: Madrid, Malasaña, Urban centrality and regeneration, Madrilenian Scene (*la movida*), Hipsters.

*Sometime ago Malasaña was Maravillas.
Today they are two neighbourhoods in one,
Maravillas during most of the day,
Malasaña by night.
(Juan)²*

An Imaginary Stroll Through Two Neighbourhoods

We are in one of the old quarters of Madrid, bearing witness to how this area, generally known to its inhabitants as Maravillas, becomes Malasaña late in the day. It is now morning, most shops are open and the people in the neighbourhood, most of them old, are buying groceries and doing their errands without haste. They stop on the sidewalks, even in the road, to chat with acquaintances, and they talk with shop-assistants and the bar owners. Their small talk can be heard from the other side of the street. Here, the traditional shops are disappearing and the cherished *ultramarinos*³ and other grocery stores are gone, replaced by the so-called

¹ Project *Madrid Cosmópolis. Prácticas emergentes y procesos metropolitanos* (MINECO, CSO2012-33949).

² Juan, interview made on 24 July 2014. In this article I use pseudonyms for the people I mention. I have maintained the confidentiality of all my sources. I owe them a great deal and I hope that their trust and patience will be honoured in these pages. Thank you.

³ *Ultramarinos* literally translates as ‘Beyond the seas’. These were grocery shops that sold salted dried cod, canned foods, beans, spices and foodstuffs that originated from beyond the Atlantic Ocean and were not sold in the fresh produce street markets.

‘Chinese’ shops.⁴ These shops are thought to be owned or run by Chinese people and are open most of the day and night. Small supermarkets, branches of the big suburban hypermarkets, are opening throughout the neighbourhood.

In the smaller, narrow streets passers-by can hear birds chirping and the sun appears briefly on one of the sidewalks. This is not a car-friendly area. Over the last few years, some of the streets have been pedestrianized and there is not much parking space. Some of the streets are clogged with cars and small delivery vehicles. In spite of these changes, it is difficult and inconvenient to walk along the streets where cars are parked. The fronts of most buildings show the design of modest homes, in many cases rejuvenated and clean. If one watches from the sidewalk, it is not difficult to see signs of home renovation. There are many bags of debris, and passing by them we can hear, through the windows, the noise of the work mixed with the voices of the stone masons.

The neighbourhood shows clear signs of being one of the oldest quarters of Madrid. The physical backdrop was born of the topography of the land and shaped by the roads that connected the centre of the city to the surrounding villages. Maravillas, like many towns and old quarters of Spanish cities, is named after the main church attended by their inhabitants; this is the Iglesia de los Santos Justo y Pastor or de las Maravillas, built in 1620. Some of the street names are reminders of past crafts, features of the land that disappeared long ago, or apocryphal stories today known by few people.

The street patterns, the older convents, churches and palaces — whose origins can be traced to the seventeenth century in Maravillas — shape the layout of this quarter, partially transformed and unified by the regular and symmetrical structure of nineteenth-century housing buildings. Behind the walls of the older buildings, gardens can sometimes be seen, but more generally they can only be glimpsed from their gates; the presence of still other gardens lying concealed behind high walls can only be guessed by looking at tree branches overhanging the street. The morphology of the neighbourhood attests to a time when all classes and kinds of citizens shared the same space. Yet, despite these landmarks being still inhabited, the neighbourhood shows traits both of a modest, working-class lifestyle and of a bourgeois class-oriented one. There are no public gardens in this neighbourhood, some of its streets are tree-lined, and its seven public squares, some of them with real charm despite recent modifications, accommodate benches and small play areas for children. In some of the squares, like Plaza Juan Pujol, the benches seem to be designed to prevent socialization as they accommodate just one person and do not face other benches. In other squares, such as Plaza Santa María Soledad Torres Acosta, one finds backless, uncomfortable benches lining the sides of the pedestrians’ space. In spite of these difficulties, in these squares people enjoy meeting and talking with their neighbours. In these squares there are also people who are difficult to classify: Spaniards and foreigners who spend their days loitering around those few

⁴ These shops are bargain and convenience shops where anything can be bought anytime. They are a kind of corner stores that serve both the basic needs of people in the neighbourhood and those of the evening and night visitors, typically selling them cheap soda and alcoholic beverages.

neighbourhood benches and corners. Outside the supermarkets, there are beggars waiting for alms or food.

The premises of a different kind of local life, that called Malasaña, begin late in the morning. At this time of the day Maravillas and Malasaña share the same space. At this time of the day traditional shops are joined by so-called ‘modern’ businesses, the kind usually referred in the academic literature as post-modern, open their doors and terraces to a different kind of customers. These are shops and restaurants offering varied and creative meals; they are also cafés established in the 1970s, stores selling or serving beverages, juices, cupcakes and salads and bars offering dishes that mix different international culinary traditions. There one can watch students, liberal professionals, people making deals in different languages, tourists, writers and generally people free from the traditional office schedules. The bars and some old warehouses, miraculously still standing, cater to a clientele whose social profiles change through the day. At mealtimes, the fast-food joints come alive, as do the designer, ethnic and health-food ones and the nondescript Spanish bars, which some call ‘old people bars’ where ‘traditional’ customers meet during the day. In most of these bars there is a mixed clientele. In the mornings, afternoons and early evenings, people from Maravillas and workers of the area outnumber those of Malasaña; in the late evening up to the small hours of the morning, most customers are visitors and local people who have a Malasaña’s lifestyle.

In the quieter streets of the area, we observe a peculiar mix of shops and businesses. For example, la Calle de la Madera (Wood Street), combine some surviving woodwork craft suppliers, an ironmonger, a china shop, a *droguería* (a shop selling cleaning products), an Art Gallery (Sabrina Ambrani), a Theatre Company (Yllana), a Comics Shop (Wonderland Comics), Kundalini Yoga, a Chinese Traditional Medicine establishment, and a well-known Vintage Café (Lolina) on the corner with Espíritu Santo (Holy Spirit) Street.

By afternoon, weather permitting, some changes in the people roaming the local streets begin to appear. Schoolchildren in uniform leave their Catholic schools; in their teens, they horseplay while walking home. The older neighbours, those inhabiting Maravillas, are decreasing in number; parents with children populate the few squares where there are playgrounds, cafés and bars. The ‘creative class’, still clearly visible on the outdoor terraces of the fashionable premises of Malasaña, is now joined by bohemians visiting the ‘traditional cafés’ established in the 1970s. These cafés revived the *tertulias*, traditional informal social gatherings where participants debate literature, philosophy, social or political issues. While waiting for friends in the Café Manuela, customers can play board games supplied by the owners.

At the tables of bars and cafés, people doing business on laptops and tablets visible to passers-by are now being replaced by *tertulianos* and by lounging tourists carrying cameras or shopping. There are middle-aged, self-absorbed customers writing on their computers; readers; groups of friends and acquaintances talking without pressure about anything that come to mind. Outside, people sitting on the public benches speak or play guitar, while drinking from one-litre beer bottles (*litrona*) or drinking other alcoholic beverages hidden in

paper bags. These people do not fit the indie label, and their 1970s look should not be confused with that of hipsters or rockers.

After sunset, particularly during weekends and holidays, Malasaña blooms. Some streets are busier than during the day. Informal, now illegal,⁵ street-drinking groups meet in public areas that are known to be less controlled by the police. These places are usually close to shops selling alcohol — sometimes, illegally, to minors — and pizza joints that are open till the small hours of the morning. So, Malasaña is now not only a space for the ‘creative class’; it is also a place for young people without resources who seek to enjoy a corner of Madrid with a special charm.

In the late afternoon opens the self-managed Multipurpose Space Patio Maravillas.⁶ This is an ‘occupied’ building offering local people and visitors a varied and free range of alternative activities with a political critical perspective. Some of these activities are public art performances or leisure activities with a social dimension. Located near the Ministry of Justice,⁷ the Patio denounces the inequalities and conflicts marring a neighbourhood of the historic centre of a city that in a few decades has become a polycentric metropolis oriented, as Juan said, around either squares or Multipurpose Malls in the suburbs.⁸

The evening is not just Malasaña’s prime time, a time internationally associated with the ‘Madrilean Scene’ (*Movida Madrileña*) of the 1970s and 1980s; it is also the time when the Malasaña side enters into conflict not only with people associated with the Maravillas district but also with the residents who wish to rest or want to enjoy a quiet time at home. Before the Madrilenian Scene made Malasaña famous (see Hector Fouce’s article in this Special Issue), Malasaña’s name was used by a kind of local people who are less conspicuous now. In the late 1960s and early 1970s⁹ newly created neighbourhood

⁵ The law known as *Antibotellón* law (Law 5/2002 of 27 June on Drug Dependency and other Addictive Disorders) was approved in 2002 by the Community of Madrid and, among other objectives, it was aimed at stopping the huge social gatherings to drink in the streets, parks and public spaces. For the critics, these repressive measures are aimed more at tax collection device than at education and social control; see:

<http://www.madrid.org/wleg/servlet/Servidor?opcion=VerHtml&idnorma=2694&word=S&wordperfect=N&pdf=S>, accessed on 13 June 2015.

⁶ <http://patiomaravillas.net/epa/funcionamiento> (home page), accessed on 13 June 2015.

⁷ At the time of writing, the police have evicted the Patio Maravillas from the old building. On the same day the ‘Patio’ occupied another building which is not far away from the original one and has been squatted for seven years. In one surprising political twist, one of the persons related with Patio Maravillas is now Councilman of the newly elected Madrid Council. The Patio Maravillas has, however, been evicted again. Perhaps this time the Patio Maravillas will get a public space owned by the Madrid Council ...

⁸ See Romina Colombo’s article in this Special Issue; Sara Sama also deals with neighbours and activism.

⁹ The last two decades of Franco’s dictatorship (1955-75) were characterized by major policy changes and growing unrest among the Spanish population. The economic policies pursued by ‘technocratic’ governments composed of members of the Opus Dei and reformist politicians opened the country’s boundaries. The poor inhabitants of the countryside migrated to the major Spanish cities, such as

associations took the name Malasaña to challenge a plan of renovation and the planned Gran Vía Diagonal (Boulevard Main Street) involving the demolition of an important number of houses, the eviction of the inhabitants, and the destruction of part of the historic heritage of the neighbourhood. This project was opposed also by the Guild of Architects and by the Chamber of Commerce of Madrid.¹⁰ These movements, indicating a social and political change in the neighbourhood, are what gave the area its new name: Malasaña.¹¹

How Many Neighbourhoods in a Quarter?

The neighbourhood of Maravillas or Malasaña does not appear in any official map of Madrid. In our imaginary stroll around the Malasaña area we go through La Palma Street and encounter the Church of Maravillas in a quarter whose official name is Universidad (University).¹² However, in the present discussion, I will not deal with the whole administrative neighbourhood of Universidad,¹³ which includes both Maravillas and Malasaña

Madrid and Barcelona, and to other European countries (France, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium). Spain became a tourist destination for people from more affluent, democratic European countries. The impact of tourism was not only economic, but also social and cultural. During those years illegal and clandestine trade unions and political parties became increasingly active and visible. Franco's death in 1975 started the Spanish Transition to democracy. An invigorating optimism and internationalization set the country in motion. Terrorist activities by extreme right- and left-wing parties and by Basque separatism hit hard. Three years later, Spain approved a Democratic Constitution. From a legal perspective, the Spanish Transition ended in 1978; yet, for many scholars it ended in 1982 with the victory of the opposition party in the general elections. A few months earlier, a failed *coup d'état* showed both the fragility of the democratic system and citizens' commitment to democracy.

¹⁰ See <http://www.somosmalasana.com/la-gran-via-diagonal-el-plan-que-casi-acaba-con-el-barrio/>, published online on 11 January 2010, accessed on 13 June 2015. In an excellent article, the recently deceased Moncho Alpuente, a resident of Calle del Pez, described the speculative forces and interests outside the neighbourhood who struggled to make a business of it:

http://elpais.com/diario/1988/12/28/madrid/599315056_850215.html, published on 28 December 1988, accessed on 13 June 2015. On neighbourhood associations and the neighbourhood movement, see Observatorio Metropolitano (2007, 2009, 2014) and Pérez Quintana and Sanchez Leon (eds 2008).

¹¹ *Malasaña* was the name of a popular heroine who rebelled in this Madrid neighbourhood against the Napoleonic occupation. Manuela Malasaña was a young embroiderer, daughter of a French baker, Jean Malesange, so its surname is a French surname phonetically transformed into the Spanish Malasaña. However, the adoption of the name by the fighting neighbours is related to a game called *mala saña*, which means 'bad fury' or 'excessive cruelty'.

¹² Among other things, in my field notes I describe walks, anecdotes, reflections, interviews and other information collected over nearly a year of part-time fieldwork. However, it is worth mentioning that the scenes that I describe here are not invented; I have written up events registered during my fieldwork.

¹³ The Central District of Madrid is divided in six wards (*barrios*); they are the Palacio, Embajadores, Cortes, Justice, University (Malasaña) and Sol. According to the census of the City, the Central area has 134,271 inhabitants, of which 31,412 correspond to the University neighbourhood (November 24, 2014). It is the second district in terms of population density.

as well other areas, and is delimited by the streets Gran Vía, Fuencarral, Sagasta, Carranza, Alberto Aguilera and Princesa.

This is the first time that my research deals not only with two overlapping neighbourhoods, Maravillas and Malasaña, but with a third one, Universidad. It is not uncommon that neighbourhoods delimited by the symbolic boundaries established by residents and visitors overlap and that some of their spaces may be in conflict; the turf wars in American cities come, for example, to my mind. Yet, it is unusual to deal with a single neighbourhood resulting from the combination of two clearly differentiated neighbourhoods. Juan, the informant whom I quoted at the beginning of this article, pointed out this dual nature, which is clear to a careful observer. So far, neighbourhoods like Maravillas or Malasaña were simply classified as ‘diverse’, a concept that I found empirically unhelpful.

Place names also show the diversity of the neighbourhood: Santa Maria Soledad Torres Acosta and San Ildefonso squares are respectively commonly known by the names ‘Luna’ or ‘Grail’. These variants are not, of course, unanimous. The name Grail is related with a bar that used to be in the square and characterizes the festive side of the area, which is unacceptable by those who aim for a less commercialized neighbourhood. Other unofficial denominations, such as Sad Street or Happy Street (attached respectively to Calles Espíritu Santo and San Vicente Ferrer) exemplify how certain groups name the key streets of ‘their’ neighbourhood.

José Manuel,¹⁴ is a working-class third generation Malasaña’s native. He recalls his life in the neighbourhood as a teenager at the time of the *movida* and clearly defines Malasaña’s boundaries; they are, the Carranza Boulevard, and the streets San Bernardo, Fuencarral and Pez. This area is much more limited than the official Universidad neighbourhood. Beyond Fuencarral Street and Carranza Boulevard lie the bourgeois and wealthy world of expensive markets and other businesses, rarely visited by local people like José Manuel. Carranza, at the edge of the neighbourhood, was also the boulevard where his mother walked during the holidays, hobnobbing with the wealthier neighbours who lived beyond her world. Pez Street was the limit to ‘something else’, an underworld of slums and prostitution. A little further, the Gran Vía is a strange place, ‘like Mars’, ‘a kind of Manhattan in Madrid’. Not all border-crossings were threatening. José Manuel said that by crossing the San Bernardo Street he had a chance of ‘getting out’ of a hopeless life. Beyond the San Bernardo Street were the ‘good’ Catholic schools and State education Institutes that allowed people like him not only to flee the poverty common to the area but also to escape the drug abuse that was devastating a formerly active and exciting situation of political, social and cultural unrest. According to José Manuel, Malasaña was a place marked by political tensions. It was a central place that moved from a class struggle taking place in the streets of the Madrilenian Scene and from the ravages caused by drugs to an exciting night venue that is home to a new subculture, the hipsters.

The *movida* was ‘something else’ to both those who had fought Franco’s regime and the old inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The *Madrilenian Scene* has been claimed to be a

¹⁴ José Manuel is a third generation locally born *Malasañero* (meaning ‘from Malasaña’) who does not live in the neighbourhood (April 20, 2015).

consequence of the disillusionment with the political utopias fought for by elder people, and of the ‘needed urge’ to stretch the boundaries of the recently gained but still fragile freedom. What began as a festive and creative outburst was followed in the neighbourhood, José Manuel told me, by drugs.¹⁵ According to most of the people to whom I have talked, it was a kind of holiday season enjoyed by the children of an expanding middle class who had time, some money and a willingness to enjoy freedom. To José Manuel, drugs and alcohol turned his neighbourhood into a nightmare where most people of his generation died of drug addiction or had a miserable life as survivors without hope. The destruction of his generation and the transformation of the life in the neighbourhood is also visually testified by the disappearance of businesses related with the social fabric and life of Malasaña, such as cafés, Oven Shops (bakery stores selling pastries), the old corner stores and crafts shops. José Manuel also described how the residents felt puzzled about the arrival of new businesses that they found hard to classify, such as a Latin American crafts store and gift shops.

During those ebullient years I was not far in time and space from José Manuel’s Malasaña. He lived the transformations of Malasaña from within. I was younger, and that neighbourhood without clear boundaries or names was to me one of the urban central spaces of my coming-of-age; unlike José Manuel, I experienced it from without. We both sought to leave our neighbourhoods and did so when we grew up. I began to explore Malasaña with my friends; it was a space of realization and transgression, of coming-of-age and becoming a citizen. It was, and still is, a place of mischief and personal realization. Also from this point of view Malasaña is a central place.

In the mornings and evenings, the neighbourhood was clearly — what I was later to learn — Maravillas. Seedy, old, fascinating premises; cheap bars; traditional shops such as rope-mills, shops selling candle, dairies, groceries, haberdasheries and carpentry but also cabinet-making and old or decaying factories. These ‘institutions’, which shaped the neighbourhood, were already disappearing; they spoke of the very same world that is still vanishing today. For example recently I realized that the Children’s Shoe Store Penalva, one of the ‘oldies’, was gone.¹⁶

The night was, then, very different from today’s buzz which I have described earlier. Then, there was little activity in the area. Only La Palma street and some premises around the Plaza Dos de Mayo began to show signs of change. I connected with Malasaña in a mediated way, by following what was going on outside Spain in music and culture and more generally by listening to innovative and revolutionary radio programmes, such as *El Buho Musical* (The Musical Owl),¹⁷ which was broadcast every weekday from 11 pm to 2 am. Radio hosts, such

¹⁵ A disruptive role was played by the pervasive presence of drugs in the creative and festive Madrilenian Scene, a phenomenon that helped transform the Spanish identity.

¹⁶ This news of the closure of the nearly century-old shoe-shop, emphasizes that there are currently only two businesses in Pez Street opened before the Civil War: *La Moda* (in 1896) and *Bar El Palentino*. See, <http://www.somosmalasana.com/cierra-penalva-la-ultima-zapateria-de-la-calle-pez/>, published 13 November 2013, accessed 12 June 2015.

¹⁷ See: <https://balbinoruiz.wordpress.com/tag/el-buho-musical/> or <http://de4a3.blogspot.com.es/search?q=el+b%C3%BAho+musical>, accessed 11 May 2015.

as Paco Pérez Brian and Rafael Abitbol, acted as musical guides who helped us to broaden our musical tastes, which were no longer confined to the Latin American, politically-oriented songwriters cherished by our older friends, brothers and sisters. Those years we lived with hope, but there was also a darker side. There were police repression and attacks by far right para-military groups on neighbourhoods associations, bookstores and individuals who dressed or behaved suspiciously; who were, that is, pro-democracy or leftist. Some young activists were killed by the police or by these para-military groups. We carefully avoided these risks but were still exposed to some minor risks, such as receiving a beating because our appearance was ‘suspicious’.

The transformations that this central area was experiencing in those years were not limited to political democratization; there were also parallel social and economic changes related to an increasing economic growth. These emergent trends were associated with the metropolization and internationalization of Madrid. Malasaña was becoming a kind of blueprint for what was coming for the rest of the country, it was also a space deteriorated by those very same transformations. On a social level, there were tensions among the old neighbours of Maravillas, the new ones of Malasaña and the increasing number of people enjoying the *movida*. This is, from my point of view, one of the characteristic traits of the old central areas of cities that became metropolis. No matter how polycentric the metropolis is, these redefined central areas play an important role in the key social, economic and international dimensions of the city. Maravillas is an urban village reshaped by a superimposed new urban village, Malasaña.

Juan described to me, not without irony, how Maravillas became the well-known neighbourhood of Malasaña.¹⁸ When he arrived there, many young people moved in but the old residents still dominated it. The area was cheap and central, with some of the bars, cafés, bookstores, theatres and other premises once related with the Universidad Complutense,¹⁹ now located a few kilometres away in the University City. He said that in the 1960s, before associations became a trait of the neighbourhood, the City Council tried to launch an aggressive plan of gentrification of the district by building a Gran Vía Diagonal of Malasaña; that is, a wide avenue connecting the Plaza de España with Alonso Martínez.²⁰ This new boulevard would force many residents to leave their homes, which would be torn down; many palaces and churches would also be destroyed. The opposition to this plan was very important. The Traders Association threatened to withdraw their money from the banks promoting such changes. This plan was finally rejected in 1980! The mayor who discarded this plan was Enrique Tierno Galvan, the same mayor who would later support *la movida*. He

¹⁸ Interview, July 24, 2014.

¹⁹ The Universidad Complutense was established in 1499 in Madrid’s neighbouring town of Alcalá de Henares. During the nineteenth century it suffered from closure ordered by the government, and from changes of location and name. In 1836 the University moved to Madrid and was named Central. It regained the name, Complutense in the 1970s. <https://www.ucm.es/resena-historica>, accessed 30 May 2015.

²⁰ Initially, this avenue would reach Glorieta of Bilbao. A proposal for it to reach Columbus Square was also soon discarded.

and the Council he led were quite controversial. Some critics argued that he took advantage of this alternative movement to launch a new image and identity of the city. By supporting the *Madrilenian Scene*, they said, he killed the alternative and independent dimension of the underground movement, thus contributing to turn it into just a burst of fun and ‘hedonism’.²¹ Before that, Malasaña was also, as Susan Larson explains writing about the magazine *La Luna de Madrid*, ‘a revolutionary cultural project [which] began on the streets and in Madrid’s *popular imagination*’ (Larson 2003: 309). The continuous, movable feast ended with the end of the *Madrilenian Scene* of the 1970s-early 1980s. As I have mentioned, drug abuse and trafficking seriously damaged the neighbourhood, claiming the lives of a considerable number of protagonists of *la movida*.

In my view, there is a key event in Malasaña’s birth and transformation that brings together two different trends, the alternative neighbourhood and the cultural movements with the festivities, into a single process. As Carlos Osorio has argued (2014: 61), in 1976 the citizens’ movement had succeeded and had become involved in the organization of the popular neighbourhood festivities. On 1 May 1976, students, unaware that the Plaza del Dos de Mayo would be busy with a neighbourhood celebration, had called a ‘*jump*’ there.²² One can only imagine the surprise of the students when they got there and were met by a *verbena* (street party). They chose to join the party. As Carlos Osorio writes, ‘It was the first massive party of Dos de Mayo. The following year, the youth party ended with a scene featuring a boy and a girl naked on top of the statue of Daoíz and Velarde’ (2014: 61).²³

The image of the naked couple on the statue may be seen as marking the transition from a time of political struggle for freedom to a creative and festive period that would come to be called *la movida*. This image is etched in the memory of the neighbourhood and of the city; it synthesizes several years of underground *Madrilenian Scene*²⁴ that flourished against, or despite, the institutions and the political struggle. During those years, Malasaña gained a new centrality in the growing metropolis, in the country and internationally. No matter how

²¹ Fouce (2006) is an excellent source on the Madrid scene there (See also José Luis Gallero 1991). The memoirs and autobiographical accounts of some of the protagonists grew over time and are, along with novels cast in context, literary sources that deserve exploration. Among others, Max Aub, Arturo Barea, John Doe, Camilo José Cela, Rosa Chacel, Theophile Gautier, Carmen Martín Gaité and Benito Pérez Galdos wrote on that area of Madrid. These writers were joined later by new authors such as Ginés Esther or Miguel Rubio.

²² ‘Jumps’ are surprise political demonstrations and protest actions. They were illegal and severely repressed by the police. People who were to participate in this ‘jump’ knew the time and place where they should be meeting to show their opposition to the regime. They were prepared to evade the riot police. The ‘jumpers’ arrived by different routes discreetly, made their claim and were prepared to flee as soon as the action became dangerous.

²³ Luis Daoíz de Torres and Pedro Velarde y Santillán were two officers celebrated as heroes who fought against the Napoleonic invasion in 1808.

²⁴ According to Larson, before 1981 *la movida* was a movement closer to *punk* and urban ‘tribes’ (2003: 309). The second stage was the coming of age a new cultural industry, and the third was a commercial expansion and internationalization.

exciting this new village was, it was a vulnerable neighbourhood. We all made it a central space that continues to hold a prominent position in metropolitan Madrid.

Malasaña: Paradoxes of a Central Space in the Metropolis

Thus far I have deliberately built a narrative of a neighbourhood made up of three different neighbourhoods, Maravillas / Malasaña / Universidad. I have built a fragmented picture drawing on my fieldwork notes, walks, observations, interviews, documentary material and previous experience in the neighbourhood. This fragmented story wants to make visible a central space of a city that today is both part of and a response to the metropolitan area that has grown around it.

This strategy had the central goal of contrasting the hegemonic narratives on this area. A good example of such accounts is an Internet Play Ocio TV programme on Malasaña (*Somos Madrid*).²⁵ The expert hosting this episode described how *la movida* transformed this ‘nondescript’ neighbourhood into Malasaña. The programme displayed the usual nostalgia for the neighbourhood that was, while stressing its modern and creative identity. We are now familiar with the story of how a festive outburst of creative and festive energy, *la movida*, was followed by the ravages caused by drug consumption and trafficking among the young who participated in that movement and in the neighbourhood more generally. Ideological perspectives determine how these events are interpreted.

According to the aforementioned TV programme’s narrative, today Malasaña is a much better, safer neighbourhood. However, as I have tried to show, tensions are not new in this quarter of the city. The current assessed threats include the loss of Malasaña’s specific identity, gentrification and the transformation of the *village* into a hostile place for neighbours. In a short promotional video on Malasaña, the Madrid City Council highlights the following *values* of the neighbourhood: alternative, young, rogue, independent and rebellious.²⁶ For the City Council, at least in this video, the highlight of the neighbourhood are its modernity and alternative dimensions, not its traditional Madrilenian way of life (*castizo*) and a monumental and artistic heritage that can attract tourism. A well-known travel guide that promotes the top ten attractions of Madrid shows a route that crosses the neighbourhood of *la movida*.²⁷

There are, however, many other stories that I have tried to bring out in the previous pages. They are as many as the local inhabitants and, just as important in a central neighbourhood like Malasaña, as the many visitors and passers-by. José Manuel’s narrative²⁸ pointed to tension, political struggle and decline, while Angeles,²⁹ another informant, described a nicer neighbourhood, intergenerational and socially varied. For her, the main traits

²⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjy3uAwxMzE>, accessed 13 June 2015.

²⁶ This video was made by the City TV: esMADRIDtelevision:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miEwCgBIfdU>, accessed 13 June 2015.

²⁷ A specific section is titled, ‘People and places of La Movida’ (Rice and Rice 2007).

²⁸ Interview, April 20, 2015.

²⁹ Interview, July 23, 2014.

of Malasaña were the shared public and private spaces, such as the *Café Comercial* where customers of different generations and economic levels used to mix.³⁰ The ‘genial’ architecture of the neighbourhood, Angeles points out, is one of its greatest assets. The buildings, according to her, have an ‘average’ quality and there people of different classes and generations mix. The building where she lived is a good example. She lived in an *exterior* home; the *exterior* being the part of building facing the street. These homes were bigger than the *interior* homes, which were affordable for people with more modest incomes. Angeles did not live far from José Manuel; only two hundred meters separated them. However, José Manuel’s house was one of several small apartments that shared a toilet on each floor and he remarked that in material and social terms the living conditions in his building were far from idyllic.

José Manuel recalls that his was a neighbourhood with dense social relations. Each local person had ‘her grocery shop’ where she or her children bought food and other household products. Buying elsewhere was considered a ‘betrayal’ of relations of mutual trust between the shop and the family. Shopkeepers did not speak well of their competitors, while emphasizing how well they cared for their customers. Women, in José Manuel’s world, could meet to sew and make clothes for their families; some used their skills to repair clothes for clients. Women controlled the use of private spaces at home; men worked outside and mingled in the public spaces of the street and the bars. While bars were essentially male spaces, cafeterias were more gender inclusive and late afternoon could be used for family meetings, particularly during the holidays. Both, Angeles and José Manuel, feel their way of life in this neighbourhood could be equated to that of a town. Their neighbourhood was, clearly, Maravillas by day, and Malasaña by night; albeit a Malasaña striving to define its destiny both from within and from without, with the arrival of young people who would take to the streets to proclaim ‘The Future is already Here’, as did the musical group Radio Futura of *la movida* with their thus titled song.³¹

What Radio Futura envisioned in their song was not what the people of Maravillas fought for and whose alternative perspective promoting a quiet village still stands today. My informant Paula,³² who moved in a few years ago, explained to me that the neighbourhood believed in public spaces and defended them against institutions such as the City Council. According to her, today Malasaña is a neighbourhood organized around citizen associations and other groups like the *Patio Maravillas*. It seems to me that Paula chose to live in this neighbourhood, and likes it, because for her it is like a town where you can be anonymous and ecologically friendly and enjoy a gentle urban way of life. No matter how much the city has changed, it is still easy to find activist and political associations in the area. The *15-M Indignados* movement meets on Saturdays in the Plaza Dos de Mayo. During the weekends

³⁰ On 27 July 2015, *Café Comercial* closed for good. Established in 1887, it was the oldest *café* in Madrid.

³¹ This is one of the most representative songs of this musical group. See also ‘In love with the youth fashion’ (Radio Futura, 1980), and Hector Fouce’s book (2006) on this movement.

³² Dialogue held on 16 April 2014; and interview of 18 July 2014.

self-organized citizen and neighbour activities, some children-oriented, take place in the Square. It seems that the years that have passed since the 1970s have not changed this trait of the quarter.

Maravillas/Malasaña is actually a social and cultural landscape generated by *la movida*. As I have already mentioned, this transformation began in the 1970s and was mostly a middle-class phenomenon. It was generated by the political disillusionment of the younger generations. Now the political utopias of those who opposed Franco were no longer something worth fighting for. The future was here; that is, here was the urge to experiment freedom and push the boundaries as far as possible at a time when strong civil liberties were not yet achieved (Fouce 2006: 29). During those years we witnessed the emergence of the so-called ‘urban tribes’; that is, *moods*, *rockers*, *punks* and other subcultures that connected the younger generations with movements born in Spain. Class-conflict is hidden in these subcultures. Hard rock came from the urban periphery, the working class suburbs; Post Punk and New Wave came from urban middle-class youngsters with time and economic resources to make of the night their habitat.

The *Madrilean Scene* was not limited to this central area of the city; it was part of a metropolization whose main feature was internationalization. One key aspect of this movement was its desire to live a present connected with the avant-garde in London and other leading cities of the West. The economic resources that allowed young people to travel to places like London and buy vinyl discs enabled them to develop a diverse local cultural movement connected to cultural trends and fashions from abroad. Spain had experienced forty years of isolation and was eager to know what was happening abroad. This was the time when Maravillas not only became radically transformed but became also a manifestation of Madrilean identity and an international attraction. But this movement associated with Malasaña was controversial. It was criticized from a conservative perspective because it was ‘hedonistic’ (coded in academic terms as post-modern) and from a leftist, progressive one because it was not revolutionary. The first democratic mayor of Madrid during the political transition was Professor Enrique Tierno Galván, a socialist who welcomed these cultural movements. It helped him to take Madrid away from the dictatorships’ grip. His policies, which remain a point of reference and a subject of controversy even today, marked the time when Madrid became a European capital (Spain joined the European Economic Community in 1986), an international city.

So, the international dimension experienced in Malasaña is related to the transformation of Madrid into a metropolis. The city expanded like an oil stain, incorporating nearby municipalities (Terán 1992; Juliá, Ringrose and Segura 1994; Monge 2002 and 2012). The functions of the old town changed for worse. Factories and office buildings became vacant in neighbourhoods such as Universidad (Malasaña/Maravillas); in the 1950s the Central University had moved out of the neighbourhood and decline was only predictable. Malasaña, the ‘new’ neighbourhood born out of Maravillas transformed this downward deterioration into a different, though uneven, success story. It is precisely the vulnerability of the

neighbourhood³³ that was turned into a positive asset by the new, young bohemians attracted by cheap, affordable houses and apartments. This transformation was made also possible by the centrality of this area in the emerging metropolis. Malasaña became not only a central public space, but also a dynamic setting developing economic activities usually related with metropolization (a knowledge-intensive, service-oriented economy): fashion, music, theatre, design and services were created by a new class that can be defined as entrepreneurial if one looks at the positive aspects, or precarious if we consider the impact of economic dynamics that have destroyed stable jobs. I will not enter here into the debate between those who consider this new economic reality as a creative class (Florida 2014) and those who see it as a necessity imposed on the younger generations by job shortage and insecurity.³⁴

We have seen that the Malasaña's *movida* was a phenomenon mostly generated by people from outside the neighbourhood. We have also seen that it is a phenomenon inextricably linked to the processes of political transition to democracy and metropolization. And we have seen that it is a central space not only in functional terms but also in symbolic ones. I have shown how in Maravillas/Malasaña, two neighbourhoods and ways of life share the urban space. Maravillas's inhabitants buy a portion of their needs in the same stores as Malasaña's; both share services and public spaces, and all those living in the neighbourhood complain about the noise at night. Cafés are a key element of shared space in the quarter. Angeles³⁵ is well aware of this and sees cafés as key in shaping this 'village', which is characterized by such a diverse array of social classes and by cultural diversity and sub-cultures. In the *Café Comercial* she explained to me that she used to go there as a child, with her parents, to have an early-evening snack — a *merienda* — and then, years later, as a University student, to discuss politics with her friends. In the cafés the space is shared by elders, writers, artists, tourists and 'normal' customers — during the interview we were indeed sharing this space with them. Some of these cafés and traditional bars, serving the neighbourhood during the day, are the same places where young people go in the evening and during the night. Listening to all the people who have told me about the neighbourhood and their lives in it and about how the way they perceive other social and cultural groups of the Maravillas/Malasaña, I was struck by the unstable balance of interests that are interwoven in the daily life of this part of the city.

It is also striking that this neighbourhood, associated with modernity, dynamism and creativity and offering a balance between tradition and local adaptation to the latest international trends, was and continues to be considered a *vulnerable area*; that is, a neighbourhood 'in which all hope of upward social mobility, of overcoming their social condition of exclusion or close to it, is seen as extremely difficult to achieve. By contrast, it involves a perception of insecurity and fear of the possibility of a downward social mobility,

³³ Vulnerability in the sense of a combination of substandard, cheap housing, high rates of unemployment and deficient social services.

³⁴ To learn more about this issue, from a comparative perspective between Madrid and Mexico City, see: García Canclini, Cruces and Urteaga (eds 2012).

³⁵ Interview, 23 July 2014.

of worsening of their current living conditions.’ (Hernández Aja 2007: 8). ‘Is it possible to assess Maravillas and Malasaña as both vulnerable and alternative, young, rogue, independent and rebellious?’ Yes, according to the City Council.³⁶

Today *la movida* is not the dominant feature of Malasaña. A new subculture now embodies modernity, the hipsters. They have seized the popular imagination. Along streets like Velarde or Espíritu Santo, their presence is remarkable. They became a media phenomenon, approved and also detested by the same leftist groups who despised the *Madridenian Scene*. Malasaña changes and, in turn, shows a significant continuity with the Malasaña that ‘gave’ this place its name and ‘placed’ these streets on the metropolitan and international maps. Hipsters are different from the people who made *la movida*; yet both aim to connect with international trends in local ways. Both emphasize individuality through fashion and both make use of a not very politically-oriented culture. Unlike the protagonists of *la movida*, who were not originally a business-oriented subculture, hipsters are entrepreneurs who are generating a new fabric of economic activity, including restaurants, cafés and modern design establishments. During the day, hipsters can be seen working on their tablets and Macs (I have not yet managed to see a hipster using another computer brand). Theirs seem to be what I call an ‘augmented sociability’; that is, a kind of personal interaction that combines physical presence with the presence offered by social networks, and by the Internet and mobile telephones. The younger generation who began meeting in Malasaña to discuss, talk or engage quietly in the ‘new’ cafés, like the *Manuela*, the *Ruiz* and the *Parnasillo*, does not seem to follow this pattern; but they could be also seen as embodying a new kind of sociability that adds to the dense social and cultural fabric of Malasaña. These cafés recovered a nineteenth-century tradition, adapted it to the new winds of political change and attracted an intergenerational clientele. Like many other social or culturally oriented businesses, these are essentially inclusive spaces. Some are patronised by people connected with the outside, who combine chatting in the cyberspace with talking with people at their table, nearby customers, waiters and the people who appear on their screens. This happens in hipster premises, too, and is a good example of how a neighbourhood may accommodate various trends. Perhaps this unstable nature is entangled in the neighbourhood’s *panopticon* dimension. We are watched and watch others. In Malasaña, the global has become local, and vice-versa. Malasaña, as a popular Spanish song says, has a special, metropolitan, emergent and traditional character, not properly described by the popular terms of globalization, theming, gentrification or commodification, although they all relate to dynamics that can be observed here.

³⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miEwCgBIfdU>, accessed 13 June 2015.

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