

The representation of the
Spanish metropolis in the cinema of
Pedro Almodóvar and Ventura Pons

URBAN CHANGE AND GLOBAL HABITAT

JYTTE HOLMQVIST



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Jytte Holmqvist



LUND
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ABSTRACT

How does the gradual transformation of the Spanish metropolis from 1980 to 2013 reflect not only concurrent socio-political changes in contemporary Spain, but also the increasingly fluid space that is the global urban habitat of today? And how can unfixed gender identities and an altered human anatomy in the cinema of Pedro Almodóvar and, to some extent, Ventura Pons be viewed as metaphors for the changing city in which this transformed individual lives? The fluid body and identity of the on-screen transvestite and transsexual occupies a third space located somewhere between the traditionally male and female. The body becomes a construct that mirrors the increasingly artificial and dual cinematic city where the scale replica often replaces real urban space. This thesis thus analyses the cities of Madrid and Barcelona in films by both filmmakers as spaces that are becoming ever more abstract, fluid, complex and artificial as globalization takes hold of our postmodern era. The films explored are considered important visual documents that reflect not only Spain's move from dictatorship to democracy, but also the transformation of the Spanish and Catalan capitals and the move from concrete urban habitat to a more abstract global space – which is not always entirely Hispanic in feel. It is therefore to be concluded that Spain both on- and off screen, is becoming ever more outward-looking in perspective. In the analysis of films spanning from the 1980s to date, the thesis argument revolves primarily around Zygmunt Bauman's theories on postmodern liquid societies and related theories applicable to postmodernity and the urban environment by cultural geography scholar David Harvey. With regard to fluid gender representations in the cinema analysed, Judith Butler's views on gender performativity will be linked to the Deleuzian concept of becoming, which again relates to Bauman's more all-encompassing idea of a liquid global society defined by its overall lack of stability and constant motion.

This is to certify that

- (i) The thesis comprises only my own work towards the PhD except where indicated.
- (ii) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
- (iii) The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of final bibliography and appendices.

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To my brilliant photographer friend Glenn Jowitt in memoriam.

“Turn your face to the sun, and the shadows fall behind you.” (Maori proverb)

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INTRODUCTION

Aims and main research questions

In order to better understand Spain as it has entered its democratic era and embraced more global trends and values, this thesis will view all nineteen feature films that make up the Almodóvarian repertoire up until this point in time as cinematic commentaries on contemporary Spanish society and its urban spaces. This analysis will be further extended to films by Catalan cineaste Ventura Pons, who arguably has developed a sustained commentary on Catalan society and the city of Barcelona as its privileged urban habitat. The second chapter reviews all films and documentaries completing his oeuvre to date. The overall thesis aim is to evaluate how the two filmmakers approach the global metropolis both similarly and differently in their films. Given the contrasting geographical locations and political concerns of these cities; the first the national capital, the latter the capital of Catalonia, it is important to discover whether the urban themes and issues at the heart of the plots change accordingly. What cinematic elements do Almodóvar and Pons have in common and what separates them? Again, the overarching research questions that the thesis sets out to respond are: How does the gradual transformation of the Spanish metropolis from 1980 to 2013 reflect not only concurrent socio-political changes in contemporary Spain, but also the increasingly fluid space that is the global urban habitat of today? And how can unfixed gender identities and an altered human anatomy in the cinema of Almodóvar and, to some extent, Pons be viewed as metaphors for the changing city in which this transformed individual lives?

In the films analysed, the not entirely smooth development of the Spanish and Catalan metropolises is reflected visually, narratively and thematically. By focusing primarily on Madrid in Almodóvar's cinema, the thesis enables the reader to visualise

how the city has become less rigid as globalization¹ challenges traditional notions of national boundaries and leaves an increasingly fragmented urban habitat – as well as a sometimes-troubled screened citizen – in its wake. The urban fluidity is reflected socially and culturally in ever more postmodern film characters whose transformed body and unfixed identity become metaphors for the metropolis on screen. This idea is pertinent also to Pons' cinema where Barcelona is represented as a fragmented space which, as such, contains also dystopian elements. When analysing Pons in light of themes prevalent in Almodóvar, it becomes apparent that their films deal with global trends and issues and are forward-looking in perspective. The plots do not generally unfold in the historical past but, rather, in a democratically transformed Madrid and Barcelona. Thus, rather than making a clear political statement regarding the Franco regime², the filmmakers' focus is on a nation shaped by transformative and liberalizing social and cultural movements. Again, the outcome is not entirely positive, as shall be seen in, particularly, Pons' representation of the Catalan environment.³

These initial analyses of Almodóvar's and Pons' cinema against the socio-political climate at the time of filmic release reflect a changed urban identity: architecturally, culturally and in terms of alternative gender representations among some of the protagonists. The concurrent off-screen globalization of the Spanish and Catalan metropolises is mirrored by an increasingly sophisticated urban architecture and infrastructure on screen – more obvious in recent films than in those produced in the 1980s (this is especially the case with Almodóvar). The sleek urban architecture seems to be matched by ever more complex themes and plot developments. In terms of sexuality and gender issues, the analysis of the fluid gender of the transvestite and the transsexual is in the thesis partly carried out with Butler's theories on gender performativity⁴ in mind, as well as Deleuze's notion of *becoming* someone (or

¹ This time has also been referred to as a "space of flows", defined by change and fluidity rather than more fixed and rigid social structures. Melissa Aronczyk, *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). 30.

² Pons openly rejected a question on independence in an online interview, where he declared that "[p]aso de preguntas políticas." "Encuentros: Ventura Pons", *El Mundo*, last modified 2011. <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/encuentros/invitados/2014/01/29/ventura-pons/>
Almodóvar, on his part, has been said to be governed by "[una] declarada irreverencia ahistórica." Isolina Ballesteros, *Cine (ins)urgente: Textos filmicos y contextos culturales de la España posfranquista* (Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 2001). 15.

³ Note that the thesis steers away from the complex Catalan debate about national independence. This is in keeping with Pons' own decision to generally steer clear of national politics.

⁴ Her theories are re-addressed in a Butlerian reader: Sara Salih, ed. *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2004). In 2011, *The Guardian* ran an online series on "Top 100 women: writing and academia", which included a commentary on Butler. The same year, *The Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott's Critical Feminism* appeared, and more recently Butler has written on politics, performativity and dispossession: *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2013).

something) else. If the screened body becomes a metaphor for the transformed global city, it could be held that a performed gender and fluid identities are triggered and facilitated by the globalization process that permeates Madrid and Barcelona.

Ventura Pons: a reflection

While the second chapter reviews all of Pons' films in a manner similar to that of the preceding chapter, in the thesis four of his films are focused on in greater depth. These are *Carícies* (1997), *Morir (o no)* (1999), *Amor idiota* (2004), and *Barcelona (un mapa)* (2007). To suit the metropolitan purpose of this research project, these films have been selected as the most relevant in Pons' body of work. They all take place in Barcelona⁵ and all contain postmodern elements. The urban setting and the main themes of Pons' plots correspond with Almodóvar's subject matters and screened milieus. This facilitates an analysis of the two filmmakers alongside each other, and it becomes apparent that although the capitals being compared are historically different, the postmodern outcome of the urban development from Spanish dictatorship to democracy is cities that at times share concerns and similarities.

Significantly, Pons' films are all based on novels or stage plays by prominent Catalan writers and playwrights who are faithful to their regional language and culture in their work. So is Pons in his screen adaptations of these texts. Thereby his films are both localised and globalized, or "glocal"⁶, and the impact of the globalizing process on Barcelona is narratively expressed in often strenuous dialogues between protagonists who harbour negative attitudes to their transformed urban space and its recent past. The Catalan setting within which his screened citizens operate and the historical conditions of this capital that set the city off from Madrid, may make these protagonists⁷ less "directly globalized" than those of Almodóvar. Or rather, Pons' protagonists are local and global at the same time, to a greater extent than their Almodóvarian counterparts. As illustrated in the second chapter, Pons remains protective of his national heritage throughout his cinema and although his characters are not always at ease within their transformed metropolitan habitat, they generally stay

⁵ So does *Ocaña, retrat intermitent* (1978). However, this documentary is not analysed in depth as the thesis focuses on predominantly fictive films. Almodóvar's cinema is here given more space than that of Pons' and the main argument takes 1980 as a point of departure (the year of release of *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*).

⁶ The local aspects of globalization have been critically assessed in collated texts by several scholars in John Eade, ed. *Living the Global City* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁷ All Pons' film characters can generally be considered protagonists as well, given that they tend to be granted equal screen time.

put in Barcelona as they witness how globalization takes a hold of their city. Fiercely keeping to their own language in their communication – which further reflects how distinctly Catalan they are and also reflects the “revival of the Catalan language and culture” (Vilarós 1999, 37) after Franco’s death – like Catalan citizens also off-screen, Pons’ protagonists prefer to compare themselves with other cities and nationalities outside Spain, rather than seek commonalities with Madrid and its people.⁸ Again, this reflects the filmmaker’s own attitude as well as that of the writers who have thematically inspired him. The very name *Pons*, literally *bridge* in Latin⁹, reflects the filmmaker’s ability to establish a connection with territories abroad rather than form ties with Madrid.¹⁰

Structure and methodological approach

The thesis is both chronologically¹¹ and thematically structured. In the case of both filmmakers, an initial chronological analysis of all feature films making up their repertoires is followed by a thematic organisation of ideas. These overviews in the first and second chapters serve to highlight the shifting socio-political climate within which Pons and Almodóvar have operated during the production of each film. As has been aptly suggested with regard to Almodóvar by critics such as Jo Labanyi (2007 and 2008),¹² Tom Conley, Jenaro Talens and Santos Zunzunegui (1998), Juan Carlos Ibañez (2013, 153-175), and even by the filmmaker himself in an interview where he talks of the impossibility to “renounce memory” (Pérez Melgosa 2013, 176), rather

⁸ This reluctance among Catalans goes back to the Franco years, when the strive to attain the “unity of the men and lands of Spain” ultimately failed. As explained by Víctor Alba, “[i]n the name of an imaginary ‘unity’, Francoism divided.” Jon Cowans, ed. *Modern Spain: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). 275.

⁹ “Definition of pons pontis,” *Latin Dictionaries*, last modified 2008, http://www.latin-dictionary.org/pons_pontis and “Anatomy of the Brain- Pons,” Regina Bailey, *About.com: Biology*, last modified 2013, <http://biology.about.com/od/anatomy/p/pons.htm>

¹⁰ As a non-Catalan speaker myself, I have taken the liberty of rendering all quotes from Pons’ films in either Spanish or English.

¹¹ Alberto Mira’s chronological overview of Spanish cinema is worth noting here: Alberto Mira, *Historical Dictionary of Spanish Cinema* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2010). The same is true for Tatjana Pavlović’s similarly schematic overview of key events in the recent history of Spain, in her *100 Years of Spanish Cinema* (2009). Jules Stewart’s more recent review of Madrid’s historical and political development is also important, especially given a chapter containing references to Almodóvar: Jules Stewart, *Madrid: The History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

¹² Jo Labanyi, “Memory and Modernity in Democratic Spain,” *Poetics Today* 28, no. 1 (2007) and “The Politics of Memory in Contemporary Spain,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 9, no. 2 (2008).

than being a-political or breaking away from the Franco dictatorship¹³, his films are telling of Spain's transformation ever since the early to mid-1980s. Thus, the changing face of on-screen Madrid is mirrored not only in themes that relate to social and cultural trends and that have impacted on contemporary Spanish society, but also in an increasingly postmodern urban architecture as the filmmaker transports us further into the 21st century. The attitudes, concerns and behaviour of the protagonists change depending on the cultural and political climate that they are exposed to. Thus, the light-hearted attitude of Almodóvar's early 1980s characters, in films where Madrid is portrayed as a joyous *locus amoenus* and a liberating hub for carefree sexual exploration, is replaced only some years later by a more serious and sombre perspective on society, which seems to mirror the statement that "the twentieth century began on a note of optimism with visions of a futuristic utopia" but ended "on a note of reflection" (Leach 1997, xiii).

Off-screen Spanish reality thus seeps into the cinematic plots and "an optimistic vision of the city as setting for desire" gives way to "a more pessimistic view of urban life as the location of alienation, violence and AIDS" (Smith 2003, 150). As both Almodóvar and Pons have entered the 21st century there is an ever-bolder exploration of themes and issues of concern in the global city (such as urban entrapment, feelings of isolation, alienation and loneliness, as well as rootlessness among the protagonists). By analysing the films in light of their social context, it is expected that the reader will gain deeper insight into how globalized Madrid and Barcelona produce individuals who are in many ways a product of their environment and where a fluid gender and identity is the natural result of a less rigid society.¹⁴ The issues of concern that come to the fore in the plots are similarly apparent in off-screen Spanish reality, and in the world at large.

Themes explored

Several urban topics are explored in the thesis. These themes that relate to the increasingly complex screened metropolis are further expanded on in the upcoming

¹³ A famous quote reads: "I never speak of Franco, I hardly acknowledge his existence, I start after Franco... The stories unfold as if he had never existed." Kathleen M. Vernon and Barbara Morris, eds., *Post-Franco, Postmodern: The Films of Pedro Almodóvar* (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Greenwood Press, 1995). 59.

¹⁴ As noted by Leslie Broyles with regard to Almodóvar, "[l]a fluidez de sus personajes y de sus identidades refleja el estado político y social de la España durante la época de la transición de la dictadura militar a la democracia." "La identidad de género en el cine almodovariano", Leslie Broyles, California State University, Northridge, last modified 27 May 2010, <https://xdoc.mx/documents/la-identidad-de-genero-en-el-cine-almodovariano-5e98c1057622e>

literature review. The thematic development of ideas relates to urban utopia/dystopia and the interlinked notion of nostalgia, as well as urban mapping, transnationalism (screened “body parts and bodily fluids” have in some films been seen as reflective of a breakdown of “national barriers”) (Craig 2010, 167), and gender representations. On-screen nostalgia has been dealt with by several critics and is often linked to melancholia (and, thematically, to melodrama) in the cinema of Almodóvar. This sense of nostalgia is also triggered by the both utopian and dystopian aspects of the screened metropolis; themes explored by e.g. Smith, Núria Triana-Toribio, Marvin D’Lugo, and Santos Zunzunegui (with regard to Almodóvar)¹⁵ and by critics such as Sally Faulkner and Anton Pujol (Pons). An additional link between body parts, organ donation and transnational (and cross-cultural) connections has been drawn by Marsha Kinder, Linda Craig, Marvin D’Lugo, Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz, and Samuel Amago, in their analysis of Almodóvar’s cinema, but will not be expanded on as a theme in the thesis. The interrelated issue of urban and national place branding, or a cinematic marketing of the external space, is theoretically explored in the third chapter on filmic mapping.

The further focus on alternative and unfixed bodies and identities brings into attention texts by Butler, Bauman and Deleuze – theories relevant to today’s society in flux. Finally, through the additional focus on the interconnectedness between urban, semi-urban, and rural spaces that serve as a visual backdrop to the plots, the thesis points to an inherent spatial dialogue in the oeuvre of both cineastes, which more broadly seems to reflect a problematic relationship between Spain and its recent past.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical structure of the thesis revolves around the postmodern screened habitat and the argument rests on the belief that “theorizing the city is a necessary part of understanding the changing post-industrial, advanced capitalist, postmodern moment in which we live” (Low 1996, 384). Theories of Bauman, Butler, Deleuze, and Harvey complement each other in several ways and become instrumental to the development

¹⁵ – as well as Carrie Ruíz in her reflection on a cinematic escape from urban neurosis in some of Almodóvar’s films: Carrie Ruíz, “The Escape from Urban Neurosis in Almodóvar’s Films,” *Western Humanities Review* 61, no. 3 (2007).

of the main ideas. Simon Anholt¹⁶ is additionally important when it comes to his critical assessment of spatial marketing in our global times. Also relevant, although they are focussed on to a lesser extent, are urban concepts by Lefebvre, Foucault, Ricoeur, Marc Augé (whose notion of *non-places* points to the increasing artificiality of global localities, where fluid transit zones such as the airport become viable alternatives to the more fixed urban environment) (Augé 1995)¹⁷, and Giuliana Bruno. Her theories are applied in chapter three.¹⁸

i. Zygmunt Bauman

Bauman introduces the concept of a “liquid” modern society in several texts. His critical body of work includes *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997), *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998), *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Society under Siege* (2002), *City of Fears*, *City of Hopes* (2003), his three sequential, globally concerned *Liquid Life* (2005), *Liquid Fear* (2006), and *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (2007) and, more recently, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (2011). An analysis of these texts becomes particularly relevant and applicable to the cinematic discourse: Bauman perfectly encapsulates the essence of globalization and how it impacts on cities, societies and people. Always acutely aware of the double-edged sword that is the globalizing movement, Bauman views the somewhat disillusioned postmodern individual as a product of an ever more fragmentising process equalled to “the human condition that arrives *after* people stop believing in the big promises made by modern ideologies” (Smith 1999, 15).

In both texts and interviews, Bauman speaks of a fluid or liquid society in flux, one defined by its modern and especially postmodern elements. In his words,

‘[li]quid life’ and ‘liquid modernity’ are intimately connected. ‘Liquid life’ is a kind of life that tends to be lived in a liquid modern society. ‘Liquid modern’ is a society in

¹⁶ A recent book on nation branding is partly focussed on Spanish nation branding: Aronczyk, *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity*. Further to this book already mentioned in the first footnote, Alfredo Martínez-Expósito dedicates a chapter to nation branding in a newly edited book on national identities: Alfredo Martínez-Expósito, “Branding the Nation: Resistance and Authenticity in García Berlanga’s *París-Tombuctú*,” in *Rethinking Identities: Cultural Articulations of Alterity and Resistance in the New Millennium*, ed. Lucille Cairns and Santiago. Fouz-Hernández (Bern Peter Lang, 2014).

¹⁷ Peter Wollen has appropriated the term “non-place” in a critical analysis of several films: Peter Wollen, *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film* (London and New York: Verso, 2002). 199-215.

¹⁸ Important in this context are two books by Giuliana Bruno: “Site-seeing: Architecture and the Moving Image,” in *An Atlas of the Flesh: Journeys in Arts and Film* (London: Verso, 1998) and *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002).

which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines... (Bauman 2005, 1).

He defines the interrelated “time of postmodernity” as an “unfinished” and likewise “unfinishable ... project of modernity” (Bauman and Tester 2001, 75)¹⁹ and in doing so highlights how postmodernity is simultaneously a reaction to a previous era and a movement that depends on the one it rebels against, for its existence. Bauman’s arguments can be directly related to Almodóvar’s and Pons’ plots and to the urban environment that forms the backdrop to these. Not only does a liquid or fluid society that is less regulated and “fossilized” in structure than the pre-democratic Francoist society allow for more liberal groups, individuals, and thought patterns to come to the fore. But it is perhaps also this very lack of *unfinishability*, paired with an individual lack of a clear direction in a society of constant movement and action, which triggers the nostalgia so clearly sensed among characters inhabiting the cinematic universe of both filmmakers. Bauman’s theories particularly match Almodóvar’s representation of contemporary Madrid and will hence frame his cinema as far as possible. *Fluidity* becomes a keyword in the thesis: it is a concept applicable as much to the screened representation of social and urban structures, as to that of individual groups and genders – where non-conventionality is generally favoured over a more traditional representation of members of society.

ii. Anholt and place branding

As a British policy advisor, Anholt is relevant to the theoretical structure of the third chapter, with regard to notions of city and nation branding. Almodóvar’s films, in particular, appeal to a large national and international audience and in his films, Madrid tends to become the main protagonist on which most of the viewer’s attention is focussed. The film characters are both products of – and metaphors for – their environment. Thus, they complement a capital city which is represented as both real and increasingly artificial the more global it becomes. In a somewhat reversed fashion, Torres Hortelano argues that Almodóvarian elements can be found in Madrid today, but they are not so much connected to any actual settings, as to

¹⁹ His statement reminds of the idea that “postmodernism, as the cultural expression of postmodernity, is characterized by the recognition – in the spectral form of the simulacrum – of modernity’s ghosts.” Jo Labanyi, ed. *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain. Theoretical Debates and Cultural Practice* (Oxford and New York: New York University Press, 2002). 2.

the vitality and passion of a city that is gritty and offers the best of itself through its people and culture (Torres Hortelano 2011, 6).²⁰

Almodóvar's last film to date, *Los amantes pasajeros* (2013), has the city "out of focus" altogether as the viewer is allowed to cinematically co-depart from Madrid and instead joins a filmic crew and their passengers on a journey that leaves them dwelling mid-air. The fluidity of Almodóvar's ever more globalized cinema is thus achieved through the representation of a more elastic city that is both socio-politically altered through time and culturally transformed through groups and movements that have liberalised their city from within. Again, in terms of *Los amantes pasajeros*, a new sense of fluidity on screen is brought about through Almodóvar's focus on the "globetrotters" of "the postmodern elite", who occupy the global habitat (Smith 1999, 152)²¹ of space rather than that on *terra firma*.

The profound impact of Almodóvar's screened metropolis on viewers nationally and abroad makes it possible to view his films as products through which he has managed to market Spain or sell the so called "Marca España." Alfredo Martínez-Exposito has written extensively on national and urban marketing through the medium of cinema. In his view, Almodóvar's early films were

hailed as a perfect on-screen version of the 1983 Marca España ... campaign, with the now famous logo by Miró and three core values: break away from traditional topics and stereotypes, the use of the word 'Spain' as essential part of Brand, and tourism as Brand Spain's competitive advantage (Martínez-Expósito 2011, 147).

Almodóvar's ability to create a brand name for himself and refigure Spain on screen corroborates Anholt's theories on nation and city branding. In the books *Brand New Justice: How branding places and products can help the developing world* (2005 (2003)) and *Places, Identity, Image and Reputation* (2010), Anholt highlights the importance for smaller nations to sell themselves on an international market, arguing that "the image of a country determines the way the world sees it and treats it" (Anholt 2005 (2003), 105). In his view, smaller countries must send out positive messages to become attractive abroad. He stresses that:

²⁰ This important study on Madrid as a giant movie set has since been complemented by a similar study on screened Barcelona also edited by Torres Hortelano and Helio San Miguel: *World Film Locations: Barcelona* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Ltd., 2013).

²¹ A ground-breaking book proposes that the new hub where most human interaction will take place in the "next phase of globalization", is the "aerotropolis" – "a combination of giant airport, city and business hub." John Kasarda and Greg Lindsay, *Aerotropolis: The Way We'll Live Next* (New York and London: Penguin Books, 2011).

[c]ountries must do whatever they can to upgrade and 'upbrand' [their] images, to ensure that they become and remain as fair, as true, as complete and as useful to their aim as the marketplace is prepared to accept (Anholt 2005a, 225).

The Madrid that we see in Almodóvar's 1990s films, in particular, can be studied with Anholt's global theories in mind. These theories are applicable perhaps especially to the generally positive representation of Barcelona in *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999), where the Catalan cityscape attracts a both national and global audience.

Anholt tracks the current popularity of specific countries considering how resourceful and culturally successful, as well as globally influential they are. He talks of "the kudos of ... pioneers" (Anholt 2005 (2003), 104) in his annual nation brand index which concerns itself with trends today and the possibility of certain countries to reach through to a foreign market. Spain, on the geographical periphery of mainland Europe and comparatively recently democratic, has entered the international stage partly because of the media light on Almodóvar – a filmmaker whose plots are commercially viable and deal with several universal themes while remaining faithful to Spanish traditions. The characters that populate Almodóvar's cinema are as transformative as their global era. Influenced by trends affecting the modern metropolis, these characters gradually resemble "cultural hybrids" whose individuality is "an end product of *societal* transformation disguised as a *personal* discovery" (Bauman 2005, 19).

iii. Cultural geography and Cultural Studies

The hybrid personalities that Bauman speaks of above fit into the fragmented and pastiche-like collage city of the postmodern habitat, where the city, according to Harvey, has developed as a "collage" of highly differentiated spaces and mixtures" (Harvey 1989, 40). Harvey shares commonalities with Bauman regarding a New Cultural Geography concerned with urban postmodernity. Cultural geography, with origins in Human Geography, offers ways of looking at physical places or spaces and takes into account the human element of these spaces. This new aspect of traditional cultural geography looked at previously not commonly highlighted social areas,

such as ideologies of race, the role of language and discourse in producing cultural spaces, the development and maintenance of subcultures, issues of gender, sexuality and identity, and the way in which landscapes and places are more than just congeries of material artefacts or empty containers awaiting social action (Mitchell 2000, 57).²²

²² Alongside Mitchell's *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction*, the book *Cultural Geography* is also relevant to the field: Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London and New York: Routledge 1998).

The new cultural geographers became particularly expressive after the *cultural* turn of the 1980s, when Cultural Geography gained momentum as a discipline within the humanities and social sciences. These geographers partly distanced themselves from the original discourse of the forerunner of the cultural geography movement, Carl O. Sauer, and his 1925 exposé “The Morphology of Landscape” (1925). Instead, more novel views on cultural geography have been expressed by critics like Peter Jackson in his *Maps of Meaning* (Jackson 1989), and in several of Harvey’s works. In these texts (e.g. *The Conditions of Postmodernity* and *Spaces of Hope*)²³, Harvey assesses the postmodern aspects of life today often from a capitalist perspective. The global awareness of cultural geography scholars is reflected as follows:

[t]hough much of the ‘new’ cultural geography remains wedded to the idea of landscape, the approach adopted here emphasises *the plurality of cultures* and the multiplicity of landscapes with which those cultures are associated (Jackson 1989, 1).

This reminds of the notion of postmodern cinema as concerned with urban fragmentation and mobility (or “fluidity” to use a Baumanian term), cosmopolitanism, pluralisation, increased globalization and internationalisation, the merging of high and low cultures, and so forth. Such postmodern filmic elements mirror Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli’s definition of “the postmodern condition” as

Western society’s current cultural, economic and socio-political condition. This condition is characterized by such interrelated phenomena as [an] increase in social polarization; the fragmentation of the urban habitat; the compression of space and time produced by the information revolution; the increasing cosmopolitanism, and multi-ethnicity of our living environments; the globalisation of culture and the shedding of barriers that once existed between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2003, 9).

As evidenced throughout this thesis, Almodóvar’s and Pons’ oeuvres keep true to this definition of a postmodern urban habitat characterised by its opening up to the world beyond national borders and both the positive and negative effects this has on increasingly liberalised citizens (in the Western world).

²³ Important reflections on the myths of modernity are also provided by Harvey in *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

Butler and her connection to Cultural Studies

As established earlier in this introduction, Butler becomes particularly relevant to the theoretical contextualisation of ideas related to the representation of a fluid gender in Almodóvar's cinema.²⁴ Able to be read in light of Cultural Studies theories, Butler partly analyses women considering race, class and ethnicity, and is particularly concerned with "representationalism." This is also of interest to her fellow "feminists, poststructuralists, postcolonial critics, and queer theorists" (Barard 2003, 804). Butler operates within the field of a more radical or questioning feminism which presents alternative views to those having been put forward by more traditional feminists. Claiming to be embracing a so-called *New Gender Politics* (Butler 2004, 4), in her numerous works she regularly places herself within a feminist scholarship and in doing so also refers to other female scholars; mainly Irigaray, Wittig, Cixous and Kristeva. Through a ground-breaking body of work (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, and *Undoing Gender* are some of her foundational texts²⁵), Butler has carved a space for herself within contemporary feminist scholarship by deconstructing the traditional fixed male/female binary and presenting more novel views on the relationship between gender and sexuality.²⁶ More specifically, she inserts her theories on sexuality, gender, and gender performativity within a larger socio-historical context when she views gender as a socially constructed phenomenon, and by the same token sexuality becomes a process influenced by "regulatory norms" rather than purely bodily conditions.²⁷ From a Butlerian perspective, gender does not hold biological connotations. Hence, the word does not refer initially to neither a male nor a female biological setup. Rather, gender is determined by the historical, social and cultural context within which one lives. Drawing from Foucauldian post-structural traditions and inspired by e.g. Lacan, and

²⁴ Pons, too, represents gender as an unfixed and transitory concept in Barcelona (*un mapa*) (2007), a film which, nevertheless, will be analysed from a different perspective in the thesis – with regard to its screened mapping of the urban space and its repeated dialogue between past and present.

²⁵ More recently she has expanded on her gender theories in texts like "Performative Agency" (2010) and the aforementioned *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Her 1997 book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* has also left an impact.

²⁶ According to Lisa Disch, "Butler holds an influential but controversial place in contemporary feminist and democratic theory because she has pursued [her primary] commitments by way of an unrelenting critique of feminism 'as an identity politics' (GT, 148). Butler is not 'post-feminist.' But she is responding to the numbers of women who ... repudiate feminism for what they perceive to be its intolerance, anger, and insistence on representing them as sexual victims." Lisa Disch, "Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative by Judith Butler: The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Suspension by Judith Butler," *Political Theory* 27, no. 4 (1999): 545.

²⁷ "Modules on Butler: I: on gender and sex", Purdue, last modified 17 July 2002, <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/genderandsex/modules/butlergendersex.html>

Simon de Beauvoir's oft quoted statement that "one is not born but rather becomes a woman" (De Beauvoir 1989 (1953), 7),²⁸ Butler proposes that

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/ gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders ... When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free flowing artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one (Butler 1990, 6).

In the context of this thesis, Butler will be drawn from in the fifth chapter where a connection is established between her theories on gender performance and gender performativity²⁹, and fluid Deleuzian gender notions. Thus, Deleuze's concept of *becoming*, defined as something that "concerns alliance ... it is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 (1980), 273)³⁰, ties in with the notion of gender and society as unfixed and undergoing a state of flux. In the chapter context, shifting identities characterise not only the ever-changing face of Madrid as a screened capital but also the way the male cross-dresser and the transgendered individual challenge and experiment with the concept of being a man or a woman when they inhabit a world of male and female fluidity. In terms of Deleuze, it must be noted that Butler has repeatedly clarified that although some fellow feminists like Rosi Braidotti theoretically link her to the French philosopher, she herself rejects this presumed connection (or what for some "has produced an otherwise unlikely alliance with the work of Gilles Deleuze") (Butler 1993, 4).³¹

Reluctant as Butler may be toward the idea of fusing Deleuzian with feminist thoughts, in *Undoing Gender* she considers the human body as subject to a state of flux, or what could be seen as a process of becoming. She here argues that,

[a]s a consequence of being in the mode of becoming, and in always living with the constitutive possibility of becoming otherwise, the body is that which can occupy the

²⁸ Butler explains de Beauvoir's view of becoming a woman by writing that she is "always under a cultural compulsion to become one." Ibid., 8.

²⁹ According to Butler, gender is "performative ... constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed." Ibid., 25.

³⁰ More specifically, this may again mirror de Beauvoir's notion of appropriating a female gender rather than being born a woman.

³¹ See also *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), page 198.

norm in myriad ways, exceed the norm, rework the norm, and expose realities to which we thought we were confined as open to transformation (Butler 2004, 217).

In the aforementioned fifth chapter, Deleuze and feminism find common ground with regard to Almodóvar's postmodern representation of a transitory gender expressed through the alternative "gendered other" and spatial fluidity. Here, Butler's theories will also be applied in the analysis of the constructed gender of the drag artist. The urban space is equalled to a construct as transformed as the screened human body in select films. This physical construct of a woman inhabits a fluid space parallel to biological reality. In Almodóvar's cinema, the gendered fluidity of the transsexual and the transvestite is reflected in a body on display that mimics a biologically authentic female body. And yet, the identification of the transgender persona with the female often acted out on stage generally leads to a performance so convincing that the imitation ends up becoming a viable alternative to a "real" woman. In other words, the male performer interprets a woman so well that what seems to matter is no longer biological authenticity, but a mental approximation – and an homage – to the female sex.

Thus, although the imitative female body of the cross-dresser ultimately remains a copy of the real (it must be noted that the screened transsexual approximates the gendered opposite to a greater extent than the transvestite), Almodóvar's transgender persona offers an alternative interpretation of gendered authenticity when sex and gender are blurred in a spectacle that correlates with the idea that:

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance... *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency* (Butler 1990, 418).

To Butler, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler 1990, 422). Drawing, in part, on Fredric Jameson's deconstructivist and postmodern take on parody and pastiche³², she views the drag artist, more specifically, as a person who successfully imitates the real by allowing themselves to be actively connected with their socio-historical and cultural past. As a result, this gender performer already has a prior understanding of what it

³² According to Jameson, "[o]ne of the most significant features or practices in postmodernism today is pastiche. ... Both pastiche and parody involve the imitation or ... the mimicry of other styles and particularly the mannerisms and stylistic twitches of other styles." Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983). 113.

means to be culturally shaped to be a man or a woman, and through parody he reaches out to the audience while captivating the viewers with his temporarily female body. In other words, Butler seems to propose that society produces men and women; i.e. individuals *become* male or female through events and processes that shape and influence them. If one adopts such a perspective, it may eventually be queried whether biological sex is all that important when it comes to gender identification. Perhaps what really matters is *feeling* male or female³³ and acting like either one or the other even though one is born into a sex other than that with which one identifies.³⁴

Overall, there is a link between the main theoretical components of the thesis and the postmodern image of the city and citizen reflected on screen: Bauman's theories on a liquid modern society, where life "cannot stand still" and which "must modernize ... or perish" (Bauman 2005, 3), Anholt's partly embraced theories on nation and city branding – which are forward-looking in their focus on a society that competes with others in an increasingly globalized world – and the ideas put forward by cultural geographers (including cultural scholars like Butler) regarding the "pluralities of cultures" and the transformed landscape of the human body today. All share commonalities and all tie in with a multi-layered, multi-cultural, historically detached and socially fragmented postmodern, global society. These theories and perspectives benefit the thesis argument, whose ultimate purpose is to analyse how Almodóvar and Pons propel their plots in an increasingly global direction.

Appropriation of the term *globalization*

Globalization denotes the coming together of people from different backgrounds and nations to form a multi-ethnic society. Thus, the term relates to interconnectedness, hybridisation, and social plurality. As an officially appropriated term, *globalization* is comparatively modern, linking back more concretely to the 1980s³⁵ – politically in

³³ Butler provides an interesting case study on an individual having forcefully undergone sexual reassignment surgery and who later in life chose to revert to his original male sex when it proved impossible for him to embrace a female persona and identity. Judith Butler, "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality." Chap. 3 in *Undoing Gender*. Abington and New York: Routledge, 2004.

³⁴ Recognizing the importance of Butler's theories also within the field of cinema studies, Steven Marsh and Parvati Nair argue that "[f]or scholars of gender and film today" ... [Butler's and de Beauvoir's work] "must stand as key reference points in the complex evolving map of understandings and imaginations of gender in advanced modernity." Steven Marsh and Parvati Nair, eds., *Gender and Spanish Cinema* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004). 2.

³⁵ – although it had already entered dictionaries in 1961, as an economic reference within a Spanish context- as noted in *The Economist* magazine "Globalisation: Going global", *The Economist*, last modified 5 November 2009, <http://www.economist.com/node/14816758>

relation to the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent opening of not only Germany (Fine 2007, 1), but also Russia and other societies worldwide. Although it was initially more specifically applied to a social, political and economic context, the term has since entered numerous social fields and academic disciplines. Consequently, it is now appropriated by anthropologists, social scientists, economists and politicians.³⁶ Lending itself to several interpretations, *globalization* has often been used to refer to political and socio-economic changes and processes. From a cultural geography perspective, it has been called “the interconnection of cultural, social, political and economic processes across the world” (Washbourne 2005, 161).

In the thesis, *globalization* is applied as part of a cultural discourse with regard to a contemporary Spanish society influenced by democratizing movements and international trends. While still wary of its recent past, Spain has now been transformed into a multicultural and multiethnic, multilayered space defined by its liberalising movements; also, in terms of its sexual and gendered “others.” The country now also exhibits a hybrid urban architecture where buildings that are traditional or local coexist with a more streamlined, internationalised and tourist-orientated architecture; perhaps particularly prevalent in Pons’ screened representation of the post-Olympic urban architecture in *Barcelona (un mapa)*. The global aspects of his cinema tie in with the definition of globalization as a:

process of *translating the transnational* structurations of nation, self and community into “translational”³⁷ *in-between* spaces of negotiated language, borderland being, and bicultural ambivalence (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996, 2).

Relevance of the thesis and its main keywords

A global, partly comparative approach to Almodóvar’s and Pons’ cinema is both timely and important in light of a contemporary society shaped and moulded by international trends. As such, it is not as much fixed and stable, as fluid and unpredictable. The fluidity of the screened metropolis impacts on urban structures, social groups and gender relations, as well as sexual and gendered identities. As opposed to most films produced during the Franco dictatorship when filmmakers were not given much leeway, Almodóvar and Pons both run their own production companies: *El Deseo S.A.* and *Els Films de La Rambla*, respectively. Symbolically, this has granted them the

³⁶ A politically orientated study on the pros and cons of globalization is David Held, ed., *Debating Globalization* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity, 2005).

³⁷ This concept is used with reference to Bhabha. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, and New York: Verso, 2004).

freedom to move in a double sense; within a now democratic nation where they can operate freely and simultaneously represent contemporary societal changes on screen. Their films shed new light on groups that defy social norms and present alternative urban (and sexual) identities, partly facilitated by Spain's entrance into the global era and the country's need to compete on the international market. This requires a more liberal outlook on Spain and the outside world. An increased tolerance for unconventional groups and individuals within a more fluid society is called for, as is an acceptance of "non-standardized identities" (urban, sexual or gendered, and cultural). Both filmmakers repeatedly prove to us that different attitudes and identities can constitute a viable alternative to the norm.

The modern identity of the on-screen metropolis is influenced not only by globally aware filmmakers, novelists and playwrights, but also by forward-thinking contemporary Spaniards governed by ideals and attitudes previously often discouraged. Almodóvar, in particular, has welcomed a normalisation of the previously "abnormal" and has "centralised the margins" through his cinema – in a manner that corresponds with Kinder's statement that Almodóvar has "subverted the center by redefining it as the marginal" (Kinder 1993, 433).

Similarly guided by a liberal outlook on life, Pons, too, focusses on the "unconventional other", while at the same time his cinema propels Catalonia in a global direction thematically and architecturally. *Fluidity* ultimately runs like a governing idea throughout the work of both filmmakers and their representation of Madrid and Barcelona. In Núria Triana-Toribio's words, Spanish filmmakers today (including Almodóvar and Pons) have

succeeded ... in changing the meaning of the words 'Spanish cinema' and what was perceived as Spanishness for future audiences, nationally and transnationally (Triana-Toribio 2003, 134).

If social and cultural liquidity is continuously embraced also off-screen, this may lead to a greater recognition of groups and individuals that make up a postmodern (and "post-rigid"), global metropolis. Both cineastes explored in this thesis can ultimately help foster a more tolerant approach towards gendered alternatives, in particular, and a comparison of their cinema may benefit a more complete picture of the fluid landscape of Spain as the country has stepped further into democracy – and globalization.

Literature review

i. Theories on culture and the city and the city on screen

Throughout the history of film, the city has figured prominently on screen and numerous plots unfold largely within an urban environment. City and cinema go hand in hand and have largely developed alongside each other. As Ackbar Abbas puts it: “It would be hard to imagine the existence of cinema without the experience of cities...” Referring to Walter Benjamin’s notion of the city as a *kaleidoscope* and Paul Virilios’s “aesthetic of experience”, Abbas argues that

not only does the cinematic image come out of urban experience; it also incorporates such experience in a new aesthetic principle, an aesthetic of movement where instability becomes paradoxically the principle of structure (Abbas 2003, 144).

In their assessment of the filmic city, critics today draw from theories on cultural and urban spaces, communication, and societal changes. Several schools of thought, such as The Berkeley School within the field of Cultural Geography, are concerned with how urban change influences society and culture. The modern city continues to attract scholarly attention worldwide, as seen in the staging of international conferences on issues like nation branding, cultural and urban geography, and, more specifically, urban spaces as well as voices “that animate contemporary cities”³⁸ (The Australian Studies Centre’s and the University of Barcelona’s joint staging of international conferences on the city are concrete examples of this). Many urban theories are linked to discourses on cultural geography – a discipline that has attracted the attention of “anthropologists, historians of science, cultural historians, archaeologists, and sociologists” (Duncan, et al. 2004, 3). Chris Lukinbeal draws a further link between specifically cinematic landscapes and theatre (two art forms successfully inter-linked by Pons in several of his films based on theatrical plays), with ties back to the 16th century. Theatre being the “immediate artistic predecessor to cinema”, the two fields are interrelated and Lukinbeal refers to cultural geographer Peter Jackson when combining theatre of the 16th century and “landscape”, with “text”, which Jackson views as a metaphor for “the late 20th and early 21st centuries” (Lukinbeal 2005, 3).³⁹ In his article on cinematic

³⁸ From a call for papers for the *Communication and the City: Voices, Spaces, Media* conference, Institute of Communication Studies, University of Leeds, June 14-15, 2013.

³⁹ It would seem that Pons as a filmmaker most aptly manages to adapt plays to the screen – his former career as a theatre director effectively drawn from in his cinema.

landscapes, Lukinbeal⁴⁰ particularly makes references to Jackson's 1979 memorial lecture in honour of O'Sauer, published in the *Landscape* magazine.⁴¹ Sauer argues, in his aforementioned brief but succinct *The Morphology of Landscape*, that

[e]very landscape has individuality as well as relation to other landscapes, and the same is true for the forms that make it up. No valley is quite like any other valley; no city the exact replica of some other city (Sauer 1925, 26).

Sauer's thoughts on natural and cultural landscapes have inspired followers within the same academic discipline that reassessed his theories particularly after the time of the cultural turn. These new cultural geographers

embraced and were profoundly shaped by feminist scholarship, as well as by poststructuralist, postmodern, and postcolonial theory (Scott 2004, 24).

In terms of a more concrete architectural and practical approach to the city, Kevin Lynch has proved instrumental within the field of urban studies with his *The Image of the City* (1960). Comparatively short as this book may be, Lynch's precise way of describing urban layouts and infrastructures has inspired followers within fields like urban and cultural geography, in their studies on the modern city. Contemporary with Lynch, Henri Lefebvre took urban theories to a new level in his classification of the city into more, or less, abstract spaces. His three main "spatial divisions" include "spatial practice", "representations of space", and "representational spaces – space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists and perhaps of those ... who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe" (Lefebvre 1991 (1974), 39).⁴² Paul Julian Smith⁴³ calls Lefebvre "the major theorist of urban space" and argues that by

[c]onnecting the architectonic to the social and the mental to the physical, Lefebvre offers both a diachronic and a synchronic account of the city. For example, 'spatial

⁴⁰ A second article by Lukinbeal also reflects his cultural studies background and becomes relevant to the cartographic perspectives on the cinematic city, explored in the third chapter. Chris Lukinbeal, "The map that precedes the territory: An introduction to essays in cinematic geography," *Geojournal* 59, no. 4 (2004). The same is true for his 2010 article, which traces cartographic aspects relating to cinema ("Mobilizing the cartographic paradox: tracing the aspect of cartography and prospect of cinema").

⁴¹ This magazine is also mentioned in the introduction to Martin Lefebvre, ed. *Landscape and Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁴² Another important Lefebvorean text is *Writings on Cities*, trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996 (first English translation)).

⁴³ Smith has written extensively on Spanish cinema and is one of the main advocates of Almodóvar in the English-speaking world.

practice' refers to how space is perceived, 'representations of space' to how it is conceived, and 'representational spaces' to how it is lived (Smith 2000b, 5).⁴⁴

Smith actively appropriates Lefebvre's theories on produced urban spaces, in *The Moderns: Time, Space, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Spanish Culture* (2000), where he uncommonly refers to Almodóvar only in passing. Nevertheless, the term "moderns" is linked to the filmmaker, in that

Pedro Almodóvar... reminds us that those said to embody *the movida* at the time of the Transition did not use that word themselves; rather they defined themselves as 'the moderns' (Smith 2000b, 6).⁴⁵

In light of Lefebvre, the notion of both real and 'imaginary' or abstract spaces is pertinent to the global city defined by its lack of rigidity and strict limitations between social and architectural artefacts, groups, norms and behaviour. The comparatively fluid spaces of our contemporary society lacking in strict boundaries have been theorised on by Bauman, who argues that:

The extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associated them with the idea of 'lightness'. ... We associate 'lightness' or 'weightlessness' with mobility and inconstancy There are reasons to consider 'fluidity' or 'liquidity' as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways *novel*, phase in the history of modernity (Bauman 2000, 2).

The global times that Bauman could be referring to here are in the thesis equalled to a process of increased social mobility, fluidity, hybridity, and internationalisation. In the films analysed this is concretely visualised in less conventional gender expressions; characters who are predominantly governed by a comparatively modern attitude to the great metropolis, and a vision set on the future rather than the past. As stressed earlier, architecturally the screened metropolis is also more sophisticated the more globalized Almodóvar's and Pons' films become.

The continued globalization of the modern city has been theorised in several studies by e.g. David B Clarke (1997), Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen, who speak of a "[n]ew type of cities, called global cities by some, world cities or megacities by others"

⁴⁴ An excellent reader on key theories on architecture and space has been compiled in Neil Leach, ed. *Rethinking Architecture: A reader in cultural theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). In this book, Leach collates views by scholars from several disciplines, and the reader is taken from Modernism to Poststructuralism in a clear and well-structured manner.

⁴⁵ The Spanish *Movida* movement has been linked to "a new democratic regional identity" in Hamilton M. Stapell's *Remaking Madrid: Culture, Politics, and Identity After Franco* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). 94-121.

(Marcuse and Kempen 2000, 1). Their *Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order?* also talks about the fluidity of the changing global city and offers a case study on different urban environments, equalling the “spatial cleavages ... in cities today” to “a quartered”, or “plural city” (2). Marcuse’s and van Kempen’s book is interesting in view of a city within a city and its focus on areas that are urban yet not always metropolitan. This brings to mind the varied representations of the urban space in the cinema of Almodóvar, where metropolitan areas are often juxtaposed with suburban and rural.

Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse also talk of the “spatial order of cities” (Prakash and M. Kruse 2008, 5) and later refer to Lefebvre and other urban theorists in their analysis. *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* further links back to Lefebvre. The book compares cinema to a “spatial form of culture” (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001, 5) and Tony Fitzmaurice defines “emergent urban landscapes” as places (and spaces) where “concepts of place, location, home, region, territory, nation, and, most particularly, city and suburb” are renegotiated and “reinforced” (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001, 19). His thoughts, too, are applicable to the cinema of Almodóvar. The filmmaker unfolds a shifting urban landscape that can be defined in a number of ways.

When it comes to the screened city, the book *Visualizing the City* (Marcus and Neumann 2007) also highlights the connection between cinema and the city, and *Deciphering the City* refers to cities as breathing, fluid entities: “they are living things, with distinct personalities” (Schwab 2005, 10). The straightforward title *City* is given a text that claims not to be “a book about cities” but rather “about urban theory” (Hubbard 2006, 1) and separate chapters are dedicated to the postmodern city, the cinematic city, city branding, and the concept of the urban *flâneur*. Author Phil Hubbard, steeped in the tradition of urban social geography, categorises the city according to the following attributes: “represented”, “the everyday city”, “the hybrid city”, “the intransitive city”, and “the creative city.” Lynch further highlights the relationship between city and city dweller. He defines the latter as an observer as well as a “participant”, of the urban “spectacle.” Making “legibility” a key term in his argument, he stresses that “we must consider not just the city as a thing in itself, but the city being perceived by its inhabitants” (Lynch 1960, 3).

The notion of the city as spectacle brings into discussion the tourist aspect of the global city; which is again connected to urban place branding. Tourism impacts on and re-defines national identity, as highlighted by Eugenia Afinoguénova and Jaumi Martí-Olivella in their book *Spain Is (Still) Different: Tourism and Discourse in Spanish Identity* (Afinoguénova and Martí-Olivella 2008). And *Tourism and the Branded City: Film and Identity on the Pacific Rim* (Hemmelryk Donald and Gammack 2007) shares similarities with theories by Anholt.

Although it revolves mainly around Sydney, Hong Kong and Shanghai, their text is still applicable to the thesis discourse. Neither overlooking the human element of the modern metropolis, nor the past as an intrinsic aspect of current nation branding, the book claims that historical text is crucial:

Places are differentiated not only by their physical forms and architectures, but also by the contexts of their construction and development, by the known experiences of usage and by the currency of the memories which attach to them (Hemmelryk Donald and Gammack 2007, 29).

In other words, although at first glance it would appear place branding pertains mainly to our contemporary times, it cannot be properly achieved without a preliminary awareness of what historically defines a country and the architectural landmarks that reflect its past. Importantly, national stereotypes are also shaped by a country's history and the events experienced by its people.

Finally, not to be overlooked regarding the globalized city and the tourist gaze is John Urry's book sub-headed *Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*.⁴⁶ This text lends itself particularly well to the visual approach to Barcelona in Almodóvar's *Todo sobre mi madre*, where the female protagonist enters the Catalan metropolis as a tourist eighteen years after her initial departure from the city. Urry likens the touristic gaze to a type of "social patterning", a viewing that presupposes "a much greater sensitivity to visual elements of landscape or townscape than is normally found in everyday life" (Urry 1990, 3). Thus, through the observing tourist gaze, the viewer, too, experiences the global Spanish city through foreign eyes. All these theories relate to an analysis of an urban habitat where concrete spaces are matched by more abstract spaces (be they symbolic, mental or otherwise).

ii. Recent Spanish cinema, existing scholarship on Almodóvar, and a gap to be filled

In terms of studies on Spanish cinema and the city, the thesis integrates theories on Spanish post-Franco identity (or identities) and embraces texts concerned with the representation of Madrid and Barcelona in the cinema of Almodóvar and Pons. In the case of Almodóvar, it must be initially stressed that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to dwell on aspects of *auteurism*, so often the focus of studies on Almodóvar (as seen in texts by Triana-Toribio and Smith – who calls the filmmaker "the one true auteur to emerge in the 1980s and a regular source of high-profile new product") (Smith 2000a,

⁴⁶ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London, Newbury Park, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1990 (second edition)).

5).⁴⁷ Nor will the argument concern itself with repeatedly explored aspects of comedy; partly covered in e.g. Mark Allinson's book chapter "Postmodernism, Performance and Parody" (Allinson 2001, 209-16) and of interest to Santos Zunzunegui in a chapter of Pavlović's *Spanish Cinema* (Pavlović et al 2009).

The melodramatic aspects of Almodóvar's oeuvre are of interest to a host of critics; in book chapters by e.g. Allinson, Linda Williams and Despina Kakoudaki (Epps and Kakoudaki 2009), as well as conference proceedings on Almodóvar (Vázquez Varela and Zurián 2005). Although melodrama can be considered a driving force behind the plot development in many of Almodóvar's films, it will not be dealt with in the thesis and nor will the screened function of music.⁴⁸ Homosexuality is another prevalent theme in films by both filmmakers (who are, perhaps not surprisingly, gay themselves). The thesis steers away from a gay discourse but aspects of gender performativity and gender fluidity through sex change as issues that pertain to queer studies are considered all the more important.⁴⁹

Instead, and to reiterate, in focus is the global metropolis as an additional, perhaps even main, character in Almodóvar's and Pons' cinema. A study of current scholarship reveals that not much comparative research has been carried out on the two as to the way they both represent the radically transformative journey that Spain has embarked on ever since the beginning of democracy. It is hence deemed important to try to fill this gap and to compare films that make up their repertoire. This also sheds light on the contrasting recent histories of Madrid and Barcelona (although, again, the thesis argument does not get involved in the issue of Catalan independence). A link between

⁴⁷ And according to Evans, "Spanish cinema is going through its best period ... from an auteurist perspective." Peter William Evans, ed. *Spanish Cinema: The Auteurist Tradition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xxi. Allinson, in turn, calls Almodóvar the "auteur of a free Spain." Mark Allinson, *A Spanish Labyrinth: The Films of Pedro Almodóvar* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001). 3.

⁴⁸ Brief references to Ismaël Lô and African music traditions will be made with regard to a crucial moment in *Todo sobre mi madre*. Kathleen M. Vernon has further expanded on the global function of songs in Almodóvar's filmic repertoire, in a chapter making up a recent book on Almodóvar: Marvin D'Lugo and Kathleen Vernon, eds., *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar* (Malden, M.A.: John Wiley and Sons, 2013). And Triana-Toribio claims that "Almodóvar's soundtracks consist of an indiscriminate mixture of songs of different national origin." Núria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). 140.

⁴⁹ The following books prove interesting reads regarding the male body and homosexuality as represented on screen: Santiago Fouz-Hernández and Alfredo Martínez-Expósito, *Live Flesh: The Male Body in Contemporary Spanish Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007) and Santiago Fouz-Hernández, *Mysterious Skin: Male Bodies in Contemporary Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009). José Arroyo and Paul Julian Smith have also provided thoughts on the matter, in Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau, eds., *Popular European Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 31-46, and so has Kinder in *Refiguring Spain: Cinema/ Media/ Representation* (London: Duke University Press 1997), 178-95.

Spain and the larger international community can ultimately be drawn as some of the issues dealt with in the films pertain also to other globalized nations today.⁵⁰

Both filmmakers establish a close relationship between their protagonists and their urban environment. At times these screened citizens relate to the city in an almost organic manner and can be said to have become “one with the urban space” more, or less, reluctantly. This partly corresponds with the statement that Madrid (as an example) offers its best

performances in regard to film ... in the lives of its anonymous citizens, in its neighbourhoods and streets, where life boils and changes constantly and continuously (Torres Hortelano 2011, 7).

A more concrete example of the identification of character with the city they inhabit is seen in Almodóvar’s *Carne trémula* (1997) and in the opening scene of Pons’ earlier *La rossa del bar* (1986). As noted by Steven Marsh in a chapter dedicated solely to the former film, the symbiotic relationship between city and citizen is here reflected also linguistically, when the names of several characters symbolise urban spaces. As *metropolis* already means “mother city” in Greek, this film is “about home” (Marsh 2004, 61). Marsh analyses the names of the protagonists considering the city they dwell in: “‘Centro’ means centre, ‘Plaza’, Victor’s surname, means square. These are characters associated with public arenas” (Marsh 2004, 66). Similarly, Mark Allinson argues that “the personalization of the relationship between city and character is strongest ... in *Live Flesh*” (Allinson 2001, 121).

Significantly, this is the one film by Almodóvar that openly rejects the Francoist past (however, it does not detach itself from it, as noted by Martínez-Expósito, who talks of “[t]he long shadow of Franco’s Spain also noticeable in the film’s momentary dialogues between past and present”) (Martínez-Expósito 2008b, 143). Protagonist Victor’s comment to his unborn son in the final scene is tinged with relief as it reflects the certainty that this child will be born in a democracy rather than a repressive regime. It has been argued that one of the “innovative features” of this film is that this is the “director’s first and only explicit reference to the Franco regime in his work” (Morgan-Tamosunas 2002, 185). Rather, the film embraces a globalized present: new birth here signifies hope for a new generation of children born in a free Spain, not tied down by the fetters of the past.⁵¹ And as has been highlighted, “[g]lobal space radiates from the city of Madrid and vice versa” (Marsh 2004, 59). Noting the foreign elements in the film, introduced through the focus on immigrants to Madrid and regular travels from

⁵⁰ Worth recommending is Verena Koppatz’ doctoral thesis on Pons: “Von der Bühne auf die Leinwand: Der Katalanische Regisseur Ventura Pons im Medienwechsel”, Wien: Universität Wien, 2009.

⁵¹ This is true even though the film takes pre-democratic Spain as a point of departure.

the city, Marsh also mentions a “clear attempt” by Almodóvar to here link the city’s architecture to Spain’s entry into the European Union (Marsh 2004, 66).

The notion of parallel urban spaces has also been observed, in “a film that is keenly aware of current international affairs” (Marsh 2004, 60). Almodóvar’s “most European and most contemporary film” (Smith 2000, 172) *La flor de mi secreto* (1995), in turn, reflects the changing political climate in off-screen Spain at the time. References to international conflict and the Spanish elections that coincided with the release of this film, reveals both global and local awareness on the part of Almodóvar, and Kinder stresses the need

for Spain to change its imagery. It must find renewal by looking at the specificity of “el país” (the country itself) through new eyes (Kinder 1997, 17).

This statement resonates with observations made by D’Lugo with regard to urban and national mapping, which further exemplifies how Almodóvar intertwines a local with a global imagery.⁵²

Kinder also notes the political aspects of *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* (1984) released a decade earlier, and she calls the film “the most politically pointed in its strategic use of cinematic references” (Kinder 1997, 43). The aspects of neorealism and naturalism in this film, further referred to in the upcoming first chapter, have also been analysed by critics like Frédéric Strauss (Strauss 1994), Paul Julian Smith, and Peter William Evans in his article “Culture and Cinema, 1975-1996” (Evans 1999, 276-77). More specifically, Tatjana Pavlović calls Almodóvar’s fourth feature film “a grotesque neorealist melodrama with strong social overtones” (Pavlović et al 2009, 161).⁵³ The neorealist elements of *¿Qué he hecho...!!* have similarly attracted the scholarly attention of e.g. Triana-Toribio (1996), Mercedes Maroto Camino (2005), and Lara Anderson (Anderson and Spicer- Escalante 2010, 299-314).

Linking back to the original Greek meaning of the word “metropolis” – “mother city”-, Almodóvar’s body of work largely revolves around women, or men resembling

⁵² D’Lugo expresses his views in two important articles on Almodóvar’s cinema: Marvin D’Lugo, “Almodóvar’s City of Desire,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 34, no. 4 (1991) and “El extraño viaje alrededor del cine de Almodóvar,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004).

⁵³ Almodóvar himself has commented that it “is a very ugly film; both the interiors and the exteriors are very ugly. And it’s much more dramatic than amusing. The humor is stifled by the harshness of everything that happens.” Paul Duncan, ed. *The Pedro Almodóvar Archives* (Köln, Germany: Taschen, 2011). 69.

women,⁵⁴ and the contemporary metropolis (Madrid and Barcelona) receives new significance through the focus on the mother and aspects of maternity in particularly *Todo sobre mi madre*, a film that marks the highlight of Almodóvar's career and that has received numerous accolades from the press. Not only is the mother or the mother figure in the centre of attention, but this is also one of the films referred to by Allinson in his reflection that "[e]arlier films portray a somewhat drab city while the later ones feature designer lofts and sleek high-speed trains" (Allinson 2001, 119-20). Such a statement highlighting concurrent urban change and development mirrors Almodóvar's general outlook on Spain and its identity, where we see him distancing himself from the Franco regime.⁵⁵ Instead, both Almodóvar and Pons present their country in light of new democratic liberalising movements; trends that have triggered a need to redefine what it means to be Spanish and Catalan in a global era.

iii. Scholarship on the Spanish nation and nationhood

A host of critics take a particular interest in Spanish nationhood and identity as it has changed and has had to be redefined since the initial stages of democracy in the 1980s. Texts worthy of mention here are *Spanish Cultural Studies. An Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity* (Graham and Labanyi 1995), *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain. Theoretical Debates and Cultural Practice* (Labanyi 2002), *The Spaniards: A Portrait of the New Spain* (Hooper 1987), *The New Spaniards* (Hooper 2006 (1986)), *Postmodern Paletos: Immigration, Democracy, and Globalization in Spanish Narrative and Film, 1950-2000* (Richardson 2012), *Blood Cinema. The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Kinder 1993) and *Refiguring Spain: Cinema/ Media/ Representation* (Kinder 1997), as well as Triana-Toribio's *Spanish National Cinema* where she ponders the "'vexed' terms nation and nationalism" (Triana-Toribio 2003, 2). Evans reflects on similar issues, as does David T. Gies, who calls Spain "a modern, democratic, chic, and vigorous cultural center" (Gies 1999, 1). And Paul Julian Smith, Jean-Claude Seguin Vergara and Nancy Berthier are also important in this context. Critically acclaimed Triana-Toribio views cinema as "the most powerful narrative machine of the 20th century", one that has influenced the "formation of national identities, Spanish included" (Triana-Toribio 2003, 6). Her

⁵⁴ Again, with regard to *Carne trémula*, it has been called an attempt to restore "the body of Spain." Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz, "The Body and Spain: Almodóvar's *All About My Mother*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 21, no. 1 (2003). Samuel Amago, in turn, argues that this is a "film about connections: national, transnational, subnational, familial, cultural, social and genealogical." Samuel Amago, "Todo sobre Barcelona: Refiguring Spanish Identities in Recent European Cinema," *Hispanic Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (2007): 12.

⁵⁵ See also Duncan, *The Pedro Almodóvar Archives*, 238.

statement echoes that of D'Lugo, who claims that for Spain to succeed outside its own territories, "signs of Spanish identity" had to be produced; "clichés that other cultures could recognize" (D'Lugo 1996, 44). His observation is reflective of the concept of nation branding, similarly observed by Triana-Toribio:

The fact that he [Almodóvar] has been celebrated from the end of the 1980s onwards ... simply goes to show that the practice of labelling as 'national' certain film directors, genres, modes or styles is alive and well (2003, 135).

Expanding in part on these thoughts, Kinder argues that to be considered a valid representative of a certain culture, "every national film movement" strives for "international recognition" (Kinder 1993, 6). This again reflects the importance of place branding also within Spanish cinema.

As highlighted earlier, Graham and Labanyi are instrumental as scholars writing on Spanish nation-building, and provide the reader with a historical background to the progressive path towards democratic Spain.⁵⁶ Labanyi talks of the difficulty to define what is currently typically and topically Spanish and pluralistically claims that "to be Spanish is to be Spanish and international at the same time" (Labanyi 1995, 397). This statement mirrors Gies' observation that Spain is seen as both mono-cultural and multicultural: "compelling claims have been made for a multiplicity of cultures which include regional history and expression" (Gies 1999, 5). Claude Murcia also speaks of the plurality, or fluidity, of the Spanish nation today. She refers to the country as an imagined community ("esta comunidad imaginada que es la nación española") (Murcia 2007, 272). Murcia verbalizes the fluidity of Spain (and other globalized nations), arguing that "una nación no es una entidad inmutable, fijada para la eternidad, ni una entidad única y homogénea" (2007, 272).

iv. Postmodernity and the screened global city

The term *postmodernity* encompasses several areas, including

architecture, art, literature, cinema, music, fashion, communications, experience of space and time, aspects of identity and sexuality as well as philosophical, political and sociological reflections on the same and broader questions of social life (Smart 1993, 13).

The concept relates to a less easily defined time following on modernity (but not completely detached from this movement or era) that has catapulted contemporary

⁵⁶ Names like Peter William Evans and Barry Jordan stand out among the contributors, not to mention renowned Spanish author and *El País* journalist Rosa Montero.

citizens into an existence that is both liberalising and anxiety-ridden due to social uncertainty, mobility and fluidity, and where there is also often a sense of disconnectedness with regard to the historical past.⁵⁷ At the same time, the plurality of cultures typical of our postmodern times reflects the global aspects of society today and may also be socially enriching. When it comes to Spain, its postmodern society has indeed been defined as a “rich amalgam of tastes and needs and expressions which make up that rather amorphous concept called ‘Spain’” (Gies 1999, 6). Similarly, Antonio Sánchez defines Barcelona as “a gigantic postmodern mirror reflecting an idealized image of itself to local and global audiences alike” (Sánchez 2002, 303). He additionally connects postmodern architecture and cultural studies and, in doing so, highlights a tendency to read the postmodern urban space post-structurally, as a “text” (Sánchez 2002, 239).

These postmodern aspects of Spain and its metropolis today are in the films analysed further mirrored by the filmmakers’ general reluctance to linger in the Spanish past, in the pastiche or “mosaic” elements of their visual narratives and which make Madrid and Barcelona resemble “collage cities”, and in several fragmented plots. This is particularly true for Pons, who regularly challenges a chronological order of events by keeping to a non-linear narrative structure (historical flashbacks become particularly effective in *Barcelona (un mapa)*).⁵⁸ Pons also classifies as a postmodern director in his theatrical focus on separate dialogues or minor narratives that make up the whole – as well as his screened representations of city dwellers at odds with their transformed environment (further explored in the sixth chapter which verbalises the notion of urban utopia and dystopia in the cinema of Almodóvar and Pons).

Several scholars have written on the postmodern aspects of Spanish cinema and cities today. Among these texts, *Post-Franco, Postmodern: The Films of Almodóvar* (Vernon and Morris 1995) and the aforementioned *From Moscow to Madrid: Postmodern Cities, European Cinema* are relevant to the thesis argument. In the latter, the global city is called “an ever-shifting text, as the mutating product of a complex series of relations and representations.”⁵⁹ “[C]inematic representations of a city” here refer not only to the mapped,

⁵⁷ As has been noted, “[t]he most profound symptoms of the postmodern condition” are “the disappearance of a sense of history, entrapment in a perpetual present, the loss of temporal referents...” Anne Friedberg, “Les Flâneurs du Mal(l): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition,” *PMLA* 106, no. 3 (1991): 420.

⁵⁸ The film achieves a “temporal displacement of the spectator”, which is said to be “one of the essential properties of cinema”, *ibid.*, 427.

⁵⁹ The notion of an ever-shifting text has in Triana-Toribio’s words been replaced by a “hybrid textual weave”; Evans, *Spanish Cinema: The Auterist Tradition*, 227.

‘real’ city but also, and more interestingly, to the city-text (the product of countless and intermingled instances of representation), and to the lived-city (the experience of urban life and of its representations that an inhabitant or a visitor may have) (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2003, 2).

Nathan Richardson (who I had the pleasure to meet at the 33rd Cincinnati Conference on Romance Languages and Literatures, 2013) also theorises Spain as a construct and is similarly interested in the postmodern aspects of the screened Spanish city. Specifically, in terms of Almodóvar’s *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, he reflects on its “postmodern anachronisms of city and country” (Richardson 2002, 140).⁶⁰ Morris and Vernon further narrow their postmodern referents when they describe Almodóvar as a postmodern auteur. By this, they mainly consider the star aspect of the filmmaker and his marketing of Spain to a foreign audience. A number of additional discourses revolve around the postmodern elements of Almodóvar’s oeuvre. Among these, Seguin Vergara views screened Madrid as fragmented, and *fluidity* becomes a key term throughout his analysis (Seguin Vergara 2009). He earlier referred to Spain as a *montage* or *puzzle*: “España es un montaje, un puzzle, periferias, descentramientos” (Seguin Vergara 2007, 10).⁶¹

In *Hispanismo y cine*, “fragmentation” has been replaced by the negatively charged *deconstrucción* to refer to postmodern Madrid (Herrera and Martínez-Carazo 2007, 203). And in a statement that reminds of Benedict Anderson’s notion of *imagined communities*, Richardson maintains that “cities have become as much imagined communities as nations” (Richardson 2012, 15), a comment that reminds of Murcia’s aforementioned view of contemporary Spain as “una comunidad imaginada” (see page 41). Thus, in the case of Spain, not only is its globalized society now influenced by foreign trends and thus less typically Spanish. But because of the social and cultural fluidity in countries and cities today, it is possible for citizens in Spain and elsewhere to feel at home (or *chez-soi* ⁶², as Bauman would have it) in any environment. Consequently, people from different nations form both real and imagined communities defined by a mutual understanding between individuals, no matter their origins.

⁶⁰ Attention has also been paid to the postmodern and imitative aspects in *Tacones lejanos*: in Lucy Fischer’s *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre* (Princeton and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1996), chapter 8.

⁶¹ Seguin here particularly talks of nation and identity and argues that in his cinema, Almodóvar manages to construct a Spanish model based on fluid identities.

⁶² This literally means “at home.” Meanwhile, Bauman has defined its opposite, ‘far away’, as “a space containing things one knows little about, from which one does not expect much and regarding which one does not feel obliged to care.” Zygmunt Bauman, “Urban space wars: On destructive order and creative chaos,” *Space and Culture* 2(1998): 110.

Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* has been called "one of the most enduring and most referenced texts in the recent history of nationalist thought" (Aronczyk 2013, 29). In this book, the author talks of the difficulty to clearly define the terms "nation", "nationality", and "nationalism" and he calls nationalism an "anomaly." In his opinion, "nationality, or ... "nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind." Thus, rather than relating to the physical interaction between people within the same real community, the term "an imagined ... community" (Anderson 1991 (1983), 6) suggests that people feel an affinity with others by imagining their interconnectedness (even if they are physically separated). Such a community

is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know much of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson 1991 (1983), 6).

Triana-Toribio draws on the theories of Anderson, Ernest Geller and Erich Hochbaum when she frames her ideas on Spanish nationhood in *Spanish National Cinema* (2003), and she credits them with a "critical rethinking of the concept [of nation] and its history" (Triana-Toribio 2003, 2). In her view, nations are "mythical ... and "created" (3). She claims that,

a nation is nothing without the stories it tells about itself. Since nations are intimately tied up with narrative acts, it seems inevitable that cinema, the most powerful narrative machine of the 20th century, has had something to say in the formation of national identities, Spanish included (Triana-Toribio 2003, 6).

More specifically, when it comes to Almodóvar, an *imagined community* could be applied to how the Spanish citizen and the city of Madrid in his films are perceived by foreign viewers. These viewers create a stereotypical image of Spain that does not necessarily match the way Spaniards perceive themselves. As noted by Murcia,

el poder identitario de su cine es más reconocido por el Otro que por el Mismo: por los franceses, por ejemplo, para quienes aparece incontestable y fuertemente "español." ¿Quiere decir esto que los franceses, por el juego simplificador de la distancia, reconocen en ello una hispanidad en la que muchos españoles no se reconocen? (Murcia 2007, 272).

In other words, the Spanish stereotypes that populate Almodóvar's cinema might help create an illusion of a rather schematic or topical modern Spain, one that does not entirely resemble Spain of today (although, arguably, his films do provide us with an insight into the lives and characteristics of certain urban groups). Almodóvar's stock characters do, however, attract foreign viewers who are both drawn to and feel an

affinity with the partly imagined community that is the society represented on screen.⁶³ There is, in other words, an interconnectedness between Spain (in the cinema of Almodóvar and also, to some extent, that of Pons) and countries beyond its borders, which helps foster globalization and transnational interest – as well as, to a certain extent, cross-cultural identification.⁶⁴ This is related to the intensive global marketing of Spain through the so called “Marca España”, and also to a country’s slightly less forceful promotion of itself to a foreign market or audience. Anholt clarifies that:

[c]ountries, regions and cities are ... best promoted indirectly by a harmonised and strategically informed approach to the promotion of their ‘products’ and ‘sub-brands’, and their overall reputations built by their actions and behaviour (which are guided, of course, by the same strategy) (Anholt 2005, 118).

Almodóvar perhaps most effectively promotes the city of Barcelona as a product in *Todo sobre mi madre* and thereby engages in urban place branding as a filmmaker.

v. Critical scholarship on Almodóvar and Pons with regard to main themes

The thematic discourse revolves around the screened representation of the increasingly globalized postmodern metropolis. Among themes highlighted, a sense of urban alienation among some of the protagonists and the interrelated notion of nostalgia are commonly explored by Almodóvar and they relate to the relationship between urban and rural places. This complex interplay between city and countryside is symbolically significant in the sense that it also reflects a problematic dialogue between Spanish past and present⁶⁵ and the ties that are ultimately impossible to sever, to the comparatively

⁶³ Bauman, in turn, refers to postmodern imagined communities and declares that “In the world of imagined communities, the struggle for survival is a struggle for access to the human imagination.” Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), xx.

⁶⁴ D’Lugo and Vernon talk about the “transnational appeal of the Almodóvar brand.” D’Lugo and Vernon, *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar*, 13. And Galt and Schoonover further describe Almodóvar’s cinema as part of a current “global art cinema.” Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, eds., *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁶⁵ This vexed issue has been dealt with in an article that begins as follows: “To confront or to forget is the conundrum that nations have historically faced about a difficult and painful past.” Omar G. Encarnación, “Reconciliation after democratization: Coping with the past in Spain,” *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 3 (2008): 435. Andrew Rigby has written on similar matters in his article “Amnesty and Amnesia in Spain,” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 12, no. 1 (2000).

recent Franco era.⁶⁶ The interconnected themes explored in the thesis thus become *urban utopia* and *dystopia*. The city longed for, ripe in (post)modern elements making up its now global appearance, is not an ideal habitat when represented on screen but, rather, an alienating space fraught with challenges. Aspects of these issues in Almodóvar's cinema are explored in the compilation: *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar* (D'Lugo and Vernon 2013). With regard to Pons, the book *Ventura Pons: Una mirada excepcional desde el cine catalán* (Domènech, Lema-Hincapié, and Cairns 2014) covers his entire repertoire, and so does the earlier *Ventura Pons: La mirada libre* (Campo-Vidal 2004). 2012 additionally saw the delivery of the conference *Ventura Pons: The Unconventional Gaze of Catalan Cinema*, held at the University of Colorado. Essential to mention in the context of recently published works on Spanish cinema is also the edition *A Companion to Spanish Cinema* (Labanyi and Pavlović 2013) which both re-addresses and provides an update on issues already explored in the aforementioned *100 years of Spanish Cinema*. Labanyi's and Pavlović's 2013 Spanish cinema companion features a thorough historical and cultural overview and contains novel thoughts by several scholars. Here, more technical aspects of cinema (such as editing, production design and soundtrack), are also included.

The screened metropolis receives further global connotations through Almodóvar's repeated focus on body parts and transplants as symbolic of transnationalism and global interconnectedness; of interest to e.g. Ryan Prout (2004) and Kinder (2004). The idea of a screened body experimented on points forth to one of the main themes explored in the thesis: regarding the fluid representation of the transgendered individual whose unfixed body and identity serve as metaphors for the more liberal environment in which these sexual and gendered others exist. These are notions pertinent also to Pons' cinema, which again reflects both filmmakers' awareness of the impact that a less rigid urban habitat has on certain social groups. *Transvestism* and *transsexuality* are central themes in some of the films analysed here and have been theorized by e.g. Butler⁶⁷ and, in more abstract terms as regards the notion of becoming rather than being born a woman, by Simone de Beauvoir as well as, more generally, by Deleuze whose definition of becoming relates to a transformative process that defies traditional notions of identity and representation. These are concerns similarly addressed by Sandra Lipsitz Bem (1993), Patrick Paul Garlinger (2004), Dafna Hornike (2009), Monica Lopez Lerma (2011), Steven Marsh and Parvati Nair (2004), Brígida M. Pastor (2006), Marie

⁶⁶ These issues are theoretically explored by e.g. Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). Rigby and Ofelia Ferrán will also be referred to in the fourth chapter, in terms of their thoughts on collective memory and amnesia in post-Franco Spain. Apart from Rigby's article on amnesty and amnesia, Ferrán's discourse is important in *Working Through Memory: Writing and Remembrance in Contemporary Spanish Narrative* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007).

⁶⁷ In e.g. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993).

Piganiol (2009), Deborah Shaw (2010), James Wyly (1999), and Mikaela Weaver (2012). Weaver also brings into discussion aspects of authenticity in the cinema of Almodóvar. So does Jennifer Vilchez (2009), and Martínez-Expósito makes the important connection between “overt sexual themes in the Spanish novel of the last quarter of the twentieth century”⁶⁸ (2008a, 174) and a changing society. Such views are pertinent also to the thesis argument in which the screened representation of the human body is compared to liberalized Spain finally rid of the shackles of the past.

The fluid figure of the transvestite comes to the fore also in Pons’ cinema, starting with the release of his much-acclaimed *Ocaña, retrat intermitent* (1978), a documentary which follows the real-life story of Barcelona transvestite José Pérez Ocaña and features scenes from la Rambla and La Plaza Real in the 1970s. The figure of the drag⁶⁹ reappears years later in the historically aware yet at the same time also historically fragmented film *Barcelona (un mapa)*, which contains several postmodern elements explored by critics such as a Pujol (in four important articles that revolve around Pons’ cinema), Faulkner (2003), Sally G. Feldman (2004)⁷⁰ and David George (2002). Also prolific as a writer on Catalan culture as it relates to film and literature is Josep-Anton Fernández (one of his articles revolves around Catalan camp and Ocaña).⁷¹

As established earlier, Pons’ films are all largely set in Barcelona and portray the Catalan capital as a postmodern space that often entraps citizens who feel alienated partly due to the urban facelift the city was subjected to in the wake of the 1992 Summer Olympics. Pujol insightfully analyses Pons from a Deleuzian perspective and notes not only the estranged relationship between character and city, but he reveals his awareness of the broader Catalan past when he states that “sheets of the past coexist unobtrusively with the present” (Pujol 2009a, 67). Although *unobtrusive* is a word that may not readily come to mind in an analysis of images from the past that

⁶⁸ Although this particular discourse relates to literature in the last century, it is still applicable also to the cinematic thesis context.

⁶⁹ Notably, two relatively recent theses explore the fluid landscape of the transgendered character. The first author draws from Butlerian theories when he posits that “If we assume that gender identity is not a natural, innate essence, but a social construction, then, how is transgender accounted for in this view?” Bruining, Dennis, “Talking Transgender: Travelling in a Corporeal Landscape.” Utrecht University, 2008, thesis introduction. The more recent doctoral thesis is trans scholar Jonathan Williams’ “Trans Cinema, Trans Viewers.” PhD, University of Melbourne: School of Culture and Communication, 2011.

⁷⁰ Feldman has also conducted an insightful interview with Catalan playwright Sergi Belbel: Sharon G. Feldman, “Dos conversaciones con Sergi Belbel: ‘Que me gusten La fura dels Baus i Molière no es una contradicción.’” (1997). Further noteworthy as a writer on Pons’ cinema is Phyllis Zatlin and the following journal article: “From Stage to Screen: The Adaptations of Ventura Pons,” *Contemporary Film Review* 17, no. 3 (2007).

⁷¹ Fernández has also written *El malestar en la cultura catalana: La cultura de la normalització 1976-1999* (2008) and he further reflects on Catalan culture and cinema in a chapter of Labanyi’s aforementioned *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain* (2002).

enter Pons' otherwise global picture of Barcelona, this dialogue between a now and a then is important and it highlights the difficulty for people to let go of memories from a troublesome past that come back to haunt them in the present. Like Almodóvar's regular screened urban and rural interplay, *Barcelona (un mapa)* also contains postmodern elements not only in its crisscrossing between different epochs in the history of Catalonia, but also through several brief dialogues between the protagonists, where they voice their personal concerns. Their individual frets are inserted into a larger context when their dialogues ultimately sketch "the upheaval taking place in Catalan society" (Pujol 2009a, 67). This postmodern upheaval is thus paralleled by the political turmoil in Franco-dominated 1930s Catalonia, where real historical events have been analysed in-depth by British historian Paul Preston (2012). The thesis revisits the past briefly in relation to this movie but generally lingers in the global presence in the analysis of the three other films by Pons: *Amor Idiota*, *Carícies* and *Morir (o no)*.

Not much has been written on *Amor idiota* and it thus deserves to be theoretically and thematically illuminated. The thesis addresses Pons' representation of urban space in this film, where graphic sex scenes somehow manage to render nocturnal Barcelona almost utopic (the on-screen sex exudes human warmth within a dark urban environment which may ultimately be embracing the frolicking couple). At the same time Pons engages in an existentialist discourse when the male protagonist ponders life in a city that he cannot fully comprehend.

The more consistently dystopic representations of cities today have been covered from a cinematic perspective by Nezar Alsayyad (2000), and Gordon MacLeod and Kevin Ward (2002). Discourses by Andrew Milner (2004) and Gyan Prakash (2010) are also worth mentioning here. All in all, these themes will be explored in light of Bauman's theories on a bewildering postmodernity which contemporary citizens strive to embrace while, at the same time, they realise that their concurrent era is far from perfect.

Concluding commentary

In closing, this literature review should be regarded as a snapshot of important scholarship on topics covered in this thesis. The review is complimented throughout by additional sources drawn from. Several critical texts relating to Barcelona, its history and architecture will, e.g., be referred to with regard to Pons' screened representation of Barcelona. Here, names such as Joan Ramon Resina, Josep-Anton Fernàndez, David MacKay, Robert Hughes, Dominic Keown, Josep Miguel Sobrer, and David George stand out. They have all provided pertinent arguments that must be highlighted.

All in all, it is the hope that this thesis concerned with the increasingly fluid screened metropolis, may help form a comprehensive picture of a transformed urban habitat which reflects societal and urban changes both on and beyond the Iberian Peninsula. It becomes clear that both Almodóvar and Pons have indeed created a “global art cinema” that represents the city as both a complex and liberalizing space which alternatively entraps and attracts citizens. The confusion experienced by their protagonists reflects ambivalent feelings among postmodern citizens of today – an ambivalence tirelessly explored by e.g. Bauman, who likens current times with a liquid modernity. Gone is the socially more rigid structure of the cities of yore (as Bauman would have it) and welcomed onto the stage are globalized urban habitats that constantly reinvent themselves and are subject to experimental architectural and cultural makeovers.

CHAPTER ONE

A chronological analysis of Pedro Almodóvar's cinema from 1980 to 2013

As stated in the preliminary methodology section, this chronologically organised first chapter, separated into three main, partly thematic, sections depending on the time of release of each film, analyses Almodóvar's nineteen films to date – including his most recent *Los amantes pasajeros*. The study is conducted in view of the social, cultural and spatial development of Madrid, as reflected in his films and where it becomes clear that the on-screen Spanish capital has changed dramatically since the 1980s – hence the sequential structure of the chapter. To accurately envisage how Madrid has developed and evolved throughout Almodóvar's more than three decades of filmmaking it is essential to begin by paying attention to the political lead-up to Spanish democracy in the mid-1970s and to reflect briefly upon the final stages of Francoism and Spain's subsequent transition into democracy. This inserts on-screen Madrid within a historical and political context.

Admittedly, and as highlighted in the introduction, Almodóvar has repeatedly claimed that he wishes to distance himself from the Franco regime. Indeed, his plots do not generally linger in the past¹ but are anchored in the present while pointing to an ever more global, complex and multicultural (as well as multifaceted) society. At the same time, a connection between two different types of Spain is established through his frequent dialogue between city and countryside – symbolic, it seems, of a parallel dialogue between past and present among Spaniards also off screen. The regular screened visits to a slow-moving rural idyll may symbolise the protagonists' return to another time and place. Two main examples of this spatial and temporal filmic dialogue

¹ As noted earlier, an exception is *Carne trémula* (1997), where Almodóvar rejects the Franco regime through words expressed by main character Víctor Plaza.

are *Volver* (2006) and *La mala educación* (2004). In the former, largely set in rural Castilla-La-Mancha, references to village traditions and images of women who would have lived through various historically important time periods, anchor the plot in a space that contrasts with the representation of a gradually more globalized Madrid. And in the latter film, there are constant flashbacks which help crisscross the plot between past and present. Generally, Almodóvar's recurrent representation of village life is connected to the theme of nostalgia linked, in turn, to the characters' longing away from the city – a theme explored more in depth in the fourth chapter.

It would thus be inaccurate to claim that Almodóvar completely breaks with the Spanish past in his cinema. He neither operates in a political vacuum nor would he have been able to produce his daring 1980s films had the social and political climate of Madrid at the time not been ripe and ready for such a liberal type of cinema. In view of the above, Smith argues that rather than “Almodóvar’s work” being “‘apolitical’ or ‘ahistorical’” (as suggested by some critics), “such views arise from an ignorance of or indifference to the Spanish context in which that work has been produced” (Smith 2000a, 2-3). Similarly, Ibañez rejects the frivolous surface image (Ibañez 2013, 153), long supported by Almodóvar's reluctance to admit any influence from the Franco era in his filmmaking. Rather, as additionally maintained by D'Lugo and Kathleen M. Vernon, Almodóvar has, in fact, always been “much more complex” and “political” (D'Lugo and Vernon 2013, 10).²

Departing from this thought, this chapter holds that events occurring in off-screen pre-democratic Spain partly aid Almodóvar in his filmmaking and make his themes all the more salient and relevant. As shall be seen in the analysis of some of his 1990s films, in particular, a retrospective connection is often made by way of a symbolic screened dialogue between *now* and *then*. Using different techniques, Almodóvar skilfully connects the rural space with the urban environment. And just like the Francoist *aperturistas* had been reluctant to let go of the past, the cinematic link to a non-modernized pre-democratic era (represented by the *pueblo*) reflects a dilemma also among the protagonists to fully let go of the safe haven of the village, its values and traditions. On this note, it has been argued that:

[l]os personajes de Almodóvar – como él mismo – son urbanitas convencidos, pero al mismo tiempo son urbanitas recientes, y vuelven al “pueblo” (al menos en *el deseo*) cuando necesitan escapar de la ciudad (Loew and Luna 2005, 412).

² These critical views were in 2009 also corroborated by Almodóvar's own claim that e.g. Penélope Cruz in *Los abrazos rotos* “could be interpreted as a metaphor for the Spanish transition to democracy.” Juan Carlos Ibañez, “Memory, Politics, and the Post-Transition in Almodóvar's Cinema”, in Marvin D'Lugo and Kathleen Vernon, eds., *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar* (Malden, M.A.: John Wiley and Sons, 2013). 153.

In a comment that echoes this declaration, Almodóvar himself nevertheless reverses the urban/rural dichotomy in his much-quoted statement that “like my characters, Madrid has a history: but the past is not enough because the future still excites it” (Allinson 2001, 111).³

Section 1: 1980-1993

First part: Almodóvar’s 1980s cinema analysed in light of the political and cultural climate before and after democracy

Spain’s political stage at the beginning of Almodóvar’s career saw the crucial five-year leadership of Adolfo Suárez González, UCD⁴ leader and first democratically elected Prime Minister (1976-1981). Like his political predecessors Luis Carrero Blanco (assassinated by ETA in 1973) and Carlos Arias Navarro (1973-1975), Suárez, too, had served Franco during his last period in power. Former (as of June 2014) Spanish monarch Juan Carlos de Borbón, in turn, had been personally appointed by the Spanish general turned dictator, to replace him after his death. Franco’s hope was that the Prime Minister and the King would govern the country in a spirit of *continuismo*.⁵ Indeed, Spanish 1980s politics was defined not by its complete rupture with the past but by its semi-adherence to the recent Francoist regime for the sake of peacekeeping between opposing political factions within a newly democratic society. Under the banner of *ruptura pactada* or *ruptura democrática* and *reforma*, the Suárez government brought “the opposition to collaborate in a process of democratization within Francoist ‘legality’”, something which “was to be one of [his] greatest tasks and consequently greatest triumphs” (Preston 1986, 94).

Thus, Spain was gradually (or “seamlessly”)⁶ steered into more complete democracy and although Franco’s wish for his own political ideology to be kept intact or “well tied down” – *atado y bien atado* (Preston 1986, 48)⁷ was not adhered to, Suarez’ political plan for the now democratic nation indeed contained some Francoist elements. One of these was a comparatively lenient approach to the Roman Catholic Church which

³ Almodóvar in the pressbook of *Law of Desire*.

⁴ In English, *Union of the Democratic Centre*.

⁵ This meant adhering to conservative principles such as a “belligerent opposition to communism, socialism and liberalism, to democratic pluralism and to any form of regional devolution.” Paul Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986). 1-2.

⁶ Christopher J Ross, *Contemporary Spain: A Handbook* (London and New York: Arnold, 1997). 125.

⁷ With reference to this Francoist term, Jules Stewart mocks Franco’s vision of Spain, calling it “a complete chimera.” Jules Stewart, *Madrid: The History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012). 206.

continued to exercise some influence also on post-Franco society. Although it had been refashioned to suit democratic ideals, the Church had an impact on e.g. the education system (where members of the Opus Dei were active as instructors).⁸ The hypocrisy of a church that defended old traditions while at the same time it was unable to withstand the temptations of an ever more liberal and sexually permissive society, is narratively expressed in Almodóvar's third film *Entre tinieblas* (1983) – as will be seen later in this chronological review.

In other words, the non-belligerent “*transactive*’ *transition* to democracy”⁹, based on peaceful negotiations rather than a repressive enforcement of democratic rules, meant that Spain was able to move comparatively swiftly between two diametrically opposed political systems. As highlighted by Javier Tusell, “rather than ruling”, Suárez pointed “the way ahead” (Tusell 2007, 274). This transitional period was by no means unproblematic. On the contrary, the country experienced turbulent times in the beginning of its more modern era, with strive for autonomy on the part of primarily Basques and Catalans, a still heavy Francoist administration, several radical terrorist movements, and international¹⁰ economic hardships. Yet newly democratic Spain jointly led by Suárez and the more symbolic figure of the monarch provided a thankful climate for independent artists whose voices could now be heard in a more open-minded and tolerant nation. The more progressive trends, which benefitted the independence-seeking Basque and Catalan regions¹¹, were also aided by the increased freedom gained by the media and which included a more liberal attitude to radio dissemination in 1977, a new television bill passed in 1986¹² (and in 2007 a new television law), as well as the culturally orientated *Ley de Patrimonio Histórico* (*Historic Heritage Law*, 1985) and the *Ley de Propiedad Intelectual* (*Law on Intellectual Property*, 2007) which greatly benefitted Spanish authors (Tusell 2007, 395). While, in terms of Spanish cinema, the *Caudillo*¹³ had favoured the production of grand narratives celebrating the Spanish past, writers and filmmakers in democratic Spain wished to artistically reshape a contemporary society influenced by progressive trends and movements. Partly taking into consideration these liberal thinkers given freer rein after

⁸ So were members of other religious orders, such as the Jesuits.

⁹ “Two Transitions: Democratisation and the evolution of the Spanish socialist Left”, Donald Share, *West European Politics*, no 8 (1), last modified 8 March 2013, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01402388508424515>

¹⁰ - as well as internal until the mid-1980s, when Spain experienced an economic boost as a result of policies put forward by the Socialist government under Felipe González.

¹¹ Jordi Pujol served as Prime Minister for the regional Catalan parliament “Generalitat de Catalunya” from 1980 to 2003. Ross, *Contemporary Spain: A Handbook*: 83.

¹² “Media: Spain: Newspapers and Periodicals”, eds. Eric Solsten and Sandra W. Meditz, Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, last modified 1988, <http://countrystudies.us/spain/85.htm>

¹³ This was the title bestowed on Franco in his role as political and military leader.

the demise of Franco, Labanyi calls modern Spanish culture a “ghost story” and refers to national heroes as

[n]ot those who triumphed but those who lost spectacularly because of their refusal to compromise: that is, using the modern language of the market, those who refused to ‘sell out’ to history’s (foreign, capitalist) winners (Labanyi 2002, 6).

Thus, “those who were not allowed to leave a trace on the historical stage” could “leave their trace in the cultural arena” (Albany 2002, 6). While in her comment Labanyi refers to individual artists in Spain who regained a voice in the democratic era, appearing on the 1980s cultural stage were also collective movements celebratory of a new Spain. One of these urban movements was the Spanish *Movida* which came to define the Madrid youth culture from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, and which reflected the transformed identity of the capital; its society and culture.¹⁴ Almodóvar’s first feature films, steeped in a fervent, newly democratic decade, bear witness to this urban movement. The characters take full advantage of a comparatively unrepressed society in which anything seems possible – and where the off-screen concurrent and promptly squashed attempt headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Tejero Molina, to overthrow the Suárez government through a *coup d’état* on 23 January 1981,¹⁵ casts no long shadow over the filmic plot and its generally carefree individuals (although the off-screen liberalizing movement “came to an abrupt standstill and Madrid held its breath”) (Stewart 2012, 211).

Tusell has defined several deep-going cultural changes that marked post-Franco Spanish society – particularly after the first democratic general elections in 1977. Among these changes were the country’s sudden interest in further exporting its own culture (a common trend which conforms to Anholt’s conviction that smaller markets and countries must do whatever is in their might to brand themselves abroad, and break through to an international market), the newly acquired freedom in Spain, “accompanied by an extreme diversification” (Tusell 2007, 385) and freedom of expression, as well as a popularization of Spanish culture. There was also a more palpable female presence in the cultural sphere, an ever more defined cosmopolitanism, plurality, and a sense of postmodernism characterizing a now modern society. As part

¹⁴ Thereby not saying that the *Movida* years were not also problematic for Spain. In fact, they hid a much more complex society where Spaniards were still struggling to come to terms with the transition from one system to another. As noted, “[c]on el éxito de la Movida, paralelo al de la transición democrática, se logra la solución imaginaria de un eterno problema de la cultura española: como ser moderno y español al mismo tiempo.” Héctor Fouce, “De la agitación a la Movida: Políticas culturales y música popular en la Transición española,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 13, no. 143-153 (2009): 143.

¹⁵ Ross, *Contemporary Spain: A Handbook*: 9.

of these times, Tusell notes “[a] tendency to abandon any form of social or political commitment¹⁶ along with a frank decline in intellectual involvement in the creative process” (Tusell 2007, 387-88).

Notably, these transformative cultural trends are all detectable in Almodóvar’s cinema, where repeated references are made to foreign literary works, by which a cultural connection is established between Spain and the wider world. This clearly demonstrates that the boundaries between reality and fiction are often blurred. His cinema mirrors contemporary reality although it does not pretend to be “real.” What is more, while his films present us with an array of personalities whose individual lives and fates intersect in a seemingly haphazard manner (although it eventually appears they were predestined to meet) and the characters drive the plots forward, ever present in his films is a gradually less authentic Madrid, which is not so much a passive observer of the filmic narrative as an active co-participant to which the protagonists can relate. As noted by Marsh,

[t]he spatial aspect to Almodóvar is an important one. Urban space, the precincts, the city arenas that have marked recent Spanish history and crucially, the element of freedom of movement are associated with questions of identity and with bridging those features that seem most peculiar in this particular director’s work.¹⁷

Almodóvar’s Madrid constitutes a place that both attracts and repels the protagonists. The city is equally much a setting for desire and sexual experimentation (implicitly approved of within a more free-spirited Spanish capital¹⁸), and a complex urban space battling drugs and criminality. This is simultaneously an exciting and a depressing place which accommodates both individuals longing for an escape from an alienating and oppressive urban environment and members of urban subcultures who only come to real fruition in the great metropolis. In this sense, the city becomes a place of shifting identities, a place in which “culture”, as it was originally intended, is still “an agent for change rather than for preservation of the status quo” (Bauman 2011, 6). In this ever

¹⁶ This statement mirrors Almodóvar’s own comment that his characters “utterly break with the past, which is to say that most of them ... are apolitical.” Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, ed. *Pedro Almodóvar: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004). 42.

¹⁷ “Great Directors: Pedro Almodóvar”, Stephen Marsh, *Senses of Cinema* 40, last modified July 2006, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/great-directors/almodovar/>

¹⁸ La Movida has, again, been read in a more complex light by two critics who argue that “[c]ompared to and read against the backdrop of the failures of the Spanish political transition, it was used as evidence as the country’s incapacity to purge its authoritarian past... it has become an unclosed chapter in contemporary Spanish culture, one that continues to be summoned but fails each time to reach its peace.” H. Rosi Song and William Nichols, “Introducción: El futuro ya estuvo aquí,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 13(2009): 106.

more liquid society “it becomes necessary – in order be oneself and be seen as such – to prove one’s ability to be someone else” (Bauman 2011, 24).

Such social fluidity in Almodóvar’s cinema is made visible in his consistent screened tracking of Madrid’s democratic development. Although his films never claim to be overtly political, they do reflect a socio-political shift in Spain after Franco. There is a link drawn to key moments in the development of democratic Spain, and time periods on and off-screen generally coincide. This seems to reflect an inexplicit desire on the part of the filmmaker to portray changes occurring within his nation and capital alongside the development of the fictive narratives. It is through regular glimpses of off-screen Madrid that Almodóvar adds a semi-documentary touch to his fictive plots. The upcoming analysis of films produced between the 1980s and the two first decades of the 21st century reflects the parallel development of on-screen and off-screen Madrid. In the films, the changing metropolis impacts both positively and negatively on the protagonists, and they themselves change in line with societal changes.

Pepi Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón (1980) and *Laberinto de pasiones* (1982)

The frivolous social and cultural climate of Madrid during the early 1980s benefitted the release of two films that can both be said to pay homage to the *Movida*, defined by Pavlović as “an effervescent cultural movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s that can be interpreted as a reaction to 40 years of oppressive dictatorship” (Pavlović et al 2009, 160).

Shot on location and on a shoe-string budget, these cinematic projects show Almodóvar embarking on an experimental journey through a Madrid jubilant from having liberated itself from its recent past. The films clearly portray the now unrestrained youth movement, including the pop and punk culture heralded by real star Alaska Olvido Gara (her on-screen stage name identical to her real name) and her band *los Pegamoides*¹⁹. The fact that *Alaska* was an amateur actress at the time, sets this film (and *Laberinto de pasiones*, which also displayed comparatively limited acting skills among some of the main actors²⁰) apart from the more complex and sophisticated acting seen in Almodóvar’s mid 1980s films and in his 1990s arthouse movies. In saying

¹⁹ In *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* “los Pegamoides” go under the name “los Bomitonis”. This film also features another *Movida* icon – Fabio or Fanny McNamara, whose on-screen presence adds flair to several other Almodóvar films as well.

²⁰ This has also been acknowledged by Almodóvar himself in Frédéric Strauss, *Almodóvar on Almodóvar* (London, and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995). 31.

that, however, it is these amateurish aspects of *Pepi Luci Bom...*²¹ that lend a sense of authenticity to the film.²²

As highlighted about real band and *Movida* icon *Alaska y los Pegamoides*, the notion of authenticity in Almodóvar's early cinema is achieved not only through amateur actors but also through the intentional blurring of on- and off-screen cultural space. As a result, contemporary viewers would have been doubly engaged in a film where the *Movida* energy propelled the plot forward while this energy was simultaneously felt on the actual streets of Madrid at the time. In *Pepi, Luci, Bom...*, the Spanish capital becomes not as much a witness to the effervescent *Movida* as an active participant in this movement: the camera often lingers in external spaces, and the city becomes a protagonist in its own right. Thus, what viewers today might regard as a not overly engaging character development in *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* helped divert some of their attention away from these protagonists and instead onto the now liberalized city of Madrid.

As opposed to the subsequent *Laberinto de pasiones*, which is generally easy on the eye and paints a picture of an exuberant urban space; its gay culture portrayed in a positive light, in *Pepi, Luci, Bom...* external Madrid is often represented in dull and muted colours. The themes are more daring, even offensive, and although the apartment buildings are generally drab and unattractive, the emerging hippie scene makes the city stand out as a space celebratory of a new-won freedom amongst the screened citizens. This off-screen liberalization process is reflected in, e.g., the generally vulgar language of the protagonists, in sexual perversion and promiscuity, and in a lesbian relationship characterized by the distorted behaviour of both dominator and the dominated or the one taken advantage of.²³ Politically, the film also delivers a pun on the 1977 elections, where the political outcome helped the nation distance itself from the shadows of a repressive past once and for all, and step into a brand new era. The sense of frivolity in this reshaped Madrid and the carefree attitude of the citizens are

²¹ Zunzunegui sees the film as structured along the principles of “*feísmo*, del *amateurismo*, de lo *informe* y de lo *grotesco*.” Santos Zunzunegui, *Historias de España: De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de cine español* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, Conselleria de Cultura i Educació, Subsecretaria de Promoció Cultural, Institut Valencia de Cinematografia Ricardo Muñoz Suay, 2002). 170. And Almodóvar himself has called the film a comedy which is “divertida, audaz, corrosiva, incorrecta, moderna, desigual, subversiva y amoral.” Núria Vidal, *El cine de Pedro Almodóvar* (Madrid: Instituto de la Cinematografía y las Artes Audiovisuales Ministerio de Cultura, 1988). 21.

²² In Allinson's words, “Alaska is intimately related to the *movida* and illustrates as well as any the link between it and British punk.” Mark Allinson, “Alaska: Star of Stage Screen and Optimistic Punk, in Jo Labanyi, ed., *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 224.

²³ Concrete examples of such behaviour are the on-screen subjugation and domination of the female partner, golden showers, and the use of a degrading language towards this apparently subdued partner, who, nevertheless, unexpectedly enjoys the verbal and sexual abuse she is subjected to.

reflected in the screened staging of the “general erections” (pun intended), and in an episode in which the filmmaker himself makes a cameo appearance. Commenting on his representation of Madrid here, Almodóvar calls the film

an unwitting instant snapshot – that is, free of sociology, traditional images – of a city, Madrid, at a certain point of its evolution and of some radically unstable and undoubtedly transitory lifestyles (Duncan 2011, 12).

It could be held that, to a certain extent, the representation of Madrid in *Pepi, Luci, Bom...* corresponds to Deleuze’s theory of the *action-image*, where:

[t]he cinema... portrays characters in an organic relationship to the milieux in which they find themselves, such that the milieu and the actions they undertake reciprocally condition and are logically connected to each other through narrative (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2003, 191).

These very organic aspects of Almodóvar’s socially aware first feature film enabled him to attribute almost human value to the Spanish capital, by further gendering the urban space and making this environment representative of a liberal era which shaped and transformed Spain as a whole. Almodóvar’s “unwitting snapshot” would thus seem to refer to a screened metropolis depicted as a fluid space filled with energy and affected by the actions of the protagonists. In this sense, on-screen Madrid reflects a gradually more modernized nation, one undergoing a democratic transformation that would considerably alter its social structure.

The continuously transitory aspect of Madrid is almost tangibly felt in the subsequent screwball comedy *Laberinto de pasiones* (released the same year as Felipe González became Prime Minister and leader of the socialist PSOE party). The opening scenes are here presented voyeuristically: through an alternatively male and female gaze “the spectator produces a series of identifications with the images and figures within them” (Ellis 1982, 41). Two individuals intent on finding sexual partners here roam the streets of Madrid. In the subsequent scene, filmed on Calle Duque de Alba ²⁴, a slice of the *Movida* is seen in images of hippies engaged in conversations where their urban jargon is influenced by American pop culture (*¿qué overdose!, ¡pásame el lipstick, querida*, etc). Almodóvar here opens his cinema to the world beyond national borders and shows the influence of the West on a Spanish society eager to keep up with international trends.

At the same time, however, the film pays homage to Madrid, which is said to be the “coolest city in the world” (Almodóvar 1982). Interestingly, Almodóvar himself later

²⁴ This is currently the Wooster Café in central Madrid.

claimed that he had been ironic in his festive attitude to the capital. Thus, years later he rather cynically commented that

[w]hen I said in *Labyrinth of Passion* that it [Madrid] was the liveliest, most entertaining city in the world, I was joking, but it seems that people believed it. Right now, Madrid has become a cliché, like New York... (Duncan 2011, 67).

Male protagonist Riza Nero could be considered a spokesperson for youths in also off-screen Madrid at the time, who enjoyed the many liberties gained in a city breaking away from the fetters of the past. Such positive appraisal of a youthful, vibrant capital is, in reality, but a parodic glorification of an urban space arrested in time. As noted by the filmmaker, “[e]n la película existe esta especie de glorificación de Madrid un poco estúpida que ha habido en los medios de comunicación. Está como una parodia” (Vidal 1988, 34).

This statement reflects Almodóvar’s awareness that the city was only temporarily fun-filled. Similar to other European capitals at the time, Madrid, too, would soon become a more complex space.²⁵ Thus, key in hand, the vibrant *Movida* culture proved ephemeral and any strive to linger in the happy eighties would only reflect a self-parodying tendency among individuals (i.e. film characters) to subconsciously turn the capital into a cliché; as a space reluctant to keep up with an increasingly problematic everyday reality. Moreover, Almodóvar’s statement mirrors a similar tendency of the mass media to gloss over and glamorize an urban environment that may already have been more complex than what initially appeared to be the case.

Noteworthy in *Laberinto de pasiones* is also the fact that its screened gay culture is not yet overshadowed by HIV and AIDS. In this respect, Almodóvar’s exuberant gay scene coincides with the real history of the HIV virus, which origins had not yet been clearly defined in 1982 and where no definite link was made between HIV and sexuality (particularly homosexuality) and/or blood transfusion:

[i]n March 1983, CDC issued recommendations for prevention of sexual, drug-related, and occupational transmission based on ... early epidemiologic studies and before the cause of the new, unexplained illness was known.²⁶

²⁵ As has been noted with regard to *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, Almodóvar’s “film signals the ephemeral nature of the *movida*’s crazed (and parodic) punk stance.” Mark Allinson, “Alaska: Star of Stage Screen and Optimistic Punk.” In *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain*, edited by Jo Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 234.

²⁶ “MMWR: Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report”, CDC (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention) 50 (21), last modified 1 June 2001, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm5021.pdf>

In fact, it was not until *Todo sobre mi madre*, released 17 years later, that HIV and AIDS were taken more seriously, also globally, and became issues dealt with by an again socially aware filmmaker.²⁷ The picture painted of the disease in this 1999 film is, however, not entirely negative as although social worker and nurse Hermana Rosa dies from AIDS, her HIV- infected son ultimately recovers from the virus. Almodóvar may thus possibly have instilled a sense of hope among viewers even though, to date, a cure for the disease has yet to be found.

Entre tinieblas (1983)

With *Entre tinieblas*, Almodóvar embarks on a more complex cinematic journey. The light-hearted aspects of the *Movida* years are no longer reflected in this film shot on location in a convent on central Calle Hortaleza in Madrid. Rather, a link is here drawn between drug abuse and mortality already at the very outset of the film with the death of a male character who will bear no major relevance on the narrative development.²⁸ Such on-screen problematizing of real trends influencing also contemporary Spanish society mirrors the lax attitude to drugs on the part of the socialist government at the time, where a bill was passed in April 1983 which “made Spanish drug laws among the most lenient in Europe” (Arango 1985, 215).

The political aspects of this film also come to the fore in yet another cameo performance in which Almodóvar makes reference to the so called “two Spains.”²⁹ In doing so, he alludes to a historic rift between conservative and more progressive forces as regards how the country should be run, and he may also have been referring to the contemporary internal political disputes between Prime Minister González (1982-1996) and his former ally, parliamentary Vice President Alfonso Guerra (1982-1991) whose contrasting socialist values and ideals steered Spain in seemingly two different directions. In Tusell’s words,

[t]here were in Spain two versions of socialism existing alongside each other at one and the same time, which seemed complementary at first but in due course proved to be mutually contradictory (Tusell 2007, 333).

²⁷ As highlighted in the introduction, organ donations and transplants in *Todo sobre mi madre* establish an additional connection between Spain and Argentina.

²⁸ Ironically, in this film drug addiction is seen as a form of beauty therapy, as mirrored in the comment by the *Madre Superior* that “there is so much beauty in physical deterioration” (Almodóvar 1983).

²⁹ Gies uses the concept to refer to the many contrasting qualities that define the history of Spain, arguing that it is “riddled with conflict, with tensions springing from the confrontation of the old with the new, of tradition with progress, of conservative with liberal, of Spain with ‘anti-Spain,’ of modern with post-modern.” David T. Gies, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 3.

Indeed, the contrasting aspects of this film become some of its distinguishing features. Testimony to this is the major role given to the woman rather than the man, as reflected in the virtually sole focus on female protagonists, who mirror each other:

a symmetry which bears within it nonetheless the trace of a male principle already amputated at the start of the narrative and consistently disavowed throughout the film (Smith 2000a, 38).

Moreover, a visual contrast is noted in the inability of the Catholic Church (symbolized by the screened convent) to fend off the liberal tide in a society gradually less concerned with religious matters and more interested in enjoying the liberties brought about by new, democratic trends. The less restrictive Spanish environment is envisaged in Almodóvar's group of nuns, known collectively as *Las Hermanas Redentoras* and who are all corrupt in one way or another. They lucidly claim that "we must change with the times" (Almodóvar 1983). Their stage names bear witness to each nun's individual weaknesses and her inability to withstand the temptation of lifestyles not influenced by strict religious values. An ex-murderess (*Sister Damned*) repents her sins in a fakir-like fashion, a cleaning maniac keeps a lion as a pet (*Sister Manure*), a nun churns out trash novels under the protective pseudonym of Concha Torres (*Sister Rat of the Sewers*), and *Sister Snake* is attracted to the local parish priest – her desire reciprocated by the man in a pretence confession towards the end of the film. These nuns all "embody the sensual obsessions of contemporary Spain" (Smith 2000a, 38)³⁰ and obey by the glue-sniffing lesbian³¹ *Mother Superior*. She, too, a contradictory woman, the head nun is doubly addicted: also to wayward night club and drug addict Yolanda Bell who finds temporary refuge in the Madrid convent. Mother Superior's emotional dependence on her younger protégé sets the stage for later lesbian references also in *Todo sobre mi madre* (where the theme is, however, less prominent than in *Entre tinieblas*).

Almodóvar's three first 1980s films thus have in common their focus on homosexuality and liberal Spanish drug culture. Nevertheless, drugs are now no longer presented solely as mood enhancers but, rather, as chemical substances leading to physical deterioration (be this bodily decay contradictorily "beautiful" or not) and death. And again, in contrast to the first two *Movida*-inspired films, *Entre tinieblas* also shares commonalities with *La ley del deseo* (1987) and *La mala educación* (2004), in its

³⁰ Smith's observation reflects Spain's liberalized 1980s culture and the rebellious desire among citizens (including members of a less rigid Catholic church) to break away from social and sexual taboos and explore what was on offer in a society finally granted a new freedom.

³¹ In Smith's words, this film "lesbianizes the patriarchal Word not by inverting or opposing it, but by suggesting that a certain space for autonomous female desire has already been opened by that Word itself." Paul Julian Smith, *Desire Unlimited: The Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar*. Second edition (London and New York: Verso, 2000). 40.

religious aspects. The latter is more clerically critical, however, when its Catholic priests become oppressors who leave traumatized young boys in their educational wake.³²

¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!! (1984)

While *Entre tinieblas* had been more concerned with narrative development than the representation of urban exteriors, *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* cinematically connects with *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* and *Laberinto de Pasiones* in its renewed focus on 1980s Madrid as, in this case most definitely, a main protagonist. Nevertheless, there is a marked difference between the three films as regards their portrayal of the Spanish capital. Thus, in Almodóvar's first feature films, the protagonists engage with an environment that serves as a backdrop to the vibrant spectacle of contemporary youth culture. Almodóvar's Madrid here conforms to Lefebvre's notion of "physical space" as having "no 'reality' without the energy that is deployed within it" (Lefebvre 1991 (1974), 13).³³ Indeed, the *Movida* movement transformed contemporary citizens and also infused them with the infectious energy required to kick-start the urban environment as such and confer it with its own special energy, in turn.

By contrast, such urban energy is no longer sensed in the more downbeat, mainly suburban environment of *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* This black comedy (called Almodóvar's most naturalistic film) (Smith 2000a, 51) is influenced by Italian neorealism in its stark portrayal of urban malaise, distorted and dysfunctional family relationships, and subsequent family breakdown. Inserting the film into a social context, Lorenzo Torres Hortelano argues that

the migration from the country to Madrid now becomes a distorted picture of marginalization and alienation, loneliness and frustration of a rural proletarian class barely able to cross the border into the city proper (Torres Hortelano 2011, 64).

These neorealist aspects of a filmic plot that unravels along the depressing M-30 motorway have also been noted by Pavlović. She echoes Torres Hortelano in her claim that this film not only marks "the end of Almodóvar's underground period" but it is also "groundbreaking both for its technical innovations and for its treatment of vital

³² With regard to the theme of religion in *La mala educación*, Almodóvar has called this a "pious film, although the object of that piety isn't God, but the human being in all his despicableness." Paul Duncan, ed. *The Pedro Almodóvar Archives* (Köln, Germany: Taschen, 2011). 54

³³ Further related Lefebvrian theories are expanded on in *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, space and subjectivity* (1996).

social issues such as poverty, rural migration, prostitution³⁴, and drug abuse” (Pavlović et al 2009, 171).

Almodóvar himself acknowledges his influence from late 1950s and 1960s Spanish neorealism (Pavlović et al 2009, 171) and is aware of the *feoísta* aspects of also this film³⁵ (reflected in dull urban exteriors rather than distorted human behaviour, as was the case in *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*), which helps him approximate his plot to real conditions in contemporary Madrid. He explains:

I was really struck by the aesthetic of the neighbourhood. It would be ideal for a horror film, gothic horror... Those endless buildings, veritable cathedrals of monstrous taste. *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* is a very ugly film; both the interiors and the exteriors are very ugly. And it's much more dramatic than amusing. The humour is stifled by the harshness of everything that happens (Duncan 2011, 69).

Apart from the film's inherent neorealism – where the urban environment is equally drab on- as off-screen – this film reaches out to the world beyond Spanish borders in a more distinct manner than what had been the case in the last scene of *Laberinto de pasiones* (the protagonists here set off on a charter flight headed to the tropical island of Contadora). In *¿Qué he hecho...!!* Barajas Airport is visualized for the first time in Almodóvar's cinema, and he thereby sets the trend for several airport references in future films (*Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, *Átame*, *Tacones lejanos*, and *Hable con ella* are some of these).³⁶

Alternatively, the airport is represented by way of miniature scale replicas in Almodóvar's 1990s films. In *¿Qué he hecho...!!*, a connection is also made between the national airport and Berlin Tegel Airport, whereby Madrid's 1980s architecture is subsequently contrasted with the sleek architecture of the more globally sophisticated German capital, as reflected in images of streamlined urban apartment blocks erected along a motorway that connects the city with the airport. Marsh calls these global meeting or intersecting points “threshold locations” (locations like “Madrid's Barajas Airport”, “the dressing rooms of film studios, theatres, night clubs”, and ... “cemeteries..”) reflecting “borderline ambiguities”, and argues that they are “points of transition but ... also locations of transformation.”³⁷ Airport scenes in Almodóvar's cinema may be symbolic of what Augé has called *non-places*; places that “cannot be

³⁴ - as well as exhibitionism and paedophilia.

³⁵ See footnote 21.

³⁶ In these films, Barajas airport is either visualized by way of electronic flight boards or in scenes unfolding in baggage claim areas. Alternatively, the airport is reached after a speedy car and motorbike chase ending in a hasty approach to the check-in area (in *Mujeres...*).

³⁷ “Great Directors: Pedro Almodóvar”, Stephen Marsh, *Senses of Cinema* 40, last modified 2006, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/great-directors/almodovar/>

defined as relational, historical or concerned with identity” (Augé 1995, 78- 79).³⁸ And if these airports were to be conferred an identity, it would be the fluid identity of a collective coming together within the borderless space of the airport.

This transformative and transitory aspect of Almodóvar’s cinema mirrors not only Spain’s concurrent transition into democracy. But this on-screen architectural, social and cultural fluidity is also central to Bauman’s discourses on liquid modern societies whose transient nature can be noted in shifting identities and in social and urban structures as cities today become increasingly globalized. There is a gradual dissolution of “everything that is solid” (Bauman 2011, 11) and urban spaces are ever more defined by their postmodern conditions. In this postmodern urban landscape, Bauman equals identity to the possibility of being “born again” and of stopping “what one is” and turning “into someone one is not yet” (Bauman 2005, 8). This statement could, in the case of Almodóvar, be applied equally much to his evolving screened Spanish metropolis as to the characters inhabiting this space. City and protagonists (as well as citizens off-screen) influence each other, and all find themselves in a state of flux – a socio-political situation which began after Franco, and which keeps defining Spain’s global present and future. In the case of the filmmaker, the inherent fluidity of his protagonists also comes to fruition in their wish to explore new sexual territory (a thought reiterated in the fifth chapter on screened transvestism and transsexuality).³⁹

Matador (1986)

The same year as Spain was granted membership into the European Economic Community (EEC), Almodóvar came out with *Matador*. This “feature film subverting the very puritanical version of Spanish orthodoxy of the Franco years”⁴⁰ does not feature Madrid’s cityscape to any major extent. Instead, sexuality and death are explored all the more intently, and in the link between the two there is again a sensed wish among the protagonists to challenge conventions and experiment with sexual identities. Uncommonly given the track record of the Spanish director, homosexuality is here portrayed as an aberration, and bullfighting Ángel (Antonio Banderas) goes to great lengths to avoid being classified as gay. A further visual link is drawn between the bullfight and the sexual act, both treated as artistic performances, and several lovers are

³⁸ Augé’s *non-places*, or *non-lieux*, were first expanded on in his book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), and constitute a notion later also used by Bauman in *Liquid Modernity* (2000).

³⁹ The transvestite is also present in Pons’ *Barcelona (un mapa)*. However, in the thesis this film will be explored with regard to its postmodern representation of time and space.

⁴⁰ “Orthodoxy”, when applied in the context of Spanish culture, is here defined as “a means of creating a human order that is separate from and superior to the rest of the material world in preparation for ascent to a purely spiritual world after material death.” John Corbin, “To Love and Kill for Pleasure: Almodóvar’s Ludic *Matador*. Review essay,” *Visual Anthropology* 19(2006): 323.

killed off in a fashion that closely resembles the act of killing a bull. Commenting on the gender fusion in this film – with female protagonist, bullfighting *aficionado* María Cardenal (Assumpta Serna) displaying both masculine and feminine traits – John Corbin argues that the film “degenderizes the private killing of people, not the public killing of bulls” (Corbin 2006, 324). Perhaps, again, this statement and the film’s subject matter could be seen as metaphors for a gruesome Spanish past, where the Civil War did not differentiate between genders when it came to who perished during this national trauma.

La ley del deseo (1987)

The year after Spain joined the EEC⁴¹, Almodóvar produced *La ley del deseo*. The film portrays Madrid in a very different light from what had been the case in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* Rather, once again the post-Franco liberalized capital is represented in a celebratory manner and a link with the 1984 film and *Laberinto de pasiones* is thereby drawn. Like these two, *La ley del deseo* also introduces homosexuality as a main theme, but it normalizes queerness to a greater extent. This is a considerably more realistic portrayal of gay lovers involved in intimate relationships, which contrasts with the generally more collective gay culture in particularly *Laberinto de pasiones*. Homosexuality is now no longer treated in a slightly parodic manner but as an alternative, fully plausible lifestyle which is becoming increasingly common in a more global and liberal capital city. The male lovers are also engaged in a triangular drama where jealousy drives the plot forward and eventually triggers a narrative showdown. Alongside the homosexual relationships between Pablo, Antonio and Juan, protagonist Tina’s transsexuality is treated with equal respect by Almodóvar. A third core relationship is constituted by the bond between two adult siblings, whose unwavering affection for each other becomes the most salient theme. Not only does their screened relationship reflect a more liberal urban climate, but the film would also have encouraged a more tolerant and lenient attitude to homosexuals and transsexuals in contemporary Spain.⁴² This mirrors Pastor’s comment regarding the historical intolerance towards sexual “others”:

⁴¹ The name became the European Union (EU) in conjunction with the Maastricht Treaty in 1993.

⁴² In saying this, a recent online commentary discusses the ongoing problematics of homosexuality in Spain also today. It is held that “No nos han discriminado históricamente por ser personas, sino por ser homosexuales y transexuales. ... Yo no he atravesado un exilio personal para poder decir ‘soy persona’, sino para poder decir ‘soy gay’ y devolverle el significado de esta palabra en forma de bomba a quienes piensan que el delito es ser homosexual o transexual y no la homofobia.” “Eres lesbiana, no persona”, Raúl Solís, Paralelo 36 Andalucía, last modified 26 August 2014, <http://www.paralelo36andalucia.com/eres-lesbiana-no-persona/>

... Almodóvar aboga por una tradición directa de la diferencia sexual en el discurso fílmico, cuya misión principal es la búsqueda de una nueva concepción histórica del género y la sexualidad: poder expresar y vivir el deseo genérico-sexual con absoluta libertad y acabar con la homofobia represiva de la tradición (Pastor 2005, 443).

Apart from opening a new discourse around sexual alternatives in Spain (although Almodóvar's screened representation of queerness is represented "unapologetically and matter-of-factly") (Galt and Schoonover 2010, 88), *La ley del deseo* also points to a future connection with *La mala educación* by using the same shooting location at one stage. Additionally, negative references to Catholic education are also made in both films. In *La mala educación*, Almodóvar autobiographically delves into this topic as a way of processing his own negative childhood experiences from a Catholic boy school in the 1960s. In doing so, he opens a dark chapter in Spain's history and personal recollections become relevant on a national level.

The religious aspects of these films and *Entre tinieblas* insert them into a Francoist context. This again mirrors the unavoidable rift between a now weakened Catholic Church and the increasingly secular Spanish society in the decade following on the *Caudillo's* death. The films thus become important documents reflecting the transformed cultural and political climate of Madrid (and indeed of Spain as a whole), pre- versus post democracy.

Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios (1988)

With *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, gone is the religious commentary and partially gone is the personalized representation of Madrid as a larger character, seen as an accommodating and inclusive space. While it is true that *Mujeres...* features some external shots, the urban environment is not so much appealing as hostile and alien – as seen in the outlandish image of María Barranco's character Candela wading through a sea of urban waste (perhaps a more recent example of the *féísmo* already visualized in *Pepi, Luci, Bom...*)⁴³ against the backdrop of a glowing evening sky. The urban space in this film also serves as a visual backdrop for the characters' speedy chase while headed for Barajas Airport, towards the climactic resolution of the film. "[H]ay un plano en que su destino le arrastra como un imán", says Almodóvar about Julieta Serrano's character motorbike-riding Lucía, and he compares the scene to a Greek tragedy.⁴⁴ In additional interior airport tracking shots, the same character is pictured in profile

⁴³ This desolate landscape also reminds of Lyotard's term (urban) *scapeland*, which "provocatively suggests that landscape is an excess of presence that leads to an experience of estrangement." Cristoph Lindner, ed. *Urban Space and Cityscapes: Perspectives from Modern and Contemporary Culture* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006). 13.

⁴⁴ Strauss 1995 (1994), 101.

during her decisive move towards her specific destination, intent to kill.⁴⁵ Augé's *non-places* that are not "concerned with identity" (Augé 1995, 78) are applicable also to the "supermodernity" of the motorway featured in this action-packed scene of *Mujeres...*, as these infrastructural arteries of the modern urbanization could be considered "archetypal non-places" (Merriman 2004, 154).⁴⁶

As noted, *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* differs considerably from *La ley del deseo* in its predominantly interior shots from Pepa's stylish Calle Montalbán 7b penthouse style apartment, a "female sanctuary" (Evans 1996, 38)⁴⁷ to which only one main character is permitted almost exclusive access. A link has further been drawn by Evans between this film and Jean Negulesco's *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953)⁴⁸, with regard to Almodóvar's similar screened balcony setting and scenes from a modern urban apartment, as well as in the obsession of the female characters with men with whom they are ultimately mismatched.⁴⁹ The sleek interiors (reflected on at length by Seguin Vergara)⁵⁰ contrast starkly with those of *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, released only four years earlier. Nevertheless, like this film, *Mujeres...* also features extreme close-ups of objects, of which the telephone becomes one of the main, in line with Cocteau's play around which the film revolves. This device influences much of the action and underscores the flawed communication between the couple in focus. The telephone is thus seen as a hindrance rather than a facilitator for communication.⁵¹

Indeed, lack of (or artificial) communication is one of the main themes in this film and lends itself to various parallel structures. A film partly about dubbing artists, voice-overs create a sensation of an artificial, double reality, as the authenticity of the dubbed film character is, in a way, gone in favour of a new character who takes over replacing

⁴⁵ In relation to this scene, it has been observed that "Lucía faces the final scene at the airport 'with that seriousness which fate leaves to the countenance of a tragic heroine.'" Smith, *Desire Unlimited: The Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar*. Second edition: 99.

⁴⁶ Merriman here quotes Augé.

⁴⁷ Evans also claims that Pepa's "penthouse is an exteriorisation of her pent-up feelings." Peter William Evans, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (London: British Film Institute, 1996). 32.

⁴⁸ Yet another reference to this film would later be made in *Todo sobre mi madre*.

⁴⁹ Almodóvar here also draws inspiration from Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and several other film classics. And as noted by D'Lugo, "the American filmic influences on Almodóvar's development are abundant." Marvin D'Lugo, "Almodóvar's City of Desire," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 34, no. 4 (1991): 64. Núria Vidal, in turn, testifies to the many genres embraced by the Spanish filmmaker, maintaining that "Los films de Almodóvar son como parodias de melodramas, seriales, *love-stories*, *biblia-stories* y musicales retro, llenos de cambios de sexo, hombres que quieren ser mujeres, de mujeres que quieren ser hombres..." Vidal, *El cine de Pedro Almodóvar*: 177.

⁵⁰ In *Pedro Almodóvar, o la deriva de los cuerpos. Ensayo* (Murcia, España: Tres Fronteras Ediciones. Consejería de Cultura y Turismo, 2009).

⁵¹ Evan's book *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1996) provides interesting reflections on the symbolic importance of the answering machine.

the old (symbolically resembling the facelift of Spain since the nation entered its modern, ever more global era, shedding the past along the way).

The sensation of artificial reality in *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* is also mirrored by the initial focus on Madrid as a scale replica. These replicas that depict the city as a construct came as a novelty in Almodóvar's cinema up until that date but have since been used repeatedly. Tellingly, they have become ever more prevalent as the filmmaker pushes further into complex global times. In their imitative artificiality, such miniature constructs can be seen as yet another type of *non-places* and be used to further problematize the screened urban space. This, in turn, "raises the question of what constitutes the city as an object while suggesting the need to re-evaluate critical approaches to urbanism" (Koeck and Roberts 2010, 121). The use of mock-ups paired with this query constitute a theme explored in the fifth chapter – where a connection is made between the artificial scale replica and the body and identity of the screened drag artist.

In *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, Madrid has become highly (post)modernized. Not only is this visualized in artificial constructs resembling the real city, but urban modernity is also reflected in the posh interior design of Pepa's flat and in the sleek street scene in which she is seen crossing main artery Gran Vía. A further contrast between real spaces and artificial or constructed spaces can be observed in Pepa's reconstructed slice of rural life staged on her balcony, where she grows plants and rears chickens in the middle of the city. The image is that of a surreal utopia which, combined with the various scale replicas of Madrid that add to the sense of Baudrillardian *simulacra* or *hyperreality* (Schofield 1996, 334), also recalls Lefebvre's representational spaces: "spaces as directly lived through its associated images and symbols." This space "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (Lefebvre 1991 (1974), 39).

Finally, in addition to the very modern feel to this film, which mirrors a contemporary Spanish society governed by a liberalizing *felipismo*⁵², Almodóvar invites the global into the local in a terrorist subplot which features Candela "abandoned by her Shiite terrorist lover" and complaining "at how unjustly she has been treated 'by the Arab world'" (Smith 2000a, 99). Comical as her comment may be, the fictive references to a terrorist bomb scare on a hijacked plane destined for Stockholm mirrors wider concerns in a global era that defends a type of warfare which contrasts dramatically with the military strategies employed during the 1930s Spanish Civil War.⁵³

⁵² This term refers to Felipe González' prime ministership.

⁵³ In an increasingly volatile world where ISIS and, recently, e.g. French terrorists have instilled further terror worldwide, Almodóvar is to be credited for his thematic political commentaries as early as in 1987 and which clear-sightedly hint at an equally unstable future.

Second part. Almodóvar's 1990s: On-screen themes reflect an increasingly complex society

Átame (1990)

Upon abandoning the 1980s and entering the 1990s, Almodóvar delved into what has been called his “blue era”, starting in the mid-1990s with the release of *La flor de mi secreto* (1995) and including *Carne trémula* (1997) and *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999). All three films display a sophisticated and thematically complex narrative style. It could be argued that *Kika* (1993) had already presented a similarly problematic discourse on screen. Almodóvar's blue-period films all conform to the more internationally competitive and sophisticated art house cinema defended in the Miró Law from 1983 (later revised).⁵⁴ With the previous film *Átame*, which “celebrates the schizophrenic mix of tradition and modernity that informed *La Movida*” (Torres Hortelano 2011, 74), the filmmaker already embraces some of the themes mentioned earlier. Urban drug culture is one of these. However, this is mainly a film about the globally recognized *Stockholm syndrome*, where the victim eventually falls for her kidnapper.

The external shots of Madrid in *Átame* reflect the city's now globalized appearance but, again, like *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, not surprisingly also this film takes place mainly inside an urban apartment. The chosen locality is no longer Calle Montalbán but an apartment on the corner of Calle Alberto Bosch and Calle Alfonso XII in the Chueca neighbourhood. Commenting on this shooting location, Almodóvar has claimed that *Átame* takes place “in a ruined Madrid undergoing constant rebuilding. I have always found a perfect landscape and an incorrect, ideal fauna for each one of my films” (Duncan 2011, 38). What is referred to here is the physical transformation of a sexually mixed part of the city, from a run-down, drug-infused zone to a trendy gay area; an urban facelift taking place alongside the shooting of the film in the 1990s.

In this “constantly rebuilt” Spanish capital which has evolved architecturally, politically and culturally with the times and taken on more fluid, or mixed, aspects since the beginning of democracy, the viewer is again introduced to the otherworldly, alternative and artificial reality of scale replicas. Although in this case it is not clear if Madrid is the city featured in the replica, the achieved effect is that of double or parallel realities which, alongside the screened shooting of a film within a film (Francisco Rabal here plays the filmmaker), makes *Átame* a film about double realities. As Torres Hortelano claims,

⁵⁴ As noted by Tusell, this law additionally “helped to create the phenomenon of the director who was also the producer of his own films.” Javier Tusell, *Spain: From Dictatorship to Democracy 1939 to the Present* (Malden, MA, Oxford, England, and Victoria, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2007). 399.

... it is no longer possible to tell the natural from the artificial in this motley group of elements including the classical, the modern and the typically Almodovarian pastiche (Torres Hortelano 2011, 74).

Again, there is a sense of abstract representational spaces considerably void of energy in this film, that conform to Lefebvre's spatial theories of the modern city and in part also to Deleuze's notions of "deterritorialization" and "reterritorializing" (Natoli 2001, 27). Thus, the film within a film to which we become witness in the parallel or dual cinematic reality of *Átame* conforms to the Deleuzian idea of a physical detachment from a given situation or location. Instead, there is the appearance of a type of in-between places, which are neither real nor unreal but constitute a place somewhere between the two, "forming so many becomings between things, or so many lines of deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 (1980), 294).

In the final scene, a symbolic link is drawn between the protagonists' return to rural life (Granadilla in Extremadura) and Marina Osorio's return to individual freedom. This rural/urban interplay that takes place alongside the noticeable personal transformation of a female hostage turned voluntary partner, eventually comes to musical expression in the song *Resistiré* by the Dúo Dinámico. The song underscores the conflicting emotions of the female protagonist. As noted by Ada Salas,

[s]on inolvidables las imágenes en las que Antonio Banderas y Victoria Abril se despiden del pueblo cantando *Resistiré*... Tal vez Almodóvar eligió esa canción porque vio en Granadilla a un magnífico superviviente.⁵⁵

Tacones lejanos (1991)

The same year as Spain hosted the Middle East Peace conference and the culturally orientated Instituto Cervantes was founded (Pavlović et al 2009, 243), *Tacones lejanos* was released. Although the film does not deal with political issues as such, Spain's liberal policies at the time are reflected in Almodóvar's continuously openminded approach to social groups who during the Franco regime would have been all the more marginalized. While *Átame* had focused on a heterosexual relationship, the figure of the drag already narratively introduced in *La ley del deseo* returns in *Tacones lejanos*. Not only is real-life transsexual Bibiana Anderson (aka Bibi, or Bibiana, Fernández) featured in a liberalizing scene that takes on the aspect of a musical played out on prison grounds, but cross-dresser *Femme Letal* also reflects the fluid sexual landscape of Madrid in his ability to inhabit several different personas, both male and female. In his staged tribute to singer Becky del Páramo, *La Letal* also proves to the viewer that the woman was a

⁵⁵ "Granadilla, al son de 'Resistiré', Ada Salas, *El País*: Archivo, last modified 4 October 2008, http://elpais.com/diario/2008/10/04/viajero/1223154502_850215.html

force to be reckoned with in increasingly egalitarian 1990s Madrid. Indeed, in Almodóvar's cinema the female protagonists are generally represented as

complex, multi-dimensional, thinking subjects in their negotiation of the social, professional, emotional and sexual changes which have characterised post-Franco Spain (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 1998, 127).

Apart from Almodóvar's liberalized representation of the woman, or the character resembling a female, 1990s Madrid as a "vibrant Euro-city" (Parsons 2003, 106) and its global connections are also reflected threefold: in the non-static coming and going of travellers through airport lounges and other "mobility changes" (Adey 2006, 360) and in the initial flashbacks to the Isla Margarita⁵⁶ in 1974. A third sign of the increased Europeanization of also off-screen Madrid, is reflected on screen by the comment "¡Dios mío, cómo ha cambiado esta ciudad!" (Almodóvar 1991). In this respect, there is a clear link between *La flor de mi secreto* and *Carne trémula*. Both films represent concurrent changes that would rapidly alter the Spanish urban landscape.

Kika (1993)

With *Kika*, screened Madrid becomes further sophisticated when the main shooting location is yet another modern apartment (on Calle de Sevilla 3). Here, too, initial images of a streamlined high-speed train entering the Atocha railway station carry the viewer far away from the drab Madrid cityscape of, particularly, *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* Instead, we are transported further into the global future. Alongside the urban trauma to which protagonist Kika is subjected, a screened counterbalance is provided in both initial and final scenes from the country-house *La Youkali* (based on a tango piece "composed by Kurt Weill about a dream country that doesn't exist") (Duncan 2011, 190).⁵⁷ This rural residence initially comes across as a temporary refuge from hectic urban life. However, just like Kika's urban apartment, the *Casa Youkali* also becomes a negative space and at the end of the film it will have accommodated two female murder victims. Additionally, neither Kika's apartment nor the *Youkali* is spared the negative media intrusion to which obsessive character Andrea Caracortada subjects her fellow citizens and which mirrors a global community equally much fed as feeding

⁵⁶ In Nueva Esparta, off the coast of Venezuela.

⁵⁷ Kurt Weill, a German Jew, wrote the piece while in exile in France, "as incidental music for the play *Marie Galante*." "Notes from the Dreamtime: Lyric Earwig", Craig R. Smith, WordPress.com, last modified 12 September 2009, <http://sewayoleme.wordpress.com/2009/09/13/lyric-earwig/> In Almodóvar's film, main character Nicholas (Peter Coyote) rather claims to have chosen the name *Youkali*, as it sounded like "Kurt Weill."

off sensationalist images of sexual brutality and other kinds of physical violence.⁵⁸ Smith has dedicated part of a chapter to the voyeuristic rape of *Kika*⁵⁹ and Almodóvar himself has commented on our televised media-crazed age:

[i]n this age, wherever you find an open window, someone could be looking in. In an era where television is like the eye of god, in this case the eye is the frame, a square frame. It is an omnipresent eye in everyone's life (Willoquet-Maricondi 2004, 102).

Kika, overall, features very few external shots. Instead, Madrid is represented almost solely by way of scale replicas and the core part of the plot is removed from the external city. The capital becomes a construct rather than an active participant in the drama played out. There is an emphasis on the artificial nature of the global metropolis, a place in which the media churns out images that represent an alternative reality. These are images that in their omnipresence give the viewer a false sense of reality when the artificial generally replaces the “real deal”. The fact that a sensationalist media apparatus is dedicated such space in the film seems to justify Almodóvar's construction of a correspondingly artificial Madrid. Images of urban landmarks (las Torres Kio, la Torre Europa, la Torre Picasso, la Plaza España, La Torre de Madrid, la Plaza de Cibeles, la Torre BBVA, Café del Círculo de Bellas Artes, la Calle Alcalá, la Plaza de Toros de las Ventas, etc) are in his film equally much part of a constructed reality, as are the excessive images of murder and rape, broadcast repeatedly in order to boost television viewing figures.

Although *Kika* disturbed sensitive US audiences and was “Almodóvar's least successful film for the critics”⁶⁰, it is highly relevant (and refreshingly modern) in an era when private lives are becoming increasingly public and where technology has a major impact on people, leading to growing alienation and poor communication between individuals. The irony of the artificial on-screen reality of *Kika* and the equally artificial off-screen technological reality among urban citizens today, is that despite the tendency for people to communicate non-stop there is in the film very little real dialogue taking place. As explained by Almodóvar, “[t]here is an enormous lack of communication among all the characters. This is something that exists in large cities” (Willoquet-Maricondi 2004, 105). Screened key in hand, at the end of *Kika* the viewer feels

⁵⁸ The name of screened rapist Paul Bazzo refers to the Spanish word “polvazo”, literally “big fuck.” Esteve Rimbau, “Imitation of Life: Transsexuality and Transtextuality in *Todo sobre mi madre* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999)”, in *Burning Darkness: A Half Century of Spanish Cinema*, ed. Juan Ramon Resina and Andrés Lema- Hincapié (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2008). 240.

⁵⁹ Paul Julian Smith, *Vision Machines: Cinema, Literature and Sexuality in Spain and Cuba, 1983-93* (London and New York: Verso, 1996). Chapter 2.

⁶⁰ Paul Julian Smith, *Television in Spain: From Franco to Almodóvar* (Woodbridge, UK, Rochester, New York: Tamesis, 2006). 149.

radically distanced from the vibrant “communication hub” that is Madrid in Almodóvar’s 1980s.

Section 2: A chronological analysis of Almodóvar’s 1990s art house cinema and 21st-century films: The “blue period pieces” *La flor de mi secreto*, *Carne trémula*, and *Todo sobre mi madre*

In the three films that mark the second half of the Almodóvarian 1990s, the cineaste takes communication to a new level when he leaves behind the omni-present media apparatus that became an oppressive element in *Kika*.⁶¹ Rather, in the films that Smith includes in the art house cinema characteristic of Almodóvar’s *blue* period of filmmaking⁶² there is a more realistic yet also more complex communication between the protagonists and their voiced concerns reflect broader issues within contemporary society – nationally and abroad. The light-hearted *Movida* years now most definitely left behind,⁶³ the three films henceforth explored provide a sombre social commentary where the filmmaker problematizes life in the ever more global metropolis while showing an awareness of the political situation in Spain at the time. In so doing, he establishes a complex and often painful dialogue between screened city and citizen. The protagonists that form a part of this problematic relationship are finely developed and the plots come across as more nuanced and sophisticated than before. In Almodóvar’s multifaceted screened 21st-century blue-period urban universe there is also a willingness among some characters to engage on a level of mutual understanding, despite their contrasting lifestyles and preferences. They share similar core values that bridge individual differences and reflect life in a more liberalized urban habitat. Their interaction and the transformed urban space within which they operate make the viewer aware of events that have shaped Spain as the country has delved further into its global era.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Although *La flor de mi secreto* (1995) also includes constant references to the global media, it does not constitute a negative force as in *Kika*.

⁶² In Paul Julian Smith, *Contemporary Spanish Culture: TV, Fashion, Art and Film*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003). Chapter 6. He here draws a clear parallel to Picasso.

⁶³ Nevertheless, Almodóvar would 18 years later paint a similarly camp picture of sexual exuberance in *Los amantes pasajeros*.

⁶⁴ Thus, not only are these films steeped in a particular social context but in their political “awareness” they can be seen as a catalyst for on-screen social changes that come to the fore in the global and fluid space of a more borderless 21st-century Spanish metropolis. As highlighted earlier in the thesis, not only does Almodóvar shed light on problems in contemporary Spain (and abroad) but his plots become more sophisticated through an increasingly complex character development and interaction between the protagonists. This all helps create a credible portrait of everyday life in cities today.

La flor de mi secreto (1995)

What may be Almodóvar's most overtly political film (and his "most technically successful")⁶⁵ has been called a "swan song for Felipe González" (Kinder 1997, 13). The film makes reference to a number of concurrent political events both within Spain⁶⁶ and beyond its borders. In doing so, Almodóvar steeps *La flor...* in a historical context. The release of the film coincided with Gonzalez' final year in power and the screened discontentment of urban youths demonstrating against the PSOE party in one scene reflects the changing political climate of Madrid at the time. Like *Kika*, *La flor...* is additionally concerned with the visual – and written – media. Thus, daily newspaper *El País* moves centre stage and there are repeated literary references to foreign female writers such as Virginia Woolf, Jane Bowles, Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys, Edith Barton, Isak Dinesen (aka Karen Blixen), and Janet Frame. This reflects Spain's interest in foreign literature and culture and the country's wish to open to the world outside. In other words, while Almodóvar himself exports a modern Spanish cinema that reinforces national stereotypes,⁶⁷ his bold themes also challenge, stimulate and disturb viewers all at once. In *La flor de mi secreto* he takes an interest in the international market and culture that he himself reaches out to. He thus charts international territories (just like he explores alternative territories in the "mapa del desencanto" additionally drawn in this film).⁶⁸

In *La flor...*, romantic novelist Leocadia Macías' (Marisa Paredes) apparent strength in solitude proves a façade that eventually crumbles when her husband Paco leaves her. The fragmented images of Leo and Paco as they reunite in their Madrid inner-city apartment after a period apart have been interpreted by critics such as D'Lugo in his comprehensive article "El extraño viaje alrededor del cine de Almodóvar" (D'Lugo

⁶⁵ Lorenzo J. Torres Hortelano, ed. *World Film Locations: Madrid* (Bristol, UK, and Chicago: Intellect Books, 2011). 78

⁶⁶ Like Kinder, Martín has also reflected on the references to the final year of *felipismo* and the youth demonstration against the socialist party in *La flor...*: "En la película, el primer (des)encuentro amoroso entre Leo y Ángel se produce en medio de una manifestación de estudiantes de medicina críticos con las políticas socialistas del momento en lo referente a sus contratos laborales." Annabel Martín, *La gramática de la felicidad: Relecturas franquistas y postmodernas del melodrama* (Madrid: Ediciones Libertarias, 2005). 269.

⁶⁷ On a related note, Anholt argues that "because we believe in the country's images, we also believe that products possess similar qualities to the countries they come from." Simon Anholt, *Brand New Justice. How branding places and products can help the developing world* (Oxford and Massachusetts: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005 (2003)). 110.

⁶⁸ Marvin D'Lugo, "El extraño viaje alrededor del cine de Almodóvar," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 287.

2004) as symbolic of imminent marriage breakdown.⁶⁹ Paco, based in the European headquarters of NATO in Brussels during the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s, is accused by Leo for volunteering for the Peace Mission as a way to escape everyday reality with her. She claims that “I’m the only victim of that war. From the moment you decided to join the NATO forces you were moving away from me” (Almodóvar 1995). As noted by Annabel Martín, Leo

[e]s la Penelope en actitud de espera eterna frente al marido ausente, un militar español de la OTAN comprometido con la situación internacional de guerra en la antigua Yugoslavia, pero insensiblemente ciego al deseo de una mujer luchando a la desesperada por recomponer un mundo y una relación conyugal ya caduca (Martín 2005, 268).

Paco, in turn, classifies his marital alienation from Leo as another type of warfare: “There is no war that compares with you” (Almodóvar 1995), a comment which reinforces Leo’s *Angst* when faced with stark facts. The broken up marital unit in the film reflects not only unstable bonds between individuals today but also social fragmentation in general and increased individualization in an ever more competitive society. In relation to the global metropolis, Bauman has spoken of “identity problems” and “the metamorphosis of utopia” (Bauman 2011, 30). The Spanish capital represented in *La flor de mi secreto* is at once a desirable place and a place towards which the characters harbour conflicting feelings. Not only do they fail to communicate properly, but the identity problems that Bauman speaks of culminate in Leo’s complete meltdown as her marriage breaks down once and for all. By the time she manages to pull herself together, she has adopted an altered attitude to her urban environment that enables her to cope better.

The fluid identities of our postmodern habitat are reflected not only in the dissolving marriage between Leo and Paco. But groups that constitute a transformed urban climate appear and evolve alongside the city of Madrid, much to the dismay of Leo’s mother: “Why would I want to go out? To get killed by a skinhead or get knocked down by a car?” (Almodóvar 1995). It comes as no surprise then that the longing for the countryside (paired with feelings of nostalgia) is an underlying theme also in this global portrait of Madrid, a film where Almagro offers temporary relief from the troubles Leo faces in the city.

Noteworthy, too, and as referred to earlier, is the symbolic value attached to the map of Spain that decorates Leo’s bedroom wall and that seems to safeguard her against the

⁶⁹ The visual impact of Almodóvar’s technical prowess has also been commented on by Eric Bou. He notes that in “many of Almodóvar’s films, a conflict between two worlds is presented, a clash without confrontation, which is pushed... through contrast and juxtaposition.” Eric Bou, “On Almodóvar’s World: The Endless Film. Hispanic Literatures and the Question of a Liberal Education,” *Hispanic Issues on Line* 8(2011): 56.

uncertain condition of nations abroad (e.g. war-torn Bosnia, a country as politically unstable as Paco is unreliable as a husband). As noted by Almodóvar in an interview with Strauss, just like the Almagro village also this national map offers a sense of security due to being so familiar to protagonist and viewer alike. Almodóvar explains,

La imagen que se sitúa encima del cabecero domina la habitación, vigila nuestros sueños, hace guardia en las puertas de nuestra intimidad, simboliza algo en lo que uno cree, algo que nos infunde confianza, nos cobija y nos protege. Es un lugar sagrado (Strauss 2001 (1994), 135).

The mother's ode to her native village at one stage in the film is attractive and she talks of a parallel reality which is home to her, but which can only be a brief solution to Leo's problems. Because, after all, Leo's issues need to be dealt with within the confines of the city. As she eventually regains her footing after a period of personal recovery, she proves that she is the "urbanita convencida" introduced as a term earlier in this thesis.

Carne trémula (1997)

In a year when Spain dramatically increased its number of Latin American, Central European, and African immigrants (Pavlović et al 2009, 244), *Carne trémula* was released.⁷⁰ Just like *La flor de mi secreto*, also this is an explicitly political film. Inspired by Ruth Rendell's crime novel *Live Flesh* (1986), it has been called pivotal "in that to date it is the last of his movies to be shot principally on the city's streets" (Marsh 2004, 54). Importantly, in line with concurrent off-screen events, *Carne trémula* reflects the immigration of foreigners into Spain. By the end of the visual narrative, members of different social groups will have come together in a city which has changed dramatically from what it looked like in the initial screened Francoist 1970s (the film ends 26 years later, in a radically different nation where fear of dictatorial repression no longer haunted Madrid citizens – screened or otherwise). The radiation of global space referred to in the introduction is also reflected in the many travels of the protagonists beyond national borders. *Carne trémula* additionally keeps up to date with concurrent off-screen sports events: the 1992 Barcelona Paralympics are particularly featured.

While *Kika* had identified a number of Madrid landmarks by way of artificial scale replicas, in *Carne trémula* the Kio Towers that form a part of *La Puerta de Europa* are presented as they physically appeared in the proximity of the Ventilla neighbourhood during the shooting of the film (these towers contrasted dramatically with the all the more run-down wasteland that characterized this derelict area before its shantytown

⁷⁰ The title of Fouz-Hernández' and Martínez Expósito's aforementioned *Live Flesh* delivers an obvious pun on Almodóvar's 1997 film.

homes were demolished not long thereafter).⁷¹ This adds a heightened sense of parallel spaces in a film ripe in global and national contrasts: beginning with completely different initial and final screened years and eras and that reflect two contrasting Spains. The film's parallel – and circular – visual and narrative structure is also mirrored by screened citizens living side by side in an increasingly cosmopolitan capital, and of different ethnicities.

As highlighted in the introduction, the organic relationship between city and citizen in *Carne trémula* is reflected linguistically, when Víctor Plaza's first name reflects his personal victory over a city repressed by the Franco regime. His surname also mirrors his growth within a city that will evolve alongside his personal development.⁷² The concurrent urban development of Madrid is reflected in a final commentary that sums up how much Spain had changed (architecturally, culturally and sociologically) from 1970 to 1997:

No sabes cómo ha cambiado esto... Mira cómo está la acera, llena de gente. Cuando yo nací no había un alma por la calle. La gente estaba encerrada en sus casas, cagada de miedo. Por suerte para ti, hijo mío, hace mucho que en España hemos perdido el miedo (Almodóvar 1997).

A more explicit comment than this is hardly needed to accompany Almodóvar's visual comparison of 1970s Madrid (underscored by a documentary state of emergency or *estado de excepción* declared by Franco's then Information and Tourism minister Manuel Fraga Iribarne⁷³) with the same capital city at the end of the 1990s. At the end, the film has effectively portrayed the city as a much-altered habitat that will keep evolving to keep up with a similarly transformative future.

⁷¹ "Hace 10 años Pedro Almodóvar rodaba las primeras escenas de su 'Carne Trémula' en La Ventilla (Tetuán), una barriada de infraviviendas ruinosas con la expropiación firmada y los días contados. El prestigioso director de cine recogía así los contrastes y la contradicción de una ciudad en la que, por esos años, se conservaba involuntariamente un montón de chabolas a los mismísimos pies de las modernas Torres Kío de Plaza de Castilla, o escondía miseras viviendas en uno de los centros neurálgicos de la capital, muy diferentes a los lujosos pisos del barrio de Chamberí, que igualmente aparecían en el largometraje." "Del barrio trémulo a la nueva Ventilla", Elena Delgado, Miod: Un lugar para la ciencia y la tecnología, 29 January 2007, last modified 27 February 2013, <http://www.madriidiario.es/2007/Enero/madrid/madrid/8043/remodelacion-la-ventilla.html>

⁷² See earlier thesis references to the symbolic value of names in *Carne trémula*, where Marsh's observations have been particularly highlighted: Steven Marsh, "Masculinity, Monuments, and Movement: Gender and the City of Madrid in Pedro Almodóvar's *Carne trémula* (1997)," in *Gender and Spanish Cinema*, ed. Steven Marsh and Parvati Nair (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004).

⁷³ This was a public declaration which "removed a series of civil liberties highlighted in the on-screen text: freedom of expression, freedom of residence, freedom to meet." Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas, "Narrative, Desire and Critical Discourse in Pedro Almodóvar's *Carne trémula* (1997)," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 8, no. 2 (2002): 3.

Todo sobre mi madre (1999)

Almodóvar's thirteenth feature film continues to receive critical acclaim worldwide and is generally regarded as the finest in his oeuvre. A year after the filmmaker was awarded the Medalla de Oro al Mérito from Bellas Artes (Pavlović et al 2009, 244), *Todo sobre mi madre* "ended up as the biggest commercial and critical success, sweeping seven Goyas as well as a Golden Globe and Oscar" during a "1999 season" that "was the year of motherhood in Spanish movies" (Stanton 2002, 121). While this film indeed celebrates motherhood and women (as tends to be the case with the majority of Almodóvar's works, although he has been called misogynist from critics who apparently fail to see the bigger picture⁷⁴), it also presents yet another sympathetic picture of members of social subcultures; groups that make up an alternative sexual landscape and whose identities are as fluid as their ever changing physical appearance. What Don Mitchell has called "[t]he geography of sex" (2000, 171) is applicable to the way the transgender persona is represented in this film. Mitchell explains that,

One of the signal contributions of academic cultural studies – and now their adoption into geography – has been to point to the obvious, show just how "public" sex and sexuality always are, and thus how they are always and everywhere contested in and through the public sphere and public space. But this visible publicity is not only of the most obvious sort: the commodification of sex and the pursuit of pornography, for example... It is also a publicity that allows, through negotiation, political struggle, acts of bold transgression and timid acquiescence, for people to create sexual identities for themselves (2000, 171).

In *Todo sobre mi madre*, Almodóvar gives free reign to sexual otherness. New sexual and gendered identities are explored, and predilections are embraced in a manner that mirrors the concurrent cultural identity transformation of the Spanish metropolis since the country began its liberalizing globalization process. Uncommonly for Almodóvar, who has called Madrid "a person in my films" (Willoquet-Maricondi 2004, 61), this time in focus is Barcelona. Madrid instead becomes a steppingstone that allows for a subsequent visual exploration of its Catalan counterpart. In the film, Manuela's travels between the two capitals, and between Argentina and Spain, establish several cultural connections. Additionally, Almodóvar enables an abstract connection to take place on the level of subcultures, with unconventional characters forming ties with more stereotypical ones.

⁷⁴ Recent examples of this are two scathing articles on Almodóvar and his on-screen representation of women, by Pilar Aguilar ("Los abrazos rotos o la inanidad") and Jacqueline Cruz (whose critique of the Spanish director in "Almodóvar ataca de nuevo a las mujeres" concerns several of his films): *Publicada en Jacqueline Cruz: Blog feminista de cine, literatura y lenguaje*, 8 de octubre de 2011. <https://jacqueline-cruz.blogspot.com/2011/10/almodovar-ataca-de-nuevo-las-mujeres.htm>

On a socio-cultural level, it also becomes clear that screened Barcelona has now definitely entered its more multicultural global era. This is reflected in images of foreign migrants who linger on city streets and squares. A link is subsequently established with *Átame*, where multi-ethnic groups had already added global flair to the street scenes. The similarly multiethnic aspects of *Todo sobre mi madre* makes this a fitting film for the aforementioned art house cinema advocated by the Miró Law. Almodóvar's screened Madrid and Barcelona here are also highly marketable abroad.

Symbolically, a vital connection between off-screen Madrid and Barcelona is also established. The rival cities have been engaged in a long history of conflicting political interests and agendas, with Barcelona often more readily comparing itself with Paris and other European cities than the national capital. On-screen, however, Almodóvar bridges any differences between the two cities through a protagonist's rediscovery of the Catalan capital after years of physical (but not mental) absence. And, as in Pons' *Barcelona (un mapa)*, the filmic portrayal of Barcelona also in *Todo...* resembles a virtual map that unfolds alongside the visual exploration of several iconic neighbourhoods. However, while Almodóvar represents Barcelona in a mainly positive light, Pons' protagonists feel more at odds with their own city (the reason for which will be pondered in the third chapter).

Almodóvar, who in the film steers clear from political commentaries regarding the Catalan struggle for independence and Barcelona's problematic relationship with Madrid, here thus creates a "visual love letter to the Catalan capital, one which was welcomed by a Catalan press which has often been friendlier to Almodóvar than that of his home town" (Smith 2000, 192). Such accolades might bide well for the continuous relationship between the two metropolises.

Section 3: A Brave New World: Almodóvar's bold exploration of 21st-century themes

With the step into the new century, Almodóvar has produced six films to date which both differ and share commonalities. As evidenced, they all form a logical transition from the 1990s repertoire and the move into an increasingly postmodern Spanish era. The films represent society today as intricate and multifaceted. It is in their thematic and narrative complexity where Almodóvar again shows his skills as an, in fact, semi-documentary filmmaker. In his films he shows an ability to keep up with concurrent social changes and to also foresee coming changes that continually and continuously transform the urban environment.

Hable con ella (2002)

Hable con ella does not feature Madrid as much as the internal space of a city hospital (and the narratively tragic Aranjuez bullring 48 kilometres from the city, as well as the inside of Alicia's apartment located on Calle Prado 2 – which has since been turned into the Room Mate Alicia Hotel) (Torres Hortelano 2011, 100).⁷⁵ In focus, rather, are issues that are not only increasingly common in cities globally, but that also link back to themes already explored in *Kika*. The first of these is voyeurism, the second communication, and the third a lack thereof.

While in *Kika* the voyeuristic gaze of the “vision machine” (Smith 1996a, 39)⁷⁶ was malevolent and obsessive, protruding into people's private lives at all costs; its purpose to fuel viewers' curiosity and feed their sexual appetite, in *Hable con ella* voyeurism is not necessarily seen in a negative light. Here, the act takes place on several levels: in the public spectacle of a bullfight gone wrong, in the re-narrated silent movie *The Shrinking Lover* (the voyeuristic spectator here follows a miniscule lover's wondrous sexual explorations across the naked body of his life-sized girlfriend), and in main character Benigno Martín's subsequent rape of the object of his desire; comatose Alicia. The voyeuristic gaze in this sequence is not that of the spectator (we are informed of Benigno's sexual appropriation of Alicia's dormant body in an indirect, symbolic manner). But the gaze belongs to nurse Benigno himself. And even though in the film his rape is condemned by the hospital board and is “conspicuously attacked within the film itself” ..., we are led to sympathize with Benigno's emotional history, stunted and deformed as it is. It is not just in *Bad Education* that Almodóvar seeks to educate his audience (Smith 2006b, 152-53).

Curiously, rape is not necessarily a malicious act in *Hable con ella*, as Alicia's ensuing pregnancy provokes her to wake up from her coma. Almodóvar here proves that an act normally condemned as violent, unethical and transgressive, can in fact lead to positive outcomes (although this would be a singular case of such positive results). Thereby not saying that Almodóvar justifies sexual violence, as some critics would have it, but he continuously challenges the viewer in a film whose themes mirror a more fluid approach

⁷⁵ The film also briefly takes the viewer to southern Andalusia, in a wedding scene shot in Lucena, Córdoba.

⁷⁶ Martín also refers to Virilio's concept of the *vision machine* (1994) when she argues, with regard to the melodramatic aspect of Almodóvar's cinema, that “[e]l modelo melodramático de la radio y la televisión, de los medios de comunicación ..., de la publicidad, etc. miente, como nos enseña Almodóvar, se falsifica y hace invisible el *vision machine* ... de la velocidad, esa aceleración que caracteriza nuestro momento histórico.” Martín, *La gramática de la felicidad: Relecturas franquistas y postmodernas del melodrama*: 284.

to sexual and gender-related issues – including rape and an obsession with members of the opposite sex – in society today.⁷⁷

Although, as noted, Madrid is generally geographically absent in this film – the city is mainly mentioned in passing and then referred to in negative terms⁷⁸ – the focus on woman as subject to the male gaze and on images of a passive body that is slowly brought back to consciousness, reflects how liberalized Madrid has become in the 21st century. In its (indirect) lack of machoism and homage to the modern woman, “the film’s representations present an unspoken affirmation of gender equality” (Goss 2008, 39). This makes *Hable con ella* yet another visual testimony to the liberalization and democratization of Madrid today.

La mala educación (2004)

In the same year as Al Qaeda carried out a terrorist attack on Madrid (after which José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero took over as Prime Minister) the film noir *La mala educación*, featuring only male characters, was released. Spain’s political turmoil at the time is not reflected on screen, and nor does Madrid feature as a character. Rather, what seems of major importance to Almodóvar is to confront memories from a repressive Catholic upbringing, which in turn allows him to deal with a larger national trauma of religious abuse of young male adepts. Rather than Madrid becoming a protagonist, uncommonly here:

all the action is set in the past, focussing exclusively on three moments: 1980, 1977, and 1964. In this respect, we may consider this Almodóvar’s first truly historical narrative (D’Lugo 2006, 115).

As will be reiterated, the plot cross-crosses between different locations and time periods. Again, the theme of physical abuse returns here but the victim is not a single adult but several young male students. Although, generally, the victimization in the film is not graphically displayed, it deeply affects the protagonists throughout their childhood and later adult years. The film contains several flashbacks to events unraveling within a Catholic boy school (“el lugar escogido por Almodóvar para rodar estas escenas fue un monumental edificio que albergó en su tiempo una comunidad de Escuelas Pías en la

⁷⁷ Almodóvar himself comments on the sexual violation that takes place in *Hable con ella*, in the article: “Girls on Film”, Jim Nelson, GQ, last modified April 2007 (©2013), <https://www.gq.com/story/pedro-almodovar-girls-on-film-april-2007>

⁷⁸ The negative sentiments on the part of male protagonist Marco Zuluaga are summed up in his statement: “La vida en Madrid era un infierno. Nuestra relación sólo funcionaba en la huida.” Pedro Almodóvar, “*Hable con ella*,” (Spain 2002).

localidad de Alella, en Barcelona”)⁷⁹ which altogether serve to strengthen the character development. These regular flashbacks further validate a story based on allegations of sexual abuse in this multi-layered visual narrative which challenges our perception of what is real and not. At the end of the film, it nevertheless becomes clear that Almodóvar has delivered a scathing criticism of Catholic education during the Franco years. There is also the suggestion that a history of childhood abuse may trigger an alternative sexual identity in later adult years:

La negación sexual de la educación religiosa convencional se contrarresta en el film con la invasión de la sexualidad en todas las relaciones humanas y culturales en las que los personajes de las películas se ven implicados. La educación tradicional negaba la sexualidad como procedimiento más efectivo para controlar sus consecuencias. De otro modo, Almodóvar propone la pansexualización, la presencia ubicua del sexo como contrapartida de su negación (Navajas 2007, 287).

What is being implied is that the sexual predilections of the male protagonists – engaged in a homosexual relationship as adults and experimenting with transvestism and transsexuality – are triggered by childhood events. In the film, individual experiences of a repressive Catholic education responsible for “an ongoing, system-induced epidemic of sexual harassment and forcible violation” (Medak-Seguin 2011, 4)⁸⁰ come to sexual fruition in relationships that do not comply with the “norm.” In this sense, Almodóvar presents an alternative picture of homosexuals, cross-dressers and transsexuals, which differs from the more light-hearted portrayal of these individuals in earlier films. Might it be that the more democratic a country, ironically the more conservative and gradually more intolerant it becomes? It has been held that the images of transsexual Ignacio and stage artist, cross-dresser Zahara,

are far from providing a reassuring, comic shield from the potentially hostile reactions of a newly (and precariously) democratic Spain. Rather, they are a function of a complex meta-cinematic structure of performances that disturbs both the audience’s framing of the narrative and any comfortable identification with the transsexual as “victim” (Allinson 2009, 150).

In a film that breaks with the Almodóvarian tradition of female narratives and the focus on the commonly sympathetic figure of the drag (and the homosexual), and which generally has a more consistently sombre undertone, the viewer is left wondering whether to sympathize with the protagonists. Still, *La mala educación* is effective as a

⁷⁹ “Todo Almodóvar: Localizaciones – Escuelas Pías de Alella”, last modified 22 March 2012, <http://todopedroalmodovar.blogspot.com.au/2012/03/localizaciones-escuelas-pias-de-alella.html>

⁸⁰ Hence why the title contains the suggestive word “mala.”

visual testimony of an abusive education system that has left many harmed Spaniards in its wake.

Volver (2006)

In a chronological Almodóvarian universe where the real city gradually must give way to an alternative semi-artificial reality defined, in part, by its parallel spaces or *non-places*, *Volver* breaks away from this “tradition.” The film additionally breaks with Almodóvar’s tendency to give Madrid the upper hand in the urban/rural interplay that commonly influences his narrative development. In *Volver*, nostalgia for the past (in this case rural customs and traditions) is explored not through a brief stint in the village but through the protagonists’ more complete return to their childhood *pueblo*. The final outcome is a coming to terms with past experiences that long needed to be dealt with; traumatic memories that are partly resolved in the resumed cross-generational relationship between a mother long believed to be dead and her daughter. In this sense, not only is *Volver* (like *Todo sobre mi madre*) ultimately a celebration of female relationships.⁸¹ But also, it is the *pueblo* rather than Madrid that here comes to the fore as a fully-fledged character, ripe in rural charm and traditions.⁸² This is a place where the characters can finally come to terms with their own past and bond with one another. Explicitly, it has been argued that:

[e]n el imaginario almodovariano, el pueblo invoca un cambio de registro: más que un lugar físico particular, concreta el universo emotivo de los personajes, aunque nunca pierde su referencialidad histórica por completo (Martín 2005, 274).

Martín’s comment reflects the interrelationship between rural places and the emotional state of the protagonists (which again reminds of Lefebvre’s notion of space – or place – as incomplete or “useless” without the energy injected into it by its people). The Spanish metropolis in *Volver* is, by contrast, initially portrayed as a site of urban malaise, where the characters struggle with poor finances and looming unemployment. The urban space is thus partly a negative environment: it is a space that triggers lack of communication between family members and subsequent distorted behaviour, aggressivity and depression. Almodóvar’s Madrid in the first half of the film conforms

⁸¹ As in *Entre tinieblas* (1983), the male character around whose corpse some of the drama revolves is written off from the start.

⁸² The opening scene contrasts with that of *Carne trémula*, where 1970s Madrid and its landmarks helped create an entirely urban portrait.

to Raymond Williams' ponderings on the urban/rural dichotomy (and the friction between the two):⁸³

If what was seen in the town could not be approved, because it made evident and repellent the decisive relations in which men actually lived, the remedy was never a visitor's morality of plain living and high thinking, or a babble of green fields. It was a change of social relationships and of essential morality (Williams 1973, 54).

It is this call for a moral conscience that runs as a governing idea in *Volver* and is reflected in the constant communication between four main women.⁸⁴ Most importantly, this leads them to ultimately understand and forgive one another.

If *Volver* is essentially about cross-generational interaction between women in a mainly rural setting and the re-appreciation of rural traditions and ways of life, gradually in focus is also the artificiality of a modern city excessively influenced by the media, and a Spanish capital that is becoming more global by the minute. Almodóvar's repeated exploration of an equally exploitative televised media becomes pertinent in an increasingly "technocrazy" and media-obsessed global society.⁸⁵ This screened media focus is paralleled by a global imagery that is alternatively drab or glossy depending on the shooting location. This allows for a film that manages to connect rural, suburban (or liminal), and urban spaces and which, as such, is very timely.

Spatial commonalities between Almodóvar's 21st-century films

That said, it is interesting to note one main commonality between all five films directed by Almodóvar in the 21st century: they all largely break away from the city with plots that unfold in different regions either on the Spanish mainland or beyond the Peninsula. Thus, *Hable con ella* features scenes also from Brihuega, in the central region of Castilla-La Mancha, and from Córdoba (in the region of Andalusia) and *La mala educación* takes place partly in Galicia, Valencia and Barcelona. The rural village of Almagro and the city of Puertollano, in turn, serves as a visual backdrop for the plot in *Volver* (just like it did in some scenes of *La flor de mi secreto*). Almodóvar's seventeenth feature film *Los abrazos rotos* places the action not only in Madrid but also in Arucas and Famara, both on the Canary Islands. Finally, the thematically complex *La piel que*

⁸³ Although this quote is inserted into an English context in Williams' book, it is universally applicable.

⁸⁴ As has been noted, "*Volver* brings the female voice again to the forefront of the cinematic dialogue." Becquer Medak-Seguin, "Short-Circuiting Urban and Rural Spanish Society: A Parallax View of *Volver*," *International Journal of Zizek Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011): 6.

⁸⁵ It comes across as rather ironic that Almodóvar has himself largely benefitted from television for marketing purposes – as noted in Smith, *Television in Spain: From Franco to Almodóvar*. 155.

habito takes place in Pontevedra, Ponte Ulla and Santiago de Compostela (Galicia) as well as, mainly, in a semi-rural mansion on the outskirts of Toledo. Only briefly is Madrid featured, as a place hosting a medical conference where ground-breaking medical findings are presented. However, overall, *La piel que habito*⁸⁶ develops neither in a rural nor an urban place – if any physical space at all – but rather in an abstract place or space in-between, in which the main character is trapped and confined to a very limiting existence. And even less concerned with the physicality of place is the most recent, camp *Los amantes pasajeros* where Madrid is only envisaged as a point of departure in airport scenes soon to be replaced by images from within a flight cabin, fitting for an airborne comedy that will not return to Madrid more definitely until its very last scene.⁸⁷

With the move away from Madrid, it also becomes clear that Almodóvar is constructing a new type of cinema less concerned with the Spanish capital and perhaps more with character development. As part of this, in his more recent films he distances the plot from any specific geographical locations, as the protagonists appear to remove themselves from their original identity. Thus, in all films covered in this section, Almodóvar pursues his screened representation of fluid identities even further. This is seen in identities and personalities “put on indefinite hold” (as in comatose Alicia and Lydia in *Hable con ella*), screened transvestism and transsexualism (*La mala educación*), a mother who is both a ghost and yet not, and a daughter who is sister and daughter at the same time (*Volver*), an actress used to inhabiting a number of different personas as part of her job (*Los abrazos rotos*), and a man forcibly changed into a woman through a process of *transgenesis* (*La piel que habito*). It seems as if Almodóvar seeks to demonstrate the transient nature of the global citizen, one whose

‘identity’ ... is mostly self-placed and self-ascribed, the outcome of efforts left to individuals to worry about: an outcome that is admittedly temporary with an undefined, yet probably short, life expectancy (Bauman 2005, 31).

⁸⁶ See my later interview with actress Elena Anaya published in *Senses of Cinema*: <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2017/feature-articles/elena-anaya-interview/>

⁸⁷ A notable exception is a brief Madrid interlude, where a desperate character (Paz Vega) attempts suicide by jumping from the famous Viaduct. More specifically, “[e]l Viaducto une en altura el Palacio Real y las Vistillas. En el imaginario popular de los madrileños, ha sido un lugar tradicional para los suicidas.” “Conoce Madrid. El Madrid de Almodóvar”, *esmadrid.com*, last modified 2013, <https://www.esmadrid.com/madrid-de-almodovar>

Los abrazos rotos (2009)

Consequently, in *Los abrazos rotos* the protagonists undergo a state of flux in their constant appropriation of a new persona or an alter ego. Thus, Lena is a diligent secretary by day but also makes a living as a call girl by night. A turn in the plot development has director and playwright Mateo Blanco (who goes under the playful pseudonym of Harry Caine) discover her as an actress, whereby they become lovers. Lena is subsequently required to impersonate several film roles. Mateo Blanco, on his part, sheds his real persona in favour of his newly adopted identity, thus solely becoming Harry Caine. He is, involuntarily, subject to yet another identity transformation during the plot development when he is blinded in a car accident and forced to live in physical darkness. The lovers' preliminary flight from modern Madrid to rural Lanzarote could be seen as reflective of their personal escape from themselves as well and their eagerness to inhabit a new self (through a new kind of acting). Kinder also notes a similarity between *Los abrazos rotos* and *La mala educación* in the use of flashbacks through which we get to know "an important character (Lena or Ignacio), who is already dead when the film begins" (Kinder 2010, 33).⁸⁸ Thus, also in Almodóvar's ability to bring dead characters back to life and become a part of the narrative, he challenges conventional character developments and explores the fluid landscape between life and death. This becomes a link between *Volver* and *Los abrazos rotos* (the latter is a film not commented further on in the thesis due to its general lack of focus on Madrid as a place narratively and visually lingered in).

La piel que habito (2011): breaking ethical boundaries

A much more dramatic separation of a protagonist from his or her own identity is seen in *La piel que habito*,

Almodóvar's not only most polished film; it may also be the deepest and most disturbing he has ever filmed. The most daring and the most lyrical, as its light is that mysterious light that lives only in our blackest night (Duncan 2011, 370).

Almodóvar here radically breaks ethical boundaries and challenges the viewer with themes that disturb rather than entertain. The setting for this bleak drama is claustrophobic and as oppressive for the viewer as it is for the transformed protagonist. The film is based on Thierry Jonquet's *Mygale* (2003)⁸⁹ and pictured in passing is also

⁸⁸ And in the words of Thomas Sotinel, "[t]he film goes back and forth between past and present, losing itself voluptuously in the convolutions of the plot." Sotinel, *Masters of Cinema. Pedro Almodóvar*, Revised ed. (Paris: Cahiers du cinema, 2010 (2007)). 94.

⁸⁹ The English translation of the title as *Tarantula* refers to an insect also known as *Lycos tarantula*.

the book cover of Alice Munro's *Runaway* (*La escapada* is the Spanish translation briefly visualized in the film). Munro's text contains several shorter narratives, all revolving around women. In an online review of the book, it is held that,

Munro consigue en estos cuentos raros, que a veces abarcan muchos años, en los que nunca sucede nada especial, meternos en las vidas de sus mujeres protagonistas, que no son excesivamente fuertes, ni resolutivas, pero a las que llegamos a comprender sin saber muy bien por qué.⁹⁰

Despite Almodóvar's subtle reference to Munro's narrative, his young man turned woman is gradually more decisive, resolute and resourceful (out of desperation) and the protagonist's ultimate escape is hinted at from the outset (through the brief focus on Munro's book title). In the film, kidnapped Vicente, accused of raping the mentally unstable daughter (Blanca Suárez) of a plastic surgeon, is forced to undergo sexual reassignment surgery as a radical punishment for his presumed deed. The captive is additionally provided with a second, artificial and highly resilient skin, made from inserting the genome from pig stem cells into the human DNA:

I've given the name "Gal" to the artificial skin I've been working on in recent years. This skin is resistant to every insect bite which means a natural barrier to malaria, for example. Naturally, I've carried out a rigorous quality control of the tissues implanted in mammals, specifically in athymic mice, and the results have been spectacular. This leads me to suppose they would be equally positive in human mammals (Almodóvar 2011).

Almodóvar (and his screened Dr. Ledger) boldly challenges medical conventions when Vicente/Vera Cruz is forced to spend years alternatively locked up, alternatively inside the operating theatre undergoing a process of vaginoplasty that eventually facilitates the brutal rape of Vicente-turned-Vera, and which has been condemned by Jacqueline Cruz. She argues that, in the film,

el cuerpo femenino aparece altamente sexualizado, como un mero objeto expuesto para el placer voyerístico del espectador (masculino heterosexual, se entiende), el cual puede identificarse con el voyerismo del protagonista, Robert, cuando contempla a Vera a través de una pantalla gigante.⁹¹

⁹⁰ "Escapada. Alice Munro", Martín Piedra, RBA Libros: Sumario. Libros. Reseña, last modified 2005, <http://www.literaturas.com/vo10/seco601/libros/resena-06.htm>

⁹¹ "La piel que habito": Almodóvar ataca de nuevo (a las mujeres), Jacqueline Cruz, blog, last modified 8 October 2011, <http://jacqueline-cruz.blogspot.com.au/2011/10/almodovar-ataca-de-nuevo-las-mujeres.html>

While this is a valid opinion, it could, on the contrary, be argued that it is through this very male cruelty and attempted subjugation of the “woman” in the film that the man comes across as all the weaker and more despicable. Through male (no longer female) voyeurism and the violent rape of Vera, it is in fact she who ends up the stronger sex – even if her femininity is an anatomical construct. Thus, in what seems like a contradiction in terms, it could be held that this film is, in fact, a celebration of the modern woman (and, in a sense, of the transsexual). The film is testimony to the fact that although the human body may be completely and brutally transformed, a person’s identity can still be left intact. Perhaps it is through this on-screen intrusive physical transformation that we visualize the real strength of an individual able to survive in an increasingly harsh and insensitive society. As noted by Gustavo Martín Garzo,

[i]n *The Skin I live in*, that snow creature doesn’t disappear. The most beautiful thing in this film is that she is the one who is saved. We see her leaving the house in which everyone has died and going back to her family. It’s an ending full of melancholy, for how can someone like that survive in the world? (Duncan 2011, 374).

It may be that as a creature in Almodóvar’s screened universe, Vera Cruz (who is still Vicente deep inside) will survive if the urban environment she returns to is liberal enough to accept her. The dual (male/female) screened persona thus comes to represent the power of the individual against the establishment.

Los amantes pasajeros (2013)

Almodóvar’s last film to date, *Los amantes pasajeros* has been called “a light, very light comedy”⁹² by the filmmaker himself. The title reflects the many camp aspects of the film and is more evocative (and provocative) than the English *I’m So Excited*.⁹³ The film heralds a new dawn for the cineaste who here links back to the camp aspects of his early cinema. As was the case with the films steeped in the period of the transition, which highlighted the frivolous sexual climate of Madrid at the time, *Los amantes pasajeros* also features several frisky sexual encounters. However, the visual backdrop to the plot is no longer the urban environment but, rather, the internal space of a Spanish airplane pertaining to the *Península* airline company.⁹⁴ Almodóvar thus distances himself from

⁹² “Pedro Almodóvar returns to comedy with ‘Los amantes pasajeros’”, Sergio Ríos Pérez, Cineuropa, last modified 10 July 2012, <http://www.cineuropa.org/nw.aspx?t=newsdetail&l=en&did=223146>

⁹³ The English title lends its name from the Pointer Sisters’ 1982 song; a song which on screen is lip-synched by three gay flight attendants suggestively moving their bodies to the rhythm.

⁹⁴ Smith has noted the obvious references to the national airline *Iberia*. He also notes the symbolic reference to “recently deceased singer Chavela Vargas”, who is being referred to in the name of the plane visualized in the film; “Chavela Blanca.” Paul Julian Smith, “Pedro Almodóvar’s *Los amantes pasajeros* (*I’m so Excited*),” *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2013): 51.

the physical environment of the national capital and his ultimately faulty cinematic aircraft destined for Mexico instead hovers above his native Castilla la Mancha, unable to find a free landing strip on which to crash-land. Although the film opens with the declaration that “todo lo que ocurre en esta película es ficción y fantasía y no guarda ninguna relación con la realidad” (Almodóvar 2013), this is far from the truth. In fact, the film is laden with metaphors that generally relate to the concurrent Spanish economic recession.⁹⁵ More specifically, the film contains “references to the ever-higher levels of corruption, banks and the 17 ‘ghost’ airports built in Spain during the economic boom, all of which were abandoned during the recession.”⁹⁶

The affected Spanish people, unable to fully operate in a stifling economic climate, are equalled to drugged tourist class passengers asleep throughout the flight. The carnivalesque plot is in keeping with Almodóvar’s comparison of comedy to a “healing balm to a crisis-rocked country that feels the need to laugh” (Smith 2013, 49). Featured on screen is a trio of overtly gay male flight attendants, an Argentine dominatrix (Cecilia Roth) claiming to have recorded also the Spanish monarch on sex tape, a “telephony” Mexican “tycoon” (Smith 2013, 51) who turns out to be a political assassin, and a clairvoyant virgin about to lose her virginity onboard. All symbolize groups making up contemporary Spain, some of whom also come to the fore in times of financial strife. Thus, the seemingly light-hearted farse revolves around serious subject matters and *Los amantes pasajeros* becomes yet another way for Almodóvar to comment on the current situation of his country. However, compared to in his early cinema, now the social commentary is cutting rather than celebratory. A film not to be discarded despite generally unimpressed press reviews, it can be read as a political statement on the part of Almodóvar, and an open criticism of the powers that be.

Summary: Almodóvar’s chronological development throughout three decades

This chapter has highlighted how Almodóvar’s cinema mirrors concurrent trends and changes in an ever more complex, multidimensional and transitory modern Spanish society (where many of the changes are witnessed also in cities worldwide as they

⁹⁵ An unimpressed David Riedel comments that “It would be nice to think the division between crew, business class and coach is a metaphor for contemporary Spanish life, and it might be. But if you’re not privy to daily life in Spain, it’s all probably goofy, and not fun-goofy, either.” “*Los amantes pasajeros!* *I’m So Excited!* is both excitable and dull”, David Riedel, Santa Fe Reporter, last modified 30 July 2013, <https://sfreporter.com/archives/los-amantes-pasajeros/>

⁹⁶ “Cinema: Almodóvar’s ‘Los amantes pasajeros’, a troubled plane metaphor for Spain”, *Ansamed*, last modified 7 March 2013, http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/culture/2013/03/07/Spain-Almodovar-Amante-Pasajeros-be-released_8361932.html
See also: <https://filmquarterly.org/2013/11/01/pedro-almodovars-los-amantes-pasajeros-im-so-excited/>

become gradually more globalized). The films covered mirror his astonishing ability to keep us up to date with a world in flux where political, societal, and cultural structures become ever more fluid. This fluidity leads to a both screened and a real Spanish identity transformation with regard to the global city, its social and physical structures, and its ever more liberalized (albeit often confused) postmodern citizens.

CHAPTER TWO

A comparative historical review of Ventura Pons' cinematic repertoire

The socio-political analysis of Almodóvar's cinema, which mapped the recent history of Madrid in the first chapter, is here complimented by a corresponding review also of the films making up Pons' repertoire.¹ This is deemed important as Pons too, with an impressive number of nineteen feature films and three additional documentaries to date², all generally released concurrently with films by Almodóvar, provides the viewer with narratives that, when chronologically analysed, serve as visual documents telling of the recent history of Spain and its socio-political transformation ever since the beginning of democracy.³ Nevertheless, it must be noted that as compared to Pons, Almodóvar is perhaps more naturally read in light of a changing national climate, documented in scripts written largely by himself and which tend to correlate thematically with important off-screen events. Pons, in turn, generally adapts texts by Catalan authors and playwrights to the screen. The following have inspired him artistically: Lluís-Anton Baulenas, Sergi Belbel, Lluïsa Cunillé, Quim Monzó, Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, Jordi Puntí, Ferran Torrent, Raul Nuñez, Joan Barbero, and David Leavitt. These writers, now able to raise their voice in an unrepressed literary

¹ I would later have the privilege of meeting and interviewing Pons in person at his studio in Barcelona: <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2017/great-directors/ventura-pons/> and <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2018/feature-articles/ventura-pons-interview/>

² His status as a filmmaker has earned him the role as Vice President for the Spanish Film Academy.

³ Pons will in February 2015 be awarded the prestigious Premio Gaudí de Honor-Miguel Porter for his long contribution and life dedicated to Spanish and Catalan cinema: "El director Ventura Pons, Premio Gaudí de Honor-Miguel Porter 2015", *Vision Cine y TV*, last modified 25 November 2014, <https://www.academiadecine.com/2014/11/26/ventura-pons-premio-gaudi-de-honor-miguel-porter-2015/>

climate no longer stifled by Francoist censorship⁴, show a remarkable ability to elaborate on themes applicable to contemporary society. As a result, both the films and the texts on which they are based are pertinent to the comparatively liberal and liberalizing postmodernity of today. Transformative societal changes society are certainly reflected in both Almodóvar's and Pons' cinematic repertoires.⁵

Additionally, as Spain has forged an ever more stable democracy since the late 1970s, Almodóvar and Pons again show social, cultural and political awareness by presenting us protagonists whose concerns are also ultimately globally applicable. When the two cineastes are compared, emerging common themes are human affection and a lack thereof, an individual sense of alienation or estrangement within a transformed urban habitat, and sexual explorations and transgressions as a way for the protagonists to temporarily escape an at times alienating environment.⁶ Both filmmakers also connect the viewer with the past, albeit in different ways. Thus, while Almodóvar could generally be regarded as doing so through the focus on the Spanish *pueblo* reflective of times gone by, Pons concretely calls the repressive Catalan past back into the screened present through filmic flashbacks where real documentary footage makes the viewer aware of his own region's historical battles. Such an experimental narrative structure is most clearly seen in *Barcelona (un mapa)* (2007) and *Forasters* (2008). In terms of the latter, George argues that the constant switching between two time frames in Belbel's play that the film is based on,

⁴ With regard to the new theatre of post-Franco Spain, it has been suggested that the general tendency in the 1980s not to stage plays by playwrights active during the Franco years "parece sugerir una preferencia del público por un teatro menos politizado y un deseo de olvidar el pasado." Candyce Leonard and John P. Gabriele, "Fórmula para una dramaturgia española de finales del siglo XX," in *Panorámica de teatro español actual*, ed. John P. Gabriele and Candyce Leonard (Madrid: Fundamentos, 1996). 10.

⁵ Barcelona's recent history has been summed up as one "shaped by a series of turbulent and transformative events such as early industrialization, the nineteenth-century cultural movement called *Renaixença* (renaissance), careful urban planning, Gaudi and modernisme, dramatic political and social upheavals, two Universal Expositions, the Civil War, and the celebration of the Olympic Games." Helio San Miguel and J. Torres Hortelano, eds., *World Film Locations: Barcelona* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Ltd., 2013). 5.

⁶ Pons has defined some of his main themes as being "la necesidad de amor, de comunicación, de encontrar al otro." Anabel Campo Vidal, *Ventura Pons: la mirada libre* (Madrid: Sociedad General de Autores y Editores and Fundación Autor, 2004). 22. George further stresses the historical applicability and thematic universality of Belbel's plays (and thus also of Pons' films) when he argues that "[t]he subjects of the plays are not limited to contemporary society ... and broader concerns such as sexuality and death characterise many of them." David George, *Sergi Belbel and Catalan Theatre: Text, Performance and Identity* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2010). 9-10.

and which possibly suggests that the 1960s could be a flashback in which characters recall or re-live their past, is part of a reflection on and a questioning of a changing society (George 2010b, 23).

Pons' films explored in the thesis thus reflect the contrasting histories of Madrid and Barcelona, where the experience of the Franco era has left a particularly bitter aftertaste among the people of Catalonia.⁷ The continuous struggle for national independence among Catalans has now led to a people who may generally connect more readily with other European capitals than with Madrid, a city that they are reluctant to compare themselves with yet indeed compete with. It could be argued that this regional detachment from Madrid is evidenced by Pons' persistent use of Barcelona as a screened urban canvas whereas, as noted earlier, Almodóvar makes an exception from the norm when he turns to Barcelona for inspiration in his 1999 film. As shall be seen in the coming schematic review of all of Pons' films since 1978, the filmmaker generally remains faithful to his native metropolis although he settles for alternative shooting locations in films like *Rosita, please!* (1993), *A la deriva* (1999), *Amor idiota* (2004), and *La vida abismal* (2006). Here, the plots unfold partly in Valencia, Chad, Buenos Aires, and Sofia. Even *El Gran Gato* (2002), although geographically based in Barcelona, establishes a broader connection with South America through the *rumba* – something which reminds of Almodóvar's connection with Argentinian tango in *Volver*.

Pons' alternation between Spain as a filming location and places beyond the Peninsula may reflect not only the Catalan people's tendency to look away from Spain rather than inwards, but similarly their tendency to "refer to their own country as a *terra de pas*, a place people pass through, a thoroughfare."⁸ One could thus argue that Pons connects viewers with Barcelona through films that portray the city as a multicultural postmodern space influenced by international trends and people, while at the same time he presents them with other global habitats outside Spain by using a sometimes foreign imagery. This makes Pons an at once Catalan and international filmmaker. Through his focus on Catalonia as a region in its own right (Catalonia and its capital are said to have "the capacity to relate to many crossing cultures without losing themselves in transit") (Martí Olivella 2011, 189) and on how the region relates

⁷ *Barcelona (un mapa)* effectively features images that reflect the ambivalent feelings among the Catalans towards the invading national forces.

⁸ One critic argues that "[i]t is a comforting view of the homeland. It implies that they are open, a mix, with people passing through down the centuries, each leaving their traces behind." Michael Eade, *Catalonia: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). xi.

to the world at large,⁹ it appears Pons symbolically reflects Barcelona's quest for independence from Madrid.¹⁰

Ocaña, retrat intermitent (1978)

The chronological analysis of Pons' cinematic repertoire begins with his much acclaimed, award-nominated *Ocaña, retrat intermitent*, a documentary initially screened at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival, and which was "seen as a sign of the definite death of Francoism" (Fernández 2007, 88). Just like Almodóvar had reflected the exuberant *Movida* years in his early 1980s films, so, too, Pons's screened tribute to Ocaña two years prior to the release of *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* not only liberalizes the urban space but also documents the life of an alternative individual who operates freely within an opened up urban climate – that of Barcelona during its period of *destape* (described as "sexual liberation – associated with the immediate post-Franco period") (George 2010b, 26). Although not a fictive narrative, *Ocaña...* could be said to have set the scene for the equally liberal portrayal of the urban space in Almodóvar's 1980s films, where groups and characters freed from sexual inhibitions drive the plots forward. Pons' screened focus on real Andalusian transvestite and homosexual painter José Pérez Ocaña who was able to express himself openly in a considerably accommodating Catalan climate after being ostracized in his native village¹¹ could be symbolically interpreted as a way for the filmmaker to give free rein to *Movida*-like alternative lifestyles and sexual expressions on screen. Indeed, it has been claimed that "[l]a movida catalana no puede excluir a cineastas como Paco Betriu..., ni a Ventura Pons con *Ocaña, retrato intermitente* (1978)" (Escribano Buendía 2008, 49). In this liberalizing documentary, Pons introduces contemporary viewers to a man whose transgressive attitude to life and to his own body and identity mirrored the transformative times that Spain as a whole experienced at the time. In fact, the transvestite, in general, has been seen as an icon of Spanish transition, as argued by

⁹ This, again, is achieved through purposefully combining Catalan texts drawn on for inspiration and Pons' own familiarity with his region.

¹⁰ And yet, Pons depends on Madrid as a market to cater for and he has a stable fan-base in the country's capital. In more negative terms, Fernández argues that Catalan culture has been subjected to a "triple subordination: politically, symbolically, and commercially." Josep-Anton Fernández, "The authentic queen and the invisible man: Catalan camp and its condition of possibility in Ventura Pons' *Ocaña, retrat intermitent*," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007): 83

¹¹ Still, according to Fernández, the film provides a "discourse of authenticity and a nostalgic look towards Andalusian popular culture that undoes camp's denaturalizing effects." It should be remembered, however, that this popular culture is parodied in the film. "The authentic queen and the invisible man: Catalan camp and its condition of possibility in Ventura Pons' *Ocaña, retrat intermitent*", 87.

Mercè Picornell. Importantly, she stresses that rather than representing a clear break between two different time periods and political and cultural systems, the transvestite symbolizes “un proceso complejo”:

Así, fuera de contexto, es cuando el travesti puede convertirse en símbolo de un límite claro entre dos *estados*, y no en la representación de una forma ambigua y compleja de transición entre instituciones de *poder*. Esta doble posibilidad de interpretación opone dos percepciones diferentes sobre la identidad transgénero: la que la entiende como frontera entre el *ser hombre* o el *ser mujer* y la que la concibe como espacio de transición en un continuum de identidades de género que solo se fijan convencionalmente (Picornell 2010, 284).

She further ponders if Spain has gone from “[*v*]iril” to “una España de *travesti*” (281), a debatable proposal that nevertheless reflects a new era “totally divorced from the conventions of a closed society” (Jordi 1987, 39). In the unique case of Ocaña, Picornells’ last suggestion could be somewhat counter argued by the on-screen declaration of the Andalusian artist that “yo no soy ningún travesti, por supuesto [...] Yo soy un teatrero, pero puro”¹² (Fernández 2007, 90). This seems to indicate that Ocaña is well aware that his public acts of transvestism are more than a personal statement: his actions are at once subversive and reflective of the transformed metropolis at the time. Indeed, throughout the film, Ocaña flamboyantly strolls through the streets of la Rambla and la Villa impersonating a female, and at one stage he casually flashes his male genitalia in the open, in what feels like an oddly natural act and which has been seen as a violation of the “golden rule of drag.”¹³ Nevertheless, this all becomes an important part of his constant street performance.¹⁴ In a year which saw a regionalization process taking place as a result of the new democratic constitution addressing the issue of regional independence,¹⁵ the cross-dresser was suddenly also being acknowledged – and just like Ocaña (or the “Queen of Las Ramblas”) (San Miguel and Torres Hortelano 2013, 52) dressed as a drag, impersonating different roles

¹² It is interesting that he should define himself in this manner in a documentary by a filmmaker who has spent his career adapting stage-plays to films.

¹³ “[i]n showing his genitals to the audience he is not saying that the female appearance is an illusion, but that appearance and essence coincide, and that they are both male; the shift from the feminine to the masculine in the word ‘desnudo’ is a sign of this.” Fernández, “The authentic queen and the invisible man: Catalan camp and its condition of possibility in Ventura Pons’ Ocaña, retrat intermitent,” 97.

¹⁴ In Fernández’ words, “Ocaña interacts with people, provoking sympathy and surprise (rather than rejection); at some point, he lifts his dress, shows his penis and hides it between his legs.” Ibid., 89.

¹⁵ “Catalonia profile”, *BBC News Europe*, last modified 14 August 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20345071>

along the way, Spain itself similarly shed its clothes and dressed up in a modernizing, alternative outfit.¹⁶

Informe sobre el FAGC (1979)

Not surprisingly perhaps, Pons' filmic tribute to Ocaña (dead at age 36 when his disguise set fire in 1983) was to be followed by another, brief, documentary released the year in which Catalonia was "given a statute of autonomy and recognized as a 'nationality.'" ¹⁷ The themes in this documentary relate to issues already dealt with in *Ocaña, retrat intermitent* and that serve to better understand Pons' documentary *La Ocaña libertaria*.¹⁸ Thus, *Informe sobre el FAGC* discusses alternative genders and sexualities and the openly homosexual filmmaker can be said to have gone full circle when, decades later, he would release a documentary on yet another gay artist. In a manner as frank as that of Ocaña, HIV positive Catalan museum expert Ignasi Millet in the 2013 documentary with the same name, is up-front about his liberal lifestyle. Although as opposed to Ocaña, Millet does not face the incomprehension of his fellow regional citizens, he too struggles – under the financial hardship still rampant in Spain today.¹⁹ This again reflects Pons' awareness of issues of concern in contemporary Spanish – and Catalan – society (and, similarly, in neighbouring European countries).

El vicari d'Olot (1981)

In 1981, the liberalized *Movida* climate was visually and narratively reflected by Pons in his camp comedy *El Vicari d'Olot* ²⁰, a film which reminds of *Entre tinieblas* although

¹⁶ A website promoting Ocaña and provides a further play on words in the following statement: "En esa tierra de nadie, la posibilidad de 'hablar', recuperada tras la muerte de Franco, hace además que estas películas se constituyan no sólo en el paisaje visual del mundo de Ocaña, también en el de la transición española. Una metáfora que Alberto Gómez ha extremado en su teoría de la *Transición trans* – travesti, transformista, transexual- donde asistimos a todo el juego de equívocos, también políticos, de nuestra transición política." "Ocaña", *Centro Cultural Montehermoso Kulturunea: Ciclos de cine*, http://www.montehermoso.net/pagina.php?m1=&m2=&m3=&id_p=471&i=cas

¹⁷ "Catalonia profile", *BBC News Europe*, last modified 14 August 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20345071>

¹⁸ "Montehermoso acoge un ciclo de cine centrado en la figura de José Pérez Ocaña", *Eduarne Palos*, *diariovasco.com*, last modified 1 November 2013, <https://www.diariovasco.com/v/20110531/alto-deba/montehermoso-acoge-ciclo-cine-20110531.html>

¹⁹ Noteworthy is the thematic connection between Pons' last documentary to date and Almodóvar's last film *Los amantes pasajeros*, which both reflect current Spanish recession.

²⁰ The film formed a part of his most celebrated quartet of comedies, which also consisted of *Què t'hi jugues*, *Mari Pili?* and *Rosita, please!* Anton Pujol, "Ventura Pons y la crónica de un territorio llamado Barcelona," *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 13(2009): 76.

in this case the focus is on male vicars rather than on nuns and the setting is no longer urban but rural. It is interesting though, that both filmmakers should focus on similar characters and themes in films released only a year apart. With a clear pun on religious rituals and ideals, also *El Vicari d'Olot* mocks the Catholic Church and declares that although “hay mucha gente que por edad, inhibiciones, profesión o miedo no ven con buenos ojos las libertades de hoy” (Pons 1981), the time has come to call for a Catholic sexual congress – “un congreso de sexología católica” (Pons 1981). The sexual liberties taken within the very vicary mirror the concurrent sexual revolution in Spain, where more conventional attitudes to sexuality and alternative identities now had to give way to more liberalizing trends. Appropriately, bearing in mind the themes of *Ocaña* and its accompanying 1979 documentary, *El vicari d'Olot* also ends with a metaphorical reference to the transsexual, when the fable retold by the main vicar in a multilayered speech contains partial references to a bi-gendered animal:

Después se le acercó el caracol arrastrando su caparazón y dijo, Señor, vos me habéis hecho macho y hembra ... siendo como soy hermafrodita os ofrezco mis cuernos (Pons 1981).

La rossa del bar (1986)

The year when Spain gained membership within the European Economic Community, Pons released a film which reflects the affluence and increasing modernity of the great metropolis. The film can be read as a dual declaration of love – not only in its focus on an unexpected love affair between a soon to be ex-prostitute and the man who falls for her, but also as regards the affectionate manner in which this man addresses his city of Barcelona. In both frank and existentialist initial ponderings in *La Rossa del bar* (whose opening credits feature a dedication to Pepe Ocaña as an apparent tribute to the Andalusian performer) the male protagonist addresses at once his female love interest and the nocturnal metropolis sprawled out beneath his balcony (a link to *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* can be drawn, although here Madrid is represented as a glossy, postmodern façade rather than a real physical habitat). The urban space in *La rossa del bar* is rendered affective in a dialogue where the man pays homage to Barcelona:

“Mira la ciudad, Marta. Notas cómo respira igual que tú y yo.” “A mí no me gusta demasiado. Hay mucha polución. Me hace daño a la garganta.” “No se trata de la polución. Todo lo que ves sobre ella son unas ganas de vivir que salen del fondo de sus entrañas desde hace siglos... Quisiera que todo lo que siento por ti inundara la ciudad, atravesara las avenidas iluminadas, se virtiera por las ventanas...” (Pons 1986).

The organic relationship between citizen and modern metropolis in Pons' film is reflected also in Almodóvar's 1980s repertoire. However, while Almodóvar generally has the screened body and city influence each other to equal degrees, in *La rossa del bar* the love for a woman becomes a force that spills over and seeps into every pore of the Catalan capital. In a televised interview preceding the screening of the 1982 film on Spanish television, Pons professed his love for Barcelona by declaring that "Yo estoy agradecido a la ciudad en la cual me muevo y que es muy bonita. Yo la quiero profundamente."²¹ While this statement is mirrored by the positive representation of the city as it was initially described in Raul Nuñez' screenplay, Pons' forthcoming 1990s films generally render the Catalan urban habitat all the more distorted and alienating, as they reflect our bewildering postmodern times.

¡Putxa misèria! (1989) and *¿Què t'hi jugues, Mari Pili?* (1990)

The comedy *Putxa misèria!* again situates the plot in Barcelona, and in Alboraya, in Valencia. With the subsequent camp comedy *¿Què t'hi jugues, Mari Pili?*, based on a novel by Joan Barbero, Pons enters the screened 1990s. In the case of Catalonia, the decade commenced with what has been described as "un extraordinario afianzamiento del género de la comedia" (Pérez 1991, 44). Released a year after Almodóvar's *Átame* (and two years prior to the Summer Olympics that would considerably transform the Catalan metropolis), the only real commonalities between the two films are their narrative puns and the obsession of the female protagonists with members of the opposite sex (in contrast to the exploration of also same-sex relationships in films by both cineastes). Apart from the perhaps more obvious similarities with *Pepi, Luci, Bom...*, a film which also revolves around a female trio whose carefree lifestyles propel the plot forward, *¿Què t'hi jugues, Mari Pili?* shares commonalities with *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*. Both plots develop within urban apartments and both films can be considered comedies of manners, even though the stock characters in Almodóvar's melodrama are more readily classifiable as such than the female leads in *¿Què t'hi jugues...* Ultimately, *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* is also more transgressive, and more technically advanced and experimental in its use of scale replicas. There are also no literary or filmic references in Pons' film, while again, *Mujeres...* (just like *La ley del deseo* released a year earlier) draws a narrative link with Cocteau's *La voix humaine* (1930).

Still, in line with Catalonia's aforementioned tendency to both compare itself with and compete with a foreign market, *¿Què t'hi jugues, Mari Pili?* has universal appeal as

²¹ Televised interview with Isabel Tenaille. TVE, INGT. 7.6.01 Digitized 9 January 2008.

an easily accessible piece of entertainment.²² His film is as readily digested as Allen's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008) would be 18 years later and which is similarly universal and generally light-hearted.²³ With Pons' 2005 release of *Animals Ferits*, the two filmmakers would share additional commonalities in films that positively market the, at this stage, highly touristic Catalan cityscape both nationally and internationally.²⁴

Aquesta nit o mai (1991), *¡Rosita, please!* (1993) and *El perquè de tot plegat* (1994)

Released in the Olympic 1992, Pons' next film *Aquesta nit o mai* portrays Barcelona as an exuberant and more sophisticated urban space than what had hitherto been the cinematic case, and homosexuality again becomes one of the governing themes. This was followed by *¡Rosita, please!*, whose plot takes the viewer to the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. Narratively structured along several hypothetical statements, the film develops seemingly at random with each event leading to unexpected outcomes. Then, at a time when Almodóvar had entered his more sophisticated "blue era", Pons, in turn, looked to Quim Monzó for inspiration and in doing so he, too, embraced a more complex and also more postmodern narrative style and structure. Thus, *El perquè de tot plegat* is divided into 15 episodes all revolving around a set of human characteristics and behaviours: *Desire, Submission, Love, Jealousy, Wisdom, Honesty, Sincerity, Passion, and Faith*. The film opens with a scene which is remarkably powerful in all its simplicity.²⁵ While the external space is partly rural, the film develops largely within internal environments and in focus are a series of dialogues between only a few protagonists. Pons now begins to steep his cinema in a more theatrical tradition while he distances himself from the more easily digested comedies of the 1980s and early 1990s. Instead, he invites the viewer to join him on an explorative journey into the human mind. A

²² Xavier Pérez stresses that "[e]l triunfo de [esta comedia catalana] permite comprobar la tendencia de los espectadores a dar plena confianza a productos que van a la búsqueda de un modelo de entretenimiento más o menos homologable con el cine comercial de otros países." Pérez, "Un cine catalán abierto a Europa." *Catalònia* 24 (1991): 44.

²³ Pons speaks favorably about Allen and others: "Con más de 100 años de cine y con lo ecléctico que llevo a ser, aparte de Woody y Pedro, Visconti, Mankiewicz, Fassbinder, una lista que no se acaba." Encuentros: Ventura Pons", *ELMUNDO.es*, last modified 2014, <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/encuentros/invitados/2014/01/29/ventura-pons/index.html>

²⁴ Phyllis Zatlin notes that "oft-quoted is the director's own comment that Barcelona is to him what New York City is to Woody Allen." Zatlin, "From Stage to Screen: The Adaptations of Ventura Pons," *Contemporary Film Review* 17, no. 3 (2007): 435.

²⁵ Here, one of the protagonists (played by Lluís Homar) entertains the viewer by conversing with a stone.

similar partly minimalist narrative structure would later be adhered to in both *Carícies* (1998) and *Morir (o no)*, as Pons would further draw from the theatrical genre.

Cinematic highlights

Between 1997 and 2000, Pons released a series of films that can be counted among some of his finest. These are *Actrius* (1996), *Carícies*, *Amic/Amat* (1998), and *Morir (o no)*. The technically less advanced, more down-to-earth human drama *Anita non perd el tren* (2000) is also noteworthy, although it has been called “a more questionable” film (Resina and Lema-Hincapié 2008, 5). *Actrius* is based on a screenplay by Josep Maria Benet i Jornet and features four Catalan actresses who would continuously be starring for Pons.²⁶ Focusing on three grand dames, the film pays tribute to the world of theatre, a genre that Pons himself has called “a metaphor for life.”²⁷ Like *El perquè de tot plegat* – otherwise a radically different film – also *Actrius* develops within mainly internal environments, some of which are inner-city Barcelona apartments (one located in the Barrio Gótico). Also, rather than portraying the characters in light of their urban habitat, Pons remains faithful to the original screenplay when his primary focus is on the mutual relationships between the main actresses (and who are thus actresses in a double sense of the world) and their reliance on the theatrical stage as a space where they can verbalize their feelings; through the words of their enacted role figures. And yet, somewhat ironically perhaps, “lack of communication” is ultimately one of the *leitmotifs* in both *Actrius* and *Carícies* – as highlighted by Phyllis Zatlin (2007, 439).

Carícies (1997)

With *Carícies*, further explored in the fourth chapter, Pons begins his artistic collaboration with Sergi Belbel and with this embarks on a minimalistic narrative journey which, indeed, revolves around a breakdown of communication and where “violence, both physical and verbal, permeates the action” (Zatlin 2007, 440). In the televised interview in Spanish referred to earlier, Pons argues that “*Caricias* es el hablar negativo de aquello que entendemos que es como lo más positivo de la vida.”²⁸ In the film, rather than embracing the possibility to meet at a level of mutual understanding, nameless characters engage in flawed communications by recurring to verbal abuse or by ignoring each other altogether within the limits of a seemingly equally nameless city

²⁶ Namely Rosa Maria Sardà, Anna Lizaran, Nura Espert, and Mercè Pons.

²⁷ He elaborates by arguing that “en el origen de cada película hay una historia y es la pasión por contar esta historia, y el concepto que tengas para contarla viene del teatro.” Televised interview with Isabel Tenaille. TVE, INGT. 7.6.01 Digitised 9 January 2008.

²⁸ Televised interview with Isabel Tenaille. TVE, INGT. 7.6.01 Digitized 9 January 2008.

(although, as highlighted by David George, “[t]he Barcelona locations also provide a social context for the action...”²⁹). Here, Barcelona could be replaced by almost any other 1990s Western or Southern European metropolis which has now turned less accommodating than in previous decades as a result of an alienating (post)modernity. Left behind is the more affective cityscape in Pons’ earlier films and, like Almodóvar, he too now explores themes that reflect broader concerns amongst perhaps more solitary citizens today. The additionally fraught relationships between the protagonists seem to correlate with the fragmentation of the global metropolis: speedy shots of Barcelona now render the city more hostile, and discomfiting and the utopia has generally been turned into a dystopia (a similar tendency is later prominent in also *Morir (o no)* and *Forasters*).³⁰

Amic/Amat (1998)

In *Amic/Amat*, a filmic adaptation of a text by Benet i Jornet, salient themes are aspects of life and death, sexuality and homosexuality, old age and the possibility to start anew in another place and in a different social context, as well as the fear of memory loss³¹ and interrelated nostalgia for a past that may be unrecoverable but where a person’s legacy may ultimately be carried on through the birth of a new child. The film sits well within our global times, where these are issues pertinent to an ever more complex society. Additionally, the film’s inherent postmodernity is achieved in both concrete and abstract ways. Firstly, Pons’ urban landscape (considerably more appealing than the colder and more hostile Barcelona in *Carícies*) now contains several stylish buildings and interior designs that are highly contemporary, such as the “light-filled concrete and glass structures of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona” (Resina and Lema-Hincapié 2008, 217). Other monuments reflect the cultural legacy of the city (“Gaudi’s Park Güell³², the church of Santa Maria del Mar, the streets and skyline of Barcelona”) (Resina and Lema-Hincapié 2008, 233) and, once again, Pons’ urban imagery brings to mind Allen’s positive marketing of the city in *Vicky, Cristina, Barcelona*; where

²⁹ These locations “range from a park where teenagers drink alcohol, to Barcelona’s main railway station, to the interior of an old people’s home.” George, *Sergi Belbel and Catalan Theatre: Text, Performance and Identity*: 97.

³⁰ The dystopic elements are here reflected in fraught family relationships (rather than in anxiety-ridden angular street shots, as had been the case in *Morir (o no)*).

³¹ This individual on-screen fear becomes symbolic of national forgetting and the disappearance of memory.

³² The images from the park are attractive and sunlit and the external verdor aesthetically accommodates Gaudi’s architecture, as additionally highlighted by Michael Eade: Eade, *Catalonia: A Cultural History*: 87.

Barcelona becomes a character in its own right.³³ And secondly, on a more abstract level, postmodernity enters Pons' filmic argument in the sense that this movement has "replaced human memory with artificial memory" (Fernández 2008, 226). Here, an essay on Ramon Llull appropriately entitled *Amic/Amac* and of which there are a limited number of disc copies, sparks controversy when, eventually, the final electronic copy is destroyed. As has been noted repeatedly by critics, its disappearance could symbolically represent the larger issue of fragmentation of memory and, ultimately, memory loss. This crucial episode in Pons' film reflects the rather contradictory fear amongst pleasure-seeking and future-oriented postmodern citizens³⁴, of losing touch with the past. A sense of nostalgia consequently enters an ultimately existentialist screened discourse.³⁵

In more concrete terms, the nostalgic reflections in *Amic/Amat* are rhetorically voiced in the open in a nocturnal scene from a balcony that overlooks the church of Santa María del Mar; "the only pure-Gothic church in all Catalonia" (Eaude 2008, 191). A woman (Rosa Maria Sardà) and her pregnant daughter (Irene Montalà) here engage in a candid conversation where the city of Barcelona is addressed affectionately while at the same time the Catalan mother embarks on a monologue which reflects her awareness of the many historical battles fought by her capital in times preceding its glossy present. In a statement that parallels personal issues with the broader concerns of Catalonia, she reflects:

Landscape after the battles. Quite a few years and quite a few battles. What will my daughter do ten years and ten battles from now? Twenty years and twenty battles. Twenty, forty years and forty battles (Pons 1998).

This statement forms an additional part of the aforementioned existentialist discourse where the present is not complete unless the past is symbolically called back into existence – no matter how painful this past may be.

³³ And just like *El Gran Gato* would later connect Barcelona with the broader Hispanic community through the rumba, and *Rosita, please!* drew a narrative link with Bulgaria, *Amic/Amat* makes thematic references to both Greece and Africa.

³⁴ Postmodern reality, according to Bauman, is "a pursuit of pleasure." "Viewpoint: Sociology and Postmodernity", *Sociological Review* (1988): 808.

³⁵ Fernández even argues that "closer examination reveals that the sexual politics of *Amic/Amat* is, in fact, the legacy of a distant past, even older than the glorious periods of *Modernisme* and the Middle Ages, whose architectural traces are carefully selected by Pons to appear as the background of some scenes." Josep-Anton Fernández. "Immortal/Undead: The Body and the Transmission of Tradition in *Amic/Amat*" (Ventura Pons, 1998). In Joan Ramon Resina and Andrés Lema-Hincapié, eds., *Burning Darkness: A Half Century of Spanish Cinema* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2008). 217-18.

Morir (o no) (1999)

With *Morir (o no)*, Pons enters a screened new millennium where he continues his existentialist discourse in a film based on another Belbel play and that ponders the complexities of life and death. Also, the dystopian discourse that defines the first part of the film reflects postmodern Barcelona as a space of urban malaise. As in *Carícies*, Pons' episodic plot structure presents the viewer a series of nameless characters who regard one another with either indifference or hostility. Although the city again gains screened prominence, the urban environment is generally shrouded in darkness, and it is neither always clear nor particularly relevant within which specific location each scene in this human drama unfolds. The dark images of Barcelona, where Pons opts for black and white colours to further evoke the hopeless situations of emotionally numb characters in the first part of the film, are directly contrasted by more vivid nuances in the second alternative part. The director thus offers a way out of a stifling situation and in doing so he seems to present also the viewers themselves with a less hopeless future.

Anita non perd el tren (2000)

With *Anita non perd el tren*, based on a novel by Baulenas,³⁶ Pons generally abandons his existentialist ponderings and comes down to a more human level in a drama revolving around love and friendship, also set in Barcelona.³⁷ Here, infidelity is an additional theme which appears to bear little negative impact on a marriage not featured on screen. The financial insecurities of a female protagonist discriminated against and made redundant because of her age³⁸ (which does not fit the youthful corporate image of an expanding company) reflect not only economic downturn but also our obsession with youth culture (and yet we all grow older..). Societies worldwide generally embrace the novel and the new while the old is rejected or discarded. Pons' film highlights this tendency when Anita's age becomes a hindrance not compensable by her professional expertise. Just like Almodóvar's earlier *Todo sobre mi madre*, also the more narratively simplistic story about Catalan Anita who inevitably keeps returning to her previous workplace even after losing her job³⁹ (and where the physical office space has now been

³⁶ The film received the award for best Ibero-American film in Mar de Plata Film Festival: "Anita Takes a Chance", MUBI BETA, <http://mubi.com/films/anita-takes-a-chance>

³⁷ At one stage the filming location is also Salou, whose "golden sands, from which comes the name Costa Daurada ... given to this part of the Mediterranean shore, have made it Southern Catalonia's main beach resort." Eade, *Catalonia: A Cultural History*: 92.

³⁸ Anita bitterly ponders her situation when in a monologue she informs that "Two weeks ago, I looked unemployed. It was as if people thought it was contagious. People are like that. Cruel. If they're screwed, everyone else should be too." Ventura Pons, *Anita non perd el tren* (Spain 2000).

³⁹ In a way, this single return of an individual to a workplace now gone could be equalled to the memories of a recent pre-democratic past, which still haunt contemporary Catalan no matter how much they seek to rid themselves of these memories.

demolished and replaced by a vast construction site) and finds love in the process, contains a number of literary and cinematic references (1930s films like *King Kong*, *China Seas* and *Gone with the Wind*, as well as *Driving Miss Daisy*, 1989, are mentioned). An additionally highly effective animated dream sequence features Anita recounting a nightmare in a manner which cleverly connects Spain with the wider global community:

I discovered the fuses of the world. I removed them and blacked out the planet. It was total chaos; it was like the end of the world. In Japan there was national embarrassment. They committed hara-kiri with TV antennas, islands disappeared, creating a giant tide way, rising waters created a sea of spaghetti over Italy. At the Vatican, a giant macaroni destroyed St. Peter's dome. This huge mass got as far as Barcelona: The Italian pasta, with Barcelona cannelloni, inundated the city. The Iberian Peninsula lost its balance, the east outweighed the west. It was the end of the world. God, with a cosmic-divine fork, gobbled it up (Pons 2000).

Apart from in this existentialist discourse reflecting Catalan (and Spanish) awareness of the world outside, Anita also visually connects with the viewer when she establishes direct eye contact with the film camera on several occasions. This candid dialogue between protagonist and viewer challenges cinematic conventions and makes the film almost equally innovative as *Morir (o no)*, although the two are technically different. As had been the case in the second part of *Morir (o no)*, also *Anita non perd il tren* portrays human relationships in a favourable light, and images of contemporary Barcelona generally render the city affective and accommodating.

Menja d'amor (2001) and *El Gran Gato* (2002)

With the following two films *Menja de amor* and *El gran gato*, Pons breaks away from his commonly Catalan screened urban map and pays tribute to the world of music. Thus, *Menja de amor*, or commonly known as *Food of Love*, is based on David Leavitt's 1998 novel *The Page Turner* – which has enabled the cineaste to merge the “lettered and the filmed city” (Martí-Olivella 2011, 199). The shooting locations are, alternatively, Barcelona and San Francisco. An almost solely American cast generally converse in English throughout the film. Just like the later *Amor Idiota*, also Pons' following film *El gran gato* (released the year before Jordi Pujol retired as “president of the regional government after 23 years in the post”, and “Socialist Pasqual Maragall” became regional president⁴⁰) draws a narrative link with Argentina; not only through one single protagonist but also through the *rumba* music and dance style. The Catalan

⁴⁰ “Catalonia profile”, *BBC News Europe*, last modified 14 August 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20345071>

take on the rumba is here paralleled with the Argentine original. In both films, Pons thus breaks away from his tendency to narrate his stories within a more specifically Catalan context.

Amor idiota (2004) and *Animals ferits* (2005)

As highlighted earlier, Argentina is brought back into filmic focus in *Amor Idiota*, where the existentialist ponderings linger in a fast-paced narrative that unfolds in a generally sophisticated alternatively diurnal and nocturnal external environment. In the film, Barcelona's transformed post-Olympic cityscape is both embraced and indirectly rejected by protagonists who manage to momentarily escape urban dread by connecting as lovers; their physical interaction and verbal utterances as fast-paced as is life in their surrounding metropolis. With *Animals Ferits* (released the year before José Montilla became regional president and "nation" was first used as a word to describe Catalonia in a revised autonomy statute that gave the "regional government greater powers and financial autonomy"⁴¹), Barcelona is represented as an almost entirely smooth and sophisticated, modernized urban space.⁴² Just like Almodóvar's representation of Madrid in *Volver* the same year, Pons' film camera pans an attractive cityscape where Barcelona's wealth is visualized in images of a stylish and cutting-edge architecture. The tourist appeal of the city is revealed in images of large hotels and wide avenues accommodating a flow of fancy cars. In the film, the Lisboa family (with a surname indicative of Barcelona's extra-regional connections) resides in a stylish apartment, where the artistic décor reflects status rather than any genuine interest in art for art's sake.

Pons' hitherto most consistently multicultural film which mirrors the post-Olympic iconic overhaul that would make Barcelona worthy of the "global gaze cast on her" (Martí-Olivella 2011, 189) again follows an episodic narrative pattern. In an operatic fashion, the plot is divided into individual parts or stories that have all in the end turned out to be interrelated. These sequences are entitled: 1. *Allegra Assai*, 2. *Moderato Tempo Giusto*, 3. *Andante Affettuoso*, and 4. *Finale Rondo. Tutti Quanti*, whereby Pons' screened narrative is immediately conferred a touch of Italian – and global – sophistication. The plot revolves around four couples all from different backgrounds. Thus Claudia is, although a native Catalan, said to have Slavic features, Marta is

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² A wider anchoring of the plot in our contemporary times is further reflected in the comparison between the domestic space and Barcelona in the following statement: *Tómatelo como una oportunidad única de renovar la casa: como los Juegos Olímpicos y Barcelona*, ironically uttered by a woman about to undergo facial reconstructive surgery. Ventura Pons, "*Animals ferits*," (Spain 2005).

Argentinian and generally alternates between Italian and English expressions⁴³, a protagonist with the Russian-sounding name of Irina is unexpectedly olive-skinned and seemingly non-Catalan, and the family has a Mexican maid whose Peruvian boyfriend is alternatively referred to as “un icono gay” and a pleasure seeking “cocainomano.”⁴⁴ These protagonists all come to the fore in individual episodes where an omnipresent narrator introduces each by way of voice-over – and yet at the end their individual fates overlap as they reconnect at a final narrative crossroads.

And still, even though most of these protagonists seem to enjoy relative wealth and survive in a competitive urban environment, they are ultimately unable to fully appreciate what they have: *Los catalanes tenemos la especialidad de no apreciar a lo nuestro: somos la envidia de muchos y seguimos en Babia. Es delirante* (Pons 2005). This serves as a direct reflection on Catalonia – and particularly Barcelona – as the marvel of many; a largely independent region which in its strive to compare itself with other European nations and cities fails to regard itself with the national pride it deserves. In the film, not only do the protagonists ultimately seem lost in their postmodern city, but they are also unsuccessful in their relationships. In the end, they are compared to wounded animals, and the urban flair turns out to be no more than a façade that hides real pain experienced on a personal level and which is kept under control to keep up appearances.⁴⁵ The film’s concluding statement appears to address the fate of one of Barcelona’s many Latino immigrants. However, it soon becomes evident that it could relate equally much to the nostalgia sensed by postmodern individuals grappling to come to terms with an increasingly artificial urban habitat:

Una embestida de nostalgia le hace soñar con los sábados, viendo en la tele los partidos de La Liga Española o jugando en los descampados de las afueras de Lima. Mañana enviará un mail contando que por fin visitó el templo del FC Barcelona... Y les hablará del paraíso, del bienestar y de la opulencia del paraíso, donde convive con otros animales que se lamen las heridas (Pons 2005).

These closing lines again evoke a sense of alienation amongst Pons’ late 1990s and 21st-century protagonists, within the limits of a Catalan capital which is now, more than ever, a tourist haven and a global passageway accommodating people from all walks of

⁴³ She prefers English to Spanish in the following terms and expressions: “*pedigree*”, “I’m glad to meet you”, “Aquí es nuestra cama *kingsize*. Con Silvio todo es *kingsize*.” “Des-estimado para siempre? *Forever and ever*?” Ibid.

⁴⁴ The additional focus on a female British tourist at a Costa Brava tourist resort, who is getting by in limited Catalan, adds a further international feel to this highly contemporary film.

⁴⁵ In Pujol’s words “en ese territorializante y territorializador ‘Rondo’, ... todas las historias y sus personajes se enlazan bajo el denominador común del fracaso. Un fracaso personal y social, ordenado, sin aspavientos, con mucho *seny*, donde todos han acabado moribundos en su particular territorio.” Anton Pujol, “Ventura Pons y la crónica de un territorio llamado Barcelona,” 75.

life. This aesthetically transformed capital was as recently as 2013 voted fourth top tourist attraction in Europe.⁴⁶ However, it may be that Barcelona is losing some of its own identity in its strive to accommodate its constant flow of visitors, and globalization becomes in part a self-effacing process.

La vida abismal (2006) and *Barcelona (un mapa)* (2007)

In rapid succession, Pons released four films between 2007 and 2009, two of which are considered heavyweights within his oeuvre: the historically aware *Barcelona (un mapa)*, and *Forasters*; which also offers a reflection on past and present. The previous film *La vida abismal*, and *Barcelona (un mapa)* have in common their references to Francoist Spain and, also, their visual references to different time periods. However, while the former film steepes the visual narrative in the 1970s and revolves around a professional poker gambler by the name of Chico⁴⁷ (a story inspired by Ferran Torrent's book with the same name) and has a plot that unravels in, alternatively, Valencia and Catalonia, *Barcelona (un mapa)* lingers in Barcelona and establishes a visual dialogue between the global present and the early stages of Francoism, when the film opens up in January, 1939. As will be explained in the upcoming chapter, Pons employs several postmodern techniques in a film that presents Barcelona itself as a highly postmodern place: both as regards its post-Olympic architecture and the effect it has on screened citizens not able to fully let go of the past and who are still haunted by the historical trauma of their region. Pons here interweaves history and fiction and in doing so he fictionalizes history in a manner described by Ricoeur in a number of works.⁴⁸ Pons also alternatively compresses and expands narrative time when he reaches back to the past while at the same his representation of the present is cut short by interspersed de-territorializing Deleuzian flashbacks from times gone by, and which reflect not only architectural grandeur but also events that have had an impact on the recent history of Barcelona (also post Franco).⁴⁹

⁴⁶ "Top Destinations in Europe", *European Best Destinations*, last modified 24 October 2013, <http://www.europeanbestdestinations.org/>

⁴⁷ A current poker network is aptly given the name "Chico" <http://pokerfuse.com/tags/chico-poker-network/>

⁴⁸ An example is Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative (Temps et Récit)*. Volume 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988 (1985)). Chap.8.

⁴⁹ According to Martí-Olivella, in *Barcelona (un mapa)* "Pons manages to transform a play into a visual territory, and his cinematic 'territorialization' of Barcelona acquires the density that Deleuze would term a 'discursive practice.'" Jaume Martí-Olivella, "Catalan Cinema: An Uncanny Transnational Performance", in Dominic Keown, ed. *A Companion to Catalan Culture* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, New York: Tamesis, 2011). 201.

Forasters (2008)

In a similar vein, the title of subsequent film *Forasters* (*Forasteros* in Spanish and *Strangers* in English) refers to immigrant neighbours within an urban Catalan residence in a 1960s decade when the region was inundated by a wave of mass tourism occurring alongside a process of financially lucrative industrialization.⁵⁰ While in the film Catalans react in a hostile manner toward foreigners entering their city, Belbel's original 2004 play is "not a play about immigration" per se:

It is a play about the fragility of family relations, the passage of time, the meaning of existence, and, above all, the fear and mistrust of what we do not know.⁵¹

Importantly as well, apart from being a film that criss-crosses between the 1960s and the transformed global space of today, it is also a story about human miscommunication and lack of empathy and comprehension – on several levels. In *Forasters*, a crumbling family matriarch (Anna Lizaran) is dying from cancer, and her advancing sickness triggers a tirade of bluntly honest opinions, hurled at her closest family members. Specifically, homosexuality is openly rejected when a gay son is equalled to a weakling, the woman restricted by old age and bodily limitations develops an embittering jealousy towards her young daughter about to embark on her first sexual exploration, and the woman's husband is forced to promise never to remarry even after she is gone. Accompanying the shift from vibrant global present to a comparatively more repressive 1960s era is a colour-scheme that changes from vivid to sepia-toned. The film highlights how a transformed Catalan cityscape and society have triggered social and cultural issues not always dealt with constructively. Rather, the changing urban dynamics on screen has a mainly negative effect on the protagonists. In this sense the film contrasts with the considerably more fluid intermingling of cultures in *Animals ferits*.

A la deriva (2009) and *Any de Gràcia* (2011)

In line with the foreign, particularly Moroccan, element in *Forasters*, also *A la deriva*⁵² connects Spain (Barcelona) with Africa (Darfur) through a plot that focusses on a love affair between a white woman and a black man, and which also weaves a political discourse into its narrative context. A corresponding connection with Africa had already

⁵⁰ "Catalonia profile", *BBC News Europe*, last modified 15 January 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-20345073>

⁵¹ "Forasters", *Catalandrama: Contemporary Catalan Theatre Translations*, http://www.catalandrama.cat/theater-pieces/forasters?set_language=en

⁵² Based on a novel by Baulenas, the film was released in a year when Catalan citizens held a referendum on regional dependence and where, despite a low turnout, the results still showed a 20% support of "the idea of independence." Catalonia profile", *BBC News Europe*, last modified 15 January 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-20345073>

been achieved by Almodóvar in *Todo sobre mi madre*, through the inclusion of Ismaël Lô's Senegalese song *Tajabone* into its soundtrack.

A la deriva was followed by an absurdist costume drama based on fifteen short stories by Quim Monzó. Epistolary in style, *Mil cretins* (2010) revolves around the themes of love, old age and death. However, rather than being imbued in social realism, the film is narrated through a sarcastic lens and from a partly mythological perspective. Human foolishness defines a film which develops largely within internal environments, and which generally contrasts with the less light-hearted films making up Pons' 21st-century repertoire. Nevertheless, similarities can be drawn between this film and *Amor idiota*; a self-narrated tale also about foolish human behaviour.

With *Any de Gràcia*, Pons pays cinematic homage to Catalan novelist Mercè Rodoreda in a film which takes place in Barcelona and whose plot can be regarded as the coming of age of a main character new to the city. Appropriately, Pons returned a year later with his most recent film to date, *Un berenar a Ginebra* (2013), which visualizes Rodoreda's long conversation in 1973 with literary critic and editor Josep Maria Castellet, in the city of Geneva. In Spain, the film was first shown as part of the Festival de Málaga, on 25 April 2013.⁵³

Ignasi M. (2013) and recapitulation

As noted earlier in the chapter, the last film to conclude Pons' repertoire to date is the documentary *Ignasi M.* which, interestingly, links back to themes already dealt with in *Ocaña, retrat intermitent*. Still, the contemporary Catalan setting contrasts dramatically with 1970s Barcelona, where the relationship between Ocaña and his artistically embraced city became highly organic in Pons' reflective documentary. It seems as if through the documentaries that frame his oeuvre, Pons has come full circle. However, it is to be expected that he will continue his screened dialogue with Barcelona, just like Almodóvar may delve further into Madrid's globalizing era (in films which may also continuously present Madrid as less a physical location and more an abstract place where the plots become metaphors for the concurrent socio-political situation in the country). As has been evidenced in this second chapter, Pons, too, demonstrates an awareness of broader contemporary issues, in films set both in Spain and abroad.

⁵³ "15 festival de Málaga. Cine español": Dossier.

https://festivaldemalaga.com/Content/source/pdf/notas/20130409105516_177_nota_de_prensa.pdf

CHAPTER THREE

Urban and corporeal mapping in films analysed, and the focus on Barcelona

Introduction: A cartographic landscape on screen

It has been claimed that “[t]he imagined landscape of the city has become, inescapably, a cinematic landscape” (Donald 1999, 68). This thesis takes up on this idea when a narrative link is here drawn to the first two chapters through a cartographic reading of the screened Spanish and Catalan metropolises. The chronological mapping of Madrid and Barcelona which provided a social and historical perspective of their respective developments is now followed by a comparison of the two cities to a both physical and mental map. Theories by e.g. Lefebvre, cultural geographers, Derrida, Anholt and Deleuze are referred to. In primary focus are *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Barcelona (un mapa)*, where the urban landscape is that of Barcelona. Nevertheless, despite the common focus on this capital, Almodóvar’s and Pons’ representations of the city are radically different, as will be evidenced.

Almodóvar’s portrayal of Barcelona in *Todo sobre mi madre* can be seen as a tribute to the historically tormented metropolis. In a cinematic repertoire generally geared towards the Madrid cityscape, Barcelona now gains increased importance and visibility and comes to the fore as a screened habitat rendered affective through generally appealing street scenes, a suggestive and highly effective musical score, as well as several protagonists whose appearances and behaviour collectively mirror the diverse aspects of a globally transformed, ever more ethnically and socially fluid city. Notably, the Catalan urban space is here by and large more positively represented than Madrid in his films where the protagonists gradually experience more conflicting emotions towards their urban habitat. Almodóvar’s emotive Catalan imagery in *Todo sobre mi madre* can (similarly to in Pons’ *Animals Ferits*) be seen as forming a part of a larger marketing

campaign, where positive images of the metropolis are transmitted to a both national and foreign audience. Applicable to such a filmic interpretation are Anholt's theories on spatial branding.

Also referred to in this chapter are *La flor de mi secreto* (mentioned only in passing) and *La piel que habito*. These films are considered important in the context as they, too, stimulate a cartographic¹ reading of what can be considered an alternatively human and urban filmic landscape. As a result, they can be justifiably compared with the two main films analysed.

As will be shown in the close analysis section, the screened urban map that unfolds in these films takes on different aspects ranging from mental to physical, historical or archival (Pons' portrayal of Barcelona contrasts radically with Almodóvar's representation of the same metropolis, and the 2007 film needs to be viewed from a larger historical perspective) to gradually more global and fluid. Paired with this, the on-screen representation of Barcelona is either affective or emotive, or all the duller and more depressive. All in all, the protagonists (and viewers) engage with the urban environment in an alternatively positive or negative way. Specifically, the screened globalised city is rendered further complex through the human element that completes it, i.e. the individual who engages with this space and who harbours complex emotions towards their physical surroundings. As Spain moves further into a multicultural and dynamic future, the multi-layered filmic map becomes reflective of this transformative era.

Postmodern screened landscapes and Derrida

Just like a mapped landscape schematically represents reality, so, too, can

a landscape of film or a *cinematic landscape* ... be defined in the broadest sense of the term as a filmic representation of an actual or imagined environment viewed by a spectator (Hopkins 1994, 49).

A sense of nostalgia is generally apparent amongst protagonists in films by both Almodóvar and Pons and it is closely linked to the urban (and at times also rural) layout of the physical environment. This lingering melancholy is partly rooted in the characters' complex and problematic relationship with their surrounding space, which becomes a "nostalgic memory-cape" triggered by contemporary postmodernity. In the postmodern movement's general strive to detach itself from the historical past and to,

¹ By this we refer to a cinematic cartography that renders the city readable as a both physical, psychological, and symbolic space that tells different parallel narratives.

rather, operate within a historical vacuum², the individual is bound to experience a sense of loss and bewilderment. Hurlled into a new era that looks to the future and in which modernity and globalization become keywords, citizens today are urged to embrace a liquid modern society defined by its rejection of old cultures and traditions and its corresponding preference for a “floating and drifting self” (Bauman 1997, 21). In films analysed also in this chapter, the globalized protagonists are engaged in an often-complex dialogue with their environment. Whatever their attitude, in their exploration of this space they subconsciously act as guides taking us with them on their urban journey. As the plots develop so, too, the screened cityscape unfolds in a cartographic fashion and corresponds with Les Roberts’ five main definitions of cinematic cartography as (1) maps and mapping in films; (2) mapping of film production and consumption; (3) movie- mapping and place-marketing; (4) cognitive and emotional mapping; and (5) film as spatial critique (Roberts 2012, 201).

Lingering here on Roberts’ two last definitions, in *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Barcelona (un mapa)* the spatial and emotional mapping of the Catalan capital leads to a more, or less, concrete urban map. In its varied representations, the city is conferred emotive value but, again, Almodóvar’s filmic map is rendered considerably affective compared to the more sombre and complex archival map in *Barcelona (un mapa)*. As shall be evidenced, in Pons’ adaptation of Cunillé’s play, the protagonists engage in a screened dialogue between past and present where, rather than embracing contemporary Barcelona, they often reject the city. Their attitude contrasts radically with that of Almodóvar’s motley group of characters – some of whom are double foreigners to Barcelona as non-Catalans and non-Spaniards who are guided by an all the more positive urban outlook.

It has been generally noted with regard to the intrinsic value of the urban space, that the modern city is,

at the same time abstractly conceptual and intensely personal. It is *the* city, not *a* city. It is an imaginary space created and animated as much by the urban representations to be found in novels, films and images as by any actual urban places (Donald 1999, x).

In both *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Barcelona (un mapa)* the characters relate to and are affected by the city, for better or worse. In the former, Barcelona becomes a “source of visual pleasure, a spectacle” (Aitken and Zonn 1994, 19). On the contrary, Pons shows us that behind his global spectacle dwell the spectres of the past. They linger in the present and add another dimension to contemporary reality. Both the real and the

² As noted by Jameson, “the postmodern looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds, for the telltale instant after which it is no longer the same...” Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991), ix.

dreamlike urban imagery of today becomes a phantasmagoric “shifting medley of real or imagined figures, as in a dream.”³ In this multifaceted present, the past refuses to be forgotten and the ensuing temporal fluidity reflects the shifting times of today, where little is fixed, and boundaries are repeatedly tested.

The mapped cityscape in the cinema of both cineastes is both a fictive representation of off-screen, real Barcelona and, in the case of Pons, a partly documentary rendition of this city. Thus, *Barcelona (un mapa)* creates a sense of urban authenticity by way of documentary footage that helps anchor the Catalan metropolis within a historic and political context. Pons’ urban map is here both partly imaginary and real as the filmmaker interweaves authentic images from Francoist Spain with a fictive narrative set in the democratic present. A spatial interpretation of Barcelona in these two primary films thus helps us visualize the urban space as not only a spectacle but, also, a complex place haunted by the memories of the nation’s past. Additionally with regard to *Barcelona (un mapa)*, the film can be read as an example of Derrida’s psychoanalytical notion of a “science of ghosts” where the “spectral other”⁴ reappears in the present. In a ghostlike fashion, Pons allows the country’s past to seep into the cinematic present in a real, documentary fashion.

Derrida equals psychoanalysis with the aforementioned “science of ghosts” and defines cinema as “the art of ghosts, a battle of champions... It’s the art of allowing ghosts to come back...”⁵ Similar concepts have been appropriated in an article on “spectro-geographies.” Here, “the ghostly, spectral and the absent” are words inserted into a cultural geographical context (Maddern and Adey 2008, 291), and a clear reference is made to Derrida’s notion of “spectro-politics” (291). This again becomes relevant in *Barcelona (un mapa)*. Also here “ghostly relations tangle up the string of temporal linearity” and “[p]ast and futures ... bare a supplementary relation to the present” (Maddern and Adey 2008, 292).⁶ Thus, although both Pons and Almodóvar conform to postmodern ideals, their different yet constant dialogue with the past means that their mapped cityscape will never be entirely postmodern (as in presenting a complete “break” with the past). The link between past and present makes for dynamic plots, and, in the case of Pons, his filmic landscape is rendered further complex through flashbacks to another time and space; flashbacks which help recreate “in spectral form

³ “Phantasmagoric”, *WordReference.com*, last modified 2013, <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/phantasmagoric>

⁴ “Others and their others: spectrality and monstrosity in the photographs of Roger Ballen”, Lewis Johnson, *Double Dialogues*, last modified 2009, http://www.doubledialogues.com/issue_ten/johnson.html

⁵ “The Science of Ghosts”– Derrida in ‘Ghost Dance,’ YouTube, last modified 27 January 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onmu3uwqzbl>

⁶ The authors here paraphrase John Wylie in “The spectral geographies of W.G. Sebald”, *Cultural Geographies* 14 (2007): 171-188.

that which the history of modernity has consigned to oblivion” (Labanyi 2002, 6). All in all, for Pons this serves to both strengthen and further problematize his largely modern images of Barcelona.

The urban environment as a landscape to be critically assessed and theoretically mapped

Before delving into the film analyses at hand, it is important to reflect on mapping as more than a purely geophysical activity among professional cartographers. Rather, this chapter demonstrates how the concept of urban mapping has influenced also other fields. Mapping is here considered not as much a practical application, as a concept that forms the basis for a theoretical interpretation of the space being mapped.

Cultural Geography and theories on the city

While cartographic readings and representations of the alternatively screened or literary modern metropolis are no recent phenomena, more focused scholarly attention has been paid to the urban environment particularly since the publication of *The Image of the City*. Here, Lynch views the city as a space both to be read and imagined and introduces the notion of the affective cityscape, or the city as *memory-scape* (it is argued that “every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings”) (Lynch 1960, 1). The book may also have inspired more thorough spatial interpretations of modern cities, including cartographic readings of this environment. Within the field of urban and cultural geography, a theoretical mapping of the city became increasingly common after the *spatial* and *cultural* turns of the 1970s and 1980s, respectively. As cities became increasingly globalized and thus also more fluid, this cultural turn came to signify a collapse of purely geographical space. Thus, in a Deleuzian fashion, more conventional notions of time and space have since had to be reassessed, and the two concepts are now mutually related. Such a “time-space convergence”⁷ has meant that space is often equalled to a construct or a “social construction, produced by social agency” (Withers 2009, 641).⁸ There is in this construct a consideration for the human element in the urban landscape – a landscape that is as unfixed and fluid as the modern times we live in. As highlighted by Harvey,

⁷ Deleuze’s notion of time-space *compression* or *collapse* is paralleled to *detrterritorialization* with regard to the scene analysis of *Todo sobre mi madre*.

⁸ Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli provide a Deleuzian reading of the postmodern road movie. They here introduce the concept of “nomadic detrterritorialization” to refer to the postmodern citizen’s sense of *unbelonging* in their physical and mental environment - also in a cinematic context: *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2006). 111.

“place in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct” (Harvey 1996, 261); an opinion which corroborates Lefebvre’s view of space as an “ongoing social practice” (Lefebvre 2003, 17).

The link between Lefebvre and Cultural Geography

Lefebvre can be considered a forerunner to e.g. urban and cultural geographers concerned with the relationship between space and place and how individuals interact with their physical environment. In books like *The Production of Space* (1991)⁹, *The Urban Revolution* (first published in 1970) and *Writings on Cities* (1996), it is suggested that landscapes are produced and that it is in the meeting point between physical space and its human element where a special energy appears. That is to say that (primarily urban) space is made complete through the energy it receives from its human dwellers. In an all-encompassing statement Lefebvre maintains that,

[w]hen we evoke ‘space’, we must immediately indicate what occupies that space and how it does so; the deployment of energy in relation to ‘points’ and within a time frame. When we evoke ‘time’, we must immediately say what it is that moves or changes therein. Space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction; likewise energy and time (Lefebvre 1991 (1974), 12).

In Neil Smith’s foreword to *The Urban Revolution*, the city is additionally seen as a liberal, and liberalizing, space. For Lefebvre, this liberation was one from the tyranny of time apart from anything else, but also from social repression and exploitation, from self-imprisoning categories – liberation *into* desire” (Lefebvre 2003, xiii).

Jackson and Hubbard draw on Lefebvre’s spatial readings of urban landscapes, with Jackson covering a range of topics pertinent to Cultural Geography and that are particularly concerned with how cultures and landscapes are interrelated (Jackson 1989 177). Hubbard, in turn, focusses on the relationship between space and place and on the idea of space as being “socially produced and consumed” (Atkinson, et al. 2005, 41). Significantly for this thesis, Hubbard also interweaves Bauman’s theories into his argument, and he draws an additional link to Augé with regard to the *non-place* defined by its “velocity, heterogeneity and flow” and Bauman’s concept of “places without place” (Atkinson, et al. 2005, 43-44). This reminds of the “place-less” place in texts by Roberts (Roberts 2012, 89). Further linking the modern concepts of place and space to cinema¹⁰, Jeff Hopkins argues that “the notion of a *cinematic place* is a fundamental

⁹ The book was published in its original French in 1974.

¹⁰ By “modern” is here meant a city that breaks away from a more traditional urban structure, one that becomes increasingly postmodern through its lack of rigidity and its increased social fluidity.

concern for a geography of film” (Hopkins 1994, 47). And, finally, Denis Cosgrove highlights the relevance of urban mapping today by maintaining that,

[b]ecause culture, like every physical and social activity, is both spatially structured and geographically expressed, the map remains a powerful mode of visualising and representing the spatial aspects of how cultures form, interact and change. Mapping thus remains a vital tool of analysis and a significant mode of representation in the study of interconnections between culture and space (Cosgrove 2005, 28).

Urban and national mapping in films analysed

Of interest in this chapter is specifically “filmic cartography.” As cinema is “a peculiarly spatial form of culture,”¹¹ it lends itself particularly well to a mapped representation of the urban space. In Almodóvar’s and Pons’ films, the cityscape is a space traversed by the characters. In their exploration of the postmodern metropolis, these protagonists subconsciously act as guides presenting us with a city which tends to become a character in its own right. Notably, Pons’ approach to screened Barcelona in *Barcelona (un mapa)* resembles Alain Resnais’ representation of post-war Hiroshima in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959). Also in this film, the way the urban space is represented can be read as a social and historical commentary while at the same time an affective city map is drawn on screen.

While, by contrast, Pons’ capital in *Barcelona (un mapa)* is not itself affective, the filmmaker’s equally archival map provides an insight into the recent history of Barcelona. The troublesome past of his Catalan capital unfolds through a cinematic montage where real historical flashbacks become a technique by which the past is evoked and called into dialogue with the global present.

In the cinema of Almodóvar, a similar historical map is not as readily discernible. Instead, his (post)modern map links back to the past where a specific time is not recalled but where the element of nostalgia instead often serves to bridge the present with this more unspecific past. His screened urban and rural landscapes are not separable but two aspects of a global era which is not as attractive to the film characters to stop them from longing to the rural countryside. As will be seen, more specifically the ensuing nostalgic memory-scape is called forth through the affective or emotive map of globalized Barcelona in *Todo sobre mi madre*. A sense of urban melancholia is here brought about through the screened combination of old and new architecture and through voiced recollections of the past among characters communicating in the global present; a time in which they share common memories. As noted by Roberts,

¹¹ Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice., eds., *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (Oxford, England, and Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001). 5.

[t]he contradictions that are mobilized *across* geo-historical configurations of film and place provide the foundation for renewed critical territories of urban engagement. Key to this is a politics of absence where the past is rendered present in ways that reflect less the archival nostalgia for landscapes that may be ‘re-visited’ through film, than a reclamation of past urban spaces and practices in such a way that they are brought into juxtaposition – into spatial dialogue – with those of the present (Roberts 2012, 23).

In *Todo sobre mi madre*, there is a sense of both archival and affective nostalgia that differs from the way nostalgia is used as an element in films discussed in the upcoming chapter. Specifically, a nostalgic longing is sensed in the affectionate depiction of protagonists strolling through a Catalan cityscape dotted with old landmarks and monuments that contrast with the much more recent, postmodern urban architecture.¹² The characters’ melancholic affection towards this urban space is almost tangible and is further strengthened by images of old Barcelona as, regrettably, home to global drug culture and sex trade (indicative of the growing Catalan tourist sector catered for).¹³ In other words, the glorious Catalan past is still architecturally visualized in Almodóvar’s film¹⁴ but old Barcelona is now forced to cohabit with the revamped metropolis of the global era, which, all in all, leads to a sense of nostalgia perfectly expressed on screen. Such an “attractive urban nostalgia” becomes yet another way for Almodóvar to market Barcelona nationally and abroad.

The marketing of the screened urban space: some arguments

In terms of a theoretical mapping of the cinematic landscape, Roberts’ four-fold classification of the urban space concretely corresponds to e.g. the “archive city” (as seen in *Barcelona (un mapa)*), the “city as urban spectacle” (Roberts 2012, 32), the tourist city accommodating the urban gaze, and the previously cited definition “movie-mapping and place-marketing” (Roberts 2012, 202) of the global metropolis¹⁵.

¹² The older buildings that still feature in Barcelona’s architectural landscape serve as a reminder of times gone by and can be equalled to a *Zeitgeist* – or “the spirit of the times.” Steve May and Dennis K. Mumby, *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2005). 171.

¹³ Indirectly, observations by Roberts can be used in this context, too, as he argues that “the tourist image represents an object of desire in a literally sexual sense” (and he continues by saying that “the urban landscape can indeed be expressive of male power and sexual domination”). Les Roberts, *Film, Mobility and Urban Space: A Cinematographic Geography of Liverpool* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012). 129.

¹⁴ This brings to mind Philippe Ariès’ notion of the dead having undergone “the moment of change” which is why “their monuments are the visible sign of the permanence of their city.” Ariès, *Western Attitudes Towards Death* (London: Marion Boyers, 1976). 74.

¹⁵ The latter category again reminds of Anholt’s theories on urban and national place-branding.

In his views on “cinematic tourism” (Roberts 2012, 139), Roberts anchors his arguments in a Lefebvrian discourse. This becomes particularly evident in the comment: “[i]n confronting the urban space there is a need to go ‘beyond the city’ (both spatially and conceptually)” (101).¹⁶ In other words, one must look at the bigger picture when analysing the city. In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre himself rhetorically ponders if “theoretical knowledge” can “treat the virtual object, the goal of action [i.e. the global city] as an abstract?” (Lefebvre 2003, 23). However, he later rejects this idea as unachievable. Instead, there is a stress on the importance of theoretical knowledge revealing “the terrain” as “an urban practice in the process of formation” (17). Lefebvre’s timeless theories relate to the chapter argument, as his text views the modern cityscape as unfixed and fluid, a space subjected to a process of cultural and global (trans)formation.

With regard to this transformed urban landscape of today, the marketing of the city in particularly films by Almodóvar and his “near-fetishistic attachment to the iconicity of buildings” resemble a kind of “architectural pornography” (Roberts 2012, 129), which reminds of Anholt’s conviction that countries and cities must do whatever they can to market themselves internationally, by selling their (rather topical) images and products abroad. Specifically, the indeed commercial value attached to Barcelona in *Todo sobre mi madre* corresponds with Anholt’s theories on urban place-branding. There is no doubt that the positive urban imagery of Almodóvar’s Catalan metropolis has ultimately favoured a closer connection between Barcelona and other global cities, while at the same time a sense of pride is instilled amongst contemporary Catalans. As noted by Anholt,

[t]he people in the brand’s home country, once they know how well a locally-made product is doing overseas¹⁷, especially in richer countries, may start to feel a little more pride and confidence in their own status in the world (Anholt 2005 (2003), 104).

A visual and narrative exploration of the filmic maps analysed in this chapter

An analysis of *La piel que habito* is herewith followed by a closer comparative analysis of *Barcelona (un mapa)* and *Todo sobre mi madre*. Select scenes from the films are highlighted to demonstrate how Almodóvar and Pons map the urban space. Rather than chronologically, the films are thematically explored. A cartographic reading of these movies makes it possible to conclude that they adhere to different categories of

¹⁶ Roberts here paraphrases a section of Lefebvre’s *The Urban Revolution*, page 16.

¹⁷ In the chapter context, the “locally made product” that comes to mind is Almodóvar’s screened representation of Barcelona in *Todo sobre mi madre*.

cinematic maps, and some of these *cine-maps* (Caquard 2009, 46) may be linked to more than one film. Thus, the maps that visually and narratively unfold in front of our eyes alternatively mirror the mental and physical (including historical¹⁸, political and geo-cultural) territory on screen. The filmic landscape becomes an at times anatomical and erotic body-map brought into dialogue with the external urban map that it complements (either by reflecting these city-maps or by being visually superimposed upon them). The cinematic map may additionally be affective and emotive, even “amorous” (Bruno 2002, 39) with regard to the city portrayed (as seen in *Todo sobre mi madre*). By contrast, Pons’ *unsettled urban map* (Bruno 2002, 380) in *Barcelona (un mapa)*, is again more archival, and the postmodern architecture does not so much appeal to the film characters as appal them, culminating in a kind of *architorture*¹⁹ with regard to their interaction with their urban space.²⁰ Finally, Almodóvar’s both urban and national map in *La flor de mi secreto* is politicized in its fluid transition from local or national, to international.

Mapping the human body in *La piel que habito*



21

In Almodóvar’s second to last film to date, the housed gender (Bruno 2002, 64) of the human body is visually embraced throughout the plot and considered more important

¹⁸ Bruno clarifies: “[t]he atlas is not a map merely of spaces but of movements: a set of journeys within cultural movements, which includes movements within and through historical trajectories.” Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002). 6.

¹⁹ This concept has been defined as “a sense of homelessness, a primal sense of loss, a loss that has lost nothing, that has always already existed and that, like Baudrillard’s simulacrum, has no origin nor original, but underpins the very possibility of existence.” Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice, eds., *Screening the City* (London and New York: Verso, 2003). 108.

²⁰ In this film, the protagonists reject post-Olympic architecture by hurling a collective scream towards several alienating landmarks that do not comply with architectural conventions.

²¹ Pedro Almodóvar, *La piel que habito* (2011), poster (blog), date of access 28 April, 2013, http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-DMVHBF3HDKg/TdFbANpn8pI/AAAAAAAAKmc/VVSkvCc1CdU/s1600/movie-la-piel-que-habito-de-pedro-almodovar-www.lylybye.blogspot.com_1.png

than any purely geographical landscape. Its focus is neither Madrid nor Barcelona or the town of Toledo, which serves as setting for the plot. Indeed, the cinematic map is not so much topographical, as anatomical and mental. Thus, rather than being taken on a cartographic journey through a geographical landscape, the viewer partakes in an exploration of the human body and mind. The changing physique of the human body adds aesthetic appeal to the scenes, and this body becomes a landscape explored and admired all at once. An individual trapped, anatomically transformed from man to woman, is featured in such extreme close-up that her naked body soon becomes a landscape onto itself, in an image that seems to stay true to the conviction that “[v]isual pleasure is ... masculine pleasure” (Mitchell 2000, 227).²² This physical transformation is paired with the chronological recording of the woman’s period as hostage, visualized by way of fanatical scribbles on her bedroom wall, and which anchors the plot within a specific time frame.

Both *La piel que habito* and the 1985 French novel upon which it is based narrate a disturbing sequence of events triggered by the nocturnal abduction of a young man again believed to have raped the daughter of a reputable plastic surgeon, and the subsequent subjection of this male hostage to gender reassignment surgery to avenge his presumed crime. In the film, the visual lingering on a female body is momentarily interrupted by a significant moment of transition. This transitory point is achieved when the object of the voyeuristic gaze realizes that she is being observed, and which is when the camera pans out to focus on her subsequent interaction with the man keeping her captive. The spell cast on the surgeon passively admiring the naked body of the transformed individual is thus broken and the anatomical landscape receives a face.

²² And woman has been seen as image while men are bearers of the look: “... pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly.” Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1989). 19.



Fig. 1: Still from *La piel que habito*. El Deseo Blue Haze Entertainment FilmNation Entertainment Films, 2011. Author's screenshot.



Figures 2 and 3: Stills from *La piel que habito*. El Deseo Blue Haze Entertainment FilmNation Entertainment Films, 2011. Author's screenshots

Visualized on the second and third images is protagonist Vicente's (turned Vera through a process of *transgenesis*) fanatical counting of days while in captivity. The initial film poster reflects the anonymity of an individual apparently stripped of his/her identity and who is provided with a second, artificially enhanced skin. As highlighted, Almodóvar fully explores the anatomical landscape of the human body while at the same time he challenges conventions of what it means to be male or female. His film seems to suggest that the human body of today may be undergoing a moment of transition similar to the concurrent transformation of a gradually more globalized urban landscape.²³

²³ A more concrete fusion of human body and city is seen in the opening scene of aforementioned *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*.

Barcelona (un mapa)

In *Barcelona (un mapa)*, a significant turn of events precedes a plot mainly set in the present, which reflects historical awareness on the part of the filmmaker. Specifically, Pons here effectively depicts Barcelona's historical transition from the Francoist era to the modern metropolis it is today. This is achieved through a few swift camera movements and the juxtapositioning of documentary footage with images of a partly authentic and partly imaginary Barcelona set in real time (the description of this initial moment of transition is in this chapter followed by that of a similarly transitional moment in *Todo sobre mi madre*).

Barcelona (un mapa) is in English translated as *Barcelona, Map of Shadows*. Based on Cunillé's stage play *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres*, Pons' film remains faithful to the narrative development and structure of this original play. He paints a disturbing yet realistic screened picture of a group of individuals whose lives in global Barcelona are marred by their inability to fully embrace an urban environment which they no longer seem to recognize. Here, the postmodern architecture is part of a *collage city* in a time when it becomes

the norm to seek out 'pluralistic' and 'organic' strategies for approaching urban development as a 'collage' of highly differentiated spaces and mixtures, rather than pursuing grandiose plans based on functional zoning of different activities (Harvey 1989, 40).

This postmodern architectural layout of the city contrasts starkly with the more classical buildings of old Barcelona, which embellish the urban landscape also off-screen. Designed by architects like Elies Rogent²⁴, Josep Domènech i Estapà, Joan Martorell, Josep Vilaseca i Casanovas (all members of the Catalan *modernista*²⁵ movement), and Josep Maria Jujol, these buildings were erected during Catalonia's historical periods of Romanticism, Neo-classicism, Historicism, and during Neo-Gothic architectural trends. A product of the post- moderniste²⁶ Catalan movement, Antoni Gaudí – whose

²⁴ Notably Barcelona University, 1863-1973.

²⁵ The *modernista* style sprang from "a new wave of Catalan artists and intellectuals ... appealing directly to the self-conscious professional classes, who affirmed a unique and autonomous cultural identity, the distinctive expression of the European and authentically *modern* characteristics of Catalan society." David MacKay, *Modern Architecture in Barcelona (1854-1939)* (UK: The University of Sheffield Printing Unit, 1985). 13.

²⁶ Arthur Terry stresses that "Catalan modernism – not to be confused with Spanish modernism, whose context is quite different- was above all an attempt to create a genuinely modern, European culture out of what was felt to be a purely local and regional one." Arthur Terry, "Catalan *Modernisme* and *Noucentisme*: From Dissidence to Order", in Helene Graham and Jo Labanyi, eds., *Spanish Cultural Studies. An Introduction. The Struggle for Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 55.

major Roman Catholic landmark is visually inserted into Pons' cinematic narrative – left a baroque imprint on Barcelona's landscape, with buildings steeped in a ground-breaking modernity²⁷ reflective of his own highly surreal architectural style. Gaudí's unconventional architecture keeps attracting and repelling citizens and visitors alike.²⁸ As specifically noted by Resina, “the Sagrada Familia has become an emblem of urban division” (Resina 2008, 155). This comment corresponds with Robert Hughes' opinion that the unconventional cathedral “will always be a divisive building, but for most of its life Barcelona has been a divided city” (Hughes 1992, 541). Regarded by some as kitsch, even offensive²⁹, others hail this and other Gaudí buildings as architectural masterpieces; an aesthetic controversy which on a micro-level seems to mirror the broader Catalan debate regarding whether the region should gain independence from the rest of Spain.

In its original title *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres*, the shadows referred to in the play and that remind of Freud's and Derrida's notions of ghosts, could be linked to the cartographic layout of Pons' film, where past and present are brought into symbolic dialogue. Once set in the global present, the film takes on the aspect of a city guide in which the protagonists repeatedly walk us through the nocturnal streets, adding their personal commentary on the transformed city in heated dialogues where they express dissatisfaction with a number of architectural landmarks (such as the Gran Teatre del Liceu or opera house, the Monumental Bull Ring, the Passeig de Gràcia, the Teatre Nacional, and Gaudí's avant-garde masterpiece la Sagrada Familia).³⁰ They also voice a desire to set fire to a number of buildings – an apparent reference made to a real fire at

²⁷ MacKay argues that “Catalan culture, always at the cross-roads of European movements, absorbed these tendencies through Gaudí, Domènech and Puig, reshaping their contradictory aspects to produce the finest examples of national Modernist architecture: a Romantic architecture that ... was free to respond to the functional requirements of a new mode, personally interpreted and popularly understood as being appropriate to the aspirations and self-image of a country that wished to express both its unique personality and its integral modernity.” MacKay, *Modern Architecture in Barcelona (1854-1939)*: 42.

²⁸ Presumably, the latter is more commonly true for Catalan citizens.

²⁹ As noted by Kate Deimling, the citizens of Barcelona “would prefer a state of romantic incompleteness to the slick and kitschy touches they currently find on the building.” “Daily Travel Flashback: The Sculptural Dissonance of La Sagrada Familia”, *Forbes*, John Giuffo, last modified 5 November 2011, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johngiuffo/2011/05/11/daily-travel-flashback-the-sculptural-dissonance-of-la-sagrada-familia/>

³⁰ The architectural style of these buildings ranges from Gothic and Modernist, to a *noucentista* style and the imitative style of Greek ideals (namely the Teatre Nacional which resembles a Greek temple in shape).

the Liceu in 1994³¹ (the “anarchist Santiago Salvador” already having “tossed two Orsini bombs onto the main floor of the Liceu” in 1893, “causing a number of fatalities”) (Sobrer 2002, 2016). Whether or not Pons’ main character Ramon – ex night porter at the Liceu Opera House and a married man who is also a cross-dresser – eventually succeeds in igniting³² and burning down this respectable establishment at the end of the film remains uncertain. A monologue from the film³³ sums up the antagonistic views on the part of the protagonists towards the more cutting-edge architecture of current Barcelona:

Todas las ciudades son más soportables de noche que de día. Sin embargo, en Barcelona, de noche sólo se pasean los turistas y los delincuentes. Alguna noche me detengo frente a los pisos que ha levantado mi hijo y miro desde las ventanas donde hay luz y la persiana levantada, y observo un rato a la gente que vive dentro. No conozco a ningún arquitecto, incluido mi hijo, que tenga el suficiente valor para hacer algo así. La especialidad de mi hijo son los chaflanes, por eso no tiene más remedio que trabajar en Barcelona, pero en cuanto sale del trabajo se escapa a toda prisa de la ciudad antes de que anochezca (Pons 2007).

This verbal hostility reflects the complex relationship between the screened citizens and their nearly unrecognizable urban habitat. They generally experience strong feelings of apprehension toward buildings belonging to various aesthetic styles, but that reflect the surface glamour of the smooth postmodern Barcelona architecture (such as the Camp Nou stadium, built in 1957, and the Torre Agbar skyscraper, erected as recently as in 2005 – and since known as Torre Glòries). These modern constructs add a shiny gloss to a city with a troublesome past that still haunts the characters. As a result, although there is constant communication between the protagonists in this metropolitan, partly “historical”, drama, they are incapable of establishing a dialogue with their own city. With a clear Deleuzian reference being made, Anton Pujol talks of a *deteritorialization* achieved in this film through the aspects of an anarchic *Modernisme* (Pujol 2009a, 72) – and perhaps also postmodern cityscape. In our globalized era, this sense of postmodern, ahistorical deteritorialization also signifies the erosion and eventual

³¹ According to Resina, “[i]f I were to choose a counterimage to the flaming arrow lighting the Olympic torch, it would be the sparks from the welders setting the opera house on fire on January 31, 1994, just a year and a half after the Olympics. Watching the gaping crater of the Liceu, Barcelonans awoke from self-congratulatory enchantment to the cold reality of negligence.” Joan Ramon Resina, *Barcelona’s Vocation of Modernity: Rise and Decline of an Urban Image* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). 232.

³² With an additional link to Almodóvar, it has been noted that “[t]o burn something down may also be necessary to build something new. It is a slow-paced film whose characters are full of surprises with a distinct similarity, however seemingly unlikely, to Almodóvar’s universe.” “Andy’s Film World”, <http://andysfilmworld.blogspot.com.au/2008/12/barcelona-map-spain.html> (Note that this site is no longer available online).

³³ The original speech in Catalan is here translated into Spanish.

collapse of any clear delimitations between culture and a specific place. Rather, in our multicultural world, urban space is rendered more fluid and generic. There is a loosening of cultural ties and boundaries reflected in Pons' film, and which generally may trigger a sense of alienation on the part of citizens towards their native environment. From a Deleuzian perspective, "when the cosmic connections of an endless line of the universe are severed", the result is the "emergence of a disoriented, disconnected space" (Bogue 2003, 99). Specifically in *Barcelona (un mapa)*, it appears the protagonists are as disoriented and lost in their urban environment as the city of Barcelona itself, and which is subject to constant architectural, societal and political changes.

Why the title of Cunillé's original play? A symbolic interpretation

In terms of the architecture erected in the mid-1990s onwards and which now defines a multi-layered Barcelona cityscape (which also affects Pons' protagonists), Pujol notes that Catalan society is not a unitary model. It no longer has an all-encompassing national narrative given the multiple de/reterritorializations it has experienced in the last two centuries. It is also a society that, after the infamous year 1992 when Barcelona hosted the Olympic Games, has both enjoyed the benefits and suffered the consequences of a quick and highly successful globalizing movement that turned it into a peculiar and complex space for the locals to negotiate, as Pons' movies relentlessly illustrate (Pujol 2010, 175).

Cunillé's *mapa d'ombres* points to the gradually unveiled secrets of the characters. More importantly though, the Catalan title hints at the many social, spatial and historical layers that dwell at the surface of Barcelona's current condition and that make up a complex global metropolis. That is to say that behind the glossy façade of (post)modern Barcelona there are many years of historical turmoil³⁴ that may seem to have been relegated to the corners of oblivion. However, the opening scenes of the film and Pons' repeated reference to the past assure us that this is far from the case. Thus, in reality, neither Cunillé nor Pons or his protagonists are unaffected by their pre-global era. Rather, the fictional characters move "across an imaginary path, traversing multiple sites and times" (Webber and Wilson 2008, 19). Again, with indirect reference to the play title, Resina notes that,

³⁴ In light of this, Josep. M Muñoz calls the title (*Barcelona (un mapa)*) "una metáfora sobre la devastación del franquismo", "El hombre invisible", *La Vanguardia Opinión*, last modified 11 January, 2008, <http://hemeroteca.cdmae.cat/jspui/bitstream/65324/6616/1/20080111MAE-VAN-I.pdf>

[u]nder the Franco regime ... Barcelona became a shadowy city. Shorn of its language and historical memory, it sank into a dull, provincial existence, livened up only by the resurgence of business in the midfifties (Resina 2008, 179).³⁵

This mirrors Preston's historical reflection on the Francoist occupation of Barcelona on 26 January 1939 (Preston 2012, 489) and the detrimental effect it had on the Catalan people, the society, political situation and economy of the region and its capital city. A final boost to the economy came in the 1960s with Spain's "economic 'miracle'" (Preston 2012, xii), a period which would stimulate migration not only to the Spanish centres but also subsequent emigration to neighbouring countries like France and Germany.³⁶

A cinematic turn of events: Pons' visual transitioning of the Barcelona of the Francoist past to the postmodern Barcelona of the global present

As hinted at earlier, Pons' film opens with an archival map that serves as a stark reminder of Catalan nationalism and Barcelona's (still) problematic relationship with Madrid. This is achieved through footage from the decisive moment in which national forces entered the Catalan capital unopposed in 1939, with General Juan Bautista Sánchez ultimately thanking the citizens of Barcelona for (involuntarily) facilitating the recognition of Franco as sole leader of all of Spain.³⁷

También digo al resto de españoles que era un error eso de que Cataluña era separatista, de que Cataluña era antiespañola. Debo decir que nos han hecho el recibimiento más entusiasta que yo he visto, y cuidado que he tenido el honor y la gloria... de asistir a

³⁵ Labanyi expands on the concept of a shadowy past, noting that "ghosts are the return of the repressed of history – that is the mark of an all-to-real historical drama which has been erased from conscious memory but which makes its presence felt through its ghostly traces." Labanyi, *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain. Theoretical Debates and Cultural Practice*, 6.

³⁶ "Rebuilding Europe: Spain 1953-1975", *International School History*, last modified 2014, http://www.internationalschoolhistory.net/western_europe/spain/1953-75.htm

³⁷ "These are the images of a hungry Barcelona who throws itself to the streets to cheer the entry of Franco's army. In these images resides the key to a splendid film about the permanent defeat." Cambridge Film Festival 12-22 September 2013: Barcelona (un mapa) 2007, La Vanguardia, last modified 2013, <http://www.cambridgefilmfestival.org.uk/films/2012/barcelona>

actos semejantes ... en ningún sitio, os digo, en ningún sitio, nos han recibido con el entusiasmo y la cordialidad que en Barcelona ^{38 39}

The black and white images depicting crowds gathering for the arrival of the military forces are rendered additionally effective through Pons' close-up of select spectators – such as a girl (of later narrative significance) expectantly forming part of the human masses and who seems quite unaware of the negative value conferred to the Francoist movement among her fellow Catalans. The viewer is lured into believing that the narrative will linger in the past, but Pons soon proves to us that “cities are spaces of transitions” (Webber and Wilson 2008, 18) in more than one way: also, as archival storage spaces that contain architectural pieces of evidence of the recent past through buildings that remain in the modern city. Through a series of quick camera movements, the focus on the human element is in this scene gradually replaced by a shift into real time, by way of an establishing shot featuring a now colour-tinged Barcelona skyline. The visual narrative now anchored in the global present perfectly conforms to “typical expositions of spatial relationships”, which will begin with an establishing shot of a general location, for example, a cityscape, and might be followed by a shot of a street or building, before moving to an interior shot of an apartment (Jordan and Allinson 2005, 55).

Pons' plot is, indeed, soon transported into internal milieus, and the narrative incorporates several lengthy dialogues between six protagonists. Regular flashbacks help continuously crisscross the plot between past and present. These flashbacks can again be interpreted through a Deleuzian lens, as they serve as “mnemosigns or flashback memories” that “point toward unorthodox forms of time – a bifurcating time in the flashback, a floating time in dream sequences” (Bogue 2003, 6). Brief as they are; images from the past that are literally over in a flash, they create a fluid notion of time which helps further collapse any clear boundaries between conventional time and space. Pons' filmic flashbacks thus heighten and underscore the characters' re-narrated personal recollections. References are made to times gone by and to well-known landmarks

³⁸ “ABC Año trigésimo quinto. Sevilla viernes 27 de enero de 1939”, *ABC de Sevilla*, p. 11, last modified 2014, <http://hemeroteca.sevilla.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/sevilla/abc.sevilla/1939/01/27/011.html>

³⁹ It should be noted here, as well, that Fernández has provided a detailed historical coverage of the *reespañolización* that Barcelona and Catalonia were subjected to under Franco, in 1939. He notes, e.g., that “[t]o better understand developments in Catalan cultural production in the post-Franco years and cultural policy in this period, it is crucial to remember that military defeat in 1939 meant the practical disappearance of the cultural infrastructure that had been created over a century. As part of the victor's attempt to return Catalonia to the fold of the Spanish soul ... the Catalan language was banned from public use and from education, and practically all signs of Catalan identity were outlawed.” In Graham and Labanyi, *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction. The Struggle for Modernity*, 342.

making up Barcelona's cityscape. Thus, a "crystal effect" (which recalls Deleuze's notion of cinematic "time crystals"⁴⁰) and a "continuum" is achieved "that fuses the historical past and the present in perpetual exchange" (Pujol 2009, 65). As further highlighted by Pujol, "the movie's historical hopscotch subjugates the characters, who cannot conceive an auspicious exit" (Pujol 2009a, 74).

In other words, the shadows from a bygone era, which are faithfully retained in the English film title, are symbolized by the slivers of Catalonia's past that repeatedly cut through the global picture of Barcelona. This establishes a dialogue between past and present (symbolically comparable to the ghosts from the past referred to in Derrida's aforementioned *hauntology* or *science of ghosts*). The historical and political past recalled in the present also serves as a reminder that Barcelona and its people are still affected by the harrowing Franco years and of the architectural movements that preceded the current physical appearance of the city. The story told is, thus, more than one of urban dissatisfaction and malaise also in the present. Rather and more importantly, Pons takes us on a journey into the past leading up to where Barcelona (and Catalonia) is today. Generally speaking, it seems accurate to say that "maps are not so much a current status of the *terra cognita*, but rather, a chronological assemblage of past representations of space" (Lukinbeal 2010, 20).

In *Barcelona (un mapa)*, Pons reminds us that the Catalan quest for independence is still on the political agenda. At the same time, his film also visually underscores Barcelona's tendency to compare itself with other European cities outside the Iberian Peninsula, and to thus negate its inherent relationship with Madrid.⁴¹ Altogether, this is a cinematic portrait of a *now* and a *then* which serves to form a more complete understanding of Catalonia as a region and of Barcelona as a city. In allowing us to visualize the past still influencing or being acknowledged from the perspective of the present, Pons once more adheres to postmodern criteria. In the film, multiple texts (verbal and visual) come together in a deconstructionist fashion and help create a "collage/montage" sometimes considered "the primary form of postmodern discourse" as also declared by Derrida (quoted by Harvey 1989, 51).

In summary, Pons has here succeeded in unfolding an urban map which, in a sense, also charts the protagonists' own generally unexplored inner territory. Their individual predilections and secrets have all been revealed by the end of a film that leaves us with a multifaceted picture of global Barcelona and its citizens. Thus, the map

⁴⁰ – as "refracting, filtering, and reflecting surfaces in which the virtual and the actual are made visible and rendered indiscernible as they pass into one another in circuits of exchange." Roland Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 6.

⁴¹ A Catalan patriotism is also sensed in generally all protagonists speaking their native Catalan, which sets Pons' Barcelona apart from Madrid also linguistically.

of shadows cleverly abbreviated to *Barcelona (un mapa)*⁴² has eventually been illuminated and the shadows of both past and present are partly gone by the end of the final scene. The episodic plot development hence comes full circle, and any loose ends are tied up. The circular narrative of the highly postmodern storyline allows us to ultimately witness the same elderly landlords around whom the plot revolves, and who had already been introduced in the first scene. Nevertheless, their mutual discourse is now rather different. No longer do they play the formal role of lessors but, rather, they embrace their own peculiarities and predilections by voicing secrets in the open. Through the spouses' mutually tolerant final cross-dressing session within the safety of their own home, Pons proves to us that "[s]iding with the underdogs and opposing the brutality of force is the opposite of fascism. The map of shadows needs not exist anymore."⁴³

A moment of transition in *Todo sobre mi madre*

Deleuze's notion of nomadic deterritorialization, with the nomad being called the "[d]eterritorialized par excellence" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 (1980), 381) is a term applicable to the alienated Catalan citizen in Pons' screened city of Barcelona. In *Barcelona (un mapa)*, the deterritorialized is not a nomad per se, physically detached from his own territory⁴⁴, but a person who belongs to his or her native soil yet is mentally detached from this place, the more metropolitan and postmodern this city becomes. Although Manuela in *Todo sobre mi madre* could be considered physically deterritorialized as an Argentine venturing into mainland Spanish territories, she is, in fact, a modern-day globetrotter who moves effortlessly through a Catalan cityscape. In the narratively important scene where she is seen traveling by speed-train from Madrid to Barcelona, Almodóvar paints an affective cinematic landscape and establishes multiple multicultural connections along the way. One of these connections is that of individuals culturally and ethnically crossing paths both on and off-screen (notably, protagonists and actors alike herald from different parts of Spain, and from Spain's former colony Argentina – renowned lead actress Cecilia Roth is an Argentine native).

⁴² Importantly, Pujol argues that "even the title change, from *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* to *Barcelona (un mapa)*, elegantly traps the city in itself. By excluding the shadows and elegantly locking the map in a parenthesis, Pons warns the audience that his narrative prolongs Cunillé's intended cartography but also prevents it from escaping." Antón Pujol, "Ventura Pons's *Barcelona (un mapa)*: Trapped in the Crystal," *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 6, no. 1 (2009): 67.

⁴³ "Andy's Film World: *Barcelona (un mapa)* (*Barcelona (A Map)*), Spain, 2007", Andrejs Visocki, blog, last modified 28 December 2008, <https://andysfilmworld.blogspot.com/2008/12/barcelona-un-mapa-barcelona-map-spain.html>

⁴⁴ As noted by Deleuze and Guattari, "nomads have no points, paths or land, even though they do by all appearances." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 (1980)). 381.

Just like *La flor de mi secreto* had woven concurrent national and international politics into its urban Spanish drama, so too *Todo sobre mi madre* operates on a both national and international level. Here, Almodóvar establishes a geo-cultural connection not only between Madrid and Barcelona, but also between Argentina and Galician A Coruña (through the implant of an Argentine native's heart into the body of a Spaniard), as well as between Argentina, Madrid, and Barcelona. The screened universe mirrors the fluid multi-ethnic landscape of the western world of today. As noted earlier in the thesis, Almodóvar also symbolically connects Spain with Africa. This allows him to embrace different gender notions, which further highlights the fluid sexual landscape in today's society. Again, this additional "geo-sexual" link is achieved through Ló's *Tajabone*, a song which hauntingly underscores Manuela's connective journey between Madrid and Barcelona, while at the same time a symbolic reference is made to a Senegalese cross-dressing ceremony.⁴⁵

The aforementioned transitory train scene in *Todo sobre mi madre* serves to connect not only two national metropolises but, as in the case of *Barcelona (un mapa)*, also two narratives that make up a greater overall storyline. In contrast to Catalan native Pons, Catalan "outsider" Almodóvar has here created a film which pays clear tribute to Barcelona. His picture of the city is one of "affective urbanism" (Anderson and Holden 2008, 144), which further helps market Barcelona to a both national and foreign audience. In doing so, the filmmaker adheres to Anholt's conviction that "the brand image of the country is made of cultural rather than economic factors" (Anholt 2006, 3).

While both Almodóvar and Pons experiment with notions of time and space in these two films set in a global context and environment, rather than using flashbacks to draw a link to the past, Almodóvar seems to be more concerned with space than time in the scene analysed. Timewise, the visual narrative remains in the present although past recollections are invited back into the "now" by way of Manuela's voice-over. Rather, Almodóvar has achieved a Deleuzian time-space collapse (or "compression") in a "sensori-motor schema" (Bogue 2003, 4), whereby in one single scene a dialogue has been established between past and present, as well as between two cities literally connected by way of modern transportation. All in all, this anchors the plot in the global present. Both the mental and physical tunnel through which Manuela travels symbolically redelivers her to the city of Barcelona and is literally provided with a light as we collectively exit this tunnel with her. The scene is hopeful although the evocative musical score leaves us with a sense of melancholy, which more generally proves the

⁴⁵ This has been explored by e.g. Linda Craig, in "From national to transnational in Almodóvar's *All About My Mother*," *Transnational Cinemas* 1, no. 2 (2010): 170-71, and Samuel Amago, in "Todo sobre Barcelona: Refiguring Spanish Identities in Recent European Cinema," *Hispanic Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (2007): 14.

validity of the claim that “[w]hat really counts is having a hold over the imagination of the customer” (Anholt 2006, 3).

At the end of the screened tunnel, Barcelona appears in all its nocturnal splendor, majestically entering the scene through an aerial shot that gives full credit to the Catalan cityscape. These images of the city positively overshadow the screened human component and occupy the space they deserve in the visual narrative. The affective urban map created by Almodóvar in this scene and others as he later takes us through the memorable streets of the Barrio Gótico and presents a number of urban and natural landmarks, such as a glittering Sagrada Familia⁴⁶, the Tibidabo mountain, the Palau de la Música, the Plaza Palau, and the slightly less touristy Montjuic Cemetery, corresponds with Bruno’s notion of a cinematic “map of love” (Bruno 2002, 243). The city here holds so many emotive connotations that it becomes the object of the spectators’ affection. Although Almodóvar’s urban space does not always reflect positive changes in Spain since it entered democracy, the overall picture of Barcelona is a positive one. Thus, as highlighted by Saida Palou and again reflective of Anholt’s notion of urban branding,

[l]a imagen y marca Barcelona integra múltiples referencias tangibles e intangibles, constituyendo un complejo compendio de elementos que tienen como función directa la representación de la ciudad, es decir, la evocación de una versión de la realidad de Barcelona. Entre de los aspectos más relevantes que integran la imagen turística de Barcelona resaltan con clara contundencia los valores intangibles: la denominada “atmósfera”, “clima” o “ambiente de Barcelona” asumen un papel protagonista con gran capacidad de seducción (Palou 2009, 80).

Final concretization of main ideas

This chapter has exemplified how Pons and Almodóvar have painted urban portraits or maps that, because of different narrative intentions, cinematic techniques and real historical backgrounds, are either affective (and “affectionate”) or emotive rather than predominantly negative or archival. The crisscrossing between past and present in particularly *Barcelona (un mapa)* and the partly fragmented, episodic storylines in these two highly globalized films, steep them both in a postmodern tradition.

Urban theories introduced after the 1980s cultural turn, and Lefebvre’s spatial reading of modern space, are applicable to the global environment of today. These theories relate to the cartographic representation of the urban space – including that of

⁴⁶ Almodóvar’s representation of this tourist attraction contrasts starkly with Pons’ comparatively pessimistic portrayal of Gaudi’s cathedral; openly criticized on screen by unimpressed Catalan onlookers.

the cinematic city. The fluid metropolis in *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Barcelona (un mapa)* is mirrored by the equally unfixed human landscape anatomically explored in *La piel que habito*. Generally speaking,

[a]cts of mapping are creative, sometimes anxious, moments in coming to knowledge of the world, and the map is both the spatial embodiment of knowledge and a stimulus to further cognitive engagements (Cosgrove 1999, 2).

CHAPTER FOUR

A postmodern analysis of voluntary historical amnesia and present-day nostalgia as conflicting yet interrelated concepts in two films by Almodóvar and in Pons' *Carícies*

Introduction: A historical background to *nostalgia* and how this theme relates to the cinema in focus

The cartographic exploration of a cinema that both connects and contrasts the Spanish and Catalan pasts with the global present (despite the fact that both filmmakers have proven reluctant to acknowledge this tendency) is in this chapter followed by an analysis of nostalgia as a driving force that propels the plots forward in Almodóvar's neorealist *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, the politically insightful *La flor de mi secreto*¹ (which moves from macro-level to local or domestic level when it interweaves global and national politics, and the politicized situation within the domestic sphere in its additional focus on a marital crisis), and Pons' largely dystopic urban drama *Carícies*. The geographical and socio-historical connection established in films analysed in the previous chapter is here thus taken to a more abstract level when there is a general feeling of loss and unease among characters in all three films, which becomes a "bittersweet longing"² communicated to the viewer more, or less, clearly. In a thesis concerned with Madrid's and Barcelona's departure from a troublesome past and the subsequent propelling of these cities into an at once liberating and confusing postmodern present, it is important to theorize and to, as far as possible, concretize the

¹ Note that *Volver* is particularly imbued with nostalgia but given that this film will be discussed more in depth in chapter 6, it will not be treated in the current chapter.

² "Nostalgia", *The Free Dictionary*, last modified 2014, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/nostalgia>

terms *nostalgia* and *melancholia* with regard to the films under analysis. In all of them, nostalgia and its interlinked melancholia become sentiments that have a dampening effect on the characters. These are conditions or notions that operate on several different levels, as will be seen in upcoming scene analyses. The protagonists experience disconcerting and conflicting emotions that influence the way they act and that impact on each film's plot development. Importantly, these emotions are not limited to the films selected for analysis, but they would reflect feelings among Spaniards (including Catalans) in general, who may feel at loss in a bewildering postmodernity which bears little resemblance with the, in certain aspects, more stable past. With this in mind, it could be held that Almodóvar's and Pons' cinematic repertoires generally acquire deeper historical and socio-political significance. This view corresponds with Caragh Wells' stance against the idea that "nostalgic, and hence sentimental, responses to the [Spanish] past ... fail to serve any progressive political agenda" (Wells 2008, 282). Quite on the contrary, the nostalgic sentiment that runs as a troubling undercurrent in some of the films explored in this thesis may be unavoidable, triggered by Spain's rapid move into a new, democratic era. Although, as suggested and evidenced earlier, neither filmmaker claims to have a political agenda³, the nostalgia evoked on screen receives deeper connotations if one considers it to be an effect of concurrent globalizing times. This not easily defined nostalgia may also be caused by Spain now finding itself

forced to "camp in time," that is, to acknowledge the dialectics of history and to recognize the traces of the past that linger on within the present and cannot be entirely eradicated (Wells 2008, 282).

In the current chapter, the theme of nostalgia creates a painful dialogue not only between the past and the present but, as a result, also between the centre and the margin. In the case of Almodóvar, the latter is particularly true in terms of his recurring "contrasting link" between urban habitat and rural village, a dialogue which is anything but smooth and unproblematic. In terms of the recent history of Spain, the filmmaker himself has repeatedly suggested that, rather than the previous Franco regime, it may be his own childhood memories that are the subject of his nostalgic gaze. More specifically, in a candid 1994 interview with Strauss, Almodóvar argues that,

[e]n mis películas, nunca he hablado directamente de mi infancia pero ... guardo de este periodo de la vida una sensación de aislamiento y soledad (Strauss 2001 (1994), 38).

³ See the second footnote of the thesis introduction.

Still, it is the yearning for a mental and physical⁴ “elsewhere” that makes it so difficult for Almodóvar’s protagonists (and perhaps for Spaniards in general) to wholly embrace their ever more global present. While they are seemingly steeped in a transformative postmodernity that generally cares little about the past, in his films the protagonists themselves (particularly the elderly, as seen in both *¿Qué he hecho...!!* and *La flor de mi secreto*) find no apparent contentment until they have returned to the village at least once throughout the visual narrative. Their stay is either temporary or permanent, which partly corresponds with Bauman’s opinion concerning postmodernity that “[o]ne person’s home ground is another person’s hostile environment” (Bauman 1995, 130).⁵ In the case of ultimately city-bound Gloria in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* and Leo in *La flor de mi secreto*, their urban fate is not without frets and stresses but their (unscreened) future is hopefully not as gloomy as their present witnessed on screen.

As will be evidenced, in Pons’ cinema nostalgia is not as apparent as in Almodóvar’s, and nor does it seem to be a sentiment as acutely felt as amongst the Almodóvarian protagonists. And yet, when it does occur, a somewhat contradictory and different type of nostalgia lingers also in Pons’ films. This is most definitely the case in *Carícies*. Nostalgia is here paired with several interrelated, negative themes: not only individual feelings of dis-ease but, indeed, urban malaise on a more all-encompassing level. The negative narrative undertone stems largely from the flawed communication between the protagonists. It can thus be assumed that aspects of urban existence trigger nostalgic outcomes. The aggression that hinders the communication between the film characters could be interpreted as a type of defence mechanism that prevents them from reaching out to one another in a constructive (and ultimately healthy) manner.⁶

Worth noting here is that the sense of nostalgia evoked in *Carícies* is quite different from what would later be the case in *Barcelona (un mapa)*. In the latter, a perhaps rather commonplace nostalgic longing away is indirectly sensed behind the repulsion amongst the protagonists in terms of how they perceive Barcelona’s (post)modern and mainly

⁴ That is to say, it is also time and place/space related.

⁵ With regard to nostalgia as it relates to “place”, it could also be held that “place while existing within space and being what we may call its lived manifestation, at the same time creates the parameters by which humans may experience their spatiality as something beyond a theoretical abstraction.” Nathan Richardson, *Constructing Spain: The Re-Imagination of Space and Place in Fiction and Film, 1953-2003* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2012). 2. In other words, place is not necessarily geographical, but it can be related to space and thus become an abstract concept.

⁶ Nostalgic sentiments can similarly be sensed in other films making up his repertoire, such as *Morir (o no)* – where Pons explores the fluid landscape between life and death –, in *Barcelona (un mapa)*, where it becomes apparent in the references to the struggle for Catalan independence, and in *Amor idiota*, where the risqué sexual relationship between two lovers within an urban setting seems to reflect a human need for understanding and interaction in a generally inhospitable environment. Ventura Pons, “*Barcelona (un mapa)*,” (Spain 2007).

post-Olympic architecture. However, any noticeable bittersweet nostalgic sentiment collides with more concrete recollections of the Franco regime, as evidenced in main character Ramon's voiced ruminations in an opening scene:

Yo por la noche no puedo pegar ojo. Tengo miedo de morirme mientras duermo. Y sueño, sueño mucho. Últimamente sueño con la guerra. Con el día que acabó la guerra, sobre todo.⁷ Dejé de creer en Dios en la guerra, mientras oía explotar las bombas. Cuantas más ruinas tanto menos creía yo en Dios. Rezar sería una hipocresía (Pons 2007).

The recent Catalan past that Pons calls forth memories of in his 2007 film, is deeply anxiety-ridden. And still, just like in the case of Almodóvar's Madrid, where the protagonists generally engage in a love-hate relationship with their capital,⁸ the antagonistic feelings also on the part of Pons' protagonists towards the now all the more globalized city of Barcelona trigger a sensed wish to escape to another era in Catalonia's aesthetic development (alternatively, the wish never acted upon is for select protagonists in this film to physically abandon the Iberian Peninsula altogether).⁹

As suggested earlier, the less aggressive type of nostalgia that becomes a lingering theme or notion in several of Almodóvar's films from the mid-1980s onwards reflects equally much a complex narrative interplay between past and present and a reluctance among some protagonists to fully embrace the ever more globalized urban space they have been hurled into. The capital within which confines they dwell has been subjected to radical changes occurring at what may seem breakneck speed – given Spain's comparatively rapid move from dictatorship to democracy. This leads to an inability amongst these characters to fully accept their transformed physical space and era. Thus, nostalgia is repeatedly at work in the films, and it has a partly "protective" or, rather, dulling effect on the screened citizens. Svetlana Boym highlights, in terms of the common occurrence of melancholia¹⁰ and nostalgia in societies undergoing major changes and transitions, that

⁷ The response is: *Las guerras no acaban nunca, Ramon. Se suceden unas a otras, pero no se acaban nunca.*

⁸ This has been explored in depth in two articles by Marvin D'Lugo: "Almodóvar's City of Desire" (1991) and "El extraño viaje alrededor del cine de Almodóvar" (2004).

⁹ The link between Barcelona and other southern-European capitals is reflected in the city's common attribute as a "Paris of the South." Joan Ramon Resina, *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity: Rise and Decline of an Urban Image* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). 41.

¹⁰ Ricoeur goes as far as to equal melancholia with insanity, and he distinguishes between "mourning" and "melancholia" by asserting that "unlike mourning, in which it is the universe that seems impoverished and empty, in melancholia it is the ego that finds itself in desolation: it succumbs to the blows of its own devaluation, its own accusation, its own condemnation, its own abasement." Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). 72-73 and 75.

[n]ostalgia inevitably reappears as a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals (Boym 2001, xiv).

Aggressivity, too, can be seen as a defence mechanism amongst citizens at a time and in a place where, metaphorically, the lines of communication have been severed, as will be demonstrated with regard to *Carícies*. An interlinked sense of nostalgia becomes yet another way for the “denizens of” a “postmodern habitat” with a “rootless and inconclusive existence” (Smith 1999, 150) to fend off ground-breaking societal changes.

A definition of nostalgia

Nostalgia has been defined as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past.”¹¹ And from a Spanish perspective, this may be a feeling which:

tiene como impulso motivador la memoria ennobecedora de un segmento del pasado que, percibido desde el presente, aparece como cualitativamente mejor que el actual (Navajas 1993, 109).

While this is true, in Almodóvar’s cinema, his characters’ melancholic yearning is not so much connected to a pre-democratic past (the mere thought seems absurd) as to a more tranquil place that serves as a refuge from contemporary urban frenzy. Thus, rather, the longing that eats away at these protagonists seems not to be linked to a specific moment in time. The bygone era towards which nostalgic sentiments is commonly directed is, figuratively, not necessarily gone altogether or a thing of the past in Almodóvar’s films, where a more appealing alternative to city life becomes the slow pace enjoyed in the rural village. Such an even everyday rhythm contrasts with the urban stress to such an extent that the characters’ return to the village may come across as a return to another era altogether. The nostalgic sentiments sensed by individuals inhabiting Almodóvar’s screened universe are ultimately both time- and place-related, although the time longed for is abstract and undefined. Their nostalgia becomes an aspect of an abstract memory-scape rather than being related to a specific period in Spain’s recent history. This thought corresponds with Smith’s astute observation with regard to Spaniards and their past that “[i]f the past is another country, then Spaniards are frequent visitors” (Smith 2006a, 11).

¹¹ “Definition of nostalgia in English”, Oxford Dictionaries: Language matters, last modified 2014, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/nostalgia>

Historical amnesia as it relates to nostalgia

Paired with the nagging sense of nostalgia that lingers in the cinema of both filmmakers is the interlinked aspect of a voluntary – and ultimately collective – historical amnesia. This amnesia can in more theoretical terms be compared to the idea of forgetting as a “disturbing threat that lurks in the background of the phenomenology of memory and of the epistemology of history” (Ricoeur 2004, 412). With this in mind, Almodóvar’s and Pons’ tendency to push faster into the global present by generally “ignoring” Spain’s historical past in their cinema gains broader significance. Their narrative preferences relating to the country’s past also seem to correspond with Bauman’s less sweeping remark that it may be hard for the postmodern individual to

“reject out of hand” the “enticing offers” of “[a]nnulling the past, ‘being born again’, acquiring a different and more attractive self while discarding the one that is old, worn out and no longer wanted” (Bauman 2008, 14).

As an officially recognized concept, collective amnesia was “enforced” by politicians of the newly democratic Spain of the mid-1970s to 1980s as a “national tranquilizer” to avoid re-opening the many wounds related to the memories of a repressive and partly belligerent past. As noted by Andrew Rigby, “[i]n the Spanish case, this decision to ignore the past, this pact of oblivion, was made by elites to ensure political stability” (Rigby 2001, 2). In saying this, Rigby also acknowledges that common Spaniards could have benefitted from the process of forgetting to which they were subjected after Franco:

... this desire to cover up the past can also be the wish of people at the grassroots. This is particularly so if many of them share a past that they would rather forget because of their active involvement in, or complicity with, the evil that was perpetrated in their name (Rigby 2001, 2).¹²

In a similar vein, Ofelia Ferrán stresses that the Spanish *pacto de olvido*, or the common Spanish expression

“echar en olvido” is useful for understanding some aspects of how post-Franco Spain has dealt with the past, for it holds remembering and forgetting in tension, without fully resolving the contradiction (Ferrán 2007, 24).

¹² And Labanyi, in turn, equals this rupture with the past to a “leap” into modernity.” She importantly argues that the “pact of oblivion” has become such a commonplace because it allows the transition to be seen as a break with the past, masking – conveniently for both political Right and Left – the fact that it was effected by politicians from within the former Francoist state apparatus.” Jo Labanyi, “Memory and Modernity in Democratic Spain,” *Poetics Today* 28, no. 1 (2007): 94.

In other words, there is a confusion stemming from wanting to forget but needing to remember yet being forced to forget or repress the memories of a stifling past that is still very much present in the minds of off-screen Spanish survivors. Also, this historical past has led Spaniards to embrace a new or reshaped identity as they have embarked on a democratic era. A real parallel can be drawn to former Nazi Germany in which numerous citizens were actively involved in the totalitarian regime, often seeking recruitment within the official machinery to stay afloat during a harsh economical and socio-political climate. In 1930s and 1940s Germany, the doctrine and its ideals were often considered sound at the time. What the phenomenon of either voluntary or enforced historical amnesia tells us then, is that it is a complex phenomenon generally linked to a history of involvement with a national regime and its cause. This cause may subsequently be rejected by new political doctrines and by citizens living in the affected society (the rejection is either voluntarily or a result of a changing political climate, as in the case of Spain). The act of remembering is either so painful or so “stifling” that alternative ways of “erasing” or attempting to forget these memories are sought.¹³

Again, as regards Almodóvar, his personal reasons for distancing himself from the Spanish pre-democratic past in his cinema and to almost completely break with this former period¹⁴ does not prevent his protagonists from being haunted by a specific time gone by, or to yearn for another place or space. Examples of this are repeated references to the Franco regime in *Carne trémula* and the constant urban-rural dichotomy or interplay in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, *La flor de mi secreto*, and *Volver* in particular. The almost tangible nostalgia felt by the film characters is triggered by a merging of past and present, which is generally reflected in juxtaposed images from a both run-down and sophisticated Madrid, and from the rural village.

Almodóvar’s appropriation of *nostalgia* with all that that entails

At first glance the nostalgia sensed in some of Almodóvar’s films could be misinterpreted as directed towards a repressive yet relatively safe and predictable Franco society – perhaps especially given that, as noted earlier, these nostalgic sentiments mainly haunt his elderly protagonists who would have lived through the dictatorship had they been real individuals of flesh and blood. However, and to reiterate, it would on reflection appear that the surfacing nostalgia at odds with the global image rendered on screen stems from a more general longing back to a less speedy present when

¹³ Again, see Labanyi’s comment with regard to this phenomenon, in the previous footnote.

¹⁴ His plots develop in an era in which the characters move into the global future in gradual concert with the off-screen spatial and social development of Madrid – and Barcelona.

everyday life was less stressful and hectic.¹⁵ This would trigger an identity confusion related to a spatial and mental upheaval (and, as a result, a sense of un-belonging) amongst Spaniards on the whole. On screen, a specific example of this can be seen in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, where the transient times that form a part of Spain's democratic era are reflected in the film's narrative connection to the 1960s. At a time when the rural village no longer offered a feasible alternative to the more dynamic urban lifestyle, Spain saw an increasing number of people flocking to the cities in search of employment and a new way of life. According to Sally Faulkner,

[i]f political and social transformation is a consequence of urbanisation, then immigration from the country to the city is the most fundamental change of twentieth-century Spain ... By the 1960s the conflicts between the previous glorification of rural life and current encouragement of migration to urban centres became acute (Faulkner 2006, 5).

A film that ultimately takes place in the 1980s, *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* narratively draws on the period of real Spanish rural exodus and a corresponding inflated urban population. The neorealist aspects of this on-screen drama, referred to earlier in the thesis, have been explored by critics such as D'Lugo, Torres Hortelano, Pavlović, Triana-Toribio, Mercedes Maroto Camino, and Lara Anderson. Almodóvar himself has acknowledged the film's neorealism on several occasions and throughout the plot development he paints an altogether bleak urban picture. The precarious situation that pushed villagers towards the city centres are in this film partly corresponded by an almost equally dire everyday life in Madrid, where financial pressure, cramped and mediocre living conditions, and generally fraught human relationships conform to neorealist filmic criteria and also accurately reflect the situation in off-screen Spain at the time.¹⁶ Faced with such urban drawbacks, the initial enthusiasm of these national migrants¹⁷ was gradually dampened. An inner battle

¹⁵ This nostalgia that is related to time rather than place corresponds with the idea that nostalgia, although it appears to be "a longing for a place", is actually "a yearning for a different time - the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams." Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," *The Hedgehog Review* (2007): 8.

¹⁶ Smith notes, regarding "issues like unemployment, violence and privatization", that "even the Spanish city is... not immune to the global 'flows' which have dislocated and evacuated urban life." Paul Julian Smith, *The Moderns: Time, Space, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Spanish Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). 109.

¹⁷ And, as noted by Richardson, "the ever-accelerating pace of creative destruction reshaping Spanish space and place in the latter half of the twentieth century was a secular phenomenon. It was economically driven and often politically guided... Postwar rebuilding, urban immigration, shantytown sprawl, urbanization plans, and neoliberal speculation coincided with an increasing secularization of Spanish society." Richardson, *Constructing Spain: The Re-Imagination of Space and Place in Fiction and Film, 1953-2003*: 147.

ensued, characterized by a conflicting awareness amongst new city dwellers that the capital offered a more viable existence, yet at the same time their suburban existence in Madrid was stifling and depressing. The wish to break free and return to a safer haven elsewhere thus becomes an aspect of the nostalgic condition experienced also by Almodóvar's screened citizens.¹⁸

It could be argued (rather contradictory it may seem) that the very protagonists are the ones who hinder or slow down Almodóvar in his desire to transport them and their stories into the global present, while he generally disregards the Spanish past. In terms of this "past" (which, again, is not necessarily chronologically specific and which has an impact on the screened present), D'Lugo notes that there is in the films the

construction of a "new past" ... [which] involves ... the appropriation of the language of the old order now turned against itself to constitute a new Spanishness (D'Lugo 1991, 50).

Whether or not the past haunting the characters is a vague territory linked to a specific time period (as primarily seen in *Carne trémula*, where the Franco regime casts a long shadow on both the opening and climactic final scene), the protagonists' recurring battle with nostalgia as they find themselves unable to fully adjust to life in the big city seems to indicate a longing for a time now gone. Such a problematic interplay between a filmmaker who, by all appearances, "favours" historical amnesia in his reluctance to cover pre-democratic times in his cinema, and the persistent feelings of overpowering nostalgia that troubles the characters in the midst of their attempts to come to grips with modern urban life, allows us to witness what Boym has called an "incurable modern condition" or a nostalgia resulting from a "futuristic utopia" (2001, xvi). From a postmodern perspective, Boym's additional claim that "the spread of nostalgia had to do not only with the dislocation in space but also with the changing conception of time" (2007, 12) is readily applicable to the on- and off-screen confusion amongst citizens who in their urban existence experience an undefined sense of loss.

The dissatisfaction with the urban centre that we witness among characters in Almodóvar's cinema may, again, result from individuals generally being hurled into a futuristic "utopia", far too fast. Almodóvar's screened utopia (which at times borders on the dystopic) could be a way to define the post-Franco *Movida* years, where a certain *desencanto*¹⁹ was felt among individuals not yet accustomed to the social freedom that had replaced the repressive yet comparably stable Franco regime, when Spain was largely self-sufficient and closed off to the outside world. *Desencanto*; a sentiment and term explained as,

¹⁸ In this film, there is also migration to and from Germany.

¹⁹ Literally "disenchantment."

aplicado al peculiar efecto político-cultural causado en España, más que por la transición a un régimen democrático-liberal, por el mismo hecho del fin de la dictadura franquista (Vilarós 1998, 23),

became even more noticeable during the less carefree, more socially aware decades of the mid-1980s and 1990s. The initial euphoria of Spaniards after the demise of Franco had by now been replaced by a more reflective and sombre urban atmosphere. Thus, the “futuristic utopia” (to keep using Boym’s term) that characterized immediately post-Franco Spanish society was a double-edged sword as it was, in fact, a utopia and a dystopia all at once. This is something reflected amongst Almodóvar’s protagonists and is explored more in-depth in the final chapter which analyses the screened city as, alternatively, a utopia and a dystopia. The voluntary amnesia that made itself noticeable in post-Franco Spain is in the current chapter considered to be a phenomenon partly linked to “modern” nostalgia. Hence, historical amnesia does not stand in opposition to nostalgia. Anything but clear-cut, the two concepts, rather, complement one another within a grey zone or an intermediary area.

Nostalgia as a human malady

In her aforementioned in-depth analysis on *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Boym tracks the development of not so much nostalgia as a concept, as the etymological origins of the word. She also sets out to establish when nostalgia was officially recognized as a term carrying real weight. First regarded as a disease that could be cured²⁰, *nostalgia* was later seen as a “public epidemic ... based on a sense of loss not limited to personal history” (Boym 2001, 6). The term *nostalgia* is made up from *nostos* – “return home” or “homecoming” – and “*algia* – longing” (Boym 2001, xiii). The former prefix has also been defined by Milan Kundera as “suffering”.²¹ In his words, “nostalgia is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return.”²² As stated earlier, in today’s society nostalgia could even be regarded a psychological defence mechanism that

²⁰ In Spanish, “nostalgia” has been called “*mal de corazón*” ... “part of nostalgic esperanto” linked to “emerging nations” that “began to insist on their cultural uniqueness.” Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). 12.

²¹ Goodreads Inc. “Goodreads. Milan Kundera>Quotes> Quotable quote”, last accessed 2013, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/125404-the-greek-word-for-return-is-nostos-algos-means-suffering>

²² Ibid.

postmodern individuals resort to as a way of clinging on to the debris from the past in the midst of a rapid global tide.²³

It has been hinted at also in the current section heading, that nostalgia was initially “perceived as a European disease” (Boym 2001, 17) linked to the advent of a modernized industrial era which triggered a “longing for the slower rhythms of the past” (Boym 2001, 16). Indeed, the screened nostalgia that influences the actions of Almodóvarian characters like Leo Macías and her aging mother in *La flor de mi secreto*, as well as the urban misfit of a grandmother in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, apparently stems not so much from a longing back to a certain historical era or one particular place, as from an “anti-feeling” among film characters unhappy with their current situation and the Madrid lifestyle. The screened capital battles with drugs and crimes and accommodates members from an array of social groups, as well as newly arrived immigrants. In this respect, Madrid’s cultural landscape is comparable to that of any other complex global metropolis today.

All in all, in Almodóvar’s 1990s films, Madrid resembles an ever more multilayered global patchwork that contrasts starkly with the generally more mono-cultural off-screen Spanish society of the pre-democratic era. The nostalgia sensed by some protagonists is here interpreted as an abstract longing, rather than a languishing for a specific time gone by. The native *pueblo* thus comes to symbolize not only a place rich in folkloric charm, but it is also a restorative place where individuals regain the energy required to later return to a metropolis defined by its relentless pace and ensuing impatience between citizens. The village can in Almodóvar’s cinema be considered “the visible re-presentation of an *elsewhere*, the utopia of nature” (Lefebvre 2003, 26). It contrasts starkly with the often more dystopic urban habitat and, as a result, proves the only viable place to linger for members of the older generation. In the rural hinterlands inhabited by a network of individuals who relate to one another in a mutually respectful manner, the elderly protagonists can find peace at last. This is far from the case regarding the common breakdown in communication between global city-dwellers, and which is cinematically conveyed through e.g. the strained relationship between Rosa and her mother in *La flor de mi secreto*, and the sour marriage between the rural turned urban spouses in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, who crumble under financial pressure.

Almodóvar hence does not have to stretch far back in time to paint a realistic cinematic picture of urban discontent among characters looking for an escape. Rather,

²³ According to Bauman, “[c]ontemporary cities are ... the stages or battlegrounds on which global powers and stubbornly local meanings and identities meet, clash, struggle and seek a satisfactory, or just bearable, settlement – a mode of cohabitation that is hoped to be a lasting peace but as a rule proves only to be an armistice...” Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006). 81.

the protagonists are convincing through their individual stories and their expressions resulting from feelings of environmental malaise. Theirs can be seen as smaller narratives symbolic of a grander national longing for another space and time, to a different reality for a Spanish people who have now entered a global era yet are not quite capable of letting go of the past. In Boym's words,

[u]nlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory (2001, xvi).

Postmodern cinema, *collage cities* and the link to the films analysed

Before analysing the three films, which are compared with regard to the interrelated concepts of historical amnesia and nostalgia, we begin by theorizing briefly on how postmodernity (or “‘liquid modern’ times”)²⁴ and nostalgia are cinematically linked.²⁵

Postmodern cinema has been defined as:

a cinema that comes after ... the momentous changes of western society ... such as the progressive deindustrialization of the economy, the increasing globalization of culture, the decline of the communist ideology and the falling down of the ‘iron curtain.’ As is clear, there is no inaugurating date, but a long sequence of changes that matured into a new socio-cultural condition (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2003, 10).

The postmodern city can be read as a “city text” or as an increasingly complex, fragmented yet multi-layered “ever-shifting text” (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2003, 1-2) that accommodates various Lefebvrian spatial layers which oscillate between social, absolute and abstract space (and various “produced” sub-spaces in between).²⁶ The visual collage or palimpsest that defines such an urban space; which is fluid and unpredictable rather than fixed in a more static pattern, also spills over into a postmodern cinema characterized by a crisscrossing between past and present and

²⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2008). 17.

²⁵ Faulkner additionally argues that “...with its inevitable focus on the visible, cinema seems predisposed to nostalgia, because the visible is always potentially reducible to mere surface.” Sally Faulkner, *Literary Adaptations in Spanish Cinema* (London: Tamesis, 2004). 163.

²⁶ As regards these spatial layers or levels within a more, or less, concrete urban habitat, Neil Smith notes that “Lefebvre’s reluctance, in deference to the openness of space, to allow this production of ‘levels’ to crystallize into anything approaching coherent spatial entities forecloses our understanding of the political processes by which social assumptions are written into the scaled cartography of everyday places.” In the introduction to Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). xiv.

between urban and rural areas. The fragmentary aspects of films by both Almodóvar and Pons are partly achieved through the transitioning of protagonists through different spaces and time periods. All this paired with an apparently haphazard coming together of individuals from contrasting backgrounds, steeps the explored cinema in a postmodern tradition. Harvey notes that:

[f]ragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or ‘totalizing’ discourses ... are the hallmark of postmodernist thought (Harvey 1989, 9).

His additional comparison of today’s urban landscape to the aforementioned *collage city* (Harvey 1989, 42), which is the aesthetic result of the many architectural styles that co-habit in today’s global cities, also defines postmodernity – on a purely physical level. In the films analysed, a more abstract postmodern collage is also achieved through the constant dichotomy between urban and rural areas. The inner conflict of characters who either leave the city or stay put, mirrors the “schizophrenia” that Harvey includes among postmodernist criteria. This is a schizophrenia which contrasts with modernist “paranoia” (Harvey 1989, 43). With this in mind, it would seem that the collage city referred to here is not strictly limited to the spatial structure of the postmodern city; it may also relate to the fragmented and schizophrenic identity of citizens today. The non-rigid, “fluid” city is both liberating and anxiety-ridden, provoking the appearance of highly ambivalent individuals. Such ambivalence can be compared with what has been called a “postmodern tolerance for plurality, difference and uncertainty” – the latter synonymous with “ambiguity” (Elliott 2007, 8).

Ambiguity and *ambivalence* can, in fact, be considered hallmarks of the cinema of both Almodóvar and Pons. Steeping their plots within a period of postmodernity that strives to cut ties with the past, the filmmakers pave their way for protagonists uncertain of who they are and the role they are supposed to play within an urban environment that has changed at a pace faster than what they seem to have been able to keep up with.²⁷ It is, however, not only the screened citizens who harbour ambivalent feelings towards their urban (or suburban) space. If the metropolis is to be considered a larger organism, it is as if it, too, struggled to find a new identity in the fluid territory between past and present, modernity and postmodernity. The urban landscape is dotted with buildings belonging to different architectural styles, some of which recall epochs which are visualized on screen rather than commented on from a historical perspective. That is to say that any references to history as it is reflected in the cities’ architecture are generally not verbalized in the films (if the buildings are indeed commented on, it is in

²⁷ In Bauman’s words, “[t]he moral self moves, feels and acts in the context of ambivalence and is shot through with uncertainty.” Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1993).

a negative fashion, as seen in *Barcelona (un mapa)*). As in the case of Spain's silent sealing of the *ruptura pactada* (see the first chapter) in relation to its recent past, so too:

Postmodernity represents a break with the modern, it displaces the modernist surgical ambition of social engineering but – in pluralising the social and cultural pursuit of order – runs the risk of 'anything goes' (Elliott 2007, 10).

In other words, rather than being an era positively liberated by its distancing from the past and conveniently self-sufficient as a result, *postmodernity* comes across as a confusing period of chaos on a personal, urban as well as national level – in Spain and abroad. While postmodernity, or *late modernity*, has been called the “ultimate crowning of the modern dream of freedom and of the long and tortuous effort to make the dream come true” (Bauman 1995, 6), it is this very unprecedented freedom that is so hard for citizens today to manage. It is a contradictory sense of freedom only achievable on the condition that each citizen embraces life in a society of fellow strangers, while at the same time they close the page on the past whilst looking to the future. The on-screen nostalgic condition that will henceforth be explored originates partly from an inability of Almodóvar's and Pons' protagonists to, indeed, negate or reject the past (or at least a space or place that evokes Spain of the past), and partly from a corresponding inability amongst these characters to similarly fully comprehend the global present, and to operate with ease within the confines of their urban habitat.²⁸

An analysis of urban dis-ease and an ultimately harmonious final encounter in *Carícies*

Carícies is henceforth analysed from a postmodern perspective and in light of the theme of nostalgia. It has been noted earlier, with regard to *Barcelona (un mapa)*, that the fainter undercurrent of nostalgia sensed in this more recent film of the two, might spring from some characters' rejection of the physical landscape of modern Barcelona and their corresponding longing for another city partly comparable with the Catalan capital (one perhaps less alienating to them). Similarly, and despite the promising film title, *Carícies* “is not a cinematic ‘caress’ of the Catalan capital” either (Faulkner 2004, 73). On the contrary, this film, rather, becomes an orgy in verbal abuse and physical violence between the protagonists against the backdrop of a hostile, generally nocturnal environment. It is not until the very last scene that Pons imbues his narrative with an extraordinary sense of harmony – and, with that, also nostalgic sentiments.

²⁸ That is to say that Pons' nostalgia is not necessarily related to past and present. As noted by Svetlana Boym, “[n]ostalgia is not always about the past: it can be retrospective but also prospective.” Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*: xvi.

As is the case with several of Pons' films, *Carícies*, based on a screenplay by Belbel, follows an episodic plot structure. Steeped in a globalized postmodernity, the film contains themes acutely reflected in our contemporary society. Anything but celebratory of Barcelona, here a sense of urban hostility comes to the fore in the omnipresent film camera's repeated, fast-paced voyeuristic mapping of nocturnal streets. The film's opening scene is strikingly similar to that of Carlos Saura's stark *Taxi* (1996) set in Madrid, where the initial focus is on a taxi gliding past the intersecting avenues of Calle Alcalá and the Gran Vía (thematically, also this is a disturbing film given its very graphic representation of racism and xenophobia in the contemporary metropolis). Similarly, the opening scene of *Carícies* features fast-moving nocturnal traffic and all eleven episodes of the film exploit "fluid temporality, a Barcelona setting and a structure of interlocking vignettes" (Faulkner 2004, 72). Both films produce a remarkably visceral effect on the viewer. This is achieved through the full narrative and visual exploration of urban malaise linked primarily to the aggressive communication between the characters. This is particularly true in *Carícies*, a film "set in a Barcelona that is both familiar... and abstracted (a chaotic metropolis at the end of millennium)" (Pavlović et al 2009, 194) and whose plot development revolves around the generally frustrated interaction between eleven protagonists who all come back twice in the narrative; each character appears in two consecutive scenes.

The fragmented and frantic, jagged dialogues; with protagonists who generally speak *at* rather than *with* each other, and who draw apparent pleasure from insulting one another, also seems to correspond with postmodern trends. Thus, the postmodern fragmentation referred to earlier is here concretely mirrored by the flawed interaction between each set of characters, in all episodes but one. Also, although Barcelona itself is not altogether hostile under normal circumstances, the fast-paced visual portrayal of the urban space makes for a distorted and unwelcoming urban atmosphere: tilted camera movements create a dystopic effect and perfectly underscore the frustration between the characters (Pons has described his shooting style as such: "La cámara agitada, nerviosa, desasosegada, inquieta, llega a la ciudad en busca de personajes") (Campo Vidal 2004, 146). These protagonists have lost their footing not only within their urban space but also with regard to the way they relate to their fellow citizens; including spouses, lovers engaged in an extramarital affair, sons and fathers, homeless men and their alienated ex-wives, hooligans, daughters and fathers, sons and mothers, and elderly women striking up an ultimately disheartening "friendship" within the alienating environment of a retirement home. They engage with one another in a spiteful and mentally crippling manner. According to George,²⁹

²⁹ George shares further important insights also regarding Pons: David George, *Sergi Belbel and Catalan Theatre: Text, Performance and Identity* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2010).

[w]hat is most striking about the characters in this and other Belbel plays is the violent nature of their relationships with one another, within a hostile and alienating environment. Cruelty, interspersed with moments of tenderness, characterises a typical Belbel text (George 2002, 91).³⁰

The painful dialogues between the protagonists here resemble a verbal *staccato* in their lack of flow and, rather, fragmented and unsynchronized sentences. Their language is notably harsh, and responses are staggered or out of synch with the statements delivered. Also, during their verbal discourse the characters realize that they never really had anything to say to one another and their words might have been better left unsaid. Henceforth a flow of verbal abuse and passive-aggressive behaviour in the film:

“I didn’t say I have nothing to say to you. I said we haven’t” ... “My baby came along. That stupid little girl! Imagine how I hated my disgusting daughter!” ... “I had a wife.” “I know.” “You don’t know anything.” ... “You talk and talk, and I don’t understand you.” ... “Your legacy ends with you.” ... “You’ll never change. You’re a sadist. Why have you turned out like this? You can’t go around frightening women. If you frighten me, I’m sure you frighten others too.” ... “Can anyone understand you?” “I don’t think so.” ... “You haven’t answered me. How can we waste so much time? You call me almost every day, insisting I should come over. I don’t know why I stay so long. I had to stand an unbearable dinner. Excellent, of course. But sluggish and full of your empty talk. I don’t like going blank. It makes me sick.” ... “I ask for coffee and you don’t make it. And time goes on. It’s all useless because you’re actually waiting. And I’m waiting. That’s tiring and it hurts. It ruins us” (Pons 1997).³¹

Not only does there seem to be a postmodern illness seeping through the narrative and poisoning the characters’ mutual relationships, but a similar feeling of discontentment toward the Catalan metropolis (or any other) is reflected in statements like the following:

I’m happy with my job and getting away from this lousy city ... Today I looked at myself in the mirror. I hadn’t for days, or maybe weeks, or maybe 10 years. The supermarket got me in a bad mood. Prices go up so fast. I’d like to climb the stairs of this decrepit building that fast (Pons 2007).

The minimalist narrative typical of Pons’s theatrical *Niche Cinema* (Smith 2003, 134) thus sets the stage for a postmodern metropolitan discourse. As compared to *Barcelona*

³⁰ His statement echoes Faulkner’s: “The alienation and solitude of the characters which surface in literal and figurative violence are accounted for by their occupation of a hostile urban environment.” Faulkner, *Literary Adaptations in Spanish Cinema*: 74.

³¹ The original statements in Catalan have here been rendered in English.

(*un mapa*) whose partly time-related cartographic features are part of the plot and character development, in *Carícies* a link is generally not drawn to the past.³² Rather, the film is firmly anchored in a speedy and alienating global present.³³ Nevertheless, despite their mutual verbal abuse, the protagonists' almost symbiotic relationships point to their ultimate inability to let go of the one they harass the most. The outcome is either a continued rejection of their fellow citizens – or a final reconciliation. The final scene seems to suggest the latter: the beaten-up husband introduced in the opening scene finds temporary refuge from his wife when he approaches an older neighbour (Rosa Maria Sardá) in the apartment above. The man asks for a cup of olive oil to facilitate his wife's cooking – and suddenly it seems as if their initial verbal and physical abuse had never happened. In the elderly neighbour's maternal treatment of the man's almost Christlike facial wounds (a Samaritan gesture that reminds of the way Marina Osorio had cared for her hostage keeper in *Átame*), this figurative mother takes instant pity on the man. In doing so she demonstrates that she is, against all odds, capable of human warmth. Such human affection: with her gestures represented in slow motion against the backdrop of a nocturnal Barcelona no longer filmed at breakneck speed, is sadly generally lacking among the eleven protagonists of the film. Indeed, affection does not even define this woman's relationship with her own son and so the adult man cared for becomes a substitute for this younger son; their interaction symbolic of human, and humane, intervention.

A dual sense of nostalgia is noted not only in the words recited from a poem midway through the film³⁴, but also in the final song by María del Mar Bonet which accompanies the end credits and is heavy in melancholy. The unbearable longing expressed in two scenes, concerns

characters who yearn for some kind of repositioning (their own personal territorialization) both physically and mentally, but inevitably they remain placeless (Pujol 2010, 181).

³² In saying that, the following statement from the film seems to be an indirect allusion to Franco: "What If this were the last time we saw each other? You're mad, and madmen are strong. Too strong to die before their time." Ventura Pons, "*Carícias*," (Spain 1997).

³³ Ferrán notes a "postmodern emphasis on the impossibility of any direct access to the past ... echoed within the dynamics of trauma, where direct recall of a past experience may not be available, despite the fact that the effects of that traumatic event relentlessly persist." Ofelia Ferrán, *Working Through Memory: Writing and Remembrance in Contemporary Spanish Narrative* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007). 49. Indeed, there is a noteworthy absence of any more specific references to the (Spanish) past in *Carícies*.

³⁴ An excerpt from the poem reads as follows: "Night is the motor of eloquent silence, where time is no time, where place is no place at all, where darkness is radiant, and nothing is impossible." Ventura Pons, *Carícies*.

A nostalgia triggered by mourning for what could have been a better life situation is visualized among characters in these brief yet intense human encounters and dialogues. As highlighted by Braidotti,

[f]ear, anxiety and nostalgia are clear examples of the negative emotions involved in the project of detaching ourselves from familiar forms of identity. Achieving a post-nationalist sense of European identity requires the disidentification from established, nation-bound points of reference (Braidotti 2006, 89).

The protagonists of *Carícies* – whose city is almost interchangeable with any other global metropolis³⁵ and to a much greater extent than the landmark-ridden *Barcelona (un mapa)* – are similarly disengaged from one another and, in a sense, also from themselves. Hence, they struggle to find an individual identity in a multicultural modern society in which identities are multiple and ever shifting. The occasional emotional outbursts of the elderly woman introduced in the second and third episode (Julieta Serrano) are dripping with sentimentality, but rather than reflecting any genuine feelings, her words cause the viewer and the screened daughter alike, to cringe. In this sense, these nostalgic utterances feel false and inauthentic. Can this nostalgia, however, be defined as a disease as such? It certainly can if it is a sentiment triggered by the falsehood and hypocrisy that partly define our times.

Rather, it is the final scene that has been called “explicitly nostalgic” (Faulkner 2004, 73) and that indeed reflects real sentiments between two characters who interact on a level of mutual comprehension and who seem to genuinely care for one another. Faulkner has commented on the slow pace of this last scene and the harmony of the suddenly quiet pace.³⁶ Reading the scene from a Lefebvrian perspective, she argues that the two characters through whom we exit the narrative engage with one another within an “absolute space” – defined by Lefebvre as a space over which “reigns phallic solitude and the self-destruction of desire. The representation of sex thus takes the place of sex itself” (Lefebvre 1991, 309). Correspondingly, in the final scene of *Carícies* a man and a woman finally connect but this connection is mental rather than physical, and, again, it has religious connotations. The film ends on a positive note as Pons leaves us with the hope that it is ultimately possible to reconnect with fellow citizens in the global – and what has been called “humanist” (Faulkner 2004, 78) – city of today. A fruitful

³⁵ It has been noted that “while Barcelona as a city is recognizable in the film ... at no point do we see its most idiosyncratic monuments.” Faulkner, *Literary Adaptations in Spanish Cinema*: 73.

³⁶ With regard to this, Pons has importantly explained that “el juego narrativo se invierte. La cámara se serena y sale despacio por el balcón a contemplar la calle de forma relajada y tranquila porque, por fin, ha encontrado lo que buscaba: caricias.” Anabel Campo Vidal, *Ventura Pons: la mirada libre* (Madrid: Sociedad General de Autores y Editores and Fundación Autor, 2004). 147.

dialogue is thus finally established between two individuals hitherto lost – “dos seres capaces de acariciarse, de darse amor”³⁷ – which may bide well for others too.

Nostalgia as a postmodern element in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* and *La flor de mi secreto*

In Pons’ cinema there is an exploration of more, or less, abstract spaces. This “reflects less the archival nostalgia” for these landscapes than

a reclamation of past urban spaces and practices in such a way that they are brought into juxtaposition – into spatial dialogue – with those of the present (Roberts 2012, 23).

In his four films particularly explored in this thesis, his protagonists remain in the city and there is never a physical return to a rural area (or to any other place offering an alternative to the urban environment). On the contrary, in Almodóvar’s cinema a concrete link between city and village is made repeatedly. This is seen in the two films selected for analysis in this chapter. The narrative interplay between city and country in both *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* and *La flor de mi secreto* serves not only to connect these places, but it also reflects their inherent opposites. Indeed, the contrast between city and countryside is already reflected in the very word *country*, “derived from *contra* (against, opposite)” (Williams 1973, 207).

Importantly, these two films are not the only ones within Almodóvar’s repertoire which partly revolve around urban alienation and nostalgia. Indeed, apart from the very much nostalgic thematic of *Volver*, also *Átame*, *Tacones lejanos*, and *Kika* establish a somewhat painful dialogue between city and country – and so does, to a certain extent, *La ley del deseo*.³⁸ In the latter, however, more concrete references to the past are deemed essential as a way to rescue main character Pablo Quintero from the amnesia he has fallen prey to. Still, *¿Qué he hecho...!!* and *La flor...* are particularly important to explore more closely here in terms of their inherently melancholic nostalgic value.³⁹ These films also share several commonalities, of which the main is the complex dialogue between

³⁷ Ibid., 146–47.

³⁸ The same holds true for *Los abrazos rotos*, where the protagonists find temporary relief from an oppressive urban situation, on a trip to Famara on Lanzarote.

³⁹ Smith also speaks of the inherent nostalgic value in *Hable con ella*, “a film which invites an emotional participation which transcends its overt narrative” and he defines the nostalgia of the film as linked to “the mourning of beauty.” Paul Julian Smith, *Spanish Visual Culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006). 9–10 and 16.

city and countryside and the longing for a change of scenery resulting in some characters' physical departure from the city.⁴⁰

City versus village in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*

As has been noted, in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, the focus on a Spanish migrant family settling in the Madrid Barrio de la Concepción can be read as a small-scale visual reference to the actual mass migration of rural villagers to the Spanish centres in the 1960s. A number of urban pull factors seemed to clearly outweigh the many disadvantages of city living amongst real Spanish citizens. Inserting the film into a socio-political context, Triana-Toribio's argues that it

seems tailor-made for studying Spain after Franco: a modern, industrial consumer society haunted by its rural past, the uneven economic growth of the 1960s that benefited some, a dog-eat-dog world built on the relics of a 'moral' nation, a community with its underclasses of poverty and exploitation of women's labour in the family, are some of the thematic possibilities (Triana-Toribio 1999, 227).

As if in tacit acknowledgement of these historical aspects of the Spanish 1960s, from the very outset of the film Almodóvar introduces the viewer to a bleak urban landscape that is paralleled by the equally dull and monotonous everyday life of housewife Gloria (Maura).⁴¹ While her "divine" name would seem to suggest a bright and harmonious personality, she rather enters the narrative as a washed-out woman weary with everyday life. Gloria's frustrated marital life prompts her to initially engage in an equally frustrated attempt at desperate lovemaking with a stranger, which could have meant a temporary relief from a predictable, loveless existence. This is not to be the case. Gloria survives the urban tedium by sniffing glue and acting as a voyeur during her sexually frivolous neighbour Cristal's intimate engagement with an exhibitionistic client. Gloria's crammed apartment is in a soul-killing neighbourhood featuring several identical apartment blocks.⁴² And nevertheless, physically plain as she may be – indeed almost as drab as her suburban environment – Gloria rather projects mental resilience.

⁴⁰ With reference to three female characters in *La ley del deseo*, Almodóvar has noted that "[h]ay en mí esta especie de nostalgia de la familia, del campo..." Frédéric Strauss, *Pedro Almodóvar: Un cine visceral: Conversaciones con Frédéric Strauss* (Madrid: El País Aguilar, 1994). 110.

⁴¹ The drab Madrid suburb where the main action takes place appears to be at once detached from the city and a part of it. It is also, like the Vallecas neighbourhood in *Volver*, a liminal space occupying a position somewhere between city and countryside.

⁴² Almodóvar has clarified that "[e]l Barrio de la Concepción es un personaje más. Supone la idea que el señor Banús y Franco tenían del confort, un confort sólo digno del proletariado. Es un símbolo muy elocuente de la engañosa comodidad a que había accedido el pueblo español en los sesenta. Una comodidad grotesca, infernal, invisible." Nuria Vidal, *El cine de Pedro Almodóvar* (Madrid: Instituto de la Cinematografía y las Artes Audiovisuales Ministerio de Cultura, 1988). 98.

By the end of the film, she will have killed off her (most likely soon to have been straying) husband in a manner that reminds of the female tactics in Roald Dahl's 1953 *Lamb to the Slaughter*.

Finding herself at a narrative crossroads, Gloria faces the decision of whether to move back to her original village. Like Leo in *La flor de mi secreto* Gloria, too, finally opts for the both liberating and anxiety-ridden continuously urban lifestyle. Although she is far from "una urbanita convencida" (Loew and Luna 2005, 412)⁴³, Gloria remains an urban resident out of forced necessity. Finding no viable future in village life, she conforms to her urban fate despite poor finances and is joined by her youngest son. His final return to the suburban family home after being taken in by a dentist with a sexual predilection for young boys, comes with his undisputed declaration that "Mamá, vengo a quedarme, esta casa necesita un hombre" (Almodóvar 1984). Thus, Gloria's long disenchantment with the city does not lead to her physical departure, and young Miguel's (Miguel Ángel Herranz) resolute (albeit precocious, given his tender age) declaration suggests that there is still hope on the horizon in this open-ended film. On the contrary, Gloria's mother-in-law and oldest son, both ultimately unhappy and adrift in the city, embrace and welcome their mutual nostalgic longing through their final return to the village in the hope that it may lead to an easier existence.

A presumably permanent rural return is hence in this film ultimately presented as a feasible alternative to urban life. The nostalgia acted on by the two characters mentioned earlier corresponds with that triggered by "the rapid pace of industrialization and modernization", which "increased the intensity of people's longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition" (Boym 2001, 16).

The unnamed *pueblo* awaiting at the end of the cinematic horizon can be compared to a "nostalgic simulacrum", as "the pueblo for the urban delinquent Toni becomes as much an alternative to patriarchal law as the city does for his country-born mother" (Richardson 2002, 153). And yet, at the end of the film we are left with the notion that this nostalgic simulacrum (or what has been defined as an "idyllic guise"⁴⁴) is as "real" as are the disenchanting conditions in the Concepción neighbourhood. Here, everyday life comes across as constructed and restricted, as opposed to the simpler and more natural existence in the countryside. In one of the crucial final scenes, the nameless grandmother/mother-in-law, having felt misplaced in the city for quite some time, voices her desire to leave the city in an open conversation with Cristal. With her son

⁴³ This expression has been introduced earlier in the thesis.

⁴⁴ Nathan E. Richardson, *Postmodern Paletos: Immigration, Democracy, and Globalization in Spanish Narrative and Film, 1950-2000* (Cranbury, London and Ontario: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp., 2002). 158.

recently deceased, she needs not delay her departure from Madrid any longer. The dialogue between the two women reads:

Tiene que tener resignación abuela.

Sí, pero ya me quiero ir al pueblo. Yo no quiero morirme en Madrid y que me entierren lejos de casa como a mi pobre hijo y al lagarto⁴⁵ también.

Resignación, abuela.

Gracias, Cristal (Almodóvar 1984).

Resignación is noteworthy in this context. In its English subtitles, the first statement has been translated as “You should take it easy, Gran.” The last time the word is used it has been translated as “I’m sorry, Gran.” More specifically, in English *resignation* has two main meanings applicable to the filmic context: It could mean “departure”, “leaving”, or “retirement.” And it could also take on the meaning of “fatalism”, “acceptance”, “compliance,” and “stoicism”, as in “the acceptance of something undesirable but inevitable.”⁴⁶ In *¿Qué he hecho...!.*, the word would relate to the elderly woman’s abandonment of the city, a space that she has not yet managed to fully adapt to (see Vidal 1988, 89). At the same time, however, it would seem that Cristal’s rather innocent recommendation to her neighbour indirectly refers to Gloria and her need to accept her urban fate even though she crumbles under the burdens of her everyday existence. Her indefinite stay in the city seems to mirror the preference amongst postmodern individuals for a liquid rather than a solid life; symbolized here as the move from modernity to postmodernity, from village to city and, as a result, from stability to a state of flux. This corresponds with Bauman’s declaration that “[c]ity living is a notoriously ambivalent experience. It attracts *and* repels” (Bauman 2007b, 89). In the end, Gloria has mentally distanced herself from the village and, in a way, also from the past as she joins off-screen Spaniards on their continuous transitioning into a new era.

La flor de mi secreto: its socio-political context and a final scene analysis

The narrative content of the urban melodrama⁴⁷ *La flor de mi secreto*,

⁴⁵ The reference is here to a lizard found in the grass near their apartment block and which, reflecting one of the grandmother’s predilections in life, is given the name “Dinero.”

⁴⁶ <https://colleenogrady.com/2021/05/28/115-acceptance-or-resignation-is-there-a-difference/>

⁴⁷ Or what Brenda Comb calls a “postmodern” melodrama. Brenda Comb, “Ambivalent Passion: Pedro Almodóvar’s Postmodern Melodramas” (Masters, The University of British Columbia, 2008), ii.

a work that stands at the chronological midpoint between the director's earliest movies, with their DayGlo emotions and Benzenine-driven plots, and the technically smoother and emotionally subtler films of the past few years (Mendelsohn 2008, 53) [of the 1990s],

is radically different from the plot development of *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*. Here, a more sophisticated Madrid enters the visual narrative, and a plot concerned with contemporary socialist politics features references to the voiced disenchantment with the 1992 Spanish socialist government.⁴⁸ This was a cultural watershed year for Spain when three national events improved the country's reputation abroad and triggered its definite move into the global era. The two main waves of immigration of the 1960s to 1980s are thus no longer in filmic focus, but three of the characters whose urban existence we become privy to also in this film, are villagers turned urbanites. Their mutually intertwined lives in Madrid unfold alongside the urban development, and the city is physically represented as a sophisticated and global space, in touch with the world beyond Spanish borders.

The stylish images of a now less traditional, inner-city Madrid are comparable to the Catalan cityscape in *Carícies*. Nevertheless, while Almodóvar's Madrid in *La flor de mi secreto* generally comes across as bright and appealing, Pons' Barcelona by night would, by contrast, be portrayed as an alienating and hostile place which does not feel accommodating until the very end of the film (all in line with Belbel's original screenplay). Featured in *La flor* ... is a sleek urban architecture which includes a number of postmodern elements where a combination of different buildings lends special character to the urban landscape.⁴⁹ In this postmodern cinematic collage city (defined by Eduardo Subirats as one mirroring a "predilección por los aspectos escenográficos de la construcción edilicia, urbana y paisajística") (Subirats 1991, 175), references to the international market are made through the regular focus on *El País* and its Madrid headquarters. The step into the global era thus distances the visual narrative of *La flor de mi secreto* from the one of *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*. Gone is the drab suburb and welcomed onto the stage is instead a much-transformed Madrid. Into this global picture, Almodóvar inserts postmodern fragments, visualized not only in the clash of structural styles but also in a number of split images where the protagonists are featured in juxtaposed images rather than within one single frame.⁵⁰ This becomes a particularly effective technique in the aforementioned geopolitically important screened

⁴⁸ Despite the unfavourable political climate at the time, González was re-elected for a second term the year after, granting him three more years in power (1993-1996).

⁴⁹ The postmodern style has also been defined as "[c]ollage, diversity, the mystically unrepresentable." "Defining postmodernism", The Electronic Labyrinth, Cristopher Keep, Tim McLaughlin and Robin Parmar, ©1993-2000, <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hf10242.html>

⁵⁰ The fragmented aspect of *Carícies* is verbal rather than visual, as noted earlier with regard to its many broken, unsynchronized dialogues.

representation of a marital split (directly followed by both verbal and visual references to the Croatian city of Split)⁵¹ where protagonist Leo and her NATO-serving husband are literally pushed away from each other by the frames that separate them. This reinforces the psychological turmoil that defines their marriage and adds yet another, small-scale, political dimension to the story.⁵²

An additional schizophrenic split is achieved through Almodóvar's mental exploration of Leo's troubled mind. D'Lugo declares that:

[D]esde el momento en que se nos presenta Leo, es evidente que ha perdido el norte de su vida. ... la trama de *La flor* enfatiza la serie de espacios fragmentados que se entrelazan a través del movimiento de la protagonista. El más prominente de estos espacios es el locus cosmopolita de Madrid, aquel mundillo de editoriales y periódicos en el cual Leo, la niña de provincia, se ha hecho una exitosa novelista del género rosa bajo el pseudónimo de Amanda Gris. Aunque ha alcanzado cierta fama, Leo todavía se siente atrapada en este ámbito artificial (D'Lugo 2004, 278-88).

It is through this contradictory combination of “estrangement and empowerment”, in a fast-paced metropolis that has “the potential to both liberate” and “alienate” (Lindner 2006, 130), that the filmmaker again opens a space for an urban-rural interplay – by allowing nostalgia to enter the narrative and to govern the sentiments and actions of the protagonists. What triggers a sense of alienation within the urban habitat and an urgent need to flee the city limits is for Leo the very absence of marital love, a “desamor” which in Martín's view leads to the dilemma of “una pérdida del tú ... vivida como la aniquilación del yo” (Martín 2005, 267). Within her elderly mother, the nostalgia takes on more common attributes. Misplaced and adrift in the Spanish capital, she compares herself to “una vaca sin cencerro”⁵³ and she cannot regain her true identity and stability in life until she is once more transported back to her childhood village. Her sentimental ode to Almagro referred to in the first chapter⁵⁴ is preceded by her rather comical

⁵¹ Curiously, in *¿Qué he hecho yo ...!!*, there is a similar reference to Lebanon, when Gloria and her husband refer to the crisis-ridden city in such a manner: “The Lebanon crisis worries me.” “Lebanon, Lebanon, you are my Lebanon!” Pedro Almodóvar, *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, (Spain 1984).

⁵² As argued by Bauman, “[i]n a liquid modern setting ... it is the personal and the individual, previously known as the ‘intimate’, that becomes ‘political’” (Bauman 2006, 47). In another nostalgic scene in *La Flor*... a distressed Leo seeks temporary refuge from the rain at a corner bar where Chavela Vargas (a brief reference to whom is later made also in *Los amantes pasajeros*) sings the heavily melancholic but also defiant *En el último trago* on national television. The song here serves to underscore Leo's emotions.

⁵³ In English “a cow without a cowbell.” Pedro Almodóvar, *La flor de mi secreto*, (France and Spain 1995).

⁵⁴ Peter Bush's English translation of the Spanish manuscript, including the mother's recited poem, can be found in Pedro Almodóvar, *The Flower of My Secret*, trans. Peter Bush (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996).

announcement that “Ay hija mía, me voy al pueblo, a mi casa. Que en mi casa hasta el culo me descansa”⁵⁵ (Almodóvar 1995). This declaration corresponds with Williams’ reference to “old mountain peasants” who “used to tell their sons... be content with the humble cottage” (Williams 1973, 47). It is, in fact, not only her mother but also Leo herself who is finally able to enjoy a village respite away from the urban rush. Injected with wholesome rural energy and having recovered somewhat from the depressive state in which she initially left, Leo returns to Madrid a stronger woman and in the end, she has grown from her urban ordeals. *La flor de mi secreto* seems to leave us with the conviction that nostalgia is common not only amongst people in great metropolises. But it is a condition that needs to be embraced rather than shied away from, to foster a possibility among those affected to cope with life anew.

The very last scene of the movie narratively and, to a certain extent visually, ties in with both *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* and *Carícies*. After her brief sojourn in the village and having tackled her feelings of nostalgia, Leo decides to stay put in the city – much like Gloria who remained in Madrid throughout the plot duration. And similar also to the two nameless characters in the last scene of *Carícies*, who are finally able to reach out to one another through human touch, also *La flor de mi secreto* introduces the viewer to a protagonist who receives the support needed for her to be able to carry on with her urban life and to regain strength. This support is provided not only by her mother but also by *El País* editor Ángel. In the final scene of the film, Leo approaches Ángel in his stylish urban apartment. Interestingly, contrary to what had been the case with Leo and Paco earlier, Leo and Ángel are here at one point reflected in one and the same mirror-image. This seems to indicate a possibility for Leo to finally heal a hitherto troubled or fragmented personality. Leo breaks her therapeutic sobriety when she joins her friend in a toast, and they also share a kiss. A cinematically cross-referential Leo (and Almodóvar) equals their encounter to the final scene of *Rich and Famous* (1981) and their conversation reads as follows:

Las dos amigas escritoras brindando, solas, alejadas del mundo, frente a la chimenea.

Sí, pero tú eres abstemia y además era Noche Vieja, por eso brindaron.

Invítame a una copa y haré que sea Noche Vieja.

Bésame; si es Noche Vieja quiero sentir el contacto con la carne humana. Y tú eres la única carne que hay por aquí (Almodóvar 1995).

While *Carícies* ended with a caress, in *La flor de mi secreto* a kiss thus seals the friendship between two lost individuals who have finally found each other. Pons and Almodóvar

⁵⁵ *I'm going to the village, to my house. The only place I can get some rest.* See also “El diario del Nanjanbin, last modified 19 February 2007, http://sub-aegida-cypris.blogspot.com.au/2007_12_01_archive.html

both seem to suggest that the nostalgia stemming partly from the “impossibility of mythical return” (Boym 2007, 6) may be at least temporarily cured through an affectionate gesture. The postmodern individual is, by all appearances, not as resilient as to emotionally survive metropolitan life without some human warmth along the way.

Summarizing reflection

This chapter has highlighted how Almodóvar and Pons represent the ever more global Spanish and Catalan metropolises as complex places towards which the protagonists harbour conflicting feelings. The nostalgia often sensed among these characters is not only a private or local phenomenon but can be linked to a nationwide sense of nostalgia among Spaniards for a not always clearly defined time gone by, and a place that may no longer be easily retrievable. From a historical perspective, *nostalgia* can also be seen as a concept related to that of collective amnesia relating to the (off- screen) Spanish past. With such a historical perspective in mind, the films analysed illustrate how filmmakers today subtly establish a dialogue between past and present on-screen; a dialogue often linked to deeper concerns within a nation still battling the ghosts from its recent past.

CHAPTER FIVE

The urban space and the human body as artificial constructs, and fluid gender representations in the cinema of Almodóvar

Introduction

Under the continuous banner of postmodernity, this chapter explores the notion of visual fluidity and fragmentation in Almodóvar's ever more global screened Spanish metropolis, where the urban habitat is becoming less rigid and more accommodating to members of different cultures and individuals with a range of sexual and gender predilections. More specifically, the transgender characters analysed in this chapter mirror the transformative era Spain is now going through and which is characterized by a lack of social stability and a corresponding increased fluidity and fragmentation in terms of more liquid and unfixed social structures, cultural groups and gender representations within these groups. Six films are selected to reflect this sociocultural trend today: *La ley del deseo*, *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, *Átame*, *Tacones lejanos*, *Kika*¹, and *La mala educación*.² All these films adhere to the criteria of "postmodern aesthetic", in the sense that Almodóvar's cinema, too, "relies on four tightly interrelated sets of concepts: simulation, which is either parody or pastiche; prefabrication, intertextuality and bricolage" (Hayward 2000, 277).

¹ The crass and brutally honest representation of the mass media in *Kika* and Almodóvar's use of voyeurism as a cinematic technique are dealt with in the first chapter. In the current argument, this film will be analysed primarily in terms of its representation of Madrid as a space detached from the physical geography of the city.

² The additional *La piel que habito*, whose entire narrative explores issues around transsexuality and particularly, *transgenesis*, is not given any major space in the current chapter as it has been covered in the previous chapter argument.

Lingering, for a moment, on some of these key notions, the simulation and fragmentation of the urban space that define Almodóvar's ever more postmodern cinema allow for a reading of his films as complex visual and narrative texts where the increasingly multilayered global habitat is as fluid and unfixed as the characters inhabiting this space. In this chapter, Madrid is itself considered to be in part an artificial construct, and the screened gender representations are as norm-breaking as his representation of Madrid as a city that has begun to distance itself from the conventions of the past to apparently facilitate a more rapid shift into a transformative new era. Almodóvar's metropolis is simultaneously a postmodern palimpsest and an artificial construct. The "sexual intermediary"³ of the transvestite, and the transsexual that constitutes a gendered alternative to the purely female or male individual, can similarly be regarded as a construct⁴ that contains both male and female traits (but where the preferences lean towards the latter). These unconventional sexual and gendered characters undergo a process of transformation within a city that is itself being radically altered as it transitions itself into a new, "supermodern" era.⁵ Such unconventional bodies and gender constructs, seemingly benefitted by a loosening of social rigidity, are "continually in the process of becoming⁶ – as multiplicities that are never just found but are made and remade" (Budgeon 2003, 50).

Almodóvar's Madrid, as seen in several of his particularly 1990s films, is repeatedly represented by way of scale replicas or mock versions of the real habitat that indeed appear to mock the physical cityscape in a rather playful, postmodern manner. These miniature copies of the urban environment exist in a parallel space; in an artificial reality that exists alongside the external urban space. As an impeccable copy of the real, the scale replica offers an architectural alternative to the concrete city (even though the toy-sized replica will always be a representation of the real environment). This imitative and artificial city thus becomes a simulacrum of the authentic space. In the upcoming discourse, the urban simulacrum is analysed alongside the fluid gender types

³ This term by Hirschfeld in a 1910 medical exposé may feel rather dated at this stage. However, in the current chapter context it is deemed applicable to Almodóvar's cinema. The term can be seen as referring to an individual drifting between sexual identities, or who abandons one identity altogether in favour of another. The *sexual intermediary* can also be seen figuratively bridging the gap between the male and the female and opening a space in-between the two polar opposites where previously different sexual identities almost merge into one. Magnus Hirschfeld, *Die Transvestiten* (Berlin: Pulvermacher, 1910). 7.

⁴ Artificial as this construct may be, the "gendered other" is thereby not inauthentic, something that will be further expanded under the next chapter subheading.

⁵ The concept of *supermodernity* relates back to Augé's definition of our era as one ripe in images, and he also introduces the paradoxical correlation between today's "excess of space" ... and "the shrinking of the planet", while all along "the world is becoming open to us." Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1995). 31.

⁶ This Deleuzian concept will be further expanded on with reference to *La ley del deseo*.

represented by film characters inhabiting this unfixed cityscape. It will be argued that the more global the Spanish capital becomes, the more artificial it appears to be. There is partly a “vanishing of the real” (Resina and Ingenschay 2003, xii). More specifically, under the all-encompassing influence of globalization, the filmic metropolis becomes a hybrid, multilayered space where numerous interpretations and representations of reality leads to a city at once authentic and unreal; one that is as much a physical reality as a make-belief imitation of the real.

A similar notion of simulacrum can be applied to the way Almodóvar represents the cross-dresser and the transsexual in some of his films, and which corresponds with Butler’s notion of gender as a “*stylised repetition of acts*” (Butler 1990, 140).⁷ Given the performative nature of the transvestite and his appropriated gender, also this individual can be considered a construct able to be analysed alongside the artificial urban replica. It may here be held that both the mock version of the city and the man inhabiting a female body either temporarily or permanently, become simulations - or imitations - of the real or what might be authentic at surface level.

With this in mind and given that gender is historically and culturally formed and constructed; a condition developed through many years of social and cultural experiences, attitudes and behaviours, it seems the imitative aspects of the postmodern habitat can be compared not only to a corresponding “human simulacrum.” But perhaps the gradually more visible transgendered individuals in society today (characters who in Almodóvar’s cinema often move centre-stage) are the very result of a partly authentic and partly imitative postmodern urban environment that allows for a multitude of interpretations of the “real” and not.

The move from external to internal space on screen

A reflective overview of Almodóvar’s repertoire makes it apparent that the cineaste takes us from Madrid as initially a real location in the early 1980s to a gradually more artificial space as he moves into the late 1980s and early 1990s. Accordingly, the visual backdrop for his plots is gradually less the external geography of the city and more an internal imitation of the real environment. The narrative develops inside inner-city apartments, cinematic studio sets, repressive Toledo mansions, or within the enclosed and comparatively claustrophobic space of an airplane – as seen in the “mild rather than abrasive” satire *Los amantes pasajeros*, where an airplane carrying a number of eccentric passengers hovers over Spanish Toledo rather than making it all the way to Mexico

⁷ Butler argues that “*gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence.” Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990). 24.

City.⁸ It appears the latter space mirrors the need for global citizens to be constantly on the go or to be part of what Bauman has defined as the *perpetuum mobile* of society today (Bauman 2011, 19). The choice of filmic location here can also be seen as further evidence of Almodóvar's wish to distance himself from a specific place or location. Rather, the plot unfolds within a fluid space symbolic of speed and velocity.

Notably, a link had already been drawn between Madrid as a global space, and velocity in several films prior to *Los amantes pasajeros*. By way of example, this was the case in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, where two visually juxtaposed airports could symbolise a connection between Spain and Europe at large. Also, in *Tacones lejanos*, the mock replica of a runway complete with miniature aircrafts and other means of transport suggestively transports the viewer away from Madrid prior to the moment in which the characters themselves embark on a flight from Madrid to Venezuela. And finally, in the earlier *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, a speedy chase between characters headed for Barajas airport through a fluid transit zone that reminds of an expansive Augéan *non-place*⁹ not only reflects Madrid as a fast-paced capital but the city also becomes a central departure point from which both national and international destinations are within reach. In these and other films, airplanes and airports mirror Spain's current insertion into the global community, and the on-screen travels of the protagonists are either voluntary or the result of a physical displacement for migration purposes or other types of socio-political traveling.¹⁰

This either screened or suggested physical mobility of some Almodóvarian protagonists contrasts starkly with the more static lifestyle of those, generally elderly, characters who stay put rather than embark on foreign travels. The screened villagers prefer the tranquillity of the countryside. And yet, not even the Spanish village can hold front against the globalizing influence of the media – as seen in television news programs that blurt out global messages and propaganda also to its older viewers (*Volver* is a good example of this). Also, these characters are thus regularly whisked away to foreign territories, although their travel is mental rather than physical.

⁸ Philip French proceeds by maintaining that “as a metaphor for present-day Spain, which Almodóvar intends it to be, it's hardly more than a faint finger-wagging.” “I'm So Excited!- review. Chaos reigns in business class in Pedro Almodóvar's slight yet droll commentary on post-crash Spain”, Philip French, *The Observer*, last modified 5 May 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2013/may/05/im-so-excited-review>

⁹ Augé includes into the concept of *non-places* “high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports”, etc. Peter Osborne, “Non-places and the spaces of art,” *The Journal of Architecture* 6(2001): 187. On the same page, Osborne cites Michel de Certeau's *Invention of the Everyday*, Volume 1 (1974) as the first text where *non-place* was introduced as a term.

¹⁰ In *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, the notion of air travel receives political connotations when the presumed hijacking of an aircraft introduces terrorism and adds a political dimension to the plot.

In Almodóvar's filmic universe, as the internal space gradually gains preference over external Madrid so, too, the inner landscape of the protagonists becomes a site explored all the more intently. In focus is, thus, not only the imitative scale replica but also in some films the human mind (or what in the third chapter is equalled to a narrative exploration of a mental map). The characters are increasingly troubled and complex, their identity shifting rather than stable and fixed. In other words, not only is their lived space transformed but the characters themselves become equally transient; belonging to two genders or perhaps none. Because if gender is a construct, is it at all possible to speak of one true female gender identification?

Keywords governing the chapter argument and main question asked

The main concepts around which the upcoming discourse revolves are *fluidity* and *artificiality*, all considering a cinematic *postmodernity*. The first terms are linked to the filmic representation of the global city and its gendered "others" as non-biological constructs. In the case of Almodóvar, the notion of artificiality is in his cinema sensed in a dual manner. Thus again, Madrid becomes an artificial construct when scale replicas are used to mirror the real city and are paralleled by a staged human body similarly represented as a copy of the real. Through repeated acts of gender performativity, the drag queen (more commonly than the transsexual) unwittingly introduces the viewer to a "woman" – i.e. an individual biologically not of the female gender – who by all appearances is as artificial as is Almodóvar's staged mock replica of Madrid.

With regard to the transgendered character on screen, it must be stressed that physical artificiality is here not regarded as synonymous with inauthenticity.¹¹ On the contrary, Almodóvar makes it quite clear in his cinema that the cross-dressing performer, with a surgically enhanced body on display and an appropriated gender which thus becomes a "construction" (Butler 1993, 7), is thereby not inauthentic as a female. The foremost example of this is transgendered la Agrado in *Todo sobre mi madre*, whose much quoted declaration

Cuesta mucho ser auténtica señora, y en estas cosas no hay que ser rúcana. Porque una es más auténtica cuanto más se parece a lo que ha soñado de sí misma (Almodóvar 1999),

evidences and highlights Almodóvar's attempt to not only challenge but completely overturn the traditional definition of authenticity as "[o]f undisputed origin and not a

¹¹ Miles Orvell writes that "the authentic is understood to be the reverse of everything that is defined as 'pseudo-, sham-, -make-believe, makeshift-, mock-, would-be-, fake-, phony-, semi-, near-, baloney-, synthetic.'" Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1800-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). 146.

copy; genuine.”¹² In reality, in his films *authenticity* has little to do with physical appearance. Rather, it becomes a concept related to a sentiment or an inner conviction. The screened drag artist (and, also, the transsexual) thus *feels* rather than *is* authentic as a woman. When this male performer fully identifies with the enacted woman on stage, he becomes authentically female not physically, but mentally.¹³ As has been stated,

“drag not only” makes us “question what is real, and what it has to be”, but it also shows us “how contemporary notions of reality can be questioned, and new modes of reality instituted” (Butler 2004, 217).

In his cinema, Almodóvar thus proposes a new and different notion of authenticity when the cross-dresser can only hope to mirror the real through an artificially enhanced female body yet becomes authentic as a woman by feeling as one and identifying with his gendered opposite.

Finally, in this chapter Almodóvar is analysed in view of Bauman’s liquid modernity paradigm. Applying the notion of urban liquidity to both the screened city and its gendered others may allow for a better understanding of some of his films. The chapter ultimately analyses how *simulacrum* is employed as a concept in Almodóvar’s cinema and how the unfixed, transitory gender of the transvestite is represented on screen.¹⁴ Is the visual detachment from conventional spatial and gender norms indeed a sign of an increasingly artificial society that allows for the appearance of the simulacrum, or the non-real?¹⁵

Simulacrum: a definition

The notion of the *simulacrum* is commonly known to have been developed by Jean Baudrillard but has later been appropriated by several critics within Cultural Geography and other disciplines. While the term may refer to “a city at once material, and mental” (Caws 1991, 9), Baudrillard’s original term has often been used in a postmodern and

¹² “Authentic”, *Oxford Dictionaries*, last modified 2014, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/authentic>

¹³ In Butler’s Foucault-inspired words, “[t]he figure of the interior soul understood as ‘within’ the body is signified through its inscription on the body, even though its primary mode of signification is through its very absence, is potent invisibility.” Ann J. Cahill and Jennifer Hansen, eds., *Continental Feminism Reader* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 40. As has been suggested with regard to *Todo sobre mi madre*, a female soul shines through in *La Agradó*’s gender speech. This makes her authentic as a woman, even though her body is not biologically female.

¹⁴ In *La mala educación*, the acts of gender performativity do not take place against an urban backdrop but, rather, in a dilapidated rural theatre partly turned into a bar.

¹⁵ In today’s experimental society it may be argued that what was once considered unnatural is now becoming more common; to the extent that the previously unreal or artificial has become almost authentic.

semiotic context. For Baudrillard, *simulacrum* refers to a reversal of sign or signifier (sometimes exemplified by “a map”) and the “real state.” He explains that,

[t]he territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – *precession of simulacra* – that engenders the territory... (Baudrillard 1994, 1).

The simulacrum both resembles and contrasts with Resina’s *after-image* as an image that lingers after an object has been visualized and taken in by the observer.¹⁶ Similar to the simulacrum, this after-image is then embedded in the viewer’s imagination, leading to new and more subjective “imaginary spinoffs” of the both fictive and real city, or what has been called “urban images” that create an “illusory sense of belonging” (Resina and Ingenschay 2003, 210). Comparing this urban afterimage to the Augéan notion of the *non-place*, which inherent distinction from place “derives from the opposition between space and place” (Augé 1995, 79), Resina argues that

[t]he afterimage refers to an optic realm where outlines and relations are ceaselessly debated and hierarchies of meaning reversed. Thus, the proliferation of non-places stimulates the fabrication of place (Resina and Ingenschay 2003, 21).

The idea of an illusory reality that verges on becoming a *non-place* will be further explored later in this chapter which, again, views Almodóvar’s Madrid as a construct comparable to the corresponding construct of the screened transvestite and the transsexual, or what Daniel Mendelsohn has described as *demimondaine characters* (thereby implying “drag queens, transsexuals, prostitutes”, and “junkies”) (Mendelsohn 2007, 2).¹⁷

Postmodern commonalities between films

All six films covered here have in common their postmodern pastiche and their represented fragmentation of the Spanish capital and its gendered alternatives. Here, a patchwork of urban styles and interpretations of what it means to be male or female (or both at once) becomes a part of what has been called Almodóvar’s “exaggerated aesthetic” (Mendelsohn 2007, 2), all in the name of pop entertainment. The scale

¹⁶ Theories by e.g. Jameson, Linda Hutcheon, and David Harvey are also covered in Peter and Will Brooker’s co- edited book *Postmodern After-Images: A Reader in Film, Television and Video* (London: Arnold, 1997).

¹⁷ *Demi-mondaine*, or “half-world” was originally a term used in a 19th century French context (it was first applied by Dumas in an 1855 comedy) to refer to those women who “existed on the fringes of the ‘real world.’” “The Victorian Era: Demi-mondaines and the Demimonde”, *19th century wordpress.com*, last modified 6 July 2008, <http://19thcentury.wordpress.com/2008/07/06/demi-mondaines-and-the-demimonde/>

replicas that gain importance in some of these films help achieve a notion of parallel “realities” or a “Near” and an “Elsewhere” (Augé 1995, 7). The miniature construct partly mirrors the real city yet at the same time it detaches both viewer and film character from the physical authenticity of this external city, placing them both in an in-between world of simulacrum or alternative reality (perhaps even a *hyperreality* given that the make-believe copy of Madrid offers a more detailed version of this capital, all neatly confined into a minute, manageable space).

In *La ley del deseo*, *Tacones lejanos* and *La mala educación*, the transvestite or the transsexual, in turn, adds an extra dimension to the visual narrative. Here, Almodóvar seemingly proposes that the cross-gendered individual (who by breaking away from gender norms becomes an “in-between” character) may be the product of a society in flux; a society which is itself becoming more artificial and constructed. And yet, it is true that in Almodóvar’s cinema the sexual and gendered other is unconventionally more normalized than not, in the sense that they are generally depicted empathically and respectfully. Also, by embracing their (sometimes innate) differences, these characters become empowered and often more fully-fledged as individuals than some of the non-trans protagonists. As has been noted about Almodóvar,

[e]n sus películas, la homo o la transsexualidad se aceptan de entrada como un dato, sin necesidad de que la narración la explique, la justifique, la legitime con pesadez. Ahí están, normalizadas hasta el punto de que a veces la heterosexualidad parece insólita (Murcia 2007, 275).

Although indeed, the transgendered persona becomes a charismatic counterpart to the more conventional heterosexuals in Almodóvar’s films, this chapter equals his screened transvestites and transsexuals to postmodern constructs whose adopted gender is one that is performed. These anti-heroes turned heroes come to fruition in a society made up of both real and constructed non-places.¹⁸ Just like the urban construct of the scale replica can be seen as an imitation of the real city that exists alongside the artificial copy, the transgendered character performs a similarly imitative role in these films. However, while the scale replica mirrors the real city in a rather one-dimensional fashion, the performativity of the transvestite and transsexual is taken one step further. Thus, the performative act involves not only trying to resemble a real woman as far as possible. But indeed, when the man imitating a woman succeeds in looking womanlier than some of the biological women on screen, the dressed-up male becomes one with his artificial femininity. Through gendered acts, the cross dresser acts performatively in his

¹⁸ According to Augé, “[p]lace and non-place are ... like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsest on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly written.” Osborne, “Non-places and the spaces of art,” 188.

imitation of the opposite gender: “In his sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (Butler 1990, 25).

In the films in focus here, the crossdresser acts on behalf of their biological counterparts, by giving voice to them and acting out their femininity flawlessly (albeit in a rather exaggerated manner). By and large, this seems to mirror a more tolerant Spanish society where the individual deviating from the norm becomes, perhaps, more of a norm than not. Kinder notes that,

Almodóvar’s films have a curious way of resisting marginalization. Never limiting himself to a single protagonist, he chooses an ensemble of homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, dooper, punk, terrorist characters who refuse to be ghettoized into divisive subcultures because they are figured as part of the ‘new Spanish mentality’ – a fast-paced revolt that relentlessly pursues pleasure rather than power, and a postmodern erasure of all repressive boundaries and taboos associated with Spain’s medieval, fascist, and modernist heritage (Kinder and Almodóvar 1987, 34).

Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios, Átame and Kika: preliminary note

While the ebullient Spanish capital of Almodóvar’s screened 1980s represented the city and its citizens as positively co-dependent, each feeding off the joyous and sexual energy of the other,¹⁹ in *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, *Átame*, and *Kika*, Madrid is all the more devoid of energy and the urban space is, to a large extent, artificially construed. No longer complimenting or becoming an extension to the city by moving through streets and lingering in urban establishments, Almodóvar’s 1990s protagonists have been called inside and now become part of plots that unravel mainly within urban apartments, internal studio sets, or the public transitory space of Barajas airport. This non-place²⁰ of the fluid transit zone, which becomes a global “space of flows,”²¹ corresponds with the idea that:

places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together. The possibility of non-place is never absent from any place (Augé 1995, 189).

¹⁹ Almodóvar’s representation of 1980s Madrid in *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* and *Laberinto de pasiones*, in particular, resembles Caws’ description of the narrated city as “a source of energy, empowered, empowering, and dis-empowering, with desire eternally at its center.” Mary Ann Caws, ed. *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film* (New York, Philadelphia, London, Paris, Montreaux, Tokyo, and Melbourne: Gordon and Breach, 1991). 10.

²⁰ The notion of *non-place* has also been defined as follows: it’s a “space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity.” Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*: 77-78.

²¹ Osborne, “Non-places and the spaces of art,” 189.

In the upcoming film analyses, it becomes clear that in his cinema Almodóvar gradually distances himself from the representation of Madrid as a location in its own right, all infused with its own special energy. Rather, as globalization closes in on this capital, a more multi-faceted yet also in a sense theatrical portrayal of the urban space is opted for, one which through metanarrative and the juxta-positioning of internal with external architectural constructs operates on several different levels. In this sense, Almodóvar's films become interdisciplinary, embracing both cinematic and theatrical techniques and elements (this, as we have seen, is also the case in Pons' repertoire).

Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios

Almodóvar's seventh feature film has him turn to a sleeker style of filmmaking. At the time of release, it was "one of the most commercially successful ... ever made in Spain" (Evans 1996, 10) and it so appealed to foreign critics that it led to several remakes in particularly the United States (Evans 1996, 10). The film, with an already vexing yet alluring title, is a visual feast that fits perfectly within the aesthetics of postmodern pop culture. Conforming to Harvey's keywords regarding postmodern ethics: "antiform (disjunctive/open), play, deconstruction, text/intertext", and even (a touch of) "irony" (Harvey 1989, 43), from beginning to end *Mujeres...* achieves a sensation of parallel realities. It features a playful merging of styles, vivid colour schemes and constant literary and cinematic cross-referencing and mimicry. Almodóvar here draws from works by Hitchcock, Negulesco, and Cocteau's *La voix humaine* (also repeatedly referred to in *La ley del deseo*). All in all, this helps create a film abundant in pastiche. Through the regular use of props such as, again, scale models or replicas, Almodóvar challenges our perception of reality and offers us an alternative way of viewing our urban environment. It is not long before the comparable "surreality" produced on screen becomes strangely normalized within the context of a film whose plot features several unexpected twists and turns.

Indeed, Madrid as an external metropolis that exists outside main character Pepa's central apartment gradually fades away when she hardly sets foot outside. When she does, it is only briefly, usually on wheels or when she witnesses the daily urban drama through a telephone booth (she could here be seen as seeking temporary refuge from reality). Thus, she is never quite in touch physically with the hustle and bustle on the streets of 1980s Madrid. Rather, by avoiding any prolonged contact with the world outside, Pepa can be said to be lingering on the outskirts of reality – despite residing in a centrally located apartment.

Aside from the many visual props and techniques employed in this film, the vivid imagery is effectively underscored by a soundtrack by Bernardo Bonnezzi which reminds of the score that would later render some scenes in *La flor de mi secreto* highly effective. Appropriately, *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* opens to the sound of

Lola Beltrán's languishing declaration that "soy infeliz, porque sé que no me quieres, para qué más insistir."²² Unravelling from here are Pepa's own matching feelings of forlornness after a recent split from a partner who has now abandoned their once shared apartment. The narrative becomes, in part, one about a woman going through the motions: Pepa is at first emotionally broken but ends up stronger during the plot development and seemingly comes to terms with the possibility of a future as a single mother.

As noted earlier, in a film that at first glance would appear to become a visual exposé on female hysteria, Almodóvar's postmodern pastiche is made evident through internal scale replicas which depict external places that in close-up help create an illusion of reality. This, paired with the collage-like conversion of the inner-city apartment where these artefacts are found, into partly an urban simulation of rural life (see chapter one) and several other scenes where we get a sensation of parallel realities, makes the postmodern patchwork complete. Indeed, in this film "Madrid ya no es Madrid, es su simulacro, transposición, copia, poco más" (Seguin Vergara 2009, 40).

As an additional take on multiple realities and "artificialities", the film introduces the figure of the dubbing artist who gives voice to up until that point inaudible characters, affected and overly sentimental as this human voice may be.²³ Thus, in the film Pepa's ex-partner, evasive womanizer Ivan, becomes one with his dubbing profession to the extent that he treats the women in his life in the same artificial manner as he does the women on the set. As has been observed, this male character, who takes on the role of protagonist not by being always physically present but by being constantly referred to by the forsaken woman now suffering from a broken heart, is "a practised deceiver (a calling honed to perfection through his career as a dubbing actor)" (Evans 1996, 36).

By casting Maura as Pepa, Almodóvar further heightens the sense of urban simulacrum and artificiality. She had already starred as troubled transsexual Tina in "the hyperrealist melodrama" (Almodóvar 1992, 81) *La ley del deseo* where she convincingly portrayed a

²² "Letras de canciones de Lola Beltrán-Soy infeliz, *letra-de-canciones.com*, last modified 2013, <http://letradecanciones.com/canciones/show/600550/lola-beltran/letras-y-traducciones-de-cancion-soy-infeliz/>

²³ Smith writes that "[i]f Iván is Voice.... then he is frequently reduced to part-object: lips shown in extreme close-up." Paul Julian Smith, *Desire Unlimited: The Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar*. Second edition (London; New York: Verso, 2000). 100.

non-biological woman²⁴, a male turned female who approximated yet was never totally comparable to the gender construct of the drag artist.²⁵

In *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, Maura plays all the more assertive, heterosexual Pepa, who although she does not undergo a fluid transition from one gender or body to another, indeed inhabits a world of visual and auditory simulation. Her semi-artificial world of double realities²⁶, or what could be seen as *parallel universes*, is symbolically visualized in a number of ways: in the scale replica of Madrid which she keeps in her bedroom and which is seen in extreme close-up before Pepa herself is initially introduced to us (this shot immediately highlights the apparent superficiality of the drama we are about to witness), in the aforementioned slice of rural life recreated on Pepa's balcony and which adds a sense of authenticity to a generally very postmodern cityscape, in a scene featuring the female protagonist engaged in conversation with a real estate agent and where she first appears from behind the detailed façade of a scale replica which produces a faithful rendition of a real housing project,²⁷ and in her role as a dubbing artist working side by side with a man who seems equally artificial privately as professionally. The entire film can be read as a simulacrum, and the multiple imitations of external reality are paralleled by studio-enhanced personifications of voiceless characters on screen (played by Joan Crawford and Sterling Hayden) (Smith 2000, 95). Denied speaking their native English, these dubbed characters remain mute until provided with Spanish words and dialogues.

²⁴ The image of Carmen Maura as character Tina sensorially and erotically hosed down in a stiflingly hot Madrid that becomes the most important protagonist of them all, would feature as a large symbolic photographic centre piece in important exhibition *Madrid, Chica Almodóvar* at Condeduque arts centre in Madrid November 2024: <https://www.condeduquemadrid.es/actividades/madrid-chica-almodovar>. This visual focus on Madrid and its many diverse neighbourhoods serving as shooting locations, and the way the exhibition was structured, reflects the lingering importance of my doctoral thesis, completed 9 years earlier. Significantly, I had already covered Almodóvar's creative journey chronologically and thematically and looked at how he acts in congruence with the concurrent socio-political development in his contemporary Madrid - the themes in focus in each film are direct matters of concern in the actual society they relate to.

²⁵ In the film, Tina (previously Tino) constantly recollects her pre-female past; a past overshadowed by incestuous memories and her obsession with a father who eventually trades in his "artificial" daughter for a "real" woman (i.e. whose femaleness is biological rather than the result of a sex change, as will be reiterated later). This past experience continuously affects Tina's relationship with men in the present.

²⁶ Almodóvar has commented on the multifaceted aspects of Madrid, calling it "a thousand cities in one." Pedro Almodóvar, *The Patty Diphusa Stories and Other Writings*. Translated by Kirk Anderson (London: Faber and Faber, 1992): 92.

²⁷ In *Átame*, main character Ricky appears in a similar fashion behind a formidable scale replica of Madrid. It here appears as if the construct takes preference over the real city and the real man. In both *Mujeres...* and *Átame*, Almodóvar appears to suggest that the unreal can be considered a viable alternative to the "real."

Evans notes that the film:

heavily relies on the aesthetics of Pop, so Pepa is governed to a certain extent by a sensibility branded above all by pastiche, exaggeration and bathos, and an inflected persona perfectly exemplifying the film's awareness of the inauthentic surface-thin texture of the new consumerist society's cosmeticised, glossy constructions of subjectivity (Evans 1996, 67- 68).

Seen in this light, Pepa's additional repeated encounters with a male taxi driver who sports bleached hair and insists on recreating a decorative snapshot of Cuba within the confines of a taxi appropriately called "Mambo Taxi", introduces her to yet another parallel reality – one in which the exotic world of tropical Cuba is recreated in the midst of her contemporary Madrid. And on that note, the Cuban *surreality* within a Spanish environment becomes a way for Almodóvar to (perhaps indirectly) market the Latino audience to a Madrid clientele and to, in line with Evans' earlier statement, commercialize Cuban culture. It has also been held that the sentimentally kitsch space recreated inside the taxi,

está acondicionado como un lugar privilegiado, un territorio de la felicidad pasajera o de las lágrimas contagiosas (Seguín Vergara 2009, 84).

Ultimately, not only do the characters move within a world of alternative realities but this stage-like surreal setting is matched by the protagonists themselves playing a role within a second film shown within Almodóvar's actual movie. This, too, confers a notion of alternative reality to the plot. Thus, Iván draws inspiration from the script provided to him as a dubbing artist, in his earlier sentimental statement to his ex-lover (one that echoes Betran's opening song): "Pepa cariño, no quiero nunca oírte decir soy infeliz." Pepa later openly acknowledges Iván's incorrigible falsehood: "Pero, ¿que falso eres!" Still, she herself plays a double role not only as a dubbing artist but also as "la madre del asesino" in televised ads marketing washing powder. Further, on a rushed drive through the city, the aforementioned Mambo-inspired taxi driver blurts out to Pepa: "Creía que esto sólo pasaba en las películas" (Almodóvar 1988), which again creates the sensation of double realities or, rather, that of a film within a film.

Interestingly, the only time off-screen reality is allowed to seep into the filmic drama is when we see iconic actress Chus Lampreave play character Chus also on screen. While at first sight this seems to be a narrative *faux pas* by an otherwise meticulous filmmaker, on further reflection it may be yet another technique employed by Almodóvar to highlight that Pepa's reality is, after all, just one great act. At the end of the film, and seemingly alluding to protagonist Iván, Cuban artist La Lupe's parting song *Puro teatro*

in which she declares that “Lo tuyo es puro teatro. Falsedad bien ensayada. Estudiado simulacro”²⁸ serves to close a circular narrative whose postmodern simulacra has become one of its distinguishing features.

Átame

With *Átame*, “the most hermetically self-reflexive of Almodóvar’s films” (Smith 2000a, 111) and which has been called a “beautiful sadomasochistic romance” (Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 118), the notion of double realities – artificial construct versus real city – is taken one step further with the introduction of a studio set all complete with actors, daring scenes shot within an artificial space that resembles the real city veiled in external darkness, and a filmmaker known as a “woman’s director” (Almodóvar 1990); Almodóvar’s self-referential touch not gone amiss.²⁹ Intertextually rich just like *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, *Átame* thus not only makes cinematic reference to Bernard B. Ray’s *The Midnight Phantom* (based on John T. Neville’s 1930s story and screenplay), but the film integrates this horror plot into its own plot development, thus making for a clever parallel narrative structure.³⁰ That is to say that *Átame* embraces the theme of horror in a dual manner: initially through the on-screen theatrical reproduction of what is in Spanish *El fantasma de medianoche* and where the stage props, make-up, and costumes altogether help achieve an ambience fit for the chosen genre. And secondly, the plot development of *Átame* itself partly mimics that of its subplot about the *Midnight Phantom*. Thus, main character Ricky, reintegrated into society³¹ after serving yet another prison sentence, puts words into action when he succeeds in doing what facially distorted phantom muscleman Osvaldo manages not to, namely to effectively kidnap his love interest. As an obvious pun on the word *arrastrar*, Almodóvar narratively connects this verb with *atar*, in a film where “drag,” “pull” and “kidnap” become words linked to the idea of tying somebody up. However, as “atar” also means “to attach”, the English synonym eventually takes on the meaning of a woman held captive and who grows attached to her kidnapper in a not untypical

²⁸ “Letra de Puro Teatro- La Lupe, *coveralia.com*, last modified 2014, <http://www.coveralia.com/letras/puro-teatro-la-lupe.php>

²⁹ Almodóvar has commented on his “status” of women’s director in a self-interview included in *The Patty Diphusa Stories and Other Writings* (1991, 101).

³⁰ The idea of a film within a film (or fiction within fiction) comes back in more recent films like *Hable con ella*, *Los abrazos rotos*, and *La mala educación*.

³¹ One of the first scenes of the movie has Ricky conversing with a fellow inmate, where the elderly man gives him his “carnet de la sociedad”, seemingly to facilitate Ricky’s re-integration into society. However, an ironic twist is provided when the society referred to by the man turns out to be “una sociedad gastronómica.” Pedro Almodóvar, “*Átame*,” (Spain 1990).

manner³²— albeit one that reflects the unpredictability of the human mind and behaviour. Thus, while Ricky himself is initially described by a female prison warden as *abnormal* (“Tu no eres una persona normal”)³³, it is not only he, but also porn actress Marina Osorio (soon to be held hostage within the confines of her own apartment) who finally acts and reacts in a manner not considered to be normal by “normal” standards.

Not only does Almodóvar here question normality, but his film theatrically imitates Ray’s, within the confines of a Spanish capital itself represented unconventionally. Fleeting images of external Madrid are occasionally envisaged behind the constructed studio set depicting an all the more dilapidated city, which visually corresponds with the (then) seedy Chueca neighbourhood where a large part of the action takes place.³⁴ Importantly, the damaged face of the staged phantom, locked up inside a dissimulating and protective mask, could similarly be seen as reflective of the correspondingly tarnished face of Madrid that exists behind the flowy studio curtains.³⁵

In the film, the notion of double narratives, as well as double realities, and a general sense of artificiality are further achieved by Almodóvar initially disguising Ricky in a wig. In the scene in which Ricky lurks behind the urban replica wearing a rather outrageous hairpiece, he physically inhabits a different persona or, alternatively, one that can be defined as his more daring alter ego which he embraces more fully when disguised. In the positioning of this male protagonist behind the scale replica, Ricky appears as one with the city: as he is visualized behind the realistic urban façade, the imitation of the real man and that of the real city are perfectly juxtaposed.

In fact, it is not only man and city that are represented as constructs in the film but so is, in a way, the entire kidnapping episode that unravels from here and in which Ricky is guided by a subliminal conviction that he must unite with Marina and start a family with her in order to achieve personal happiness for them both and thereby also make her own life complete. Within an internal space ripe in kitsch religious imagery, Ricky himself turns into a Christian icon in a scene where Marina tends to his wounds after he has been left bleeding and aching after taking a beating from a gang of drug dealers doing business on Chueca Plaza. Acevedo-Muñoz reads a sacrificial message into

³² The so-called *Stockholm Syndrome* is also central to the plot development in Rodrigo Sorogoyen’s film *Stockholm* (2013).

³³ As will be evidenced, the notion of not being normal would later resurface in *Kika*. Here, “subnormal” becomes an expression used to refer to a character whose extreme actions bring the plot to a head.

³⁴ Commenting on the complete transformation of this area from the 1980s to the 1990s, Acevedo-Muñoz writes that “[t]he Chueca neighbourhood, notorious for its criminality, drug dealers and prostitutes..., has gone through a visual transformation and gentrification... and is now a hip, popular area of Madrid’s upwardly mobile, artistic, professional and affluent gay communities...” Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz, *Pedro Almodóvar* (London: British Film Institute, 2007). 124.

³⁵ Man, and city here become partly real and partly constructs

this scene: “Ricky’s body, Christ-like, is sacrificed for the redemption of Marina’s sins” (Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 129). Once more it appears as if the point made is that Marina is reliant on her kidnapper to be freed from the shackles of her porn-acting profession and her current lifestyle in general. The kidnapper thus becomes the redeemer as Marina falls in love with Ricky in an episode central to the plot and which stays true to the recognized Stockholm syndrome.

At the end of the film, Ricky and Marina have both undergone a process of transformation and can embark on a new personal journey together (one which more broadly has been compared to Spain’s complex healing process during the period of transition, a time that may have ultimately been as beneficial to the country as the “unambiguously hopeful ending” (of *Átame*)) (Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 133). The protagonists finally abandon their once interdependent roles as hostage and abductor within a location that is no longer a run-down neighbourhood but the more pristine village. It seems as if, in a film that experiments with the notion of the double, multiple façades and artifacts eventually crumble and individual masks are similarly shed.

Kika

Just like the multilayered postmodern drama in both *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* and *Átame* was played out mainly behind closed doors, i.e. in an internal rather than external setting³⁶, so too *Kika* is shot largely inside the female protagonist Kika’s (Verónica Forqué) central apartment building in Madrid. A film released in the global 1990s, Almodóvar’s focus on an intrusive media apparatus paired with his continuous representation of Madrid as a construct, again mirrors the postmodern preference for pastiche and artefact. This film, too, is rich in cross-references and Almodóvar particularly chooses to provide his disturbing urban tale with several Hitchcockian elements. This is seen not only in his use of a voyeuristic film camera that, like in *Rear Window* (1954), pans up urban facades and provides the viewer with close-ups of several film characters during some of their most intimate (and, as Kika herself puts it, embarrassing) moments. But Hitchcock also proves instrumental to Almodóvar in a haunting scene where a male protagonist is pictured in silhouette against a nocturnal horizon as he buries the body of a woman he has just murdered and, particularly, in the so-called *swirling vortex*. In *Psycho* (1960), this technique was used to zoom in on the eye of a female corpse in a bathtub.³⁷

³⁶ Kika’s own body has been read as an internal territory forcefully entered when she is raped midway through the film. Paul Julian Smith, *Vision Machines: Cinema, Literature and Sexuality in Spain and Cuba, 1983-93* (London and New York: Verso, 1996). 48.

³⁷ As opposed to Marion in *Psycho*’s shower scene, Kika is not murdered. Still, she is doubly objectified and abused in a viscerally uncomfortable drawn-out sequence where she is physically violated while videotaped in a broadcast made readily available for all of Madrid’s night-time television viewers to see. Her subsequent emotional scarring includes lingering shame and embarrassment at having been both raped and publicly ridiculed at once.

The immediate image of a drain, which seamlessly replaces that of the human eye, symbolizes the draining of a life.³⁸ Almodóvar, on his part, prefers the swirling vortex to a more conventional fade-out in *Kika*: it is in his similarly voyeuristic film³⁹ used to visually fuse an artificially flat image of the moon with that of a rotating, comparatively circular spin-dryer. As highlighted earlier, yet another effective filming technique is the repeated traveling or tracking shots with which Almodóvar traverses the façade of Kika's urban apartment building and where a "reversed fixation" takes place as we look in as voyeurs rather than being looked at by characters gazing out and back at us in an all the more fetishistic manner.⁴⁰

A film which, yet again, is partly detached from reality through a physical distancing of the plot from external Madrid to internal spaces, in the second scene a detailed scale replica of Madrid features an elaborate copy of its main landmarks.⁴¹ Here, Madrid is again represented as an artificial and illusory construct rather than a real city shot on location. The result is a sense of urban theatricality *par excellence*. Although his portrayal of Madrid is generally physically distanced from the real city, the possibly most refined urban replica in Almodóvar's cinema to date helps achieve a strong sense of authenticity in the viewer. Indeed, the inauthentic here seems to become more authentic than the real place off-screen. Also, when comparing the three films analysed in this first part of the chapter, which all challenge our perception of reality in several ways, it becomes clear that it is not until in *Kika* that the notion of also gender authenticity first becomes an issue, as it is addressed by Almodóvar through one of his characters. Thus, in two memorable, interrelated scenes featuring butch maid Juana (a cubistically angular Rossy de Palma) engaged in an upfront conversation with Kika, a lesbian undertone runs through the following dialogue:

Juana, no puedes pretender que todas las mujeres seamos bolleras.

Ser bollera no es ninguna vergüenza, ¿eh?

³⁸ And in *Vertigo*, eyes in extreme close-up "suggest a sort of frightened helplessness." "Alfred Hitchcock", *brightlightsfilm*, last modified November 2003, <http://brightlightsfilm.com/42/42hitch.php#.U2tBpvmSxIE>

³⁹ Acevedo-Muñoz writes that the film "opens with a credit sequence already reminiscent of *The Law of Desire*, with a theatrical spotlight being shone on a rough-looking surface. The shot promptly pans to reveal, through a cut-out of a keyhole, a young woman in profile, undressing. The theme of voyeurism is thus firmly established before the narrative actually begins." Acevedo-Muñoz, *Pedro Almodóvar*: 204.

⁴⁰ According to John Ellis, "[f]etishistic looking implies the direct acknowledgement and participation of the object viewed." John Ellis, *Visible Fictions. Cinema: television: video* (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982). 47.

⁴¹ See chapter 1 for more precise references to these postmodern miniature landmarks.

No, pero tampoco lo es que una chica se vuelva loca por los hombres, Juana ... A propósito.. ¿no has pensado nunca en afeitarte el bigote?

¿Por qué? ... el bigote no es sólo patrimonio de los hombres, ¿eh?

¿Ah no?

No, de hecho, los hombres con bigote, o son maricones o son fachas, o ambas cosas a la vez (Almodóvar 1993).

After Juana is given a momentary facial makeover by professional cosmetologist Kika, their dialogue takes on a slightly different tone:

Mírate, Juana, ¿a qué estás maravillosa?

¿Le gusto más así?

Sin comparación. Y si fueras menos cardo ahora que se llevan las caras raras, hasta que podrías ser modelo.

No me veo yo en una pasarela. Me gustaría ser jefa de prisiones, rodeada de tías todo el santo día.

Que *heavy* eres, Juana.

Soy auténtica.

Desde luego.

¿Qué pasa, Juana?

Señora, que me ha excitado.

Juana, por favor...

Necesito un poco de agua, que me baje la erección (Almodóvar 1993).

We here note how Almodóvar overturns conventional notions of what it means to be an authentic woman. Additionally, Juana infringes on commonly male territory when she questions why having an erection should be a privilege enjoyed only by men. Why not indeed also by women? In other words, we are here presented a female character who through her opinions and mannerisms may be considered more of a man than a woman and who is also aware of her one male physical attribute: a moustache which she refuses to shave off in country where greater gender equality is no doubt still on the political agenda. The screened references to Juana's moustache thus become symbolic of women gaining ground in a traditionally male-dominated country. Into the quirky on-screen dialogue can be read a socio-political commentary. With regard to Juana's authenticity, she stresses this twice; also at a later stage in the same dialogue: "Soy

auténtica, señora.” It may here be argued that Juana fits into the same category as Agrado in *Todo sobre mi madre*, in the sense that each of them feels more authentic the more they resemble the one they have always dreamt of becoming (with la Agrado physically resembling a woman and Juana, in turn, being a rather masculine woman). Through these characters, it seems Almodóvar asks us to ponder authenticity from various angles. He also makes us reflect on this concept as it relates to individuals embracing different gender notions within an urban environment which is, in itself, very inauthentic.

In the continuous dialogue between Juana and Kika, Almodóvar narratively introduces the viewer to character Pablo Méndez, alias *Paul Bazzo*, a stage name which (as noted in the first chapter) connotes his soon to be demonstrated male virility.⁴² Juana casually refers to her brother as a *subnormal*, a denomination that comes so naturally to her that it seems more normal than not. She continues by adding, forebodingly, that “y como todos los subnormales le gustaba mucho follar” (Almodóvar 1993). The absurdity of the statement is soon fittingly followed by black humour when Juana adds that this particular sexual voracity used not to limit itself to intercourse with fellow humans, but it also included *zoophilia*. And we realize to what extent Almodóvar plays with notions of normality and abnormality in the film.

In the documented scene, Juana’s statements and mannerisms correspond to what has been called a performative gender identity, in the sense that this identity is expressed through acts and gestures that are manufactured *fabrications* (Butler 1990 145). Thus, although Juana is clearly a woman, she largely embraces a more male gender role. In doing so, Juana displaces the binary (Butler 1990, 31). She does, in other words, not conform to more conventional notions of looking and acting like a woman. When, in the next scene, Juana is complimented by Kika’s partner Ramón for looking “estupenda” after her female makeover, she retorts dryly: *La señora que le daba por travestirme* (Almodóvar 1988). Juana here clearly identifies with her more masculine side and although she is visibly flattered by Pepa’s admiration of her now more feminine look, she appears uncomfortable as a more “womanly woman.” The viewer is offered a reversed perspective on gender performativity as this is not a case of a man in female drag. Rather, here we have a woman *feeling* like a man yet *dressing* like a woman. The act of cross-dressing in *Kika* thus takes on a double meaning: not only does Juana dress

⁴² In the (in)famous rape scene, Kika reminds the porn star turned violator that his rape is real, and not (as he seems to believe) an act played out in one of his many porn movies. In D’Lugo’s words, “Bazzo... is a character whose outlook is ... contaminated by mediatized representations taken as life. He is also the logical extension of the confusion between representation and personal belief earlier dramatized in Banderas’s Ricky and, to a lesser degree, the same symptomatic conflation of mediatized and personal identity embodied by Rebecca in *High Heels*.” Marvin D’Lugo, *Pedro Almodóvar* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006). 83.

as “more of a woman” but in doing so she also takes on the performative role of resembling a woman, given that she is not “typically female” (or feminine).

Overall, in *Kika*, virtually everything can be read as a simulacrum and a construct: from the representation of Madrid as an artifice through the scale replica and the corresponding distancing of the plot from the actual city outside Kika’s urban apartment, to the symbolic questioning of what it means to be authentic in the aforementioned dialogue between Kika and Juana and the casting of real transsexual Bibiana Fernández in the role as Susana, as well as the focus on an all-intrusive media apparatus mainly represented by obsessive Andrea Caracortada (Victoria Abril) whose daily show *Lo peor del día* revels in people’s misery and is broadcast from a studio set which itself becomes a simulacrum in its lack of a physical audience (yet each macabre statement by Andrea is artificially applauded).⁴³ Nearly everything in the film seems fake and artificial but the notion of gender authenticity is left intact through the surprisingly clear-sighted utterances of character Juana.

Tacones lejanos, *La mala educación*, and *La ley del deseo* analysed from a sexuality and gender perspective

The three films explored henceforth constitute the second and final part of this chapter. The films differ slightly, thematically and visually, from the three previous, covered in the first part. Thus, while *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, *Átame*, and *Kika* all represented Madrid as a construct mainly through the miniature replica serving as an effective stage prop in the visual narratives, in *Tacones lejanos*, *La mala educación*, and *La ley del deseo* the gendered body is focused on to a greater extent than the constructed representation of the urban space. Or rather, in *La ley*..., Madrid as a real shooting location becomes a gendered space, affected by the corporeal fluidity of the female protagonist. The urban environment in this film can be considered equally fluid and open to new interpretations as transsexual Tina; often viewed against the backdrop of the *Movida* that subjected the city to a state of flux. And, correspondingly, in *La mala educación* the shifting geographical landscape traversed by the protagonists on their various journeys through Spain mirrors their mental development and, particularly, their physical transformation.

⁴³ Smith draws an interesting connection between technology and gender in the film, arguing that while in *Kika* “gender is technologized, with the ‘essential’ woman dissolved into visual paraphernalia (false eyelashes and fun fur)”, ... “in Andrea technology is gendered, with the ‘indifferent’ penetration of the vision machine (of video apparatus) revealed to be not simply instrumental to but rather complicit with the powers of patriarchy, even as it is embodied in a figure empirically gendered feminine.” Smith, *Vision Machines: Cinema, Literature and Sexuality in Spain and Cuba, 1983-93*: 49-50.

While the critical focus also in this part of the chapter argument is Almodóvar's representation of what is regarded as a corporeal construct, the analysis will no longer revolve around the notion of the urban environment as a simulacrum. Of interest is, rather, predominantly the screened human body and gender. It is true that in *La mala educación* the urban space itself changes in line with the anatomical changes of, particularly, main character Ignacio and symbolically underscores his character development. Still, overall, in these films internal space is favoured over external and thus the most important part of the action takes place within the characters themselves and not always against the backdrop of a transformed capital.

Specifically, the comparative analysis of *Tacones lejanos* and *La mala educación* explores the non-binary, fluid interrelationship between sexuality and gender as a performed identity when it comes to the filmic representation of the *drag* or the *transvestite*. Almodóvar's protagonists here once more challenge social conventions and sexual and behavioural norms. The plots revolve around identity issues as they relate to sexuality and gender, and the cross-gender phenomenon *transvestism*⁴⁴ or what in some (particularly Butlerian) discourses have been seen as "the spectacle" of the *drag* and also a *male femaling* (Ekins 1997).⁴⁵ Generally speaking, it may be that the increasingly permissive Spanish metropolis of the democratic era has facilitated a greater urban visibility of these sexual and gendered "others", who once used to form a part of Spanish subcultures. This conforms to Piganiol's reflection that:

Almodóvar's proposal seems to depart from the premise that gender/sexual categories are not natural, but cultural and, therefore, there is no ontological impediment for the transformation of these categories within the same process of change as that of social structures (Pastor 2006, 19).

Although it may be that the drag artist and the cross-dresser in Spain today have carved a new space for themselves within the context of a more liberalized culture and politics, from a cinematic perspective it has been rightfully pointed out that cross-dressing had already been regularly employed as an element in classic Hollywood films. Indeed, transvestism has been called "the most common formulation of conventional body-image modification" and repeatedly features as an act in several films by (again) Hitchcock, and others (Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito 2007, 136).

⁴⁴ Transsexuality also becomes an issue explored more intently in *La ley del deseo*. Piganiol even goes as far as to say that "transsexuals are not only visible in his [Almodóvar's] work, they are a *leitmotiv*." Piganiol, "Transgenderism and Transsexuality in Almodóvar's Movies," 80.

⁴⁵ The term has been explained as follows: "Male cross-dressers and sex-changers are genetic males who 'female' in various ways; variously adopting what they take to be the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviours, accoutrements, and attributes of genetic females", Richard Ekins, *Male Femaling: A grounded theory approach to cross-dressing and sex-changing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

In a performative manner, the drags in *Tacones lejanos* and *La mala educación* (as well as in *Laberinto de pasiones* and *Todo sobre mi madre*) are multifaceted, fluid or *liquid* to keep using one of Bauman's key concepts and "mouldable." This is seen not only in their capacity to embrace different sexual and gender roles but also through their merging of various identities into one: either in their voluntary appropriation of someone else's staged identity, or in their literal incorporation (through sex changes) of "the Other", i.e. the persona they wish to inhabit. This makes the drags in focus welcome complements to other, less outrageous, characters who, in a sense, are more one-dimensional; characters lacking a similar ability to adopt and impersonate multiple personas. In other words, these protagonists "fluctuate between a varied range of sexualities and gender identities."⁴⁶

Tacones lejanos

Almodóvar's ninth feature film has been called one "which celebrates representations of the feminine" (Shaw 2010, 55). By this is meant that either the female persona or the female construct generally takes preference over the male in the film. The man is influenced by the woman or what she represents. He could be said to honour her by cross-dressing and enacting the female part in drag-shows where the imitative performance artist is as faithful to the original performance and performer as possible. Alternatively, the film's anatomically male protagonist fluidly adopts a sometimes male, sometimes female gender, depending on the occasion.

As was the case with the previous films analysed in this chapter, *Tacones lejanos*, too, is set predominantly in Madrid. However, the physicality of the Spanish capital is not given any major attention in the sense that it is not statically represented as a series of urban landmarks. Thus, the recognizable *cardboard city*⁴⁷ is now partly left behind. Rather, as in *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, the almost sole purpose of the city is to serve as a space traversed by characters wishing to enjoy specific amenities (as is the case in e.g. the internal shooting locations Villa Rosa, a club that lends itself to staged drag shows, and Teatro María Guerrero; both centrally located in Madrid). It could, nevertheless, be argued that the protagonists' "movement" within the city

⁴⁶ Pastor also argues that "[i]n fact in many of his films, the boundaries of sexuality and gender are not clearly delimited: these boundaries are only exposed as idealized cultural constructs that can be transgressed on the cinematic screen, and are used by Almodóvar to destabilize the fossilized cultural structures of tradition." Brígida M. Pastor, "Screening sexual and gendered otherness in Almodóvar's *Law of Desire* (1987)- the 'real' sexual revolution." *Studies in European Cinema* 3, no. 1 (2006): 7.

⁴⁷ "Explore Madrid: Almodovar's Madrid, *esmadrid.com*, <http://www.esmadrid.com/en/portal.do?TR=C&IDR=532>

provides the connective material that links place and gender, urban space and the human body, the public sphere and the private” (Marsh 2004, 55).⁴⁸

Lingering, for a moment, on the notion of urban space and urban constructs, *Tacones lejanos* also features a scale replica which, although it is no longer a miniature copy of a building, still denotes the increasing artificiality of the external space in a postmodern era characterized by its increased speed and blurred limits both geographically and, indeed, with regard to a partly artificial human gender. As mentioned earlier, the image of a miniature aircraft in the opening sequence of the film symbolically underscores the fluidity of a typical *non-place*, one that, as opposed to more “existentialist” anthropological spaces, is defined as a space “formed in relation to certain ends” (Augé 1995, 80 and 94).

In narrative focus in the film is a daughter (Rebecca) forcefully separated as a child from an acting mother (Becky) who prefers a prosperous career to more conventional childrearing. In a typical Freudian manner, the daughter’s frustrated love for her mother, one that does not come to “normal” fruition, triggers Rebecca (Victoria Abril) to rid herself of the men attracted to Becky (Marisa Paredes), and to also eventually marry her mother’s ex-lover Manuel, Becky unawares. Fifteen years after childhood separation, mother and daughter reunite in the Spanish capital, their initial encounter taking place within the fluid transit zone of Barajas Airport. It is in this same location where we witness how Rebecca’s childhood memories trigger a series of flashbacks that help explain the current situation between the two women. Their strained relationship is repeatedly tested, and things come to a head when Rebecca kills Manuel to avenge Becky’s new affair with him and to win back her mother’s affection (now without a man standing between them). Screened Spanish news anchor Rebecca subsequently confesses her deed on national news. Judge Dominguez (Miguel Bosé) comes to her rescue and makes every effort to clear Rebecca of the crime. We learn that he is personally invested in Rebecca as her friend when cross-dressing as *Letal*. In his drag shows, *Letal* impersonates Becky and (quoting Almodóvar’s film script) Smith writes that this screened gender artist becomes one of the “‘new wave’ of drag queens whose aim is not to be women, but rather to pay parodic homage to them” (Smith 2000, 126).

It has been argued that the name *Letal* may symbolically reflect the threat he poses to the conventional male in a traditionally patriarchal Spanish society.⁴⁹ The drag artist is only one of three impersonations assumed by biological or “real” Hugo. This man with multiple personas is thus Hugo, *Letal* and Judge Dominguez all at once; three aspects of to the same individual that are all equally “valid” – be they related to a male

⁴⁸ Marsh here refers to *Carne trémula*, but his statement can be applied also to *Tacones lejanos*.

⁴⁹ When *Letal* later impregnates Rebecca, this act confuses the screened gender representations and the boundaries between sexuality and gender become blurred.

anatomy or to a constructed gender and identity. As the film draws to a close, this man engaged in constant cross-dressing proposes to marry Rebecca, which could suggest a future relationship based on an unfixed gender and sexual identity. Nevertheless, it may be that he neither can nor wishes to shed any of the multiple identities or roles embraced on- and off stage. This is also a point made by Shaw, who maintains that “in his insistence that he is all of the characters he plays, he refuses to take on a single unifying identity” (Shaw 2010, 60).

Hugo’s attitude to gender and sexuality seems to mirror Butler’s statement that “... the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (Butler 1990, 11). The multi-layered filmic drama is resolved through final forgiveness between mother and daughter and there is the chance for a more balanced love and affection to grow between Hugo/*Letal*/Judge Dominguez, and Rebecca (perhaps particularly once the mother/previous rival is gone). Thus, not only can this film be analysed from a Freudian and, partially, Jungian perspective, but Butler’s theories on gender performativity are particularly relevant in terms of the “need for a radical rethinking of the categories of identity within the context of relations of radical gender asymmetry” (Butler 1990, 16).

La mala educación

If the main focus in *Tacones lejanos* had been on internal character development, in *La mala educación* both the physical and mental transformation of the protagonists is played out against the backdrop of a Spanish landscape that is either embraced or abandoned by these characters. That is to say that the protagonists’ constant journeys through Spain allow the spectator to witness how an alternatively rural or urban location indirectly becomes conducive to the character development and helps the protagonists shape an identity that is more, or less, fluid. Dafna Hornike has compared these individual mental and physical changes that are partly environmentally influenced, to “un nomadismo personal.”⁵⁰ By this she refers to,

[una] mudanza geográfica... acompañada de un nomadismo personal, es decir, con cambios de oficio, género y tendencia sexual mostrando un desplazamiento del sujeto en el espacio físico como el metafórico (Hornike 2009, 86).

As shall be demonstrated, concrete geographical space plays almost as big a role in the film as the mental and physical space explored by Almodóvar in a cinematic narrative that stands out in his repertoire (in its focus on male rather than female protagonists). Thematic and narrative key words in the film are *homosexuality*, *transvestism* and

⁵⁰ She borrows this key concept from Rosi Braidotti.

transsexuality, as well as the power abuse of a Catholic educational institution towards those who depend on it in their tender years. Taking 1980s Madrid as a starting point, the film takes us back to the Francoist 1960s through constant flashbacks, and later flash-forwards bring the viewer back to a present which offers little consolidation to characters who are never quite complete and always subjected to further challenges and changes, some of which are orchestrated by none other than these very protagonists themselves. Like several other films by Almodóvar, *La mala educación* is also steeped in a postmodern tradition through its various double narratives and self-referential focus on a film within a film (an instant parallel can be drawn to *Átame*. Here, however, the actual script on which the meta-film is based does not gain crucial importance. It certainly does in *La mala educación*) and its constant merging of the literary and the cinematic genres. In other words, *La mala educación* does not adhere to a linear plot development but becomes a fragmented visual and narrative collage that contains several film noir elements and follows a windy structure, which involves:

[a] convoluted ... *mise-en-abîme* of flashbacks within flashbacks, false leads and a kind of 'smoke-and-mirrors' resolution that is more baffling than original (Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 263).

Falsity being a theme explored in *La mala educación*, the word can be used as a term to define the drag artist who becomes a key figure also in this film. Thus, although Almodóvar does not have a biological woman play any major part here, the female character is indeed still present in the film and is crucial to the plot development, but is represented by a man in drag. This is main character Ángel Andrade (later known as Juan, both parts played by Gabriel García Bernal) who at various instances in the plot cross-dresses⁵¹ as alternatively seductive drag queen *Zahara*, complete in his appropriated gender with a series of moves and mannerisms inspired by a presumably homosexual impersonator of real Spanish artist Sara Montiel,⁵² or falsely appears as his dead brother, transsexual Ignacio (Francisco Boira).

⁵¹ A recent Melbourne Gaultier exhibition featured this "*trompe l'oeil* nude sequin-embroidered gown" by the French designer, Zeca's tiger outfit from *La piel que habito*, as well as Andrea Caracortada's zipper bomber jacket from *Kika*. Almodóvar has provided the following commentary accompanying the exhibited garments: "Everything in the costumes was related to tragedy or blood. They were wonderfully beautiful and absolutely 'conceptual.'" "The fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk", NGV 17 Oct 2014- 8 Feb 2015, last modified 2014, <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/jeanpaulgaultier>

⁵² In Dafna Hornike's words, "la imagen de Sara Montiel se transforma en una inspiración ... En el proceso de la creación de una draga, se transforma el personaje de una actriz conocida, a un arquetipo, un extracto de lo que percibe como femenino." Dafna Hornike, "La estabilidad del cambio- los personajes travestidos en *Sirena Selenia vestida* y *La mala educación*," *The Hebrew University of Jerusalem* 2, no. 3 (2009): 94.

In narrative focus are two male friends turned lovers and their ways of dealing with probable childhood sexual abuse at a Catholic boy school, in later adult years. The partly autobiographical film, which prior to its release was a decade in the making, features a subplot where literature professor (or “profesor de teatro” in Spanish) (Almodóvar 2004) and Salesian monk Padre Manolo becomes one of the protagonists and wrongdoers. The drag artist is again given a place in the narrative foreground in a film that revolves around an autobiographic manuscript called *La visita*. The title could symbolically refer to actor and presumed author of the play Ángel Adrade (acting as dead Ignacio) who makes an apparently impromptu visit to childhood friend and first love turned movie director Enrique Goded, in the hope that his manuscript might be turned into a film. This sudden reappearance occurs sixteen years after the two had been forcefully separated from each other within the confines of a Catholic institution which becomes a catalyst for the main course of action in the film.

And additionally, *La visita* become words used to not only narratively embrace the protagonists’ geographical crisscrossing through Spain, but also to visually show the return of a now adult victim to his culprit (and in the later visit of this same culprit, now under a protective pseudonym, at the doorstep of the same victim turned transsexual). The manuscript *La visita* recounts the sexual abuse that Ignacio was subjected to as a youth whilst undertaking Catholic education in the Catalan region of Levante. In a film which also takes the viewer from Madrid to Valencia (as this is the decentralized place where Ignacio’s sex change is first initiated, it means that a marginalized character acts upon his wish to anatomically change into a female within a space itself located in the rural margins)⁵³ and Galicia and which includes a visually and narratively important scene played out amongst the macabre sculptures of *El museo de Gigantes y Cabezudos*, the narrative focus is largely on the fluid identity of Juan and on his temporarily visual transformation into a female, in a film directed by Goded and based on the screenplay of Ignacio Rodríguez. As opposed to other Almodóvarian transvestites, Juan’s cross-dressing is here not triggered by an urge to become a woman performatively and to embrace a gendered identity that leans towards the female. Rather, his screened transvestism becomes his way to temporarily fuel his own acting career. Thus, Ignacio’s original manuscript is used as a method by which Juan can enact his now dead, once troubled brother on screen and tell his story in the process. Although it has been argued that with this film Almodóvar “intenta... una exploración del pasado pedagógico-nacional” (Navajas 2007, 286) and the narrative can serve as a critique of an oppressive and abusive Catholic educational institution in 1960s and 1970s Spain, the cineaste himself has never called *La mala educación* directly anti-

⁵³ Dafna Hornike has expanded on this idea in her insightful article. She claims that *La mala educación* “sigue jugando con el proceso de encarnar diferentes roles en cualquier ciudad.” Hornike, “La estabilidad del cambio –los personajes travestidos en *Sirena Selena vestida* y *La mala educación*,” 88.

clerical. With this in mind, the film can be seen as a visual exposé that focuses on sexual and gendered fluidity and where the performed female persona becomes a construct explorable from a Butlerian perspective. Thus, the “constructed status of gender” in the film means that gender becomes “a free-floating artifice” (Butler 1990, 6) where a female body inhabited by a man becomes so seductive that the performer’s original sex is, in essence, no longer relevant. Rather, what fascinates is the immaculate female that he has become.

Indeed, as was the case in *Tacones lejanos*, also in *La mala educación* a dashing man turns into an extravagant woman with such conviction that the normally contrasting personas merge into one. And in fact, the male hidden behind the female construct during Zahara’s impassioned initial drag show is essential for a complete female impersonation to take place. It seems as if only the transvestite is fully capable of carrying out such an impeccable gender performance. Thus, in a sense, the man enacting the woman presents her as more immaculate than a biological woman would generally be capable of.⁵⁴ In Zahara’s performance of an adopted female gender, his physicality is constructed (“un personaje femenino de extrema belleza y altamente seductor ... pero estos atributos son falsos: su vestido tiene pubis y pechos ‘de utilería’”) (Bonatto 2008, 8), but the artist on stage convincingly seduces and captivates the audience mentally and physically with costumes that emphasise “her female (fake or not) forms; her gestures and dances are full of delicacy ... transsexuals are the characters who really dare to show their (female) bodies” (Piganiol 2009, 83).

A final quote from Butler summarizes her take on gender performativity as reflective of a gender independent from sexuality or which, rather, incorporates sexuality within the notion of gender:

What drag exposes ... is the “normal” constitution of gender presentation in which the gender performed is in many ways constituted by a set of disavowed attachments or identifications that constitute a different domain of the “unperformable.” Indeed, it may well be that what constitutes the *sexually* unperformable is performed instead as *gender identification* (Butler 1993, 235-36).

Consequently, we again witness how biological sexuality gives way to gender performativity. Thus, when sexuality is no longer conferred biological connotations, it can become a construct equally performable as the gender with which it merges.

⁵⁴ Hornike additionally plays with the word “quizás” (in the song *Quizás quizás quizás*, originally by Nat King Cole), as it is being used in Zahara’s staged performance. She speaks of the fluidity of the subject as also reflected by the sung words: “El sujeto nómada está siempre en este “quizás”, quizás sea un hombre, quizás una mujer, quizás sea del pueblo, quizás de la ciudad, quizá todas estas posibilidades sean correctas.” *ibid.*, 95.

Fluid gender notions in La ley del deseo and the move from biological sexuality to a constructed gender

In continuation, *La ley del deseo* is analysed with regard to its screened representation of a transsexual protagonist whose personal journey through the filmic narrative can be partly compared to the social and cultural transformation of 1980s Madrid. No longer is Butler's notion of gender performativity drawn on. And still, performativity does run like a governing idea also through this film and, as such, will be an aspect commented upon, especially in terms of protagonist Tina Quintero and the way in which her "artificial femininity" is projected on screen. Almodóvar's representation of a transformed gender is primarily analysed from a Baumanian postmodern perspective and in consideration of Deleuzian theories. In their respective arguments they either present the urban environment as fluid, or the human body itself as undergoing a constant process of transformative *becoming* (someone else). As will be highlighted, in *La ley del deseo*, not only is the female protagonist physically the result of a process of gender reassignment surgery that has her abandon her male anatomy in favour of the female construct that she becomes. But at the same time her identity oscillates between male and female, as it is both shaped by and still anchored in a male past, leading to a male/female identity fusion (rather than "confusion" given that Tina's choice to linger in her past seems quite natural to her⁵⁵ and, indeed, also to the viewer). This is partly where Deleuzian theories gain ground in the film analysis.

And as briefly suggested earlier, Bauman's theories can also be applied to the way in which the same protagonist further genders the urban space within the context of a Spanish capital that is socially and culturally seeking to free itself from the shadows of Francoism. In the film, this is made particularly evident in a sexually suggestive external scene much referred to by critics, where Tina and her urban environment are simultaneously eroticized by Almodóvar.

As Bauman's sees it, our global and, in many ways, postmodern society is defined by a lack of stability and constant fluidity and evolution. He argues that "[f]luidity or liquidity [are] fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways *novel*, phase in the history of modernity" (Bauman 2000, 2) (as well as, again, postmodernity, one might argue). Today, while the past is recalled, it is not a site mentally dwelled on. Rather, postmodern individuals are constantly looking for change and the human identity is one that is as fluctuating as the body that it pertains to:

⁵⁵ In a charged scene she establishes that "en lo esencial sigo lo misma" ("I'm still the same deep down"). Interestingly, she here refers to the person she was prior to her sex change by using the female form of the adjective. By not referring to herself as *mismo* (as the one she was prior to her sex change), Tina here demonstrates how much she identifies with a female.

[T]oday the problem of identity arises mostly from the difficulty of holding to any identity for long, from the virtual impossibility of finding such a form of identity-expression... and the resulting need not to embrace any identity too tightly, in order to abandon it at short notice if need be (Bauman 1997, 123).

In a postmodern universe, the longing for change governs the individual who lingers neither in the past nor completely in the present. Rather, citizens now engage in a frantic chase (or a “hunt” which becomes “like a drug”) (Bauman 2011, 28) for a generally undefined dream. More than anything, this dream consists in embracing an identity that is as fluid and all-encompassing as the global society in which we live. The individual guided by such an identity also feels at home (or *chez soi*)⁵⁶ everywhere, yet nowhere in particular (“I feel at home anywhere despite the fact that there is no place I can call home”) (Bauman 2011, 3). This notion of social and geographical adaptation, or an individual strive to fit into any environment that may not resemble that with which one is familiar, correlates with the idea of a multicultural society whose borders are open to the world outside. Bauman seems to propose that such social fluidity also spills over into a general acceptance of what is different and unconventional. This includes a postmodern “palimpsest identity” (Bauman 1997, 25) which fits the idea of a “good society” ... intent on ‘giving everyone a chance’, on “removing one by one the obstacles preventing those chances from being fulfilled” (Bauman 2011, 93).

Bauman and Deleuze

Bauman’s notion of social fluidity corresponds with Deleuze’s comparison of society to “lines of flight.” Thus, society to Deleuze is “something that is constantly escaping in every direction... it flows monetarily, it flows ideologically. It is really made of lines of flight” (Deleuze 2006, 280).

It has been argued, with regard to Deleuze and Guattari, that “[r]hizomatic connections⁵⁷ form open territories that are not constricted by the enclosing frame of a rigid borderline” (Buchanan and Parr 2006, 95). Interestingly, while Bauman is cynically aware also of the drawbacks of postmodernity⁵⁸ and of the less “rigid” society and citizen of today, Deleuze’s idea of the individual being subject to a process of flows holds almost entirely positive connotations. Thus, his various types of “becoming”

⁵⁶ This term denoting an individual feeling at home anywhere has also been quoted in a postmodern context by James Good and Irving Velody, eds., *The Politics of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998),

⁵⁷ These are comparable to lines of flight.

⁵⁸ Especially as expressed in *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997).

(*becoming-animal*, *interpetrosis*, *becoming-woman*⁵⁹, and so forth) (Colebrook 2002) highlight an individual's or entity's innate tendency to evolve into something else and to be constantly engaged in a process; in a not standing still. By becoming hybrid in a postmodern manner (rather than "affirming its humanity" or "returning to an animal state"), this human being "becomes more than itself, or expands to its highest power" (Colebrook 2002, 129). In this sense, being in motion or shifting into something new or different, is not a forced act but, rather, something that happens relatively effortlessly and naturally.

A troubled transsexual on screen

Bauman's and Deleuze's notions of a transformative individual whose, mainly physical, appearance changes radically over time prove pertinent to the screen analysis of *La ley del deseo*. Here, transsexual Tina Quintero is subject to a process of change which affects her throughout life. Tina's (or Tino's) sex change is physically transformative, but the changes are not radically mental given that she refuses to let go of her pre-female past. Rather, this past comes back to haunt her throughout the plot development. And yet, at the same time this past also compliments and completes her as a character. The memories that "feed her" (Kinder and Almodóvar 1987, 41) help Tina stay grounded and also provide her with a past that she shares with her brother. And as she candidly points out, "my memories are the only thing I have left"⁶⁰ (Almodóvar 1987).

Revolving, in part, around the themes of memory and amnesia, while playwright Pablo Quintero (Eusebio Poncela) in the film suffers temporary memory loss (symbolic, perhaps, of the collective and unvoiced attempt in contemporary Spain to at least momentarily "let go of" the past to facilitate a faster transition into a transformative present and future), Tina repeatedly recalls her period as a male. In a cathartic scene midway through the film, Pablo proposes that his sister play the lead role in his next film, a film "loosely" based on her own life and her "troubles with men." This triggers an explosive response from Tina which works as a perfect cinematic showdown:

Tu papel... no es que esté inspirado en ti, pero guarda cierta afinidad...
¿Como cuánto de afinidad?

⁵⁹ According to Deleuze and Guattari, "... becoming-woman... implies two simultaneous movements, one by which a term (the subject) is withdrawn from the majority, and another by which a term (the medium or agent) rises up from the minority." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 (1980)). 291.

⁶⁰ Almodóvar calls Tina's engagement with her worst enemies a kind of masochism, or, rather, a "quotidian masochism." Marsha Kinder and Pedro Almodóvar, "Pleasure and the New Spanish Mentality: A Conversation with Pedro Almodóvar," *Film Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1987): 41.

Pues en lo que se refiere a tus problemas con los tíos.

Yo no tengo problemas con los tíos pues para mi hace ya mucho tiempo que no existen.

¿Y te parece poco problema eso? (Almodóvar 1987).

Troubled by memories of a father with whom she presumably once shared an incestuous relationship and who approved of his daughter's imminent sex change, Tina's past affects the way she behaves and regards herself in the present. She is doubly sensitive to the criticism of a brother with whom she has forged a strong bond and who, so she claims, has never judged her. Still, while Tina's above response reflects her own insecurities, her comment in a subsequent scene that "Soy muy vulnerable, y muy imperfecta" (Almodóvar 1987) can be interpreted as an honest reaction to Pablo's prior provocation, which proves how upfront about her own sexual and gendered identity she really is.⁶¹

Tino's anatomically male body was once renounced and gave way to a female alternative. As a result, he undergoes a transitional process of leaving one kind of sexuality behind while embracing another (thereby not saying that he had not felt like a woman already prior to the actual sex change). Tina thus appears from a Deleuzian process of *becoming-woman*⁶² – as would later be the case with Vicente transformed into Vera, in *La piel que habito* (in this film, however, the forced gender reassignment surgery becomes a nightmarish experience for a kidnapped "patient" who is a victim rather than a co-participant in a preliminary moment of joint decision-making). With regard to *La ley del deseo*, it can be held that Tina keeps transforming throughout the plot development which, all in all, makes for a fluid protagonist. In contrast to Almodóvar's screened representation of the transvestite, Tina's physical transformation from man to woman is not temporary but permanent. Also, it may again be held that her sex change is not a biological appropriation of another sex but, rather, a female construct – where her transformed body is artificial rather than biological. That is to say that no matter how much Tina identifies with being a woman, she will never be one in a biological sense – in that she was never biologically of the female gender. Her female anatomy remains a construct as it is the result of operative surgery or an intrusive physical operation. Put alternatively, Almodóvar's transsexuals "choose to mainly express the feminine part of themselves, but still live outside of common sex and gender dichotomies" (Piganiol 2009, 80).

⁶¹ Piganiol notes that "[f]ar from being ridiculous, transsexuals are the most appealing characters in his [Almodóvar's] movies." Piganiol, "Transgenderism and Transsexuality in Almodóvar's Movies," 82.

⁶² From a Deleuzian perspective "[b]ecoming woman necessarily affects men as much as women. In a way, the subject in a becoming is always 'man.'" Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: 321.

Performativity in *La ley del deseo*

Almodóvar himself, despite having called his cinematic representation of Tina Quintero “the most complete feminine portrait I have done to date” (Almodóvar 1992, 83), does not seem to equal this femininity to femaleness either. Thus, in the same breath, he labels Maura’s transsexual “shocking” and continues by saying that

[b]eyond the circus-like aspect of looking like a man who has turned himself into a woman ... Maura proves herself to be in possession of so many registers that her performance becomes an actual festival (Almodóvar 1992, 83).

Ironically perhaps, this comparison of a lead actress’s performance to an actual festival echoes Tina’s aforementioned habit of referring to herself as a “freak” (*un fenómeno*). Her subsequent refusal to lend her own life to a film script, as, “mis fracasos con los hombres son algo más que el argumento de un guión” (Almodóvar 1987) adds a further self-referential touch to the film (as was likewise the case in *Átame*).

Piganiol argues that,

[e]ven if they are not at the core of the plots, transsexuals become the focus of the audience attention in Almodóvar’s movies. Transsexuals are always performing within the film: they are on stage in order to be visible (Piganiol 2009, 81).

This holds true for *La ley del deseo*, where, generally, several episodes revolve around performing and being on stage (already in the very opening scene we voyeuristically witness the filming of a porno-sequence inside a studio, where the male subject is spurred on to orgasm by two increasingly aroused male scriptwriters). In the second scene, Tina is first introduced to us. She approaches her playwright brother from behind the curtains of the movie theatre during the opening night of his film (its final scene is also shown to us as viewers). It could be held that Tina engages not only in an on-stage performance that becomes a brief subplot or interlude within an already multi-layered film, but also in off-stage performativity when she enacts a female gender also in her private life. Thus, in the film she is being cast as an actress in a staged production of *La voix humaine* and prior to that she had sung in her childhood chapel (part of the Instituto Ramiro de Maeztu, on Serrano 127 in Madrid); a sentimental act which evokes Tina’s past as a choir boy at the same college and which triggers a “controlled confrontation” with her previous spiritual mentor Padre Constantino.⁶³ But her most

⁶³ The similarities between this spiritual father, and Padre Manolo in *La mala educación* are striking. This is particularly true as regards the interaction between a transformed Ignacio and el Señor Berenguer in the second part of the film: neither here nor in the Instituto Maeztu scene in *La ley del deseo* does the clergyman recognize his physically transformed former adept.

natural gender act of all (one which, as such, may not be considered a performance at all) is the critically acclaimed voyeuristic water-hosing scene where, in front of the 16th century barracks of El Conde Duque and having found pleasurable relief from the suffocating nocturnal heat, a “hydrotherapeuticised”⁶⁴ Tina lets out a suggestive, almost sexual, grunt⁶⁵ or what has been called a “shout of freedom ... in an era in which the first generation after the dictatorship was living in a kind of strange utopia” (Torres Hortelano 2011, 70).

Also, as mentioned earlier, Tina’s mental crisscrossing between male past and female present by way of voiced recollections of times gone by, can be regarded as performative, although these instances take place off-stage (in the film). In these episodes we witness Tina’s rather natural, or casual, way of referring to her previously biologically male anatomy, from the point of view of a physically constructed female appearance in the present. Similarly to her anguish at the prospect of Pablo not recovering from his memory loss later in the film, as “tu amnesia me deja sin pasado”, it may be held that Tina’s inability to live fully in the present partly mirrors the corresponding inability amongst contemporary Spaniards to fully let go of a troublesome past, and the importance of holding on to also this collective past in order to gain a complete sense of national identity in the present – traumatic as this may be (thereby overcoming the paralysing and ultimately disruptive effects of “El pacto del olvido”).

All things considered, it may be held that Tina’s transitory personal journey as an individual who trades in one body for another and gains a slightly different identity as a result, can be compared to Bauman’s notion of individualization as a process of “transforming human ‘identity’ from a ‘given’ into a ‘task.’” (Bauman 2000, 34)⁶⁶ – the given can in the chapter argument be equalled to biological gender and the task to the act of adopting a performative, “artificial” gender.

⁶⁴ Smith draws an important connection between this scene and the water-hosing scene in *La piel que habito*, with its all the more harrowing “hosing down of a scantily clad soon-to-be transsexual.” Jo Labanyi and Tatjana Pavlovic, eds. *A Companion to Spanish Cinema* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013). 135. All in all, two starkly different gender representations.

⁶⁵ Maura has called the experience “una impresión tremenda, muy física, muy violenta.” In Nuria Vidal, *El cine de Pedro Almodóvar* (Madrid: Instituto de la Cinematografía y las Artes Audiovisuales Ministerio de Cultura, 1988), 157. Pigianol, in turn, likens the scene to sexual intercourse and argues that “[t]he sexual fulfilment that Tina experiences in the street may appear as the reconciliation between transsexuality and public space.” Pigianol, “Transgenderism and Transsexuality in Almodóvar’s Movies,” 82.

⁶⁶ A link can also be made between Tina as a gender performer and Pablo Quintero’s complaint that she “really over-acted” in Cocteau’s stage-play. Perhaps her apparent over-acting again reflects her inability to naturally embrace or inhabit her new female body and persona.

Chapter conclusions

The films analysed in this chapter reflect the heightened inauthenticity and artificiality of our contemporary urban space and the screened human body. As globalization takes a hold of our increasingly postmodern metropolis, this space has become gradually less homogenous. The city, rather, resembles a collage of different styles and expressions. Almodóvar experiments with this notion in a cinema where the constructed human body paired with a fluid gender identity can be seen as metaphors for the concurrent unsolidified postmodern era where, through a process of “liquefaction” (Bauman 2000, 3), fluids appear that “neither fix space nor bind time” (Bauman 2000, 2). By using scale replicas or mock versions of Madrid in several films, Almodóvar explores notions of what is real and not. He seems to propose that that which is less authentic than the commonly defined as “real”, may indeed be equally worthy of attention and hold a value in itself. With regard to transvestism and transsexuality, Almodóvar’s tolerant screened portrayal of sexual and gendered others mirrors a society less fixed in its ways; one which is increasingly fluid and accepting of an ever more multifaceted global individual. This individual must “keep changing” (Bauman 2011, 24) as often as possible to stay afloat in a rapidly changing urban reality.

CHAPTER SIX

Almodóvar's Madrid versus Pons' Barcelona: The global metropolis as a city of desire or a site of urban malaise?

Introduction and questions asked

This concluding chapter links back to the initial hypothesis that the cinema of Almodóvar and Pons reflects not only the concurrent transformation of Madrid and Barcelona, but also global transformation in Spain at large. Through their filmmaking these cineastes also influence changes happening around them, in the sense that their cinema has an impact on viewers and triggers several responses and attitudes to the society represented on screen. The social and cultural issues dealt with mirror conditions in the postmodern habitat of today. In the case of Spain, what may be considered in part a liberalized utopia of a less restrictive society is not spared from a its also dystopic elements. This becomes particularly evident in their more recent films, where the narrative development and representation of the city correspond to the idea that “[t]he distance between dystopia and utopia can seem alarmingly close at times” (Claeys 2011, 13).

More specifically, the thematic analyses carried out so far relate to issues of concern in an ever more complex metropolis, such as the dichotomy between the urban and the rural space and the interlinked concept of nostalgia, urban and archival mapping, and alternative gender expressions. They all lead to the following questions addressed in this chapter: Is the urban space in Almodóvar's and Pons' more recent films mainly a utopia or dystopia? Why do the screened portrayals of Madrid and Barcelona generally contrast, and what aspects of the films point to the city as a mainly positive or negative place? Might it ultimately, and as suggested earlier, be possible to view *urban utopia* and *dystopia* as two interrelated concepts – cinematically and in society at large? A

postmodern vision of the urban habitat suggests that this may well be the case and, importantly, this becomes an issue explored by Bauman in several of his discourses. He suggests that what appears to be a utopic condition may, in fact, be no more than a futile attempt by citizens today to escape a past that continues to form a part of the present – no matter how much they strive to break away from or relegate “the past to the past.” As Bauman puts it,

[s]emantically, escape is the very opposite of utopia, but psychologically it is its sole available substitute: one would say – its new rendition, re-fashioned to the measure of our deregulated, individualized society ... You can no longer seriously hope to make *the world* a better place to live, you can’t even make really secure that better *place* in the world which you might have managed to cut out for yourself (Bauman 2006, 8)

In their screened narratives, Almodóvar and Pons confront this dilemma within a Spanish and Catalan context. The notion of a postmodern escape here becomes relevant regarding the need for the protagonists to embrace urban change as part of a globalizing movement and to mentally avoid lingering in the past. However, this approach often leads to a false sense of utopia; the concerns of the characters repeatedly reflect the difficulty for contemporary citizens to fully live in the moment and embrace a transformed urban environment which is at once enticing and liberating and bewildering and alienating – even hostile. This will be evidenced in upcoming film analyses.

Structure, chapter aims and the notion of screened urban malaise

The chapter cinematically compares and contrasts the terms *utopia* and *dystopia*.¹ The original meaning and application of *utopia* is briefly introduced, and the concept and its interrelated opposite are applied within a specifically urban context. In a thesis that revolves around the screened representation of the global habitat, the two terms are mainly referred to considering Bauman’s postmodernist views. Alongside those of Bauman, Harvey’s corresponding theories expanded on in e.g. *The Conditions of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* and *Spaces of Hope*, also prove pertinent to the chapter argument.

When theories of *utopia* and *dystopia* are applied to the cinema of Almodóvar and the four films by Pons examined in this thesis, it becomes clear that *utopia* is most readily linked to Almodóvar’s early 1980 films, whereas it ceases to be as effective a

¹ Dystopia has been defined as “[a]n imaginary place in literature, art, or film, in which conditions are destructive to human life.” Martha P. Nochimson, *World on Film: An Introduction* (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). 406.

term with regard to his 1990s and 21st-century movies (with *La flor de mi secreto* commonly taken as a turning point as a film that paved the way for a generally more sombre outlook on life amongst the protagonists). In the case of Pons, in *Carícies, Morir (o no)*, *Amor idiota* and *Barcelona (un mapa)* his screened Barcelona is largely more dystopic than utopic. There may be several, mainly postmodern, reasons for this, as discussed later.

In Almodóvar's early works, his screened urbanites are governed by both social² and sexual desire within a metropolis with which they enjoy an almost organic relationship. City and citizen seem to influence each other to almost equal degrees when the external space lends itself to the characters' repeated sexual adventures and explorations. The urban environment becomes itself erotic: it accommodates individuals who explore a range of sexual and gendered predilections. Even *La ley del deseo*, released at the end of the same transformative 1980s, is largely governed by a both individual and collective desire and a zest for life amongst the characters, which comes to full fruition within the limits of their screened capital. Not only does newly liberalized Spain in these films infuse the protagonists with a special energy, but their energy, in turn, positively affects their urban space, perhaps especially in a sexual sense. Thus, in the specific case of transsexual Tina Quintero in *La Ley...*, although visibly troubled on several occasions, she is ultimately guided by desire: not only with regard to an altered, now female physique, but also when it comes to her relationship with her external habitat in which the sexual urges and energy of her fellow urbanites are released. All in all, *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*, *Laberinto de pasiones*, and *La ley del deseo* find common ground when Almodóvar generally represents Madrid as a liberalised, carefree capital seemingly not perturbed by the ghosts from the recent past.

Dystopia, on the other hand, acutely enters the theoretical and cinematic discourse in Pons' representation of Barcelona as a city of malaise and verbal as well as physical abuse and alienation between protagonists who relate to each other in a hostile manner and who often talk *at* and *past* rather than with one another. His four films have in common their existentialist approach to contemporary urban space. Both the films and the texts on which they are based are concerned with concurrent social and cultural changes set in motion by the increased globalization of the city.³ These changes are generally represented in a negative light, and they are reflected on an individual, human

² This is indeed also a "social desire" in the sense that they are ready to embrace democratic change within their urban habitat. As noted by D'Lugo, "[a]s a city of pure, hedonistic desire, Almodóvar's Madrid... becomes the site of a radical new series of social desires as well." Marvin D'Lugo, "Almodóvar's City of Desire," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 34, no. 4 (1991): 52.

³ It has been stressed with regard to Pons, that "... su obra cinematográfica ha partido siempre de un productivo encuentro con otros creadores de ficción en Cataluña con sus escenarios cotidianos – muy especialmente la ciudad de Barcelona." Núria Bou and Xavier Pérez, "Venturosas carícies," *Avui* 8 February 1998.

level. As part of the social awareness of the Catalan writers and filmmaker, the themes around which these narratives revolve become universally applicable. When removed from their strict literary or cinematic frameworks, the narratives are generally reflective of trends and concerns in society today. In an alienating postmodern environment, citizens ponder their existence and re-evaluate their role and identity within a transformed society that is no longer as familiar to them. In Pons' films, these real concerns also haunt his characters. He notes with regard to the male protagonist in *Amor idiota*: "Se da cuenta de que la vida no es que sea poca cosa, sino que tiene mucho que ver con encontrar el sentido a tu mundo" (Campo Vidal 2004, 216). Likewise, commenting on his earlier *Carícies*, Pons notes that the film reflects:

la dificultad de comunicarse y de darse amor en las grandes ciudades occidentales en los años del cambio del milenio. Son personajes de asfalto ciudadano que nunca podrían vivir en el campo, donde la mentalidad y las relaciones son muy distintas (Campo Vidal 2004, 147).

These two statements make apparent the relevance of Pons' late 1990s and early 21st-century films as visual and narrative documents that lay bare the many existentialist fears and concerns that seem to become exacerbated amongst citizens today – in societies where individualism is generally favoured over the collective. As highlighted by Bauman, "[w]e are all individuals now; not by choice, though, but by necessity" (Elliott 2007, 23). Lacking a sense of community and often needing to fend for themselves, postmodern individuals are part of a fragmented society where, rather than being related to fellow citizens, they are often viewed as strangers within an equally strange and unfamiliar environment.

In the case of Almodóvar, his representation of dystopia in films like *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, *Átame* and *Kika* differs from Pons' in the sense that it is generally not as much the external habitat that becomes dystopic, as the internal. The protagonists are here largely removed from the external space, and their lives led inside inner-city apartments become increasingly artificial when these characters are subjected to a voyeuristic media apparatus (*Kika*). Alternatively, they themselves work alternatively in a profession where reality and fiction are blurred (*Mujeres...*), or they are denied access to the city throughout most of the plot development (*Átame*). This is also the case in the more recent *La piel que habito*, where the forcefully transsexualised protagonist is kept hostage within a restrictive mansion and is only occasionally granted access to the Toledo countryside awaiting beyond these domestic walls. As highlighted earlier in the thesis, this removal of characters from authentic physical habitat to an internal space in which the mock replica mirrors external Madrid, symbolically severs the ties with the urban space and with the energy this space contains. Rather, as a

construct, both the city and the internal space within which these characters dwell become soul-less and, as such, dystopic.

In other films like *La flor de mi secreto* and *Volver*, Almodóvar does indeed grant his characters access to external Madrid, but their longing creates a painful dialogue between city and countryside. Still, the picture of urban malaise generally seems less confronting and graphic than that painted by Pons in *Carícies*, *Morir (o no)* and, to a certain extent, *Amor idiota*. In these films, the protagonists linger in the city where they battle their postmodern fears throughout the plot duration. On the contrary, the occasional feelings of urban discomfort among their Almodóvarian counterparts is, once they have been physically removed from the city, generally followed by a desire to return. This again reflects their almost symbiotic relationship with Madrid. Their often ultimately positive rapport with the Spanish capital contrasts with the endurance with which Pons' protagonists must bear their urban ordeal.

In Almodóvar's recurring screened urban/rural dichotomy, *utopia* attaches itself to a both reflective and restorative type of nostalgia. In the case of the latter, the nostalgic sentiment generally stems from a longing for the village amongst those elderly protagonists who have forcefully migrated to the city. Alternatively, the nostalgia sensed among the protagonists is predominantly reflective. This is the case in *Átame*, where the village offers an opportunistic escape from urban life. The protagonists are here not so much governed by rural nostalgia as intent on beginning a new life elsewhere. Or alternatively, in the globalized world of *Volver* the dystopic elements of suburban existence trigger a return to the village amongst protagonists who, while appreciative of rural life, ultimately prefer life in Madrid. Their attitude in the midst of an advanced global present proves the validity of the statement that:

[n]ostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that makes the division into "local" and "universal" possible (Boym 2007, 8).

Almodóvar thus demonstrates that nostalgia does not need to hold negative connotations (as repeatedly demonstrated by Boym). If his characters' nostalgic sentiments are embraced, this may help them change their attitude to the city, which on their return comes across as less dystopic. It appears as if through their reflective attitude, his characters are ultimately better able to tackle the stressful conditions of the metropolis – better than what Pons' protagonists do in films where they never leave their oppressing urban environment behind. In this sense, Almodóvar's screened nostalgia is oriented towards not only a nonspecific time and place, but at the same time it is forward-related and constitutes a condition needed for his characters to be more readily able to deal with their global present.

Films in focus

Specifically explored in this chapter are *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*, *Laberinto de pasiones*, *Amor idiota*, and *Volver*. The films are analysed in order of appearance and screened Madrid and Barcelona are compared in a gradually more postmodern light. While the utopic portrayal of the gendered urban space in Almodóvar's early 1980s cinema is referred to in a more sweeping manner, Pons', in part comparable, *Amor idiota* is explored in greater depth. Despite the over two decades that separate them, also in this film the sexually liberated metropolis at times comes across as utopic. Here, global Barcelona is conferred human warmth when it becomes highly eroticized. Specifically, Pons' external space serves as a visual backdrop for the protagonists' many intimate explorations. The lovers engage in frantic sexual intercourse across the city.⁴ Indirectly, this becomes a method by which Pons guides us on an often nocturnal, fast-paced city tour which contrasts with the virtual stroll he later invites us to take part in, in *Barcelona (un mapa)*. In *Amor idiota*, images of urban establishments flick past our eyes at almost breakneck speed, which visually underscores the characters' hungry lusting for each other in scenes depicting their constant intercourse. While the focus in *Barcelona (un mapa)* was the city as such, particularly its postmodern architecture, in *Amor idiota* the urban space is not locally specific to the same extent. Rather, the Catalan metropolis is indirectly glimpsed behind the frolicking human bodies. As highlighted, these graphic sex scenes can be seen as an alternative way for Pons to render the global habitat utopic – despite an underlying sombre existentialist discourse narrated by voice-over, which ultimately leaves the viewer wondering if the urban tale was really a happy one or not.

Utopia and *dystopia* are in this chapter subsequently brought into a thematic and theoretical dialogue concerned with the rural nostalgia sensed among characters affected by the global tidal wave in Almodóvar's internationally aware *Volver*. A film which presents the urban habitat as both flawed and exciting and where the liminal space of the suburban areas is given considerable space in the narrative, again evinces how the utopic and the dystopic exist alongside each other. The two concepts are interrelated and Almodóvar's portrayal of a multifaceted Madrid is perhaps his most nuanced, and realistic, to date.

Finally, the dystopic aspects of global Barcelona are explored in relation to Pons' *Morir (o no)*. Just like *Carícies*, his representation of the regional capital here conforms to the theoretical juxta-positioning of dystopia with "the uncanny frailty of individualized society, particularly the feelings of insecurity generated by societal

⁴ In more abstract terms, their intercourse seems to correspond with Harvey's claim that "[t]he figures of 'the city' and of 'Utopia' have long been intertwined." David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000). 156.

liquidization” (Elliott 2007, 50). The film reflects the disorientation experienced by citizens today with regard to their external habitat. The urban space of the 21st century is ever shifting and fragmented, and so is, in a way, its architecture. This produces visible discomfort amongst the screened citizens. Although now a globally sophisticated, multilayered metropolis, Pons’ Barcelona in *Morir (o no)* fits Harvey’s notion of *heterotopia*, central to “the contemporary urban condition:”⁵

[w]hat appears at first sight as so open by virtue of its multiplicity suddenly appears either as banal ... or as a more sinister fragmentation of spaces that are closed, exclusionary, and even threatening within a more comprehensive dialectics of historical and geographical transformation (Harvey 2000, 185).

In the argument at hand, *heterotopia* may be linked to the distorted view that global citizens often have of one another, and which can lead to a breakdown in communication. This feeling of *otherness*, a sense of *unrealness*, and particularly of *dystopia* between these individuals, are keywords that are particularly applicable to *Carícies* and *Morir (o no)*. As noted, Pons here generally renders the Catalan metropolis dystopic when Barcelona is represented as a postmodern, fragmented place of alienation and estrangement among characters, both with regard to their urban habitat and how they relate to each other.

The origins of the term *utopia* and its applications

Etymologically, the Greek term *utopia* combines the word parts *ou* and *topos*, meaning ‘nowhere’, i.e. “it is a place that doesn’t exist.”⁶ As such, the ideal yet imaginary society called a utopia is never completely attainable as it rests on a concept that is in itself ambivalent and paradoxical: the term means both “‘good place’ [eu-topos]” and “‘no place’ [ou-topos]” (McGuirk 1999, 169).⁷ However, if such a utopian society is represented on screen, a sense of urban perfection may be achieved, and there is a closer approximation to the original meaning of the word. This is because, similarly to the non-reality of the *utopia*, the screened landscape is a representation of the real space

⁵ Michiel Dehaene and Lieven de Cauter, eds., *Heterotopia and the City: Public space in a postcivil society* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2008). 6.

⁶ “What is the meaning and origin of ‘Utopian?’”, G. Aruna, *The Hindu*: Education Plus Chennai, last modified 24 July 2006, <http://www.hindu.com/edu/2006/07/24/stories/2006072400041603.htm>

⁷ Eric Rabkin argues that “[u]topianism needs to be paradoxical precisely so that it cannot be tried too sorely by reality, so that it exists in a fluid zone of ideology, a realm of social agreement in which falsifiability is rare.” Eric S. Rabkin, “The Utopian Paradox: On the Necessity of an Impossible Dream,” in *Transformations of Utopia: Changing Views of the Perfect Society*, ed. George Slusser, et al. (New York: AMS Press, 1999), 311.

and, as such, never entirely real⁸ (the filmmaker can thus create a utopic mirror image of a real city, but the screened environment is ultimately fictive).

As regards literary appropriations of the word *utopia*, Thomas More's use of the concept in his influential book with the same title is most commonly known. In his fictive account, the *utopia* refers to an ideal society established on a dream island where citizens live in apparent organized harmony. Mainly presented in a positive light, this geographically undefined island society; a "nowhere" that is "somewhere" (Morgan 1946, 15), is not free from criminality and other drawbacks that constitute an integral part of the urban dynamics. As noted by Gregory Claeys, "[h]uman nature here is not perfect, for crime still exists" (Claeys 2011, 12). However, More's fictive lawbreakers are punished to keep a libertarian and liberal society going and thus the act of punishment is, presumably, for the greater good of all.

Although written as early as 1516, More's sociological and political reflections still hold true today. His notion of utopia can be applied to a society that strives to become utopic but where the rapidly changing habitat triggers a sense of rootlessness and consequently also nostalgia amongst citizens today. And yet, like dystopias, utopias are not entirely real: even if they "present society in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down... these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces" (Foucault 1984, 3). Bauman, too, reminds us that More's "blueprint for a world cleansed of insecurity and fear was but a dream, a *utopia*" (Bauman 2006, 2).

Since they were originally introduced literarily and socio-politically, the terms *utopia* and *utopic* as well as their closely related opposite, *dystopia*, have been applied in a number of contexts. Claeys has written extensively on the search for a better world and provides a historical and mythological overview of the application of *utopia*. He defines three main domains within which the term has been used over time: "utopian thought; the narrower genre of utopian literature; and practical ways to found improved communities" (Claeys 2011, 11). Lingering here on utopian thought as it relates to social and urban dynamics in the cinema of Almodóvar and Pons, the term is applied to their globalized metropolis. The filmmakers' alternatively utopic and dystopic representation of Madrid and Barcelona shows us a present and a future in which "utopian and dystopian possibilities are negotiated via the city" (Mennel 2008, 131).⁹

From today's perspective, Bauman's discourses on a postmodern utopia which verges on the dystopic, fit the society to which we now belong. Highlighting, once again, the

⁸ As noted by Ellis, cinema and television "are not neutral mechanisms that convey a truth from the world beyond. On the contrary, they work very hard and very subtly to convey an impression of truth." John Ellis, *Visible Fictions. Cinema: television: video* (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982). 62.

⁹ Mennel here refers to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) but her statement can be applied to the cinema of Almodóvar and Pons as well.

inherently surreal aspects of the term, Bauman argues that “utopia is an image of another universe, different from the universe one knows or knows of” (Bauman 2005, 3). Providing a historical overview, he tracks the changing application of *utopia* from pre-modern to postmodern times and finally anchors his analytical reflections in a global era where we may soon see an end to utopia as we know it. More specifically, Bauman draws a link between the *gamekeepers* of the “utopias of yore”, intent on maintaining the social status quo, the subsequent *gardeners* who in their strive for change tended to be the “most ardent producers of utopias” (Bauman 2005, 4 and 12), and the even more restless and uprooted postmodern *hunter* (Bauman 2005, 5)¹⁰ involved in the *perpetuum mobile* or the incessant race of concurrent global times. In our frantic chase to keep on top of the game we are involved in a process of individualization, as hunting in packs will only slow us down and prevent us from keeping our edge in the constant competition that defines a society of individual hunters. In the ensuing disconnectedness between people, dystopia threatens to replace the ultimately fickle social utopia of today. Bauman rhetorically asks if this is “the end of utopia?” (Bauman 2005, 10)¹¹ and provides an answer to his own question by arguing that:

[i]n one respect it is – in as far as the early – modern utopias envisaged a point in which time will come to a stop; indeed, the end of time as *history* (Bauman 2005, 10).

This move from modern times as a period of historical security to a fluid postmodernity where the once hospitable and accommodating metropolis has become all the more alienating and unwelcoming (rather than forming part of a collective, here the individual fights his own battles) is reflected in the cinema of both filmmakers. Although the urban atmosphere conveyed on screen sometimes differs, the more recent the films become, the more they share commonalities regarding their utopic and dystopic representations of contemporary reality.

¹⁰ Bauman expands on this definition by writing that “the hunters’ utopia does not offer a meaning to life - whether genuine or fraudulent. It only helps to chase the question of life’s meaning away from the mind of living. Having reshaped the course of life into an unending series of self-focused pursuits, each episode lived through as an overture to the next, it offers no occasion for reflection about the direction and the sense of it all.” Zygmunt Bauman, “Living in Utopia,” *Soundings-London-Lawrence and Wishart* (2005): 12.

¹¹ His rhetorical question echoes Navajas’ assertion “Estamos ante el declinar del posmodernismo.” Gonzalo Navajas, “Una estética para después del posmodernismo: la nostalgia afectiva y la reciente novela española,” *Revista del Occidente* 143(1993): 105.

The desirable capital in *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* and *Laberinto de pasiones*

Almodóvar's first two feature films were produced by Figaro Films and Alphaville S.A, respectively. Not until 1987 was *El Deseo* established, a company "known for its sensitivity toward creative culture" (Díaz López 2013, 115). The name is telling of the socially and sexually liberated times of the Spanish 1980s. The "desire" that lingers behind the company name¹² has spilt over in films where the characters are driven by a zest for life within a city that underwent a screened makeover after the end of the Franco regime, a city which held a utopic *encanto* for film characters and viewers alike.¹³ Nevertheless, the initial charm of newly democratic Madrid and the protagonists' visual love affair with their own city, have become notably tarnished the more global the cinematic urban space has become.

In *Pepi, Luci, Bom...* and *Laberinto de pasiones*, Madrid is, as yet, mostly unaffected by globalization and the characters seem blissfully unaware of the more complex times ahead. Instead, they symbolically celebrate the end of a repressive era and the beginning of a brand-new epoch in Spain's recent history. When these films were produced, a promising democracy held the country in a tight and protective embrace. The *Movida* movement, "most energetically located in Madrid, a landlocked and long lethargic city" (Epps and Kakoudaki 2009, 6), influences the protagonists of *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* and *Laberinto...* in an almost tangible manner. They take full advantage of life in a city still dazed by the many possibilities that the future may bring. The sexual liberation at the time is visually expressed in these two films, with the gay scene primarily in focus in *Laberinto de pasiones*, and the screened city becomes a gendered space. Although the lesbian interaction in *Pepi, Luci, Bom...* is in turn anything but appealing – as has been noted by both Zunzunegui (2002, 168-77)¹⁴, who expands on the film's grotesque elements, and Evans who calls the golden shower-scene

¹² This name was initially inspired by the film title *La ley del deseo*, and it remained the same when *El Deseo* kept producing Almodóvar's films, although its "modus operandi did not initially suggest the promise of continuity beyond its initial production." Marina Díaz López, "El Deseo's 'Itinerary': Almodóvar and the Spanish Film Industry," in *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar*, ed. Marvin D'Lugo, and Kathleen Vernon (Malden, M.A.: John Wiley and Sons, 2013). 108.

¹³ In Rob Lapsley's view "[t]he city is situated in relation to desire, and desire always takes a historically contingent form." Rob Lapsley, "Mainly in cities and at night: some notes on cities and film," in *The Cinematic City*, ed. David B. Clarke (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). 190.

¹⁴ Isolina Ballesteros notes a similarly unappealing scene in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, when she writes that "[l]a seducción romántica es grotesca en todos los casos, empezando por las escenas que abren la película..." Isolina Ballesteros, *Cine (insurgente: Textos filmicos y contextos culturales de la España posfranquista* (Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 2001). 62.

and the politically aware scene featuring the “general erections”¹⁵ part of Almodóvar’s “shock tactics” (William Evans 2004, 255) – it is still refreshing especially given that also this plot element was a way for Almodóvar to reject the more rigid yet orderly way of life under Franco. Through these sexually daring, yet ultimately comical scenes, Almodóvar “frees a perversion, and in doing so he redefines the erotic dynamics of the cinema” (Williams 2000, 40).

Apart from taking sexual liberties, the film also delivers a pun on a corrupt Spanish police force (again, there is an inexplicit reference to Francoist institutions) when in the opening scene Pepi’s domestic encounter with the brutish police officer from the flat opposite begins with the man inspecting her presumed marijuana plans but soon ends with him raping her. Thus, the screened constable sabotages the intentions of an “unlikely virgin who had been planning to sell her maidenhood to the highest bidder” (Smith 2000, 10). D’Lugo notes that the abusive officer “continually voices the tenets of old-guard Francoist ideology: law and order, misogyny, and homophobia” (D’Lugo 1991, 51). In this scene, Almodóvar overthrows More’s definition of *utopia*. Because while in this historical account, the police force becomes a force to be reckoned with, Almodóvar’s more negative portrayal of this authority reflects a reversed utopia. That is to say that newly liberalised Madrid rejected previously repressive and morally corrupt institutions while at the same time personal freedom was advocated on several levels. The screened representation of a city rebelling against its institutionalised past and a patriarchal Francoist system may be considered utopic. As has been argued, “Pepi, Luci, Bom suggests initially a utopian rupture with the (heavily censored) cinema that had preceded it” (Smith 2000, 17).

In the gendered urban space of both *Pepi, Luci, Bom...* and *Laberinto de pasiones...*, the gay man becomes an expressive character who is often a performer in a double sense of the word: not only as a screened protagonist but also as somebody who enacts a role on stage within the very film. Almodóvar’s frivolous portrayal of a generally promiscuous youth culture renders the city itself sexualized. Madrid as a liberalized capital in *Laberinto de pasiones* lends itself particularly well to cinematic homo- and heterosexual explorations. The very opening scene is testimony to this when protagonist Sexilia (a fitting name given her sexual addiction and promiscuity) uses El Rastro as a sexual hunting ground in her search for a man. Her attitude here corresponds with Mennel’s take on “contemporary gay and lesbian culture” (Mennel 2008, 176), where she defines the “sexual city” as a “queer playground” (176-177).

¹⁵ According to Smith, it would be “foolish to look for direct connections between discrete events in that period and a work as chaotic and corrosive as *Pepi, Luci, Bom*. But it is surely legitimate to ask what ideological investments are to be found in the comic cacophony of a film made at a time characterized by such dramatic historical changes.” Paul Julian Smith, *Desire Unlimited: The Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar*. Second edition (London: Verso, 2000). 15.

The liberalized capital in Almodóvar's first two films is energized not only by a democratic government striving for social and political change, but also by its now socially, politically, and sexually uninhibited citizen. The democratic 1980s came as a breath of fresh air for a city (and country) hungry for change. Almodóvar's cinematic representation of this desirable time and space is utopic, if one considers that

utopian life can be defined as a condition of the largest number of pleasurable sensations, or pleasurable sensations of the greatest intensity, or some compromise of the two (Kateb 1965, 457).

Some of the subsequent films, primarily *Entre tinieblas*; where the city becomes a *site of* "female empowerment" (D'Lugo 1991, 53), *La ley del deseo*, and the much more recent *La mala educación*, also feature homosexual relationships that become instrumental to the plot development. And *Matador*, *Átame*, and *Carne trémula*, in particular, again positively sexualize the urban space when the screened lovemaking takes place against the visual backdrop of an at times dilapidated Madrid. D'Lugo also notes the voyeuristic role of the spectator in *La ley del deseo*, where the urban space "pointedly serves as a frame for a continuous erotic spectacle that the filmic narrative persistently chronicles" (D'Lugo 1991, 58). The same holds true for *Átame* when the graphic lovemaking to which we become voyeuristically privy indirectly infuses more energy into a neighbourhood that had already itself become sexually liberated (Chueca). However, none of the films released after *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* and *Laberinto de pasiones* quite matches these when it comes to a lengthy representation of a thriving city visually energized by the throbbing sexuality of its protagonists.¹⁶

Pons' erotic representation of Barcelona in *Amor idiota*

Commonalities between films

Almodóvar's erotic representation of Madrid at a time when the country had just entered its democratic era, can be analysed from a historical perspective as regards the more liberal socio-political climate in Spain at the time. The partly comparable *Amor idiota* must be explored as a visual testament to a more complex contemporary urban postmodernity and globalization process. Although released two decades after *Laberinto de pasiones*, *Amor idiota* also represents the screened metropolis as a gendered and sexualised space. Here, central Barcelona constitutes the urban backdrop, and the

¹⁶ Even though *Los amantes pasajeros* features a whole orgy of high-level sexual intercourse, the confined space within which these steamy encounters take place is in a plane hovering over Castilla la Mancha, not in the liberalized city of Madrid.

inspiration for the plot is Lluís-Anton Baulenas' 2003 novel *Amor d'Idiota*. Like *Barcelona (un mapa)*, both book and film are set in a post-Olympic metropolis, "at a time when people are slowly beginning to return to their routine lives after months of dreaminess."¹⁷ In *Amor idiota*, Barcelona is more immediately post-Olympic and the representation of this city is not as consistently negative as that of *Barcelona (un mapa)*. The characters also do not seem too uncomfortable within their global habitat, the "capital of Catalonia, a capital in Spain, ... and a major player in a 'Europe of the cities'" (McNeill 1999, 69). Rather, Pons' highly erotic film can be considered simultaneously a visual declaration of love (the sexual act here verges on a declaration of love when the protagonists' hold on to each other within a nocturnal city which initially appears devoid of any warmth) on the part of the emotionally bewildered protagonist towards his (post)modern muse, and an eccentric existential fairy-tale. The existentialist aspects of the film are conveyed through lengthy and repeated ponderings on the meaning of life and love; concerns that reflect the curious yet troubled mind of the main character.

Apart from its existentialist undercurrent, *Amor idiota* also reaches out to the world beyond the Iberian Peninsula when a narrative connection is established between Barcelona and Buenos Aires. Contrary to what had been the case in *Todo sobre mi madre*, where an Argentine citizen becomes a Spanish resident, in Pons' narrative the male protagonist embarks on regular travels to Buenos Aires to keep a friendship alive. A transnational link between Spain and its former colony is thereby also drawn in *Amor idiota*, and the film is globalized both through its representation of Barcelona as a sophisticated metropolis and its international plot. The film camera lingers on the Catalan cityscape and panoramically sweeps also that of Buenos Aires, in shots which portray the capital as a nostalgic memory-scape. The nostalgic aspects of these scenes are further heightened when the Argentine man later dies, leaving his distraught friend behind.

Further, similarly to *Barcelona (un mapa)*, *Amor idiota*, too, becomes a visual trajectory when, throughout the film, the viewer is voyeuristically introduced to the streets and squares of external Barcelona as well as to several also internal spaces. In *Amor idiota* the capital is not only represented by night, but also as a considerably more attractive and accommodating space, by day. The city is compared to:

una señora de edad que volvió a sentirse joven y guapa gracias al lifting de los Juegos Olímpicos y que no puede entender por qué, de golpe, cada día parece lunes (Pons 2004).

¹⁷ Lluís-Anton Baulenas: *Amor d'idiota (Idiot Love)*, last modified 2013, http://www.lluisantonbaulenat.cat/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=131%3Aamor-didiota&catid=6%3AAnarrativa&Itemid=80&lang=en

Importantly, while in *Barcelona (un mapa)* the urban residents would constantly criticize their capital, *Amor idiota* features an initial declaration by voiceover which, indirectly, can be considered an urban homage:

Barcelona, capital mediterranea antigua y olímpica. Orgullosa, posee de una serie de habitantes indígenas que dicen que le falta el carácter de las grandes urbes europeas. Pero pese a ello, no se van. Desorientada, acoge a foráneos que la tildan de provinciana. No aceptan que la ciudad es lo que es y no lo que ellos quisieran que fuera. Pero pese a ello, se quedan (Pons 2004).

Still, when the plot unravels by night, the city quickly loses its unique charm. Instead, it becomes a vast global canvas featuring metropolitan architecture and traffic that moves speedily through the nocturnal streets. These swift images are often effectively underscored by the male protagonist's rapidly spoken *castellano* (rather than Catalan). Pons' speedy urban tale is narrated by omnipresent voice-over, a technique which in the film also serves the purpose of an inner monologue. This, in turn, seems to reinforce the main character's obsessive personality. His almost incessant monologue is perfectly synchronized with urban images that follow on from each other in rapid succession. The global image seems complete.

Amor idiota: scene analysis

In the film, urban "idiot" Pere-Lluc Solans¹⁸ (Santi Millán) keeps referring to himself as such: "Siendo adolescente me di cuenta de que era idiota" (Pons 2004). As he approaches his mid-30s he realizes that he is not the only one suffering from this "condition." Safe in the knowledge that he interacts with fellow idiots daily, Pere-Lluc repeatedly tests boundaries as he has nothing to lose, being, as he is, an "idiot" anyway ("Una de las ventajas de ser idiota es que no tienes que justificar tus actos a cien por cien") (Pons 2004). The film opens with a tracking shot of Pere-Lluc cruising through nocturnal Barcelona on motorbike while headed for a company event which soon has him testing the limits. In the company of work colleagues, he resolutely flashes his genitalia in the open. When, some scenes later, Pere-Lluc is informed of the death of his friend Nicco Zenone, he drowns his sorrows at a local pub. As he staggers outside, he accidentally bumps into the ladder of businesswoman Sandra (Cayetana Guillén Cuervo) who is erecting advertising banners all over the city. Immediately obsessed, Pere-Lluc becomes intent on winning her over and ends up her stalker. From here on, the viewer becomes Pere-Lluc's voyeuristic co-participant as we follow Sandra's every

¹⁸ Uncommonly for Pons, in this film the characters are rendered complete by names that provide them with an identity. This is not the case in *Carícies* and *Morir (o no)*, where nameless characters lose their individual identity as a result.

move, generally at night. The male gaze becomes both voyeuristic and fetishistic: like the fetishistic gaze Pere-Lluc's is "captivated by what it sees" but unlike this gaze, the male protagonist and his observing gaze *does* wish to "inquire further, to see more, to find out" (Ellis 1982, 47). The plot unfolds quickly from here and the story unravels along the vertiginous paths of a gradually more eroticized urban landscape. Sandra is an unwilling sex object until she surrenders and embarks on a manic sexual relationship with Pere-Lluc. As they explore each-other, reaching "instantaneous satisfaction" (Bauman 2003, 7) within the confines of a dimly lit Barcelona, they are both objectified for the pleasure of the voyeuristic viewer.

The most cathartic scene in which all the sexual desires of the mutually responsive protagonists come to explosive fruition is where their physical intercourse is represented as a series of successive sequences all played out at night. While in the film diurnal Barcelona is often portrayed in a light-hearted manner, with scenes set in broad daylight symbolically reflecting Pons' love affair with the Catalan capital (the film characters here stroll through the streets in a leisurely manner, at times chatting casually with one another¹⁹), the nocturnal environment is generally more alienating. It is as if the lovers cling to each other in a double sense of the word: not only driven by mutual lust, but they seem to seek each other's embrace to protect themselves from their cold environment. In these nocturnal shots, Barcelona has lost some of its identity and is suddenly only half recognizable. The protagonists engage in frantic intercourse, defined by Pere-Lluc himself as a sex that is "dirty, messy, wretched" (Pons 2004), wherever they are able to find temporary refuge: in shady areas of apartment buildings, against parked cars, on staircases, in shrubby areas on the outskirts of the city..., and the erotic scenes are accompanied throughout by Pere-Lluc in voiceover. He thus becomes both protagonist and narrator as he gives voice to words unsaid but that linger as metaphysical questions within a narrative that, indeed, has become increasingly existentialist.²⁰ The fatalistic love affair is summed up in the following manner:

La primera estación de mi vía crucis fue espiarla. La segunda, irle detrás y confiar en que se dignase a hablar conmigo. La tercera, encontrarla cada vez que trabaja y sabiendo que me estará esperando. Porque ahora es ella misma que me informa de donde estará y a qué hora. Ya no me abofetea, no discutimos, ni tan siquiera hablamos. Ahora follamos.

¹⁹ The environmentally friendly Torre Agbar, elliptic in shape and designed by Jean Nouvel, was finalized in 2004, the same year as *Amor idiota* was released. The phallic monument is visualized in the background in one of these diurnal scenes and no negative comment is being hurled at it. This, however, would later be the case on the part of the more negative protagonists of *Barcelona (un mapa)*.

²⁰ The existentialist discourses in the film are also delivered by Pere-Lluc's friend Àlex Mallol, who at one stage maintains that *[e]l amor no es nada. El amor no existe. Es un invento de ricos que hasta hace poco los pobres no podían ni considerar. Los pobres no tenemos individualidad. Somos un colectivo y los colectivos no se enamoran* (Pons 2004).

Es el vía crucis más idiota de la historia. Es el anti-vía crucis. Amor de circunstancia hecho en la madrugada como si fuese el último día de todos. Como un par de mendigos sin espacio propio aprovechamos cualquier lugar. No se puede explicar un contraste de sentimientos como éste. Lo provoca la vivencia de sensaciones donde se mezclan tan incluídamente el placer y el miedo. O el placer y la dificultad de obtenerlo (Pons 2004).

In this scene, not only are the protagonists compared to those at the bottom of the social pecking order (*tramps*, or *mendigos*), which further links Pere-Lluc and Sandra to their gritty urban environment. But the filmic tale becomes both existentialist and metaphysical. The sexual gratification of the two individuals (or what can be called the mutual enjoyment of a “pleasure-seeking spontaneity”) (Smith 1999, 25) seems strangely utopic²¹, although the meaning of the term is here far removed from its original more mythological connotations.

From a postmodern perspective, *utopia* in *Amor idiota* becomes a notion applicable to a both attractive and alienating urban habitat that the characters seem unlikely to leave behind. And even if they do end up somewhere else, given the fact that other contemporary metropolises resemble Barcelona in all their global pros and cons, there is no real escape from the space within which they seem to feel at times trapped. Pere-Lluc sums up his ambivalent feelings towards his postmodern city by rhetorically pondering whether Sandra, too, is “afraid ... of ending up in existential inertia” (Pons 2004).²² This *inertia* defines not so much the urban space as their bewildering contemporary times. Additionally, it appears inertia reflects Pere-Lluc’s own personality, one that is comparatively sluggish until he finds Sandra to compliment him. It then becomes more dynamic and solidified. Although Pere-Lluc is haunted by a sense of *Angst* ²³, in the final scene the unscreened future of the couple seems positive as they in a quest-like fashion leave their old life behind and embark on a potentially promising future together. If they as global citizens “relativise existing social practices and conditions” they can

²¹ This corresponds with the belief that pleasure is the “whole or the chief part of human happiness.” Gregory Claeys, *Searching for Utopia: The History of An Idea* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2011). 65.

²² In Spanish, this reads as follows: “Tal vez ella también tiene miedo como yo de acabar viviendo inmersos en una especie de inercia existencial: ni vivos, ni muertos. Sin vivir en el presente, ni en el pasado, ni en el futuro.” Ventura Pons, “Amor idiota,” (Spain 2004).

²³ This is a foreboding sensation which mirrors Bauman’s view that “postmodernity is drenched with anxiety. People feel ambivalent against themselves and the world they live in”. Dennis Smith, *Zygmunt Bauman: Prophet of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1999). 25.

open up the prospect, not of the realisation of a social blue-print, a utopian design, but of the possibility of changing things, of transforming prevailing forms of life, for the better (Smart 1993, 105).

Almodóvar's cinematic balancing act between (sub)urban dystopia and rural utopia in the globalized world of *Volver*

Like *Amor idiota*, Almodóvar's poignant sixteenth feature film, released two years after that of Pons, can be considered in part an existential drama. It is a drama rather than a melodrama as, although the film does feature several melodramatic traits (Kinder 2007, 7), it lacks the over-sentimentality of some of Almodóvar's other movies. In *Volver*, the characters are portrayed as complete human beings who, rather than governed by fate, take control of their own lives in a filmic narrative that masterfully navigates the shadowlands between life and death. More concretely, this is a thriller-like suspense story that largely revolves around a male corpse hidden in a freezer next to the suburban restaurant where some of the main action takes place.

Similar to in *Morir (o no)*, Almodóvar challenges traditional perceptions of life and death by exploring a territory in-between. In his film, the long-presumed dead come back to life (Carmen Maura's maternal character Irene revisits her adult daughters, years after she was believed to have perished in a fire). As shall be seen, in *Morir (o no)* the supposedly dead do not come alive like in *Volver*, but an alternative outcome is offered when, in the second part of the movie, characters initially killed off in an, as yet, unpublished script may instead be saved and thus escape the violent death intended for them in the first part.

Of interest here is not as much the existentialist discourse that also defines *Volver*, as Almodóvar's cinematic crisscrossing between urban and rural areas (i.e. metropolitan city and nostalgically utopic²⁴ village), and the liminal suburban space in between. The latter is neither completely urban nor rural, but a transitory space repeatedly left behind when the protagonists temporarily return to their childhood village. Importantly, also Almodóvar portrays the impact of globalization on the suburban area of Vallecas, and Spain is inserted into a larger Hispanic context. Is the alternatively urban, suburban and rural landscape in the film mainly utopic or dystopic in character? Almodóvar seems to leave that open to interpretation.

Volver has been called a "trans-territorial Hispanic film" (D'Lugo 2013b, 412). It was released in a politically tumultuous time in Spain, after the 2004 terrorist attack on

²⁴ Julián Daniel Guitérrez-Albilla, "Returning to and from the Maternal Rural Space: Traumatic Memory, Late Modernity and Nostalgic Utopia in Almodóvar's *Volver*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* (2011): 321.

Madrid's commuter train infrastructure. This, it has been noted, has spilled over in a film that is "highly sensitive to the spirit of the times of its production, the *zeitgeist*" (Marsh 2009, 353). Almodóvar's global awareness is here reflected in a plot which not only unravels in urban and rural areas, but the global is invited into the local through constant screened media references. This mirrors contemporary citizens' obsession with global television (including national talk shows which, in an American fashion, relentlessly lay bare the private lives of those invited to participate). As viewers we, too, are fed images of a now highly multicultural and multiethnic Spanish capital; images complimented by references to foreign migration, and so on.

The film opens with a tracking shot of rural tombstones polished by a group of women who toil away against an easterly wind which "saca a la gente de quicio" (Almodóvar 2006). Superimposed onto one of these marble slates appears the word *Volver*, which symbolically hints at the return of a ghost from the past to the world of the living (it also reflects the main characters' return to their childhood village). Three women are subsequently presented in close-up: Raimunda (Penélope Cruz), her daughter Paula (Yohana Cobo), and Raimunda's sister Sole (Lola Dueñas). Not yet familiar with these rural surroundings, Paula marvels at how many widows live in this village, to which Sole responds "Las mujeres de aquí viven más que los hombres" (Almodóvar 2006). Not only does this opening shot set the stage for further female connections and mutual female solidarity in the film, but the absence of men in this scene and in the film in general is reflected by Raimunda's comment that her husband Paco has stayed in Madrid ("... en Madrid se ha quedado. Trabajando") (Almodóvar 2006). Indeed, male characters are largely absent and when they are featured, they are clearly secondary to the female (in contrast to the consistently male protagonists in *La mala educación*).²⁵

While the subsequent rural scenes in *Volver* are played out in the idyllic village of Almagro, where days pass by slowly and peacefully, the later return of these three protagonists to the city leaves the viewer with a foreboding sense of anxiety. As the women reunite with their suburban habitat, tellingly the first individual they meet is Cuban immigrant Regina, headed to work. A dress that barely covers her voluminous body and her harsh makeup give her away as a prostitute. The first connection with the world beyond Spanish borders is made here. Not only does this reflect social awareness on the part of Almodóvar; many immigrants today lack official documents, and women are forced

²⁵ Kinder writes that "*Volver* is as exclusively devoted to women as *Bad Education* was to men." Marsha Kinder, "*Volver*. Review article," *Film Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2007): 6.

to work the streets for a living.²⁶ But a further cross-national connection is made through El Deseo's collaboration with Latin American production companies at the time of filmic release (D'Lugo 2013b, 424). Regina gains narrative importance when she and Raimunda later form a special bond. In this sense, Raimunda plays the symbolic and fluid role of mediator not only between the rural and the urban space, but also between Spain and the Hispanic world at large. With this in mind, it has been noted that:

[s]till affectively rooted in her provincial past ... [Raimunda] is, nonetheless, accepting of the broader world of the city and modernity, again represented in figures like Regina, with whom she identifies (D'Lugo 2013b, 421).

Almodóvar thus sets the stage for a "glocal (global + local) culture" (Díaz López 2013, 110) and he could be said to use both Regina and Raimunda as cultural vehicles bridging the national and the international. As a result, he paints both a provincial, or local, picture of Spain (as seen in the village scenes) and a global one, through which a connection is made with the outside world.

In the film, as Raimunda and Paula re-enter their suburban flat after their initial stint in the village, it is heavy-laden with artefacts that reflect the materialistic aspects of globalization. A sense of dread imbues this scene when the women suddenly fall silent. The first sign of darker times to come is Paco's casual confession that he has been laid off work. Facing facts, Raimunda comments that "We're a poor family and we'll live like one" (Almodóvar 2006).²⁷ Having hitherto been the main income earner, Paco finds his male ego visibly tarnished when he is suddenly unemployed. This is mirrored by his frustrated attempt to sleep with Raimunda later the same night. Doubly rejected by both his employer and his woman, Paco's manhood quickly disintegrates. Instead, Raimunda gains importance as a (female) protagonist.

A narrative turn of events comes with Paco's attempted rape of Paula. Unsuccessful, he is instead accidentally stabbed to death when she tries to defend herself with a kitchen knife.²⁸ As homicide enters the drama, urban discomfort is paralleled by Raimunda's urgent need to clean up the murder scene, and the previous images from the, all the more, utopic village quickly fade away. Instead, the drab suburban

²⁶ The precarious situation for Hispanic immigrants has been further expanded on by Marsh in his analysis of *Volver*: "Missing a Beat: Syncopated Rhythms and Subterranean Subjects in the Spectral Economy of *Volver*," in *All About Almodóvar: A Passion for Cinema*, ed. Brad Epps and Despina Kakoudaki (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). 345-46.

²⁷ "Somos una familia pobre, pues viviremos como una familia pobre." Pedro Almodóvar, "Volver," (Spain 2006).

²⁸ Brad Epps and Despina Kakoudaki argue that "the very threat" of rape "issues in a rather matter-of-fact and feminist-inflected justification of murder in *Volver*." Brad Epps and Despina Kakoudaki, eds., *All About Almodóvar: A Passion for Cinema*. (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). 9.

environment is soon represented in all its daytime gloom, by way of an initial traveling shot panning the graffiti-covered walls of a tavern which will later gain crucial importance in the film.²⁹ Although geographically close to the Madrid city centre, this drab suburb has none of the “perfect global gloss” that defines the screened inner-city environment; a “postmodern habitat ... shaped by the opportunities and threats that come with freedom” (Smith 1999, 161).

Thus far, Almodóvar has presented the viewer with two diametrically opposed environments: the pristine village, resplendent with its whitewashed façades and populated by mainly elderly residents presumably thankful to have escaped the stress of Madrid, and the depressing suburban grey-zone that defines the fluid landscape between the city and the countryside. As highlighted, in the film a global link is drawn on several occasions and in a variety of ways. Thus, other nationalities and ethnic groups are symbolically brought into contact through e.g. Irene passing for a Russian migrant (Russian women had been referred to earlier in the film in their role as beauty queens dominating the Spanish market). Regina’s precarious existence as a Cuban immigrant adds a socio-political touch to the Spanish narrative and this is also true in terms of the later references to Argentine tango. Raimunda’s moving rendition of a song by Carlos Gardel³⁰ has been critically explored by e.g. Kinder (Kinder 2007, 8), D’Lugo (2013b, 414-17), and Marsh (Marsh 2009, 348-49). Alfredo Le Pera’s lyrics brought to musical life by Carlos Gardel in 1935, nostalgically reflect the dilemma faced by a traveller on his symbolic return to a place and time in the past:

Tengo miedo del encuentro
con el pasado que vuelve
a enfrentarse con mi vida.
Tengo miedo de las noches
que, pobladas de recuerdos,
encadenen mi soñar.
Pero el viajero que huye
tarde o temprano detiene su andar...³¹

²⁹ In Guitérrez-Albilla’s words, “[r]epeated panning shots of these graffiti-scarred barrios ... suggest how these peripheral areas of Madrid scratch, stab, slash or fissure the cosmetic façade of late modernity.” Guitérrez-Albilla, “Returning to and from the Maternal Rural Space: Traumatic Memory, Late Modernity and Nostalgic Utopia in Almodóvar’s *Volver*,” 328.

³⁰ It has been held that “Cruz’s lip-synching of this hybrid song reverberates with the accented film’s emphasis on the lack of synchronization by creating a slippage between voice and speaker.” Ibid., 325.

³¹ *Volver*, Tango (1935), *Todo Tango: The Library*: Lyrics, <http://www.todotango.com/31/Volver>

The song is significant in the film as it highlights how reflective nostalgia “fears return to the original stasis” with “a passion.”³² Additionally, it alludes to both present and future and musically and poetically connects Spain and Argentina. The lyrics reflect the dilemma faced by contemporary citizens (fictive and non-fictive) to fend off the global tide and to, in a way, retain the past in the present. If this feat is indeed achieved, there may be an approximation to an almost utopic reality. As highlighted by Ruth Levitas, “utopia refers not simply to a past state, but to the past as imminent in the present” (Levitas 1990, 188). Utopia thus operates on several levels; as a concept that relates back to times gone by, as a way to define a surreal present where citizens refuse to let go of the *dream* or *illusion* of a utopia, and with regard to a potentially utopic future (one not lacking in continuously dystopic elements).

Linking back to the screened globalization in *Volver*, central Madrid is portrayed as a “creative cultural crossroads” (D’Lugo 2013b, 418), which reminds of the notion of global space as having assumed “*the character of a frontier-land*” (Bauman 2002, 90). The capital is initially represented by way of mirror images: the sliding doors of the inner-city bus that Raimunda and Paula had been transported on, open and the human masses on the streets outside are reflected in the shiny windows. Immediately thereafter, the two make their way through multi-ethnic throngs of people in a busy metropolitan shopping district. In this postmodern habitat, the global images contrast not only with the earlier representation of Almagro, but also with the drab images of suburban Vallecas. Interestingly, Almodóvar’s focus on two Madrid *barrios* or neighbourhoods (Vallecas and Tetuán) again establishes a connection with Latin America given the many Latino migrants that have settled there over the years. D’Lugo calls these suburban localities:

spaces of marginality: spaces occupied by the socially marginal, but they are also the geographic borders of the commercial and cultural center of the nation (2013b, 417).

His statement reflects the pros and cons of globalization. The more touristic aspects of Latin Americanism are reflected in the cultural hybridity in *Volver*. Here, Latin American motifs define some of the scenes: “sultry nights, mojitos, and tango” (D’Lugo 2013b, 415).³³ Apart from the above, constant media references add a further global

³² Boym continues by arguing that “[i]nstead of recreation of the lost home, reflective nostalgia can foster the creation of aesthetic individuality.” Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” *The Hedgehog Review* (2007): 15.

³³ He similarly draws a link between Spain and Latin America (especially Argentina) in a book chapter where he argues, with regard to protagonist Raimunda, that “[s]he is rooted in her provincial past but accepting of the broader Hispanic world.” Marvin D’Lugo, “Pedro Almodóvar’s Latin American ‘Business,’” in *Contemporary Hispanic Cinema: Interrogating the Transnational in Spanish and Latin American Film*, ed. Stephanie Dennison (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2013a). 129.

dimension to a semi-rural/ semi-urban plot. Not only is cancerous rural spinster Agustina's mercilessly hung out in the media on the talk show *Donde quiera que estés*³⁴ but the screened citizens' obsession with television media is perfectly represented in a parodic scene from Sole's suburban hair salon where two female clients, their heads inserted into gigantic pieces of orange hairstyling equipment that resemble 1960s lampshades, converse as such:

Es que de verdad la basura tiene algo, ¿eh?

Yo cuando me siento delante del televisor no puedo dejarlo. Me voy sintiendo cada vez peor pero no me puedo levantar. Para mí es como una droga.

Por la noche he tenido que dejar de mirarla porque luego duermo fatal.

Claro, que oigo tanto grito de volver loca (Almodóvar 2006).

Their dialogue highlights to what extent *Volver's* characters are affected by global media hype. Be they urban or rural residents, their fascination with the media reflects a need for entertainment and to keep up with the global tidal wave that has already threatened to engulf metropolitan Madrid, and which now also affects the village. Thus, even in elderly Tía Paula's rural residence, the television appears to be turned on around the clock. As Raimunda, Sole and younger Paula enter the home, a news program churns out images of a raging bush fire that the brittle woman seems to care little about (the screened flames serve as a reminder of the deadly fire narratively introduced in the first scene of the movie). News images from areas beyond the rural limits are similarly pumped out in rapid succession and although these are largely ignored by Tía Paula she, too, turns out to be reliant on national and global television as a source of visual entertainment.

Almodóvar's female protagonists here constantly shuttle between city and village and, symbolically, thus also between past and present. Unable to fully let go of the past and nostalgically attached to the rural space where this past is evoked (especially through the sudden reappearance of an individual believed to be a ghost), Raimunda, Sole and Paula ultimately remain urbanites and never directly condemn city life.³⁵ The only woman who voices her suburban discontent openly is Regina. She calls Vallecas

³⁴ Agustín Gómez Gómez notes that "[t]ambién en *Volver* Almodóvar hace una denuncia de los medios televisivos que utilizan la vida de los demás como forma de espectáculo." Agustín Gómez-Gómez, "El modelo de televisión en Pedro Almodóvar: Cine vs. televisión." *Fonseca: Journal of Communication* 4 (2012): 71.

³⁵ Reflecting on globalization and on a different kind of nostalgia, Boym writes that "[t]he most common currencies of globalism exported all over the world are money and popular culture. Nostalgia, too, is a feature of global culture, but it demands a different currency." Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," 10.

“una zona miserable”³⁶ and in a crucial scene where she appears to be speaking on behalf of Latino immigrants in general, she stresses how complicated her life is: “I have no job, no papers, I have to work on the streets to survive” (Almodóvar 2006).³⁷ And yet, even she may ultimately be better off in the Spanish capital than in her Cuban motherland (which in the very same year as *Volver* was released experienced a change of presidential power³⁸ when Fidel Castro handed over his role as President to his brother Raúl).

Apart from, unquestionably, being urbanites, the Madrid-based protagonists in *Volver* are themselves globalized in their position at the crossroads of Spain and the world beyond their own national borders. They constantly interact with people from the larger Hispanic world. This not only makes them aware of their recent rural past, but they socially and culturally engage with the global society of which they are a part. It is often held to be true that “utopian schemes not infrequently betray nostalgia for an agrarian past and are modeled on pastoral life” (Cunningham 2010, 274). However, despite its complex narrative and problematic subject matters, *Volver*, rather, seems to be defined along the lines of the following statement: “Utopianism is ideological when its future visions are projections of an ideal order already embedded in contemporary society” (Cunningham 2010, 273). If we wish to see Almodóvar’s Madrid in the film as a place that positively embraces change, his storyline is in keeping with Bauman’s observation (with regard to “hunters”) that “the road itself is the utopia” (Bauman 2011, 29). The film welcomes into its urban picture characters from a range of cultures and ethnic groups, all reflective of a Spanish future that may hold benefits for urban and rural residents alike. Whichever way we look at it, it is a fact that with this film Almodóvar has succeeded in rendering the global image complete while at the same time he paints a nostalgic picture of a village whose utopic aspects cannot be denied.

An analysis of death and urban malaise in *Morir (o no): Morir*

This last chapter section applies Bauman’s and Harvey’s theories on postmodern utopias and their opposites, to an analysis of Pons’ *Morir (o no)*. This is a much more consistently negative portrayal of global Barcelona than his representation of the same city in *Amor idiota* (and the same was true in *Volver* where metropolitan Madrid holds partly positive connotations as a vibrant multicultural melting-pot). Not surprisingly, Pons’ filmic adaptation of Sergi Belbel’s existential play *Morir (un moment abans de*

³⁶ “A ver si podemos darle un poco de alegría a esta zona miserable.” Pedro Almodóvar, “Volver.”

³⁷ Regina declares: “Mira, bonita; yo te agradezco la confianza, pero mi vida es bastante complicada. Mira, no tengo trabajo, no tengo papeles, tengo que hacer la calle para sobrevivir.” Ibid.

³⁸ “Cuba’s Political Succession: From Fidel to Raúl Castro”, Mark. P. Sullivan, CRS Report for Congress, last modified 29 February 2008, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22742.pdf>

morir) (1995) presents the viewer with a city that contrasts dramatically also with the Madrid of Almodóvar's *Movida*-inspired early 1980s films. The positively organic relationship between city and characters in *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* and *Laberinto de pasiones* has in Pons' sombre filmic drama been replaced by its diametrical opposite; an equally organic negative co-dependence between the protagonists and their urban habitat. Similarly to in *Carícies* (and, again in contrast to *Amor idiota*) the troubled characters in *Morir (o no)* remain nameless throughout a visual narrative in which the anonymity of the postmodern habitat seems to prevent these individuals from developing a more clearly defined personality of their own. Be the organic relationship between city and citizen positive or negative, both Pons' and Almodóvar's representations of the great metropolis correspond with Harvey's definition of the modern city as a mouldable place that adapts to the people who dwell in it:

[f]or better or worse, [the city] invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in. You, too. Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form around you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, like a map fixed by triangulation. Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature (Harvey 1989, 5).

In Pons' film, the protagonists are symbiotically part of their urban environment – in a negative sense. Not only is their alienating and hostile environment detrimental to them, but Barcelona itself appears to be visually harmed by the fate of these characters. *Malaise* becomes a keyword in a film where both the city and its screened residents are physically and sometimes also mentally ill. A connection can thus be made between urban malaise in general and the protagonists' unhealthy surroundings (such as drab and dilapidated apartments, vast and largely empty nocturnal streets where in one scene a police-car breaks the speed limit and, ironically, collides with a motorcyclist³⁹, and a sterile hospital ward where a sarcastic male patient is symbolically punished when, during a sudden cough attack, he is unable to call for help and consequently “dies”). Not only is there an almost tangible sickness in the air but *dis-ease* also defines the mutually aggressive conversations, which remind of the insensitive dialogues between some of the protagonists in *Carícies* (a film “essentially about a lack of communication between people, who perpetrate violence, both verbal and physical, on each other”) (George 2010a, 400). The general state of “un-health” in *Morir (o no)*, imbued with a “gritty realism” (Mira 2010, 242), is visually reflected by characters falling ill, whereby each of them meets with a tragic, accidental death. The term *urban malaise* can here thus be applied to define the “generalized feeling of discomfort, illness, or lack of well-

³⁹ According to the script: “The accident is mortal. It’s a head-on collision.” Ventura Pons, “*Morir (o no)*,” (Spain 1999).

being”⁴⁰ among these protagonists and which quickly results in their death. The plot development seems to correspond to our anxiety-ridden postmodern era, where postmodernity has been defined as a movement that “swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is” (Harvey 1989, 44).

The first part of Pons’ film is henceforth analysed. It is here rather than in the second and final part of this alternative urban drama where a dystopic vision of the Catalan metropolis comes full force. His films have been called “an exercise in displacement” (Pujol 2010, 180) and this certainly holds true for *Morir (o no)*. The plot revolves around an, as yet, unpublished text by a scriptwriter (Lluís Homar) who shares his ideas for a film with his wife (Carme Elías). As he tells her about the ill-fated characters whose individual struggles define the visual narrative, his story comes to life through brief but intense images flashing by our eyes. Meanwhile, each Catalan spouse is seen in close-up through several shot-reverse-shots. As the scriptwriter elaborates on the violent, accidental death of each protagonist in contemporary Barcelona, he himself unexpectedly dies; from chest pain which renders him unable to breathe. A circular narrative structure then takes over. This film within a film is episodically structured into sections called *The Writer*, *The Junkie*, *The Child*, *The Patient*⁴¹, *The Mother*, *The Biker*, and *The Businessman*. Each scene is presented through a series of, generally nocturnal, distorted angular shots. The effect is a spectator confused by such “visual and narrative distortions” (Pujol 2010, 178).

The sudden death of each protagonist is played out against the backdrop of a hostile urban environment. Just like in *Carícies*, a film nearly equally dystopic, the characters are presented twice. However, in *Morir (o no)*, rather than each of them being paired up with someone new in one of the following scenes, they all reappear in a more conclusive manner in the second part of the movie. They are now portrayed in a very different light compared to at the beginning.

Three of the emotionally charged scenes in the first part of *Morir (o no)* are set in inner-city apartments, all of them unappealing in their own ways. More specifically, in the third scene an emaciated Catalan mother intent on feeding her daughter scolds the child when she refuses to eat. When the woman is asked why she herself does not join in the meal, she claims to be on a diet but declares that she will later allow herself an

⁴⁰ “Malaise”, *Medline Plus: Trusted Health Information for You*, last modified 22 March 2013, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003089.htm>

⁴¹ Notably, this scene is shot in the same Barcelona hospital (Hospital del Mar) as a crucial scene in *Todo sobre mi madre*, and in both films the hospital is seen in broad daylight.

apple.⁴² The already tense atmosphere in the room goes from bad to worse when the girl is told to eat rather than constantly talk at the dinner table: “As soon as I put food on the table, you feel like talking” (Pons 1999). What may be considered normal child behaviour is here thus rejected when the mother prefers complete silence from the child if she has her meal. Eventually, the girl removes the chewing gum that prevented her from feeling any hunger and under continuous verbal abuse from her increasingly provoked mother (who at one stage asks herself why she has given birth to a monster), she now digs into her food ravenously. Almost immediately the girl chokes on a chicken bone and dies. All through her ordeal she had been scolded by a visibly amused mother (“You’re a real comedian!”), believing her *nena* to have been faking her condition.

The same child actor (Carlota Bantulà) is seen in the previous, second scene of the movie. Her enacted young protagonist now accompanies another woman as she enters an apartment (it later turns out the woman is the girl’s aunt and thus the sister of the mother in the third episode). The two pay a visit to a down-and-out brother. Having excelled academically a year earlier, he is now a heroin addict who spends his days pushing and drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. Urged to admit himself to rehabilitation, the man refuses, and an aggressive exchange of words ensues between the siblings (“¡imbécil!”, “¡puta!” and “¡borracha!” are some of their derogatory remarks). Given the repeated deaths in Pons’ postmodern human tragedy, not surprisingly also this man soon dies from an overdose.

In the fifth episode, Pons represents urban dread and misery most successfully when he presents us with an elderly woman (Anna Lizaran) whose life in a run-down Barcelona apartment provokes an immediate sense of disgust in the viewer. The female occupant comes across as equally unappealing as her internal environment. This is particularly the case when her erratic personality negatively influences her telephone conversation with a presumed cousin. A hostile and threatening undertone is here sensed behind an ongoing rant where the woman alternatively verbally abuses her relative and suddenly regrets the words that have slipped out of her mouth. She goes from semi-lucid to lunatic while she clings to the phone as if it were her only salvation from not only urban malaise but, more than anything, her own traumatized mind. Thus, in one of her conversations (more of a monologue than a dialogue), her ramblings read as follows:

You’re uglier than your mother’s corpse.

⁴² In Catalan-Spanish playwright Belbel’s original play the fictive mother’s line reads as follows: *¿Yo? No, niña, no, estoy a régimen, lo sabes perfectamente, me comeré una manzana cuando vayas por el postre.* “(Un instante antes de morir) de Sergi Belbel” (pdf), Università Ca Foscari Venezia Online, last modified 2014, venus.unive.it/matdid.php?...LM0021%2FBelbelMorir.

I'm sorry. Don't hang up.

... I'm not a drunk!

You're bad, you're rich, your husband's a millionaire.

We can't belong to the same family. Don't hang up!

Me, rob you? I'll tell you something, you witch. Do you know why I called you? To tell you what your mother's corpse told me. You're not her daughter, I am! So, fuck you!

Cousin? Cousin, I'm sorry (Pons 1999).⁴³

In a later monologue held within the crumbling walls of her cold bathroom, the woman's words as she recalls past experiences seem to reveal a history of sexual abuse. She reverts to childhood years when she rhetorically asks: "Where's Papa? And Mama? Why have you got a snake in your hand, Papa? I'm afraid of snakes" (Pons 1999). All in all, this first filmic part is heavy in dystopic elements that radiate not only from the physical environment as such, but also from the very protagonists themselves in this hitherto bleak urban tale.

(o no): A shimmer of hope

The first part of *Morir (o no)* thus leaves the protagonists with no hope; trapped, as they are, in an alienating postmodernity. The fragmented urban habitat is reflected in seemingly schizophrenic characters with erratic personalities and who are engaged in distorted dialogues. Yet, when the urban dystopia seems darker than ever Pons presents us with a narrative alternative. The characters now "survive at the last moment, except in the ambiguous ending of the screenwriter" (Pujol 2010, 172). Thus, in the second part of the movie a road to salvation is offered for fictional characters that make up Pons' already fictive storyline. The scriptwriter introduced in the beginning of the film is, at least temporarily, resurrected when we again see him converse with his wife (the first scene is here revisited but a different outcome is offered). As a medical professional, this woman reappears in a hospital flashback as she nurses back to health her junkie brother from the second episode of the film. Through their contact, his character can step out of the parallel narrative that he had been a part of and enter the screened reality of the scriptwriter who invented him. On the wife's/woman's/nurse's adamant

⁴³ Belbel's original discourse reads: *¡YO NO SOY UNA BORRACHA!! Eres mala, una bruja, una cerda asquerosa nadando en la abundancia, tii eres rica, tu marido se ahoga en los millones ... no puedes ser de mi misma sangre, NO, NO CUELGES, ¿qué, qué, qué, robarte yo? Pues, déjame decirte algo, bruja, ¿sabes para qué te llamaba realmente? No, no para lo que acabas de decirme, cerda. No. Para decirte lo que me había contado el cadáver de tu madre esta mañana: que tii no eras hija suya, que era yo, su hija, ¡¡¡¡jódete!!!!*. "(Un instante antes de morir) de Sergi Belbel" (pdf), Università Ca Foscari Venezia. Online, last modified 2014, venus.unive.it/matdid.php?...LMoo21%2FBelbelMorir.

insistence that her husband let these invented characters live, the story takes a radically different turn. In the last scene, the writer himself is rushed to hospital by ambulance while his wife repeatedly begs him to “Live, Live, Live!” (Pons 1999). Her words thus serve as a way for Pons (and Belbel) to change the narrative course of the film and present an entirely different outcome.

It again becomes clear that Pons, despite a dark subject matter in both *Carícies* and *Morir (o no)* and an uncertain plot resolution in *Amor idiota*, ultimately ends all three films on a hopeful note. And so, while the character relationships in *Carícies* had been negative throughout the main part of the plot, the very last scene is filled with human warmth, as a female tenant tenderly cares for her bleeding male neighbour – the Christian symbolism evident. As noted by Feldman, “[t]he ending, as well as the play in general, eludes any sort of slick categorization, and it is perhaps in this ambiguity that one can locate the power in Belbel’s theatre” (Feldman 2004, 257). Also, in *Amor idiota*, Pons seems to suggest that his protagonists may face a promising future after all. And even in *Barcelona (un mapa)*, where the characters’ verbal abuse of their metropolitan environment contrasts with the more light-hearted portrayal of diurnal Barcelona in *Amor idiota*, the mutual comprehension reflected in the final words of the elderly protagonists reveal their ultimate trust in one another – and possibly also their trust in a global era which may not be altogether negative.

Although it rings true that:

[i]n the midst of the present – messy, fetid, rambling and chaotic, and thus deserving of a death sentence – utopian thought was a bridgehead of future orderly perfection and perfect order (Bauman 1998a, 37), [t]he future that Bauman began to envisage after the mid-1980s was no longer the socialist utopia, but the postmodern human condition. Bauman saw a world taking shape in which the challenge facing humankind was not to awaken hope, but how to cope with foreboding. The culture of postmodernity, in Bauman’s view, is drenched with anxiety. People feel ambivalent about themselves and the world they live in. They try not to think or care too much. They are uncertain about the present and lack trust in the future (Smith 1999, 25).

And yet, it is this very uncertainty that inevitably defines our contemporary times and that is reflected in the dilemmas faced by the protagonists of both filmmakers. Given that there is no turning back and that fluid postmodernity is characterized by global flows and increasingly blurred territorial limits, it seems apt to claim that “[t]he liquid modern equivalents of the Utopias of yore are neither about time nor about space – but about *speed* and *acceleration*” (Bauman 2002, 241). Such global speed is reflected in Pons’ films, where fast-paced dialogues and narrative developments define his narrative style. Our speedy present is also visualized in Almodóvar’s 1990s and more recent films,

where (as in *Volver*) the characters are unable to fend off urbanization and globalization. Rather, they must embrace these processes to stay afloat. It seems both Almodóvar and his protagonists, who, first reluctantly then increasingly convinced, return to the global metropolis time and again, ultimately suggest that it may be better to accept change than fight against it. If some of these changes are embraced, the postmodern metropolis can become more liberalized, and more tolerant attitudes towards previously marginalized groups can come to the fore.

Final reflections

To sum up this chapter and, preliminarily, the overall thesis argument, an analysis of all films making up Almodóvar's repertoire to date allows us to envisage how Madrid has developed and become transformed over the course of his three decades of productive filmmaking (and where his pink and blue periods may now be followed by a new thematic era, one that could signal Almodóvar's return to camp comedy).⁴⁴ As Spain has left the culturally and artistically stifling Franco regime behind, the country and its capital have become spaces open to liberal influences and trends. Spanish democracy has left in its cinematic wake nineteen films by Almodóvar which, although not overtly political, are telling of the time in which each film was produced. Watching all his films in chronological order (a narrative approach adhered to in the structure of the two first chapters) enables viewers today to historically observe Spain's gradual transition and transformation into a more solidly democratic society.

As has been highlighted in this sixth chapter, the screened metropolis in both Almodóvar's and Pons' repertoires is neither entirely utopic nor dystopic, but it occupies a space in between the two extremes. Although a complete utopia can never be achieved in a world not capable of fully integrating a concept that is itself unreal, the two filmmakers are to be credited with having boldly embraced urban and global change on screen. Problematic as this social and cultural transformation may be, they never shy away from the representation of Madrid and Barcelona as complex places that battle their own historical demons, as well as individual and collective nostalgia within a currently global framework. The cineastes portray the great metropolis as a simultaneously positive and negative space and although they never explicitly exalt the advantages nor condemn the drawbacks of globalization for the gradually more postmodern habitat, their films are certainly reflective of urban change throughout recent decades.

⁴⁴ Alfredo Martínez-Expósito speculated on this in a Melbourne Masterclass - Faculty of Arts Winter Series, held on 20 July 2013, where he began his seminar by showing a screened interview with the Spanish filmmaker. Martínez-Expósito, Alfredo, "Almodóvar, Barcelona, and the Quest for Authenticity" (lecture, Melbourne University, Melbourne, VIC, July 7, 2013).

As expanded on in the preliminary analysis of *Barcelona (un mapa)*, Barcelona has historically faced a very different situation from Madrid. The harrowing times that the city underwent after its occupation by Francoist forces on 26 January 1939, have been analysed in depth by, e.g., Paul Preston, who makes us aware of the exodus of Catalan people from Barcelona prior to the arrival of the Spanish troops, and stresses that the repression of the city:

took many forms and merely to stay alive was a major achievement for many Republicans. Those who had not been executed, imprisoned or exiled lived in an atmosphere of terror (Preston 2012, 467).

Although this traumatic period in the history of Barcelona and Catalonia is only briefly represented in the opening sequences of *Barcelona (un mapa)*, the terror of the times is sensed behind the apparently peaceful images of Catalan citizens awaiting the armed forces in this scene. The film is to almost equal degrees steeped in the past and in the global present, and it becomes quite evident that Pons, like his Catalan contemporaries, "vivió el momento en que la gente tenía un pie dentro de la dictadura y otro fuera."⁴⁵ The socio-political situation and the history of Barcelona is thus considerably different from that of Madrid and the deep-lying tension between the two cities is partly reflected by Pons' total avoidance of Madrid as a city visually compared with Barcelona. Catalonia's ongoing struggle for national independence and its citizens' problematic relationship with their aesthetically transformed post-Olympic capital, may be some of the reasons why Pons and the writers to whom he pays filmic tribute have generally painted the city more complex than what Almodóvar has Madrid.⁴⁶ As opposed to Madrid, from the early 1990s and well into the 21st-century, Barcelona has had to face its own post-Olympic battles. The city has not only been democratically transformed since the end of the Franco era, but it has been doubly (post)modernized and globalized through its hosting of the 1992 Summer Olympics. Not surprisingly, such rapid urban

⁴⁵ This was noted by Prof. Pompeu Casanovas Romeu, of the Spanish National Research Council and Research Professor at La Trobe University Law School, Melbourne, in an email to me on 28 July 2013. In this message, Casanovas also maintains that "Pons no duda en meter su ojo donde no debe: en la noche y en el umbral de lo indecible, tan revelador desde el punto de vista social."

⁴⁶ With regard to the representation of Barcelona in Pons' *Barcelona (un mapa)*, Martínez-Expósito has interpreted the negative attitudes on the part of the characters towards their own city and, particularly, towards the postmodern urban architecture (especially prominent after the 1992 summer Olympics) as reflective of the many abuses Barcelona has been subjected to as a result of mass tourism. Martínez-Expósito additionally notes that the purpose of the tourism industry [in Spain and elsewhere] is the "commodification" of the city. Martínez-Expósito, Alfredo, "Almodóvar, Barcelona, and the Quest for Authenticity" (lecture, Melbourne University, Melbourne, VIC, July 7, 2013). This, alongside the screened dialogue between past and present, is at the heart of the cinematic argument in the film, and one of the underlying reasons behind the protagonists' apparent unacceptance of their architecturally transformed Catalan capital.

changes may not only be difficult for citizens to keep up with, but they are generally not immediately embraced. According to Pujol:

Barcelona, gracias a la plétora de lemas, estrategias mercantiles y de marketing que la envasa y distribuye para consume inmediato, ha sufrido tal metamorfosis que ha desembocado en una esquizofrenia urbana tal y como se dramatiza en varias vertientes culturales (Pujol 2009b, 62).

This, as seen, is part of an inherent problematic in Pons' repertoire. Nevertheless, the globally reflective cinema of Almodóvar and Pons can also be seen as a catalyst for global change within the screened metropolis. By embracing topics and themes that have become increasingly relevant in a country needing to become more liberal and to literally move with the times, the two filmmakers have set the stage for other directors who may now continuously open up debates around postmodernity and globalization, an ensuing both reflective and restorative nostalgia within the urban environment, and issues relating to the artificiality of the city and a performed human gender. These concepts are not always readily defined, nor are they always separable from one another; as evidenced by Almodóvar in several films where Madrid is represented as both a real place and an artificial construct.

Last but not least, Almodóvar and Pons have in their cinema redefined the role and status of the transgender individual.⁴⁷ This, too, could lead to more open-minded attitudes towards individuals who in the past constituted social subgroups in Spain. As appears to be suggested in some of the films analysed, previously marginalized members of society may be considered more heroes than anti-heroes at a time when individual "courage is encouraged" rather than rejected.

All this demonstrates exactly how important Almodóvar and Pons are in a country that has generally welcomed its move into democracy. In Spain today it has become essential for citizens to prepare themselves to be increasingly open-minded in order to benefit more fully from the transformative global era which is now quickly bringing the nation into dialogue with the rest of Europe and the world at large. With this in mind, it seems accurate to assert that

[f]or better or worse... in our fast globalizing world, while territory is fast losing its importance, it is acquiring a new significance: a symbolic and ghostly shadow of the gravity lost (Bauman 2002, 237).

⁴⁷ Pons does so in both *Barcelona (un mapa)* and in (the non-fictional) *Ocaña, retrat intermitent*.

CONCLUSION

This research project has investigated the representation of transformed Madrid and Barcelona in the cinema of Almodóvar and Pons. While the overall argument has revolved around the key terms *urban change* and *global habitat*, the main question that the thesis has set out to respond is how the gradual transformation of the screened Spanish and Catalan¹ metropolises from 1980 to 2013 reflects not only concurrent socio-political change in contemporary Spain, but also the increasingly fluid space that is the globalized urban habitat of today. Additionally, and equally importantly, the thesis argument has viewed unfixed gender identities and an altered human anatomy on screen as metaphors for the changing city which accommodates this transformed individual. Body and city have thus become concepts paralleled with each other, and the filmic metropolis has in part been considered a living organism initially positively infused with energy from its liberalized citizens. And partly, city and body have been regarded as artificial constructs as unnatural, in a way, as the increasing postmodernity in which the visual narratives are steeped; a free-flowing culture seemingly detached from the past and which similarly governs metropolises today. Overall, the two main research questions addressed in the thesis abstract are relevant within the context of an ever more modernized Spanish nation which has quickly progressed through burgeoning democracy in the 1980s and become gradually less restrictive socially and politically. These liberal trends are reflected also on a human level, and in the films brought into discussion this is visualized in increasingly fluid and unfixed gender and identity representations. Mirrored on screen are trends in Spanish and Catalan society at large, where members of urban subcultures are now receiving more recognition after having had to operate largely in the margins of mainstream culture during the Franco era.

¹ As part of the Catalan strive for independence, there is notably an ongoing debate in Spain about whether or not Barcelona should be regarded as Spanish.

By viewing Almodóvar's and Pons' films as visual documents that depict the changing face of Spain over the past 3.5 decades, it becomes apparent that new trends and attitudes have radically transformed the social and cultural climate of the country. Citizens on- and off screen have become increasingly aware of the role Spain plays in a wider social and political context, and are more outward-looking as a result. Their country is open to Europe and the world at large and has proven a valuable competitor on the global stage. As noted, Almodóvar's and Pons' cinema reflects these dramatic and rapid modernizing changes and although they are never overtly political, the filmmakers lay bare the many pros and cons that globalization brings and that become an intrinsic part of *late modernity* – or *postmodernity*. Their cinema is contemporarily relevant and neither cineaste shies away from issues commonly faced by audiences today; issues that connect viewers from a postmodern perspective, be they Spanish or Catalan. That is to say that the more postmodernity closes in on our global habitat, the more interconnected we are when it comes to the need amongst citizens today to face a both attractive and bewildering new era defined by increased social fragmentation and which manifests itself also in an increased individual, regional and national detachment from the recent past.

The thesis has explored the screened urban and social transformation in Spain – and particularly in Madrid and Barcelona – by adhering to a both chronological and thematic structure in its analysis of plot and character developments, narrative devices, and the urban space that serves as a visual backdrop in these films. The overall thesis argument has been further enhanced by references to Bauman, who holds that “[c]hange and city may, and indeed should, be defined by reference to each other” (Bauman 2003, 104). While all full feature films constituting Almodóvar's oeuvre have been analysed more, or less, in depth throughout the thesis, Pons' films (including the 1979, non-fictive *Ocaña, retrat intermitent*) generally released concurrently with those of Almodóvar, are all chronologically covered in the second chapter where a historical overview is provided. In the first two chapters, the filmic repertoires are thus inserted into a larger regional and national framework to demonstrate the social and political awareness of the filmmakers and how timely their films are, released in an era skilfully reflected on screen and where the plots generally unravel in the same time periods as those concurrent. The issues of concern amongst the protagonists and which often stem from their complex relationship with their great metropolis, are similarly often dealt with by urbanites also off screen. This makes the films socio-politically relevant to viewers today, who would be able to identify with their screened counterparts, and comprehend their thoughts, feelings and reactions.

These two introductory chapters evince the films' shared features although they also contrast at times, particularly thematically. The films selected for deeper analysis in the thesis have particularly in common a sense of postmodern fear amongst the protagonists.

Such and other commonalities between Almodóvar and Pons reflect their capacity to rise above regional differences by exploring issues that are universally applicable to citizens and societies today. As seen in the third, fourth, and sixth chapters, the themes dealt with by Pons in *Barcelona (un mapa)*, *Caricies*, *Amor idiota*, and *Morir (o no)* remind of themes explored also by Almodóvar. Still, Pons differs in terms of his consistently darker subject matter in these films, and in his hyperrealist representation of an at times frightening urban environment – one in which also our own:

fears have become self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing; as if they have acquired a momentum of their own and can go on growing by drawing exclusively on their own resources (Bauman 2007b, 9).

Drawing from the literary genre, the Catalan authors, playwrights and filmmaker generally portray the urban reality of Barcelona as one not always readily embraced by the protagonists (in direct contrast to the more ‘benevolent’, organic representation of the same capital in e.g. *Ocaña*, *retrat intermitent* and *La rossa del bar*) – a stance that generally corresponds with Bauman’s sombre views on a fluid postmodernity defined by its tendency not to stay fixed for too long.

In scholarly discourses today, Almodóvar and Pons have, rather surprisingly, not been compared or contrasted to any great extent and while some critics, like Smith (2003), Martínez-Expósito², Bénédicte Brémard³, and Kinder (who talks of a “primary sense of Spanishness” in Almodóvar’s cinema when he replaces the “regional” with “the marginal” whereas in Pons’ the marginal is “reappropriated” for his “own regional discourse”)⁴ indeed draw occasional parallels between the two, they form a minority within the wider scholarship. The general preferences are for critical analyses to be geared toward the cinema of either one filmmaker or the other. In this thesis it has thus been considered all the more important to pay tribute to both cineastes as creative artists able to be studied side by side; artists who have proved themselves capable of capturing urban and global changes and trends on screen and who, in doing so, have reached out to both national and international audiences. When their cinema is increasingly read in a postmodern light, certain common themes become apparent and important. As these themes are in line with trends observed in our contemporary society, the subsequent thematic analyses following on the first two chapters are pertinent as they

² See e.g. Martínez-Expósito, “Posthumous Tales of One Great, Free Nation: Spanishness in post-Franco Spanish Film”, *Athenea Digital* 14 (2008).

³ In Bénédicte Brémard, “Le métissage des cultures/dans le cinéma espagnol homosexuel contemporain: Pedro Almodóvar/Ventura Pons,” in *Inverses: Littératures, Arts, homosexualités. Dossier bilingue de Littératures Hispaniques*, ed. Patrick Dubois and Nicolas Batule (2005), 53-80.

⁴ Marsha Kinder, *Blood Cinema. The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993). 436.

cover issues such as postmodern nostalgia and the related inability amongst citizens to fully let go of the past in the midst of a global presence which spurs them on in a constant race towards an uncertain future. Themes highlighted in this thesis, related to the main research questions, are henceforth reiterated. It becomes clear that the different plot contents, depending on the year of release of each film, correspond with the order in which similar themes, trends or concerns have become more noticeable in society also off-screen.

The third chapter that maps Almodóvar's and Pons' cinema historically, socio-politically and spatially, demonstrates how the filmmakers have been able to represent the screened urban space as one that can be explored in different ways. In terms of *Barcelona (un mapa)*, it has been noted that the Franco era is initially called back into the present and slivers from the past continuously interfere with the screened present through flashbacks depicting historically and architecturally significant internal settings. These landmarks help position the plot within a larger cultural framework and make Pons' narrative distinctly Catalan. Given his cultural and historical awareness, Pons' half-realistic, half-fictive Barcelona is explored immediately after the initial overview of his oeuvre. The capital is thus inserted within the context of the recent history of Catalonia, and that of Spain.

The mapping of the urban space is more forward oriented in *Todo sobre mi madre*. Here, Barcelona is in part depicted as a tourist attraction⁵. In doing so, Almodóvar promotes the urban space to a both national and foreign audience in a manner that corresponds with Anholt's theories of urban (and national) place branding.⁶ In contrast to Pons, Almodóvar does not use brief snapshots or footage from an either real or fictive past to map the Catalan cityscape. Rather, he unfolds a tourist map of Barcelona when he has his female protagonists traverse the city on foot while he simultaneously embellishes his visual narrative with images of urban landmarks glimpsed in passing. In this globally aware film, Almodóvar additionally establishes a connection with the larger Hispanic world when – aside from with other parts of Spain – a narrative link is drawn

⁵ However, issues like memories from the past, human conflict and tension also make for complex subject matters in the film.

⁶ In a recent book chapter, Martínez-Expósito argues that “nation brand agencies can effectively promote a destination because they are actually selling a product ... In the case of Spain, the film industry has been a privileged vehicle for the coinage and dissemination of Brand Spain propositions thanks to a combination of factors ... [such as] the felicitous synergies between some of the most Spanish filmmakers, such as Pedro Almodóvar, and the most salient selling points of a re-constituted Spain (new gender and sexual relations, for example).” Alfredo Martínez-Expósito, “Branding the Nation: Resistance and Authenticity in García Berlanga's *París-Tombuctú*,” in *Rethinking 'Identities': Cultural Articulations of Alterity and Resistance in the New Millennium*, ed. Lucille Cairns and Santiago Fouz-Hernández (Bern Peter Lang, 2014). 147-48.

with Argentina⁷ (a parallel connection with the outside world had already been made in *La flor de mi secreto*, where wider European and current affairs were woven into the narrative and helped propel the plot forward). A chapter that critically draws from cultural geography and integrates theories of Bruno, additionally illustrates how a cartographic reading can be applied not only to the urban space, but also to the screened human body and mind. This is demonstrated with regard to *La piel que habito*; a film which explores no longer the external space but an individual's body and mind in its clinical depiction of a man physically transformed into a woman through a process of *transgenesis*.⁸ The inclusion of references also to this film in the third chapter has made it possible to highlight a narrative and cinematographic turn in Almodóvar when, the more recent his films become, he gradually leaves the physical space behind and instead opts for a spatial representation of a person's body and mind. As part of both physical and mental transformation undergone by the troubled protagonist, the impact that this has on their identity is simultaneously explored.

While this narratively and visually connects the third chapter with the fifth – where the human body and anatomy is increasingly regarded as a construct in line with an, at this stage, similarly constructed urban environment – the fourth chapter analyses notions of screened nostalgia and melancholia and in doing so also ties in with the third. Thus, with the spatial and temporal link drawn by both filmmakers comes attached a range of feelings amongst Spanish and Catalan citizens who may not be fully able to embrace the ground-breaking postmodernity that generally defines life in metropolises today. More specifically, nostalgia and melancholia underlie visual narratives that are at once forward oriented and reflective in regard to a more, or less, easily defined time and place. The alternatively nostalgic and melancholic sentiments of some of the Almodóvarian protagonists are similarly detectable behind some of the words uttered by characters in Pons' ultimately moving urban drama *Carícies*⁹, where the human action and interaction in the final scene is tinged by nostalgia. A chapter that explores collective historical *amnesia*, individual melancholia, and the interrelated

⁷ With regard to the much-cited European tunnel sequence, Rimbau argues that “only the travel between Madrid and Barcelona leads through explicitly Freudian tunnels that link the past with the present, rejection with searching, pain with happiness, and truth with its appearance.” Esteve Rimbau, “Imitation of Life: Transsexuality and Transtextuality in *Todo sobre mi madre* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999),” in *Burning Darkness: A Half Century of Spanish Cinema*, ed. Joan Ramon Resina and Andrés Lema Hincapié (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008). 252.

⁸ The term has been defined as a biomedical procedure involving “the transfer of cloned genetic material from one species or breed to another,” “Transgenesis”, *The Free Medical Dictionary*, last modified 2014, http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/_/dict.aspx?rd=1&word=transgenesis

⁹ It seems rather harsh and unjust to argue, like David Vasse has in French, that “Inutilement artificiel, Carresses est surtout d'une lourdeur démonstrative assez confondante [...] Sans la moindre originalité, le film renvoie au simplisme de son programme affectif (et affecté).” David Vasse, “Carresses,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 538 (September, 1999): 76.

nostalgia that haunts urban residents today as they experience conflicting emotions with regard to their global space and time, focuses on *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, *La flor de mi secreto*, and the aforementioned *Carícies*. The latter is, similar to *Morir (o no)* and *Forasters*, ripe in dystopic elements. Both reflective and restorative nostalgia surfaces in these films and becomes an inherent notion or condition amongst individuals dwelling in an urban landscape that attracts and repels all at once; a place in which “escape now becomes the name of the most popular game in town” (Bauman 2007, 104). This postmodern condition has been explored in depth by scholars like Gonzalo Navajas and Svetlana Boym, who defines restorative nostalgia as one that “stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home.” Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, “thrives on *algia* (the longing self) and delays the home-coming – wistfully, ironically, desperately” (Boym 2007, 7).

These restorative and reflective aspects of a concept used to verbalize an ultimately not easily defined state of unease, are employed differently in the cinema of Almodóvar and Pons. Thus, while Almodóvar regularly allows his protagonists to escape the location in which their nostalgic sentiments have become most prevalent, in Pons’ single film *Carícies* the nostalgia that imbues the last scene can, rather, be seen as a final relief from the hostility, agony and general urban malaise (“en las calles extrañamente hostiles de una nocturna Barcelona de nuestros días”) (Campo Vidal 2004, 246) that has plagued the characters up until the very end. Pons himself has defined this film as “sobre la ciudad y el tiempo” (Campo Vidal 2004, 146). Indeed, rather than embarking on a temporary urban departure, his protagonists battle a reflective nostalgia related not so much to a longing away, as to an ultimate desire for human communication and togetherness within a fragmented environment which has triggered distorted and jagged dialogues between the protagonists. The nostalgia that imbues the sentimental poem recited in the nocturnal second scene and that lingers also in the very last scene, ultimately triggers a sense of relief or what can be seen as a necessary reaction to hitherto fraught character relationships. This again mirrors sentiments among urbanites today and proves the relevance of both reflective and restorative nostalgia as it is evoked in a contemporary cinema which draws from trends and tendencies in the society that it is seeking to reflect.

As has been proposed in the second main research question and in the corresponding fifth chapter, the thesis has also sought to illustrate how, when analysed from a chronological perspective, it becomes clear that Almodóvar’s cinema reflects the increasing artificiality of the human body and an urban space that has gone from being comparatively carefree in the immediate post-Franco period, to gradually more construed and complex as those liberal sentiments have since had to partly give way to a more sombre atmosphere in a Spanish 1990s affected by increased globalization, social fluidity and fragmentation. Although the less homogeneous Spain of today has led to a

more multi-faceted nation, globalization has also come with its clear drawbacks. In a postmodern era defined as *modernity without illusions* (Bauman 1993, 32), not only is there often the sense of an almost tangible disenchantment which also affects Almodóvar's characters. But the result of a comparatively less spontaneous and, in a way, less natural urban environment today, is an increasingly streamlined society guided by new sets of norms. Our times have been seen as defined by *indeterminacy* and *immanence* (Hassan 1987, 46). In this postmodern society, the human body has itself become increasingly elastic and changeable; as manipulated and transformed as the space it inhabits. This is demonstrated in the chapter analysis of the gradually more artificial Spanish metropolis and screened human body in several films by Almodóvar spanning from the late 1980s to 2004. In some of these films, there is simultaneously an apparent detachment from the external environment when the plot develops largely within an alternative internal space where the imitative scale replica artificially recreates real Madrid. Not only does this seem to reflect the less natural society of today but it could also refer to a more inward-looking postmodern individual trapped, at times, within a metropolis that has become all the more globally outward-looking.

It has been held that the generally immaculately represented female body of the Almodóvarian transvestite and transsexual in films such as *La ley del deseo*, *Tacones lejanos*, and *La mala educación* (as well as the graphic representation of a man turned "woman" in *La piel que habito*) can be regarded as a construct able to be juxtaposed with the representation of Madrid as a corresponding urban construct. Just like the frivolous 1980s have now quickly had to be relegated to the past as Spain has moved into a perhaps less "spontaneous" new era, so, too, the human body has been radically transformed along a gradient from more, to less natural. And yet, the female identity performed by the screened drag artist is in Almodóvar's cinema not considered to be as apparently artificial as the constructed body on display. As has been argued with regard to *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* and *Todo sobre mi madre*, the fifth chapter agrees with this reflected standpoint and holds that a constructed, ultimately artificial (by being non-biological) physique does not necessarily come with a similarly artificial female identity. Would it not be possible to regard as authentic the constructed female gender if the male performer identifies with a woman to such an extent so as to pay homage to her on stage? (thereby not meaning "parodic homage", see page 185). Just like some Almodóvarian characters ill at ease in an alienating urban postmodernity flee this space to find relief in a more natural rural setting, it could similarly be argued that the cross-gendered persona who fully identifies with the performed female and who distances themselves all the more from the man they were born into, has finally found a place to call home. In a largely artificial postmodernity, it is thus possible to remain authentic with regard to one's identity – as repeatedly demonstrated by Almodóvar.

As a critically and thematically conclusive final thesis argument, in the sixth chapter a link is drawn not only with the fourth when there is a natural connection between the terms *nostalgia*, *utopia*, and *dystopia*.¹⁰ But in this thesis section all previous theoretical discourses and themes analysed overall, culminate in the final question whether the gradually more postmodern plots and the screened environment within which they unravel is ultimately a positive or a negative space, i.e. an urban utopia or a dystopia? It has, at this stage, become clear that even if the historical background of Madrid and Barcelona differs and this would have to be taken into account in a similar reading of the screened cityscape of *Barcelona (un mapa)* (the only film explored in this thesis which interweaves a global narrative with real archival footage and images from a Barcelona not yet drastically transformed by a Post-Olympic urban makeover), Almodóvar's and Pons' films share commonalities when analysed from a mainly postmodern perspective also with regard to their utopic/dystopic dichotomy. Specifically, it has been argued that the 1990s and 21st-century films examined in the last chapter contain both utopic and dystopic elements and that even though some of the films come across as thematically and narratively darker than others, in the end they are all concluded on a positive note. Given that the cinematic narratives are not complete until the struggle between a seemingly overbearing dystopia and an all the more relieving, but perhaps ultimately fickle, utopia has reached a "happy medium", this ultimately proves that the on-screen global habitat is neither a utopia nor a dystopia. Rather, it is a combination of both, given that one element cannot exist without the other. As these alternative and interrelated concepts originate in abstract and often rather subjective ideas on what is tolerable and not in society today, *urban utopia* or *dystopia* are not to be considered the only yardsticks by which to measure the positive and negative impact of globalization on our postmodern habitat. Still, the cinema explored lends itself well to such a critical application, and from a broader perspective it is deemed important to examine Almodóvar and Pons from a utopic/dystopic perspective, as all salient themes in their films ultimately point in the same global direction.

Simultaneously, the aptitude with which the filmmakers chronologically map the ever more transformed urban space within which they operate reaches a scholarly finale in the thesis when it is finally argued that the viewer has, all along, been transported through a historical and socio-politically varied landscape that in the most recent films has become fully post-modernized. Given the postmodern aspects of metropolises today; subjected to a fluid modernity characterized as an "epoch of disengagement,

¹⁰ Although, undeniably, also the rural space can become dystopic (or, as in *¿Qué he hecho yo...!!*, offer no relief for a protagonist ultimately better off in the city for financial reasons), in the repertoires explored in this thesis it is generally the city that is conferred dystopic elements.

elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase”¹¹, Almodóvar’s and Pons’ repertoires shed light on concurrent changes occurring not only within Spain but in the world at large. Their films also allow us to better understand the postmodern dilemmas faced by our fellow citizens. The included focus on the transgendered persona and the prominent role they play in particularly Almodóvar’s films reflects not only his own tolerance towards these individuals but also his influence on Spain as a nation. The country now has some of the most progressive legislations on trans-people in the world and Spain’s laws also protect Catalan LGBTIQI people. Their greater social visibility mirrors a more liberal and tolerant society; one more open to alternative gender expressions.

As a final reflection on the thesis as a research process, this project has allowed for a closer analysis of Almodóvar’s and Pons’ cinema, which in turn has facilitated a better understanding of Spain and Catalonia’s screened urban and cultural development and transition over the course of three decades hopefully also among readers of this thesis. In these films, the individual and collective joys and battles of the protagonists sometimes mirror those of their off-screen urban counterparts. In this sense, the overall filmic analysis has become one about the postmodern human condition in general. Understanding the protagonists, their actions and reactions, ultimately means comprehending contemporary urbanites in general, and the role we all play in society today. Should the thesis lead into a further research project, it could be solely focused on Pons’ cinema and on Barcelona and Catalonia as visual backdrops for the plots. There is scope for continuous exploration when it comes to the Catalan filmmaker, where a greater analysis could be made of all his films and on the narrative link he often establishes with the outside world. Pons and his cinema can in a continuous project thus be compared not with Almodóvar nor with the rest of Spain, but with other European filmmakers, metropolises and nations with which Barcelona now compares itself and which praise the Catalan capital in turn; celebrating the city as a flag-bearer when it comes to urban design and development ever since it was radically transformed and modernized through its pre- and post-Olympic overhaul. It would be interesting to investigate Barcelona and the Catalonia of today mindful of regional identity and to predict in which way this community is heading in a country subjected to further changes while it keeps afloat in the global present.

Will Pons in future cinematic explorations render the urban space and city dwellers continuously postmodern, or are we now approaching not only the end of utopia but also of postmodernity? In the cultural and historical movements replacing the one we have now sometimes reluctantly grown accustomed to, will we continuously see a rootless individual look ahead while at the same time they are being held back by uneasy

¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, “From Heavy to Light Modernity,” in *The Contemporary Bauman*, ed. Anthony Elliott (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2007). 38.

feelings of nostalgia and melancholia? Or will citizens halt the speed with which they move into the future, reconsider their past and even attempt to come to terms with it? It might well be that the dystopia that lingers in Pons' recent films and in the literary narratives on which they are based, may henceforth be transformed into something quite different in a no longer postmodern universe but one guided by other visions and outlooks on life. While it may be true that Almodóvar could now be making a return to socio-politically satirical comedy (although his new film in the making – *Silencio* is a “hard-hitting drama” and “a return to the cinema of women”)¹², it is debatable whether Pons will do the same. Whatever the case, it seems feasible to say that he, too, will change his literary and cinematic predilections in line with the changing climate in and outside his own country.¹³

¹² “Tea with the FT: Pedro Almodóvar”, Financial Times, last modified 2015, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/568f623a-8f4e-11e4-b080-00144feabdc0.html>

¹³ Charming, eloquent, and incredibly intelligent and insightful, my friend Ventura Pons, one of the greatest and most aware and bold filmmakers out there, sadly passed away in January 2024. I will forever remember our meeting in Barcelona 2017, and it is my intention to follow up this PhD research project with a book solely about Ventura Pons, published by Brill, and which honours the man and his incredible legacy. *Viva Ventura Pons, in memoriam*. You were sophisticated yet down-to-earth, aware of your artistic greatness, yet humble and extremely generous with your time and your resources.

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- Volver*. Directed by ———. Spain: El Deseo S.A Canal+ España, and Ministerio de Cultura, 2006.

APPENDICES

1. Transcribed interview with Spanish actress Mariola Fuentes, pertinent to themes analysed in the thesis and Pedro Almodóvar as a director.

Interview conducted at the Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne, on 9 August 2012, two hours prior to her staged performance of *Blood Wedding* (based on García Lorca's play *Bodas de sangre*, 1931). Ethically approved 28 September 2012.

2. Transcribed interview with New York University professor Jo Labanyi. In this interview Labanyi expands historically on Cultural Studies as an academic discipline and sheds further light on gender issues.

Interview conducted at the School of Languages and Linguistics, Melbourne University 19 September 2014. Ethically approved 13 October 2014. (Note that for privacy reasons, the interview is not published here).

3. PhD certificate and AHEGS statement from University of Melbourne.

Appendix one

(JH): Buenos días y muchas gracias por reunirme conmigo. Quisiera hablar algo sobre *Hable con ella*, en particular, y llegar a saber un poco más sobre cómo ha sido trabajar con Almodóvar.

¿Cuántas veces has trabajado con Almodóvar?

(MF). Tres: En *Carne trémula*, *Hable con ella* y *Los abrazos rotos*.

¿Y qué papel interpretaste?

(MF): La peluquera del personaje de Penélope Cruz, la maquilladora, y una enfermera. En *Carne trémula*; una de las que trabaja con Francesca Neri en la guardería. Fueron papeles secundarios.

¿Cómo fue trabajar con Javier Cámara?

(MF): Además de un actor maravilloso, porque es un actor bastante bueno, es una persona excelente; muy divertido. Yo personalmente lo quiero mucho, trabajo muy a gusto, muy bien con él.

¿Él vive en Madrid?

(MF): Si y yo también vivo en Madrid. Para el trabajo de actor... es mejor vivir en Madrid donde se hace las provisiones; en el resto de España no hay industria. Y bueno también se hace películas en Barcelona, pero para trabajar en Barcelona tienes que saber el catalán, lo cual es más difícil para el resto de los españoles.

¿Es fácil seguir las instrucciones de Almodóvar?

(MF): Para mí ha sido fácil, hay gente para la que le resulta más complicado, pero para mí ha sido fácil... Le entiendo bien, entiendo lo que me pide cuando rodamos y para mí es una experiencia siempre divertida y grata; no es un sufrimiento para nada... somos muchas horas... el rodaje... son muchas horas.

¿Y en cuanto a los actores y las actrices, es diferente su manera de guiarles?

(MF): No yo creo que no. Yo creo que trabaja igual.

En España, ¿qué piensa la gente sobre los temas más bien controversiales de Almodóvar?

(MF): Pues en España tiene muchos detractores, no sé por qué, pero normalmente es bastante mejor valorado fuera de España que en España. Es muy extraño, no sé. De

todas maneras, en España tenemos un problema que no valoramos casi nunca a lo nuestro; siempre nos parece mejor lo que viene de fuera. Es extraño porque España es un país muy rico de cultura y creo que tenemos una cultura muy buena, un idioma estupendo y no sé por qué no apreciamos lo nuestro nunca.

Y parece que los españoles generalmente se quedan dentro de España más bien que salir durante sus vacaciones.

(MF): Sí, porque también tenemos el hándicap del idioma porque, a ver, no es que seamos más torpes que el resto del mundo, sino que no tenemos el oído muy acostumbrado al inglés porque en España todas las películas extranjeras se doblan en español... no te permiten desde pequeño hacerte el oído al inglés; entonces nos cuesta mucho aprender idiomas.

La última película sobre la transgénesis [*La piel que habito*]; ¿cómo fue recibido por los españoles?

(MF): No muy bien... en cambio fuera se valora mucho más; a mí me parece que Pedro tiene una manera de rodar impecable, que los planos son... tiene una belleza superior y bueno luego el tema te puede interesar más o menos, pero la manera de rodar es impecable... es un genio. Tiene un sentido de la estética que no tiene mucha gente.

***Hable con ella* incluye muchos intertextuales (la música, el teatro, etcétera) y empieza con una escena donde se presenta la obra *Café Müller* de Pina Bausch. ¿Almodóvar se interesa mucho por el teatro, parece?**

(MF): Claro, es un esteta, le da mucha importancia a la estética y a la música. Es una persona con inquietudes culturales, evidentemente, y una persona culta y le gusta tratar en sus películas todas las cosas culturales que a él le influyen, me imagino.

¿Cuál es el tema principal de *Hable con ella*?

(MF): Lo que más me gusta de esta película es que te cuenta una historia de amor, por supuesto. Es una historia de amor maravillosa, pero en ningún momento censura o hace ninguna crítica moral hacia el personaje de Javier Cámara... no analiza, no sé cómo explicarlo que tampoco enseña imágenes de mal gusto... nunca se ve cuando tiene sexo con ella, por ejemplo, nunca se ve. Lo hace de una manera muy elegante y poética... en ningún momento lo criminaliza ni lo critica ni cuenta si esto está bien o está mal, o sea simplemente lo cuenta y eso me parece muy interesante.

¿El nombre de Benigno refleja quién es y esto influye la reacción del público ante este personaje?

(MF): Yo no sé, en este caso es que hiciera lo que hiciera es una persona buena, o sea no se puede decir que sea una mala persona, y bueno en este caso el nombre le viene muy bien.

¿Piensas que los personajes de Almodóvar crean una tolerancia más grande de parte de los españoles para la gente marginada?

(MF): Pues no lo sé, aunque él que tiene una mente liberal ya no hace falta tampoco que vea películas de Almodóvar para ponerse en el lugar del marginado, para tolerar la gente marginada, y él que es una persona estricta y conservadora nadie le va a convencer que cambie y mucho menos Almodóvar... precisamente para la gente conservadora y de derecha es como un demonio... Estoy segura de que si Almodóvar hubiera vivido en una dictadura lo hubieran querido matar, igual que mataron a Lorca.

¿Qué tienen en común Lorca y Almodóvar?

(MF): Bueno son dos genios que en diferentes maneras hacen poesía, ¿no? Yo creo que si Lorca hubiera nacido en esta época seguramente habría hecho cine.

La ciudad o la gran urbe juega un papel muy importante en las películas de Almodóvar. Marco Zuluaga en *Hable con ella* dice que “Madrid es un infierno”, y que “nuestra relación solo funcionaba en la huida”. ¿Qué opinan sobre su ciudad los madrileños?

(MF): En cualquier gran ciudad y en Madrid encuentro que todo es muy estresante, hay mucho tráfico, mucho ruido y a veces necesitas salir, aunque sea sólo a 40 kilómetros, a la sierra y respirar... Hay mucha contaminación y evidentemente... a los seres humanos les tiene que afectar... Yo de hecho hace años que me fui a vivir fuera, a la sierra y el campo, a 40 kilómetros de Madrid.

Y Almodóvar también trata mucho la relación entre la gran urbe y el campo o el pueblo, así como la ciudad de medio tamaño.

(MF): Es que nos empeñamos en vivir en ciudades que son un poco como colmenas y para el ser humano lo natural es vivir al aire libre, no encerrados, pero que sí, que hay mucha gente que quiere salir de la ciudad tarde o temprano, de escapar de la ciudad...

En *Hable con ella* dice la profesora de baile (Geraldine Chaplin) que “la vida no es nada sencilla.” ¿Qué piensas de este mensaje simbólico?

(MF): La vida no es sencilla, claro, pero bueno se superan las cosas. La vida está llena de amor, sufrimiento, muerte, vida; es todo, todo junto... Creo que todas las películas

tienen que hacerte reflexionar. Te vas al cine y sales de la película y no te ha provocado por dentro nada; no tiene ningún sentido... Tampoco quiero decir que las películas te tengan que enseñar algo, no; simplemente hacerte pensar, lo que sea.

¿Almodóvar seguirá rodando películas en España?

(MF): Almodóvar no depende de nadie. Él produce sus propias películas... no depende de nada externo para poder rodar... porque siempre un productor te va a censurar de una manera u otra por el dinero, por lo comercial... siempre te va a poner trabas; “no tenemos dinero para esto o esto no va a vender” ... Almodóvar rueda con toda libertad... También lo hace Ventura Pons un poco, que él también tiene su propia compañía de cine y rueda independientemente. Es muy difícil, porque no es fácil pagarte una película, pero bueno; Almodóvar ya está en un nivel que sí que puede.

¿Y crees que puede seguir así pese al clima de recesión en que se encuentra España por el momento?

(MF): Yo creo que sí, que si las amortiza en el extranjero como para poder hacerlo. En España a lo mejor no amortiza, o sea no gana todo el dinero para pagar la película que ha hecho y poder hacer otra, pero entre lo que gana en España y lo que gana en el extranjero sí le da.

¿No podría rodar sus películas en el extranjero?

(MF): Si, pero es que Pedro tampoco se sentiría cómodo rodando en otro idioma porque no se podría expresar.

¿En tu opinión, Madrid seguirá siendo la ciudad en el enfoque en sus películas? ¿O podría Almodóvar situar sus tramas más en otros lugares dentro del mismo país, como se ve en *La piel que habito* que tiene lugar en un cigarral en Toledo?

(MF): Si también la última sería Tenerife no... ah, Lanzarote.

Si es cierto; la última película en que actuabas, *Los abrazos rotos*, fue rodada en parte en Lanzarote.

(MF): O sea que bueno no solamente rueda en Madrid. Pero claro Madrid es la ciudad donde uno vive y donde uno tiene las experiencias vitales con lo cual es lógico rodar en Madrid. Además, tiene más acceso Madrid que otros lugares... También te resulta más barato rodar en Madrid que mover todo el equipo a otro lugar.

¿De las tres películas, cuál ha sido la más interesante para ti?

(MF): De estas tres me quedo con *Hable con ella*. Quizás porque Javier Cámara me parece maravilloso y porque me parece una película bastante bella, muy bella.

¿Te parece que de todas las películas de Almodóvar ésta sea generalmente la más seria? Creo que te deja con una sensación triste pero también está llena de esperanza.

(MF): De la primera época de Almodóvar me gusta mucho *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* - es mi favorita... y *La ley del deseo* también. Una es mucho más comedia digamos... aunque no se tratara como una comedia, pero es muy graciosa... En esta última también hay mucho actor; *Los amantes pasajeros*. Está rodando ahora en verano. Cuando llegue ya habrá acabado.¹

¿Y cuánto tarda rodar una película en general?

(MF): Dos o tres meses.

En cuanto a tu actuación actual aquí en Melbourne en la obra de Lorca, ¿hacer el papel en inglés te hace sentir más alejada del rol de lo que sería el caso si hubiese sido todo en español?

(MF): Hombre, claro en inglés pierde mucho porque esta obra en concreto de Lorca tiene mucha poesía y muchas rimas y al traducirla en inglés la poesía se pierde... es muy difícil rimar... y todos los amantes en el bosque... Todo esto en la versión original de Lorca; en español es todo poesía y rimas... pues aquí queda prosa, queda un diálogo. Se pierde mucho de la belleza de la poesía, pero el sentido del personaje es lo mismo. Yo sé lo que estoy diciendo en todo momento.

¿Y te dieron este papel de la madre?

(MF): Sí, fueron a Madrid a buscar a la madre.

¿Y podrías haber hecho otro papel?

(MF): No. Ya no tengo edad de hacer de novia... no ya no... con 42 años ya no puedo hacer de novia [y ríe].

¿Y cuántos años tendrá el personaje de la madre?

(MF): Pues la madre no tiene edad... en ningún momento la obra dice la edad que tiene, pero teniendo en cuenta que en aquella época una mujer con 15 o 16 años ya podía estar casada perfectamente... con 42... de hecho mis hermanas ya son abuelas no de uno; de tres y de cuatro y tienen 5 años más que yo... Y en aquella época se casaron más jóvenes que ahora; es como los gitanos; con 14 o 15 años ya están casados y al año siguiente ya empiezan a tener hijos. Cuando tienen 40 ya son abuelas.

¹ Mariola Fuentes is here referring to *Los amantes pasajeros* (*I'm so Excited*) which was being filmed in Madrid at the time of our Melbourne interview.

¿Es posible actuar “de manera mayor”?

(MF): No, aquí no hace falta pues la madre no... en la obra no pone que es una anciana y no tengo por qué trabajar físicamente como una anciana. Tengo que trabajar como madre nada más.

¿Es difícil hacer el rol de madre?

(MF): Lorca en general es difícil, pero bueno cualquier rol es difícil. Meterte en la piel de otra persona siempre es complicado.

¿Y te sientes más vulnerable en el sentido de sentirte más desnuda en la escena que en una película?

(MF): Por supuesto... o sea que en una película si te equivocas puedes repetir, aquí no. En concreto con esta producción que está en inglés necesito estar muy concentrada, no equivocarme, porque yo no puedo improvisar en inglés. Mi nivel de inglés no es tan grande como para improvisar. Yo sé muy poquito inglés.

¿Cuánto tiempo te tardó recordarte el papel?

(MF): Pues estar estudiando; dos meses: Un mes antes de venir y un mes de servir como actriz.

Concluding comments:

(JH): Bueno muchísimas gracias, Mariola. Ha sido un gusto tremendo hablar contigo.

(MF): Y hay un artículo que ha salido hace muy poco, igual te interesa. Es sobre la relación ente Pedro y Carmen Maura.

¿Se rompió su amistad, ¿no?

(MF): Bueno así llevan toda la vida. El artículo es muy bonito porque hace mucha referencia a los boleros.²

Muchas gracias por mencionar este artículo. Ha sido muy agradable hablar contigo.

(MF): De nada, mujer.

² This is with reference to the following article on Almodóvar and Carmen Maura, published in *El País*, 8 August, 2012: <https://blogpresa.blogspot.com/2012/08/el-despecho-como-forma-llevadera-de-la.html> or http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/08/07/actualidad/1344364786_048234.html

Suerte con la presentación esta tarde. Debes ir a prepararte para ella.

(MF): Si a calentar la voz y repasar el texto.

End of interview excerpt.

Appendix two

Content removed due to copyright and/ or privacy restrictions

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The
University of Melbourne



This is to certify that

Anna Karin Iytte Holmqvist

was duly admitted to the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in The University of Melbourne on

30 July 2015

Vice-Chancellor

University Secretary



28 August 2015

574853

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Kind regards

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Neil Robinson'.

Mr Neil Robinson
Academic Registrar

How does the gradual transformation of the Spanish metropolis from 1980 to 2013 reflect not only concurrent socio-political changes in contemporary Spain, but also the increasingly fluid space that is the global urban habitat of today? And how can unfixed gender identities and an altered human anatomy in the cinema of Pedro Almodóvar and, to some extent, Ventura Pons be viewed as metaphors for the changing city in which this transformed individual lives? The fluid body and identity of the on-screen transvestite and transsexual occupies a third space located somewhere between the traditionally male and female. The body becomes a construct that mirrors the increasingly artificial and dual cinematic city where the scale replica often replaces the real urban space.

This thesis thus analyses the cities of Madrid and Barcelona in films by both filmmakers as spaces that are becoming ever more abstract, fluid, complex and artificial as globalization takes a hold of our postmodern era. The films explored are considered important visual documents that reflect not only Spain's move from dictatorship to democracy, but also the transformation of the Spanish and Catalan capitals and the move from concrete urban habitat to a more abstract global space – which is not always entirely Hispanic in feel. It is therefore to be concluded that Spain both on- and off screen, is becoming ever more outward-looking in perspective. In the analysis of films spanning from the 1980s to date, the thesis argument revolves primarily around Zygmunt Bauman's theories on postmodern liquid societies and related theories applicable to postmodernity and the urban environment by cultural geography scholar David Harvey. With regard to fluid gender representations in the cinema analyzed, Judith Butler's views on gender performativity will be linked to the Deleuzian concept of becoming, which again relates to Bauman's more all-encompassing idea of a liquid global society defined by its overall lack of stability and constant motion

This is Jytte Homqvists thesis that was submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in February 2015 at The University of Melbourne.