

# Introduction

## Film, Television, Transmedia

This book is the first to evaluate contemporary Spanish cinema and television in the new context of transmedia, perhaps the most pressing problem in current media studies. It is divided into three sections – film, television, and transmedia – of three chapters each. The aim here, as elsewhere in my work, is to go beyond the limits of Spanish cinema studies, which tends to restrict itself to a small number of art or auteur feature films that are by no means representative of the field as a whole. Moreover, Spanish TV studies, which is practiced only within Spain and in departments of communication and social sciences, focuses on institutional questions and rarely examines concrete texts, as I do here.

In the first part of the book, “Film,” chapter 1 begins with a close study of some forgotten feature films from 1980s cinema, a neglected decade; the second chapter gives an account of a festival-cum-industry screening attended by the author; the third explores the media self-fashioning of Spain’s best known auteur, Pedro Almodóvar. The second section of the book, on television, gives a detailed report on one full season of series production (chapter 4), an analysis of LGBT dramas in Catalonia (chapter 5), and an account (chapter 6) of three TV series on the construction boom and bust that has caused Spaniards such anguish and is perhaps the country’s most pressing social issue. The third and final section of the book, which also contains three chapters, first traces the little known history of the crossover between cinema and television since the 1950s (chapter 7). Chapter 8 moves to the present, proposing a new paradigm in the Spanish audiovisual scene, one that inverts historical hierarchies: namely, popular cinema and quality television. Chapter 9 presents a transmedia study of current fiction on the economic crisis, offering close readings of case studies in print, cinema, and TV. Fittingly for a study of transmedia, this last chapter shows how the novel and television have become more cinematic, while cinema has become more televisual.

---

The central focus of the book is, as its title suggests, the question of education. And there is a strong current of pedagogy in Spanish discourse around cinema and, perhaps surprisingly, television. Such an educational mission is of course to be defined very broadly. Thus one specialized book posits an essential “relation of conflict” between culture and media, with the former defined restrictedly as ever-threatened television arts programming (Rodríguez Pastoriza 2003). Conversely the best TV blogger in Spain defends Spanish fiction series, which often choose a historical subject, as sources of learning, thus radically expanding the realm of pedagogy. As the pseudonymous “Chica de la tele” (“TV Girl”) writes, we need to ask ourselves the question: “What is a cultural program?” Her example here is *El ministerio del tiempo* (“The Ministry of Time,” TVE, 2015), an innovative science fiction series that managed to turn Golden Age luminaries Velázquez and Lope de Vega into trending topics on Twitter (Chica de la Tele 2015).

In a rare reference to television in his *Distinction*, Bourdieu cites highbrow cultural programming as “part of the paraphernalia which always announces the sacred character, separate and separating, of high culture” (1996, 34). The blurring of boundaries and leveling of distinctions promised by transmedia and newly complex TV render such a position untenable.

This extension of the educational or didactic beyond traditional limits is a theme that, in a transmedia variant, echoes throughout this book. Thus, according to one scholar, the films of the 1980s that I discuss in the first chapter embody two didactic missions. The first is to present classics of Spanish literature through an accessible form and high production values; the second is to emphasize the hardship of life in the postwar period, but without apportioning blame for that deprivation. Cultural and political pedagogy here come together in a middlebrow cinema that educates Spaniards in the new rights and responsibilities of democracy.

The industry screenings and movie market known as “Madrid de Cine,” which I examine in the second chapter, also prove to be a perhaps unexpected classroom. The press conferences I report on here sought to educate foreign correspondents on the nature of Spanish cinema (which earns twice as much income abroad as it does at home), while the films themselves embraced new trends such as postapocalyptic thrillers, literate ensemble pieces, genre pieces, auteur movies, and technically innovative features. What is striking, however, is that it is the popular cinema shown to buyers and critics in Madrid de Cine (most especially science fiction, a rare genre in Spain) that offers the clearest and most resonant

---

---

lessons on the nation's present situation, on its economic decline and environmental degradation.

The third chapter begins by addressing the new configuration of art, industry, and auteurs in a context where media-savvy directors have learned lessons on how to conjugate the uncanny combination of personal intimacy and physical distance characteristic of social media. In its second half the chapter charts how Almodóvar, a director openly concerned with pedagogy in films such as *La mala educación* ("Bad Education," 2004), fails to adapt to a new, less forgiving and respectful media landscape. Nonetheless he seeks to refine his own image and connect with a newly slippery audience in such self-reflexive mediations on the artistic and industrial process as *Los abrazos rotos* ("Broken Embraces," 2009), the main subject of the chapter.

Even more so than film, television has been seen by scholars in Spain as raising the question of education. Indeed Manuel Palacio, the doyen of TV historians, claims social "pedagogy" as a key term in the development of a medium often still dismissed as trash ("telebasura") (2001, *passim*). My fourth chapter, which is parallel to my second on the annual crop of film shown at Madrid de Cine, explores the unusually rich spring season of television fiction in 2009, placing it in the context of migration between the two media of film and TV and the continuing importance of cultural proximity in an era of transnational production. Beginning with a survey of the current TV ecology, it goes on to evaluate four innovative and popular titles: miniseries *23F: El día más difícil del Rey* ("February 23: The King's Most Difficult Day") and series *Águila Roja* ("Red Eagle"), *Pelotas* ("Balls") (all from Televisión Española), and *Doctor Mateo* (Antena 3), a rare adaptation of a British format. This chapter argues that these fictions share three themes: a continuing exploration of Spanish national history, both distant and recent; the fractured family, particularly as caused by missing mothers; and nostalgia for close community, whether its location is urban or rural. While such nostalgia might seem reactionary, combined with the previous themes (which are more evidently educational), the mourning for a lost past can serve as a kind of social pedagogy for the alienated modern nation.

Chapter 5, the second chapter on television, discusses LGBT fiction series in Catalonia. Starting with a major feature film by the country's best-known director that laid the foundations for such representations, the chapter goes on to argue that the goal of long-form fiction (especially when it is funded, as here, by a public service broadcaster) is to work through social issues such as homosexuality,

---

guiding audiences toward pedagogic objectives. Indeed, in an interview Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, the prestigious playwright who created one of these series, says explicitly that his aim was “to educate the public” in such “unpleasurable” areas as gayness, cancer, and diabetes (a somewhat problematic list) (Barranco 2014). Nonetheless the series in question exploit the closeness to the audience that is especially charged for the TV medium in a smaller nation with a unique language and culture such as Catalonia. Strikingly, this politically progressive pedagogy is found in series set both in the city (Barcelona) and in the more conservative countryside.

Chapter 6, the last and longest chapter on television, examines three series whose plots center around the property bubble of the last decade and its attendant corruption and misery. Here I begin by showing how academic studies of the Spanish real estate sector give their readers lessons in solidarity and sustainability, by critiquing past practices and promoting future development that is less socially and environmentally harmful than before. Turning to the series themselves, we see how they likewise teach negative lessons on harm (a wealthy developer, Croesus-like, destroys all he touches) or positive lessons in caring (a formerly carefree young woman takes responsibility for her dead sister’s family). Very diverse in genre, ranging from crazy comedy to tragic drama, these series thus educate Spaniards on the very visible perils of the present and point, implicitly, to the possibilities of a different future that is more difficult to imagine.

Chapter 7, the first on transmedia, considers the forgotten history of crossovers between cinema and television. A telling example is how a single actor in a single year (Lluís Homar in 2009) could play similar characters in a film and a TV serial, fathers who engage in a kind of personal pedagogy with their sons (one of them is a film director, the other the King of Spain). Beyond such textual similarities, I suggest that the well-known virtues of television (its familiarity, domesticity, and cultural closeness to a local audience) might be imitated in a film medium that has sometimes turned its back on national spectators and could learn valuable lessons from the successes of the small screen.

In the eighth chapter I return to the idea of television as a kind of democratic pedagogy in Spain, but now in the context of recent quality or complex TV series. Thus while “televisual” feature films have reconnected with mass audiences via the popular thriller genre, “cinematic” television has asked Spaniards to meditate within the law and justice format on such thorny issues as drug trafficking, colonialism, and Islamist terror. As we shall see, the transparent visual and

---

---

narrative pleasures of such ambitious television do not undermine but rather reinforce its continuing didactic intent. The key case here is Antena 3's lavish historical miniseries *El tiempo entre costuras* ("The Time In Between," 2013–14).

In the final chapter I return to the theme of crisis, inescapable in Spain, which was discussed earlier in the more restricted field of the property bubble. Here I note textual similarities between a prize-winning novel, feature film, and TV series, all of which propose via their claustrophobic narrative worlds that there is no way out of Spain's current conundrum and that the nation is set on a one-way voyage that permits no return. In the original and creative forms to which they appeal, however, the three texts suggest that Spaniards need not be the prisoners of their history (the term I use for this process is "path dependence"), that rather they can trace new and collective "desire lines" in a postapocalyptic landscape.

I trust that the evidence of the creativity of the Spanish audiovisual sector displayed throughout this book will convince readers also of this final and more positive moral. In spite or perhaps because of a crisis that is at once economic, political, and cultural, Spain has, as we shall see, experienced a continuing emergence of new and complex artistic phenomena arising from the multiple interactions of transmedia.

As will be evident from the pages above, in this book I tend to use transmedia as the mutual relation or coexistence of multiple media in a single text or institution: thus the feature films of the 1980s incorporate the literary values or the television aesthetic of the period, while, conversely, the television series of the millennium aspire to the production values once monopolized by cinema. Beyond these empirical relationships, transmedia (and its related term "intermedia") also suggest new historical and theoretical approaches to diverse cultural objects.

One compelling account of the subject is Agnes Petho's "Intermediality in Film: A Historiography of Methodologies." Petho starts by addressing the continuing suspicion of a term that remains perilously poised between film and media studies, asking whether it is a legitimate scholarly enterprise (2010, unpaginated). Further questions arise: Is intermediality a rift in film theory or just a blind spot? And is film itself, threatened as it is by electronic or digital transmedia, an incredible shrinking medium or an intermedium?

Charting paths along the historical axis, Petho returns to early models of film as synesthetic experience, noting that far from being new, "the idea that cinema is unavoidably interconnected with other media and arts has been a constant issue ... ever since the first moving picture shows were presented in a theatrical

---

environment and ever since movies attempted to present narratives and to produce emotions by a combination of images in movement, music and words.” Thus, she writes, Rudolf Arnheim’s *New Laocoön* (1938) examines the advent of the talkies by dismissing sound as an unwelcome interference with the purity of the visual medium. Later, however, Arnheim revised his attitude, stating:

*I see now that there is no such thing as a work limited to a single medium. ... The film medium, as I recognize now, profits from a freedom, a breathing space that I could not afford to consider when I fought for the autonomy of the cinema. ... This freedom puts the film more closely in the company of the other performing arts, such as the theater, the dance, music, or pantomime. (cited by Petho)*

Arnheim turns here, then, to a synesthetic model reminiscent of Wagner’s “total work of art” (*Gesamtkunstwerk*).

Petho herself concludes:

*The mapping of such tendencies has brought the study of cinematic intermediality far from the mere listing of media combinations or analogies of intertextual relations. ... There has been, in general, a major shift from the utopia of the Gesamtkunstwerk to the heterotopia of intermediality.*

Petho’s discussion thus provides a prelude to the three chapters on film that begin this book. For if cinema has always been made up of multiple media (a rich mix of Arnheim’s theater, dance, music, and pantomime), then, newly challenged as it is by television and the internet, film deserves to be read not as a utopian fusion but as a heterotopic combination of those distinct elements.

---