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Artículo recibido: 11/11/2013 - aceptado: 20/01/2014

LOS AMANTES PASAJEROS: AN UPDATE ON ALMODÓVAR'S TRANS-BORDER CINEMA

ABSTRACT:

Los amantes pasajeros (2013) follows a pattern initiated by Almodóvar in *La mala educación* (2004) of creatively remaking films from the first decade of his career. This form of cinematic recycling is a means of inducing in his audience historical reflections on the changing social and political situation in Spain as well as on the evolving nature of Almodóvar's own authorial style. In particular *Los amantes pasajeros* uses an intricate intertextual strategy to produce for viewers a nostalgia for Almodóvar's comedies of the 1980s. The film thus appears almost to be a parody of an Almodóvar comedy. Dialogue, action and characters recycle local Spanish materials but also direct elements of the plot to international audiences, giving rise to an intensified transnational aesthetic. That process is tied historically to Almodóvar's gradual transformation from a commercial auteur into an «auteur of Global commerce».

KEY WORDS: Global Auteurism, Historical memory, Pedro Almodóvar, Screwball comedy, Transnational cinema.

RESUMEN:

Los amantes pasajeros sigue la pauta iniciada por Almodóvar en *La mala educación* (2004) de rehacer en clave creativa largometrajes de la primera década de su carrera profesional. Esa forma de reciclaje cinematográfico es una manera de inducir en su público espectador reflexiones históricas sobre la situación social y política de España, igual que la evolución de su propio estilo autorial. En particular, el film se sirve de una intrincada estrategia intertextual para producir una nostalgia por las comedias almodovarianas de los años 80. *Los amantes pasajeros* es, en efecto, casi una parodia almodovariana de un film de Almodóvar. Los diálogos, el argumento y los personajes reciclan material local pero

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también dirigen ciertos elementos narrativos a los públicos internacionales, construyendo así una estética transnacional. Este procedimiento refleja la transformación biográfica de Almodóvar mismo de un autor de cine comercial a lo que se ha denominado como un autor de comercio global.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Autores globales, memoria histórica, Pedro Almodóvar, comedia loca, cine transnacional.

¿Quién, de tu vida borrará mi recuerdo y hará olvidar este amor, hecho de sangre y dolor, pobre amor? «Déjame recordar». Bola de Nieve².

1. ALIENATED MEMORIES

In March of 2013, on the occasion of the domestic release of *Los amantes pasajeros/I'm So Excited!* (2013), Pedro Almodóvar penned a commentary for the Sunday supplement of the Spanish conservative newspaper, *La Razón*, titled «La comedia según Almodóvar». Two months later a slightly modified version of the same article appeared in English translation in the British film journal *Sight and Sound*, now titled «The Rhythm of Comedy». While clearly intended to promote his most recent film at home and abroad, their content suggested, as well, an attempt to position the film and himself within the broad contexts of Hollywood screwball comedies, dating back to the 1930s, and, for Spanish audiences in particular, to recall his long-established links to the Spanish black comedies of Luis García Berlanga, Marco Ferreri and Fernando Fernán Gómez of the 1950s and 1960s (See Almodóvar 1998: 50-51). In both texts, Almodóvar sought to remind audiences that his own auteur signature has been shaped by familiar cinematic comedy traditions. Perhaps more significant than the substance of his comments, is what they tell us about the authorial practices of Spain's preeminent global auteur and his need to reinforce his connections to his national and international audiences. The following discussion is aimed at illuminating this tension between Almodóvar's cinematic memories and the most recent iterations of his authorial self-definition.

Los amantes comes at a difficult moment in Almodóvar's career. He appears to critics in Spain as having become disengaged from his local audience (Martínez 2011: 50) while audiences abroad have responded tepidly to his more recent films. What thus comes into focus in this film is an aesthetic strategy aimed at returning the transnational Almodóvar to his Spanish roots while also addressing

² The voice of Cuban singer Bola de Nieve is heard over the final credit scroll of *La ley del deseo* (1987) a paean to love lost that may be the first time that nostalgia as a cinematic trope is textually formalized in an Almodóvar film.

diverse sectors of his international spectatorship. The project takes form through a process of textual layering and allusions that incorporates into a contemporary comedy Spanish nostalgic tropes from Almodóvar's past, almost as if the authorial Almodóvar were spoofing an Almodóvar comedy³.

In a career spanning three decades, Almodóvar's films have often been only slightly veiled stories about himself and of the revisions of his own identity as a film auteur (Smith 2013: 23). His biographical self-reference, however, has not been so insistently on display until the recent cycle of films that began with *La mala educación/Bad Education* (2004) in which his own childhood is fetishized through a series of objects, images and icons (Mira, 2013: 95, 98). By the time he makes *Los abrazos rotos/Broken Embraces* he is publicly reflecting on how this film mirrors the dynamics of Spain's law of 'historical memory' (Delgado 2009: 44). What is clear throughout the recent cycle—and made explicit in *Los amantes*—is that as an aesthetic strategy the community's collective memory is measured by the limits of the auteur's personal history, both public and private. In *La mala educación*, the process takes shape by investing the imagined body of Sara Montiel with an historical trace that mirrors the Spanish Transition to democracy (D'Lugo 2009: 371-73). *Los amantes*, metaphorically invests another body—the corpus of early Almodóvar comedies—as the embodiment of the spirit of the sexual liberation that was one of the public features of the Transition into the film's plot and aesthetic design.

We may see this reflexive authorial self-definition on display throughout *Los amantes pasajeros*, but it may be best crystalized near the end of the film when Norma Boss (Cecilia Roth), comfortably seated in the Business-Class cabin of a soon-to-be aborted flight from Madrid to Mexico City, is sipping drug-laced «Agua de Valencia» and explaining to the cabin crew and fellow passengers how she came to be a high-priced and influential Madame in Madrid in the early 1980s. The tale of her experience in Spain during the euphoric years of the political Transition holds an ironic resemblance to Roth's own career during that same period. Norma's presence, in turn, leads her seat mate, Señor Infante (Mexican actor José María Yazpik), to recall his own childhood in Mexico, and his father's sole treasure, a sexually provocative image of a younger Norma on the cover of *Interviú*, the Spanish soft core magazine that specialized in semi-nude female images and reports of political and economic scandals.

This seemingly incidental dialogue highlights the characters' evocation of the effervescent years of sexual freedom of the early post-Franco period. These were

³ He uses precisely those elements which, in the eighties were themselves often camp refigurations of an earlier age's tropes of Spanishness. See in particular: Yarza 1999 17-18.

the very years of Almodóvar's own meteoric rise to celebrity. In this way Almodóvar underscores the film's overall narrative logic in which a parody of the flight disaster movie camouflages a more serious effort to bring a Spanish audience to view their own current political and economic plight through the nostalgic filter of an Almodóvar sex farce.

This strategy produces a kind of textual hide-and-seek as the script is grounded in contemporary Spanish and global issues (Latin-American drug traffic, Spanish political corruption and Spain's current economic crisis), but just as persistently disavows any serious discussion of these topics by receding back into the comedic visual-narrative style of the first decade of Almodóvar's film career. Like the film's cabin attendant Joserra (Javier Cámara), whose current pact of total candor is an antidote to his previous pact of secrecy, Almodóvar rescripts that earlier style of apolitical escapism into a work whose plot moves inexorably toward the passengers' realization that they have to face up to the political and cultural disorder at home.

The invitation to recall the past, a secondary feature in his 1990s films—the elaborate staging of 'Un año de amor' in *Tacones lejanos/ High Heels* (1991); the retrospective opening of *Carne trémula*—had become the central focus of *La mala educación* (2004). In that film, as in each of the three films that follow it, storylines were anchored in the self-referential remembrance of key films of Almodóvar's own first decade of filmmaking: *Bad Education* reimagined the Movida background of *Pepi, Luci Bom; Volver* reprised *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?*; *Los abrazos rotos* was a behind-the-scenes melodrama focused on the making of a film visually similar to *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, and *La piel que habito* refigured the sexualized kidnapping trope that was at the center of *¡Átame!*. Each film in turn actively dialogued with the past by suggesting a connection between cinematic nostalgia for Almodóvar's films and contemporary Spanish society.

Not exactly 'remakes,' these films might more productively be understood as what Pierre Nora terms 'alienated memories,' films in which connections with the past have been severed (Nora 1996: 12) and which emerge as problematic points of interrogation for the audience when «we try to puzzle out our relation to the past» (Nora 1996: 11). While following in the pattern of those earlier films, *Los amantes* involved a slightly different strategy in which Almodóvar's highly-theatricalized protagonists are employed in what the filmmaker identifies as the Spanish Mediterranean tradition reminiscent of the choral comedies of one of his spiritual mentors, Luis García Berlanga, as a way to talk about social problems with humor (Almodóvar «Rhythm» 2013: 39). They are all consciously engaged in escaping the difficult environment of contemporary Spain and their respective journeys to

Mexico are cast self-consciously as a *«fuga»*, a flight of escape. Yet they are trapped in an even more theatricalized and predictable genre plot, the flight disaster movie, which, as his most recent films suggest, has been rewritten to reinsert the «alienated memories» of Spain's long-term political morass. By emulating the Berlanga style, Almodóvar claims that he is enabling audiences to «laugh[ing] at life's limitations and tragedies, letting light and laughter break through the blackness» (Almodóvar 2013: 39).

Specific characters in *Los amantes* are easily recognizable as updates from his eighties repertory: The comic portera from *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios/ Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), Chus Lampreave, is reprised in the Carmen Machi character who appears in one of the only three sequences that take place outside the airplane. As well, Ricardo Galán (Guillermo Toledo), the womanizing actor en route to star in a Mexican telenovela seems a calque of the character Iván (Enrique Guillén) from that same film. Ricardo's telephone call to his former girlfriend Alba (Paz Vega), as she takes to Madrid's famed Viaducto in an attempted suicide, recalls a scene with Eva Cobos in *Matador* (1986). The story of the financial swindler, Señor Más (José Luis Torrijo), and his reunion with his estranged daughter, is itself a rescripting of the ultra-conservative Opus Dei family of Antonio Banderas in *Matador*.

Parody (as in his earlier penchant for spoofing television) and self-parody («La concejala antropófaga» from *Los abrazos rotos*) are stylistic constants of Almodóvar's movie rhetoric. Here, though, they are not as random as in earlier works but suggest a sustained form of authorial address that will gradually lead the characters to confront the world they had sought to repress. We see just how that self-refracting mirror operates in the opening minutes of the film as the established signature credit: «un film de Almodóvar» is replaced with the earlier, more modest «un film de Pedro Almodóvar» conspicuously recycling the same graphic used for the credits of *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* The final panel of the animated visual credits is designed for *Los amantes* by famed graphic designer Javier Mariscal, an artist of Almodóvar's generation whose early career, like that of Almodóvar, was connected to underground comics in the immediate post-Franco period. Such transpositions of the Almodóvar bio-filmography work as a palimpsest of Spanish social and cultural memories in which the director's personal and professional trajectory are used as a metonym for post-dictatorship Spain. The sharp contrasts between the bright and colorful credits and the social world it masks, hark back precisely to the eighties style later repudiated by Alberto Iglesias' taut melodramatic scores which accompany each of the films of the cycle beginning with *La mala educación*.

After the credits, the bridging strategy is then picked up in the first post-credit scene in which Antonio Banderas and Penélope Cruz appear in a comic cameo

which sets the plot in motion. The presence of the two Spanish actors who have been closely identified with Almodóvar is significant in that their appearance together reminds American audiences of Almodóvar's extratextual status as star maker, thereby evoking a form of address to a prior Almodóvar as an auteur with history in international markets. Banderas's and Cruz's comic exchanges in an uncharacteristic Andalusian accent further serve to remind domestic audiences of the Spanish roots of both actors. In this way, the narrative will work opaquely to trigger the cinematic memory machine in a variety of culturally different audiences for whom the film operates both to play out the local Spanish material but also to connect it with international markets.

2. THE AUTEUR OF COMMERCE

More than mere narcissism, Almodóvar's biographical self-inscription has long been aligned with a global perspective. We discern an awareness of contemporary culture beyond the borders of Spain beginning in his earliest commercial films, as in the evocation of British Punk Rock and Mexican boleros. Yet none of his films until *Los amantes*, had been so explicitly focused on the transnational as the plot device of the international airline flight from Madrid to Mexico City that naturalizes the connections contemporary Spaniards have to the Hispanic world beyond the nation's borders.

Global cinema has for decades meant to Spanish filmmakers and producers a mode of expanding the ever-shrinking Spanish domestic market by developing projects to attract European, US and Latin-American audiences (Elena, 2013: 40-44; 2012, Falicov 2013: 67-88). The roots of Almodóvar's current version of globalized Spanish production and marketing can be traced to his brief engagement with the efforts of the first post-Franco Socialist government to stabilize what Pilar Miró in 1984 famously called «*Cine español para el mundo*», an effort by the Ministry of Culture to promote for international markets a broad notion of cinema of quality the founding principle of which was '*cine de autor*.' Almodóvar's direct experience of transnational marketing came from his crucial but troubled experiences with Andrés Vicente Gómez who in the mid-1980s was a key player in the Spanish government's promotion of a new generation of Spanish auteurs. His fifth feature film, *Matador* (1986), was produced through Gómez's Iberoamericana Films. The filmmaker in fact has noted the ways in which the script of *Matador*, his first effort within that expanded sense of the national industry, was tailored to reposition what had previously been his somewhat narrower, more topical image of Spain into a product able to circulate more effectively in international markets. This is the first and only time Almodóvar worked with a script collaborator, Jesús Ferrero, to produce a script which was to be «more Japanese, more universal»

(Vidal 1988: 159) in keeping with Gómez's notion of a transnational marketable commodity.

The version of *Matador* finally released, however, represented something quite different. More than absorbing foreign cultural models, the film demonstrates a conscious effort to glamorize and internationalize Spain for the outside world. It is here where Almodóvar begins to achieve the new «look» of Madrid and coincides with a version of the Spanish imaginary of post-Franco modernity in earnest (Dapena 2013: 507). This local/global scenario will in turn be played out in Almodóvar's own self-transformation as an international auteur which increasingly becomes one of the persistent intertextual narrative threads of his later films. Rosanna Maule reminds us that «the *movida*-informed style championed by Almodóvar contributed to propelling the viability of Spanish cinema in the domestic and international film market throughout the 1980s and early 1990s» (2008:137).

Almodóvar's auteurist ambitions are perhaps best embodied in a brief sequence in *Matador* in which he appears in a cameo as a fashion designer Francisco Montesinos, producing a new fashion show titled *Las dos Españas* (The Two Spains). Tellingly, he presents himself as the self-appointed arbiter of a new fashionable version of the old Spain and one whose creativity is clearly aligned with the commerce of fashion (Dapena 2013: 496). The metaphor of the fashion designer as judge of national style presciently announces the forms of transnational activity that will be taken up shortly after *Matador* when, with his brother Agustín, Pedro establishes his own production company, El Deseo S. A. We may look to the efforts to simplify a style of the national with a comic touch, overdetermined as the product of the creative genius of the author/designer.

After *Matador*, Almodóvar moved from what appears to be a modest development of his identity as auteur, that is, as the guarantor of textual coherence, to that of the auteur-star, that is as a particular brand of social agency whose chief function was the commercial promotion of his own films. This expansion and transformation of the auteur into a celebrity is increasingly guided by a cartography of cultural commerce unconcerned with geopolitical borders. The earliest evidence of this new cultural geography of the Spanish auteur comes with the marketing of *La ley del deseo* for an international gay niche cinema.

It will be axiomatic in the films produced by El Deseo that the auteur becomes synonymous with the global and the global auteur, in turn, becomes inseparable from marketing a particular authorial style. Timothy Corrigan argues that this modification of conventional film auteurism constitutes a «cultural and commercial intersubjectivity» (2003: 98), «promising possibilities of the auteur as a marketable commodity since the commercial status of his presence now necessarily becomes

part of an agency that culturally and socially monitors identification and critical reception» (2003: 99). Gradually, the newly revised authorial Almodóvar of *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, *¡Átame!* and the later films of the nineties will devise strategies to monitor that business of commercial authorship beyond the borders of Spain, transforming the more conventional notion of a celebrity auteur into what Corrigan terms «the auteur of commerce» (2003: 101).

One of the earliest of these strategies, the tried and true activity of promoting readings of his films consistent with his own persona, began with Nuria Vidal's book of interviews *El cine de Pedro Almodóvar* (Barcelona Planeta, 1988). Circulated almost exclusively in Spain, the book nonetheless laid the groundwork for progressively more elaborate controlled readings offered in Frédéric Strauss's volumes of interviews, beginning in 1995. These interviews appeared first in the pages of the prestigious French film journal, *Cahiers du Cinéma* and would later circulate in book form as **Pedro Almodóvar: Un cine visceral**. (Madrid, El País/Aguilar 1995), expanded and reedited in subsequent English-language versions. The interview format later devolves into the even more elaborate controlled «Self-interviews» which appear in the press books for his films. In more recent years, these are transposed onto Almodóvar's own web pages which helps to transform the commercial auteur into what Núria Triana-Toribio has identified as 'un *autor mediático*' or media-savvy autor (Triana-Toribio 2008: 260, 262). With the intensification of this process through the agency of his own production company, and buttressed by the interpretive apparatus of the interview and self-interview, Almodóvar becomes, for Triana-Toribio, a paradigmatic authorial figure shaped by and, in turn, shaping his media appearances.

His efforts at managing reception involve a unique form of media dispersion through the exploitation of subsidiary commercial outlets that accompany the evolving media presence of Almodóvar through music (Vernon 2013: 387-411) and the promotion of «*Las chicas de Almodóvar*». In this latter phenomenon, leading and supporting actresses from his films are seen as the product of Almodóvar's creativity and implicitly authenticate his authorship as a prodigious and boundless source of creative energy. This activity deflects Almodóvar's own stardom by suggesting that he is not merely a celebrity but rather a star-maker of ever more popular artists who will, in turn, sing his praises.⁴ The promotional apparatus of each film seeks to carefully balance the local with what is now understood as global cultural circuits, giving rise to an intensified transnational aesthetic. We will see this, for instance, in a figure like Penélope Cruz who is known to American audiences for her own appearances in Hollywood films and

⁴ See the pastiche of comments by various of the Chicas in the VIVA PEDRO! The Almodóvar Collection, producido por SONY PICTURES CLASSICS en 2006.

fashion magazines, but also as one of Almodóvar's «discoveries», As David James argues in terms of one of the progenitors of Almodóvar's commercial auteurism, Andy Warhol, »[t]he audience for any specific film, and, in fact, any specific spectator activity both were subordinate to the audience in general, the subject of communication industry as whole (James 1989: 82).

This process is intensified by the commercial expansion of *El Deseo* when, in 1990, it enters into a financial relation with French Production and Distribution Company Ciby 2000, which enabled Almodóvar's films more stable distribution in France and throughout Europe. This arrangement paralleled the earlier arrangement established with SONY Pictures Classics for U.S. distribution (Díaz López 2013: 113). While these commercial alliances assure unparalleled distribution for a Spanish filmmaker, as Jean-Claude Seguin has suggested, they also modify the visual-narrative style of the subsequent films (Seguin 2013: 432-452), projecting the eclectic range of non-Spanish audiences that needed somehow to be aligned with the domestic audience. Not unrelated to this expansion is the increase of product placements within his films⁵.

There is in the early 1990s, a notable asymmetry in that commodification of the Almodóvar brand; while the Atlantic markets of the U.S. and Europe dominate, there is also a very spotty circulation of his films to what would otherwise have appeared as the natural Spanish-language market in Latin America. Indeed, during the early nineties, Almodóvar is essentially a Euro-American commercial phenomenon. It is not until 1995, with *La flor de mi secreto/ The Flower of My Secret*, in which a notable stylistic shift occurs through the prominent reinsertion of Latin-American music in Almodóvar's films as they foreground the hybridization of Latin-American sounds in a Spanish context. While congruent with the diegesis of this Madrid-based film with narratives links to Europe, three incorporated musical compositions—Chavela Vargas's «El «último trago», Bola de Nieve's «Amor y vida» and Caetano Veloso's «Noche de luna llena»—suggest efforts to interpellate a Latin-American viewership «beyond the fictional frame» (Vernon 2009: 58). Tellingly, the three musical compositions work as sources of cultural knowledge for the heroine of *La flor*, Leo (Marisa Paredes): They motivate her actions or comment on her melodramatic predicaments. In this way, Almodóvar begins addressing a deterritorialized Spanish-language audience whose identification with any of his films may well be built on the cultural medium of the Spanish language or other culturally-specific elements. This is a process that embodies what Mette Hjorte refers to when she speaks of «affinitive transnationalism», «the tendency to communicate with those similar to us» (2009 17). With the eventual intensification

⁵ One notes the prominence of fashion accessories by Chanel in *Tacones lejanos*, the highlighting of Jean Paul Gaultier costumes in *Kika* etc. For more details see Dapena: 511-517.

of collaborations with Latin-American producers in Mexico and Argentina, and an emphasis on Latin-American plotting beginning with *Todo sobre mi madre*, the shape of the trans-border auteurism comes into increasingly sharper focus. It is ultimately this geocultural expansion of the auteur of commerce that shapes the plot of *Los amantes* through the narrative device of an airline flight across the Hispanic Atlantic from Madrid to Mexico City.

3. LATIN-AMERICAN BUSINESS

One of the central aesthetic and cultural premises of *Los amantes pasajeros* is the borderless contiguity between Spain and Mexico. As early as *Tacones lejanos*, Almodóvar, in fact, acknowledges in interview, the reality of «the Mexico-Madrid axis» (Strauss 1996 183) and thus suggests the very naturalization of the transnational dimension of the film. Norma's relations with Infante, which moves through progressive stages of animosity, physical violence, sexual gratification, finally to amorous coupling of the Mexican and Argentine characters, effectively mirrors on screen Almodóvar's ideal trans-border audience. Refining the broad framework of Hjort's 'affinitive transnationalism», Deborah Shaw identifies a community who are not merely the passive receptors of a marketing or distribution scheme but instead «seek out films from cultures with which they identify» (Shaw 2013 59). She terms this audience the «transcommunity» (60), and sees them as a reconfigured audience that transcends the limits of national borders.

Indeed, the Norma-Infante coupling mirrors a broader process of Spanish/Latin-American trans-border movements in Almodóvar's cinema. Mexico, which was first figured in his films through the auditory intertexts of boleros in the late 1980s and early 1990s,⁶ is updated in *Los amantes* through the micro-plots involving the efforts of the various passengers to flee from the economic, emotional and political calamities of contemporary Spain. More than a country, Mexico is for them a fantasy space gleaned from contemporary headlines. A site for business encounters (Norma with her date with a prominent businessman in Mexico City; for Ricardo Galán, a new career in a Mexican telenovela, suggesting the media shift for Spanish audiences from movies to Mexican tearjerkers); a place to escape the law for Señor Más; finally, a place defined by the narco-traffic and death by

⁶ The final musical duet in *La ley del deseo*, as Antonio and Pablo lip-sync the voices of the Trio Los Panchos, then the opening credits of *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* with the voice of Lola Beltrán singing the Mexican ranchera song, « Soy infeliz». In *Tacones lejanos*, allusions to Mexico come in the scripting of Becky del Páramo's elaborate return to Spain after a long sojourn in Mexico, loosely fashioned on the career of Spanish singer Rocío Dúrcal; finally through the integration of Mexican actors Gael García Bernal and Daniel Giménez Cacho in principal roles in *La mala educación*.

the seer Bruna (Lola Dueñas), the honeymoon ‘mule’ and, most of all, the hired assassin, Señor Infante, whose very name recalls the acclaimed Mexican actor and singer, Pedro Infante. These, however, are all clichés and treated as such in the film in order to awaken in the audience the sense of a persistent adjacency between the two communities that reinforces the sense of an audiovisual space in which the borders that define sacrosanct national culture are all but erased by the emergence of a new trans-border cultural imaginary.

As Juan Carlos Ibáñez persuasively argues, a similar trans-border axis of Argentina-Spain relations forms a complex backstory to such films as *Laberinto de pasiones/ Labyrinth of Passion* (1982) and *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999) (Ibáñez 2013: 163-166). That connection also informs the casting of Cecilia Roth (Ibáñez 2013 164-65) as one of three pivotal figures of the ensemble cast of *Los amantes*. Along with Javier Cámara and Lola Dueñas, she is a familiar presence in the film as one of Almodóvar’s regulars. Roth, however, is distinct from the other cast members in that her character embodies the trans-regional dynamic of the film. While playing a fiction role, that role mirrors Roth’s off-screen celebrity person and channels Almodóvar’s cinematic past and Spain’s recent cultural history. Identified with the sexualized characters she portrayed in early Almodóvar comedies—she appeared in cameos in three of his first four films and was the female lead, the nymphomaniac Sexilia, in *Laberinto de pasiones*, a film in which comic treatments of Argentines in Spain figures prominently. In her dialogue and ensuing sexual coupling with Infante, she evokes the hypersexual Spanish past that was part of her own and Almodóvar’s earliest screen persona. As well, she serves as an on-screen surrogate for the filmmaker, moving the plot forward in ways that the other two Almodóvar regulars do not: She organizes a petition against the airline, becomes the center of attention of the cabin stewards and, finally, helps the businessman, Señor Más, reunite with his daughter.

As a member of Almodóvar’s close circle of friends in the late 1970s (Iván Zulueta, Eusebio Poncela), Roth’s career dovetailed with Almodóvar’s. They worked together in Zulueta’s production of *Arrebato* (1980), where she played the lead female role and Almodóvar dubbed a female voice. Roth subsequently appeared in cameos in Almodóvar’s films of the 1980s: In *Laberinto*, in particular, Roth’s celebrity persona as a sexual presence and her linkage with Almodóvar became solidified. In 1985 Roth left Madrid to return to her native Argentina, not to reappear in an Almodóvar film till the 1999 *Todo sobre mi madre*.

During those intervening years, she appeared in two key films by her fellow expatriate Argentine director, Adolfo Aristarain, both Spanish-Argentine coproductions: *Un lugar en el mundo/ A Place in the World* (1992) and *Martín Hache* (1997) which for the latter she won a Goya for best actress from the Spanish Film

Academy. Besides the prominence that her collaborations with Aristaráin brought, her two films with him helped to reinforce her Argentine identity for a Spanish audience that may only have recalled her as an Almodóvar ensemble player but in plots that underscore her Spanish-Argentine links. As well, these films affirmed her Argentine voice. In keeping with the Spanish practice of not using direct sound, but also owing to the industry's xenophobic language tyranny, Roth's voice was dubbed in all of her roles in Spanish films up to 1985 (Guerra et al 2000 39). In the Aristaráin films, she speaks with her natural porteño accent. When she reappears in *Todo sobre mi madre*, after her two star turns for Aristaráin, she is no longer dubbed. Yet instead of a porteño accent, Roth speaks a hybrid Spanish, addressing characters in the vosotros form as she will do in *Los amantes*. In this respect, she becomes the embodiment of Almodóvar's transregional cinema, reminding audiences through her performance as Norma Boss of Almodóvar's Spanishness of his early years, but also of its refiguration over time to embrace a sense of borderless transcommunal audiences.

Through these intertextual associations between Spain and Latin America, *Los amantes* expands the notion of Almodóvar's cinema as a trans-border Hispanic phenomenon. It is, in fact, this deterritorialized Hispanic audience to which El Deseo and Almodóvar have addressed their attention over the past decade. Beginning in the late 1990s, El Deseo entered into its first Latin-American collaboration, with Tequila Gang, for the coproduction with Guillermo del Toro of *El espinazo del diablo/ The Devil's Backbone* (2001). That film marks the first of an important series of transnational enterprises involving El Deseo with Latin-American producers and directors. Unlike anything in which El Deseo had engaged up to this point, *El espinazo* was a striking transnational mode of production involving Mexican and Spanish producers, a production crew and cast that moves beyond the limits of one nation (Shaw: 2013: 53), and a particular narrative mode suggesting forms of address built upon cultural exchange. Following that same aesthetic of hybridity, his 2006 film, *Volver*, is a crucial point in this cultural remapping. Through the centrality given to a tango standard, Carlos Gardel's «*Volver*», the narrative evokes a world of trans-border immigration for the plot and also the setting. The seamless bridge across geopolitical boundaries embodied in the flamenco version of the title song acknowledges the Spain-Argentina cultural axis which parallels what Almodóvar had already noted as the Madrid-Mexico cultural axis.

The process textualized in *Volver* is mirrored in El Deseo's decided emphasis on Argentine sources. These collaborations, as El Deseo's executive producer, Agustín Almodóvar, hastens to note, are less about financial exploitation of Latin-American markets than about 'closely aligned cultural sensibilities' (D'Lugo 2013: 413) linking the Almodóvar brand with transregional cultural initiatives. In this

regards, it is noteworthy that, while aligning their coproduction efforts with Argentine auteur cinema, this new turn mixes high and low in the 2000s with the company's financial collaborations on productions of art-house favorite Lucrecia Martel (*La niña santa*, 2004, *La mujer sin cabeza*, 2008) and more mainstream comic auteur, Damián Scifrón (*Relatos salvajes*, 2014).

As the preceding has suggested, *Los amantes pasajeros* is a crucial self-referential pause in Almodóvar's development, a film which, more than any of his earlier forays into movies about movie-making, makes his own cinematic biography the medium through which to narrate his story. The goal, as I have argued, is to return his cinema to his Spanish roots in an immediately recognizable way. At the same time, the film provides a striking update of two interwoven tendencies that have essentially transformed his cinema from its condition as a product of local Spanish culture to the status of a transnational, trans-border event. The first is the commercialization of his auteurism far beyond the models usually described of commercial auteurs. Authorship here is understood as both an artistic aspiration, but also a conceptual strategy through which to engage audiences in a reflection of their own social and political position in the world. The second involves underscoring the alignment of his authorial identity with the evolving cultural narrative of post-Transition Spain, especially as these involve a rethinking of the geopolitics of the multiple audiences of Spanish cinema. *Los amantes pasajeros* follows the evolving pattern of Almodóvar's cinema to stabilize what might be productively understood as part of a trans-Hispanic imaginary that remaps Spain and Latin America but which also showcases the transcommunal nature of the films.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it defines the place of Latin America in the Spanish imaginary. That place is initially perceived as an escape, a place to run away to. Through the staging of a dramatic catharsis in the characters, invoked by their fear of impending calamity, their personal problems are resolved and, typical of the Almodóvarian narrative, they prepare to go home. That «home» is embodied in the Castilla-La Mancha airport, a contemporary emblem of Spain's economic and political chicanery, thus metaphorically serving to remind audiences of the corruption that now needs to be addressed.

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