

“A VERY BEAUTIFUL BARCELONA”: ALMODÓVAR, A TOURIST IN ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER (1999)¹

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INTRODUCTION: BARCELONA AND (FILM) TOURISM

The love story between cinema and tourism is old and fertile. From the cognitive effect of primitive films to productions such as *Roman Holiday* (William Wyler, 1955) or *La dolce vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960) cinema has always increased the popularity of certain locations and sightseeings. However, the research about the connections between cinema and tourism have been sporadic and unplanned for much of film history. However at the end of XX century, the study of the links between these two areas of leisure has been developed and implemented. This new interest is originated by a series of socio-cultural changes like the democratization of tourism and the transformation of the traveller into a fundamental source of income for cities and countries.

In the nineties, institutions began to take interest in promoting film productions in territo-

ries under their jurisdiction due to a series of economic transformations in the western. Incentives through the so-called film commissions were articulated. In this sense, it deserves to be mentioned the pioneering work of the United Kingdom through its *VisitBritain* program, which was 50 years old in 2019, and extension and reformulation of the previous *Visit London* initiative. From then on, what has been conceptualized by Riley and Van Doren (1998) as “film tourism” or “tourism induced by cinema” phenomenon was born.

“Film tourism” researchers have concluded that the final choice of a holiday destination depends on a vast variety of factors. Their main focus is to determine the role played by films in this process, and how different institutions can collaborate to increase it. In other words: how moving images induced by governments can make a place so appealing to foreigners that they choose to visit it. Methodologies adopted from marketing to urban cultural studies are often applied in

their analysis. Scholars use to establish different categories that influence tourists' decisions. Busby and Klug (2001), for example, have defined a taxonomy of stimuli caused by cinema, that ranges from the trip motivated by pure cinephilia and associated to a romanticized image of a city, to the cinema attached to art or work motivations. Likewise, Hyounggon and Richardson (2003) have made a fundamental contribution to our research, as they categorize the reactions to cinema-induced tourism in cognitive, empathic, family and affective aspects, the latter being one of the most remarkable aspects of our case study.

Quantitative studies such as Hudson and Ritchie (2006) measure the flow of visitors that a successful film can bring to a city or region and its concrete effects on its economy and employment. Needless to say, quantifying these effects is of great interest to institutions that are always eager to boost the income derived from tourism.

In the particular case of Spain, few cities have received as much attention from the film and tourism industries as Barcelona. Two reasons may explain this interest: firstly, its pioneering conditions in the development of film stimuli; secondly, its privilege status in the international tourism context.

Barcelona's official tourism data in 2017 and 2018 are astonishing: with more than 15 million visitors per year², it is the city that hosts more visitors in Spain. It is also one of the ten most visited cities in Europe³. According to the Government of Catalonia (*Generalitat de Catalunya*), around 12% of Barcelona's GDP comes from tourism, one of the most important sectors of its economy. In 2017, visitors claim to have visit the city for –in this order–: architecture, culture, leisure, public transport and the citizens' kindness (*Observatori del Turisme a Barcelona*, 2017). Barcelona is not only visited as a vacation destination (67,6%), but also as workplace (21,3%). Key places as the *Basílica de la Sagrada Família* or the *Park Güell* accumulate each year more than 3 million visitors.

Consequently, the relationship between Barcelona and cinema has been profusely analyzed in works like *Barcelona: World Film Locations*, edited by Helio San Miguel and Lorenzo J. Torres Hortelano (2013) or *Barcelona: Una ciudad de película* of Eugeni Osàcar (2018). The former written from film studies, the latter from tourism studies, which demonstrate how attractive it is for both disciplines. Works as Martínez-Expósito's *Cuestión de imagen: Cine y Marca España* (2015) also worth to be mentioned. This work, which is not specifically about Barcelona but about Spain, devotes a whole chapter to the study of the representation of Barcelona in cinema. Finally, the research group CITur (*Cine, Imaginario y Turismo / Cinema, Imaginary and Tourism*) lead by Antonia del Rey-Reguillo have published remarkable works as *Turistas de película. Sus representaciones en el cine hispánico* (2013) or *Cine, imaginario y turismo. Estrategias de seducción* (2007).

TOWARDS THE CREATION OF BARCELONA PLATÓ

Barcelona's case is of particular interest because, unlike other European cities, its condition as a remarkable tourist destination is relatively new and comes from a carefully designed plan developed during Democracy in the late 70s. During Franco's Dictatorship, Barcelona as a tourist destination was more popular in foreign than national productions. A classic example would be Henry Hathaway's *Circus World* (1964), in which the well known and prestigious opera house *Teatre del Liceu* is transformed into a circus stage. In this film, two universal icons are fused in a single shot: John Wayne's silhouette and the monument dedicated to Columbus. In fact, the image of Barcelona at Spanish movies during the Franco's Dictatorship wasn't often idyllic as it was the main scenario for a peculiar Spanish *film noir* movement – for example, *Brigada criminal* (Ignacio F. Iquino, 1950), *Apartado de Correos 1001* (Julio Salvador, 1950) or

A tiro limpio (Francisco Pérez-Dolz, 1963). In all of them the action takes place in sordid urban environments.

Something changed during the sixties and the historic period called 'Desarrollismo'. Cineman considerably improved this pessimistic image of the city, in films like *Operación Plus Ultra* (Pedro Lazaga, 1966), in which the young protagonists visit the best-known sightseeings of Barcelona. Mari-sol and Manolo Escobar, two pop icons of those years, also sang in its streets in films like *Carola de día*, *Carola de noche* (Jaime de Armiñán, 1969) and *Cuando los niños vienen de Marsella* (Sáenz de Heredia, 1974). Their films portrayed Barcelona as a refuge and a problem-solving space, an idea highly appreciated by scholars like Martínez Expósito (2015). As far as we are concerned, this vital, modern and colourful city, decidedly Anglophile and focused on consumerism and *disseny* (design) reached its peak in *Tuset Street* (Grau and Marquina, 1968).

These can be significant precedents, but Barcelona as a scenario for filmmaking and cinema as a booster for tourism will know a new era with the arrival of Democracy. Notwithstanding film tourism is a phenomenon depending on several administrations and a multilayered governance – from state to local ones – especially in a decentered country like Spain, the case of Barcelona will be particular due to the influence of the *Ajuntament* (City Hall)

The origins of what would be known as «Modelo Barcelona»⁴ (Barcelona Model) must be found in 1979 when the *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (PSC) ally with the *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (PSUC) achieved the local government. This “model” comprehends a series of changes, which try to transform the whole nature of the city – physically, but also economically –, through brave architectural interventions.

Due to its historical background, Barcelona would be prone to accept those changes enthusiastically. After the first oil crisis in 1973, the lo-

cal political elite realized that the city could not stay as an industrial hub, the so called “Catalonian Manchester”. as it was impossible to compete in such terms in a global world. With the financial centre placed in Madrid and suffering an unstoppable deindustrialization process, Barcelona chose to reinvent itself as a tourist hotspot, following the path of other cities known as “intermediate” (Borja and Castells, 1997). This is how Barcelona embraced what has been labeled by Harvey as «entrepreneur turn» (1992) and by Zukin as a «symbolic economy» (1995). Moving from an industrial to a service economy, Barcelona will become a «fantasy city», linked to shopping, gastronomy and culture (Moragas, 2017: 60).

In order to complete its mutation, Barcelona had to advertise its changes to the world. According to its new status, Barcelona had to compete against other cities to attract foreign investment. The most successful commercial of its transformation will be the celebration of the Olympic Games in 1992. Much has been said about the singularity of this planetary event, as well as about its image (Moragas, 2017) or about how the Games were part of a bigger strategy that today comprehends a whole imaginary around today's mythical Spain of the year 1992 (Palacio, 2020)⁵.

To our concern, the most interesting fact is that, for the first time in the history of the Olympic Games, such huge spectacle would have its main scenario integrated in the city that hosted it. The organization of the Games wanted not only to show, but also perpetuate in the social imaginary the new image of the city born after the Dictatorship. The advertising agency Ovideo-Bassat-Sport would be crucial for accomplishing such purpose. As highlighted by Moragas, one of the paradigmatic examples of the incoming «Barcelona Brand» will be the broadcasting of the outdoors diving competition at Picornell swimming pools, placed at Montjuïc mountain, renamed as «magic mountain». In Moragas' opinion, the mentioned broadcasting could be considered as an adver-

tisement of the city (Moragas, 2017: 60). One of the grandstands was removed so that the TV shot could frame the swimmer during the competition but also the *Templo Expiatorio de la Sagrada Familia* in the background. In a quick and single shot, the main attributes that the *Ajuntament* wanted to promote were eye-catching: Barcelona's benign weather, its rich cultural past and, of course, the sea. The characteristics that, as explained in the following pages, will be key elements of Barcelona's future cinematographic representations.

Once the Olympic Games ended, the local administration started to plan how to keep promoting the image of Barcelona. In 1993, the *Ajuntament* created the *Turisme de Barcelona* (Tourism of Barcelona), a consortium between the political institutions and *Cambra de Comerç* (Chamber of Commerce, a private association of Barcelona's businessmen). Launching what will be called «Barcelona Brand» (*Marca Barcelona*) was the main purpose of this new entity.

In 1996, Ferran Mascarell chaired the Culture Department at the *Ajuntament*, in what would be considered a major political movement. In Ferran's view, cultural politics had to give up the former interventionism pre Olympic Games to allow private investors to participate in the development of the city. The main goal of the City Hall was to help attract investors and visitors. Concepts like «creative tourism» become popular during those days. In this context, cinema was a wonderful tool to accomplish these new goals. Two years before, in 1994, echoing the images of the Olympic Games, three Hollywood movies shot in Barcelona were filmed and released: *Unveiled* (William Cole), *Uncovered* (Jim McBride) and *Barcelona* (Whit Stillman). Aware of the universal power of cinema, Mascarell established in 1996 *Barcelona Plató*, the first *film commission* in Spain, whose main goal was to stimulate the film production in the city⁶. As other *film commissions* – like *VisitBritain* – the functions of the new office was to help producers and filmmakers to get

the shooting permits, to scout locations, to license management and to intermediate in any possible problems during productions. One of the movies that best illustrates the activity of the Barcelona Plató is *All About My Mother* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999), the zenith of the global projection of the city. *All About My Mother* will probably become the most important and influential film ever shot in Barcelona up till now⁷. Almodóvar and Barcelona will create a mutual synergy, highly positive for both, filmmaker and city.

ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER: A TURN IN ALMODÓVAR'S AND BARCELONA'S CINEMA

Few filmmakers in the world are as self-conscious of his career as Pedro Almodóvar. During the nineties, Almodóvar, who has never attended the Cannes Festival, thinks for the first time on fighting for international awards as well as a way to reach a global audience. Therefore, after *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, 1988), he decided to undertake a series of melodramas co produced with France. In 1993 *Tacones lejanos* (*High Heels*, 1991) won the César Award to Best Foreign Movie. In 1994 Frédéric Strauss' classic work *Conversations avec Pedro Almodóvar* was published. However, the definitely change in the path to Almodóvar's internationalization will come after *Carne trémula* (*Live Flesh*, 1997).

In 1998, *El Deseo*, the production company created in the eighties by the Almodóvar brothers (Pedro and Agustín), greenlights the project *All About My Mother*. Surrounded by its usual pop paraphernalia, Pedro Almodóvar announced that his new movie pretended to be a critical reflection about maternity, through Manuela's eyes (Cecilia Roth), a woman who is looking for the father of their recently dead son. Besides the plot of the movie, a big and surprising change in Almodóvar's cinematography is also revealed: *All About*

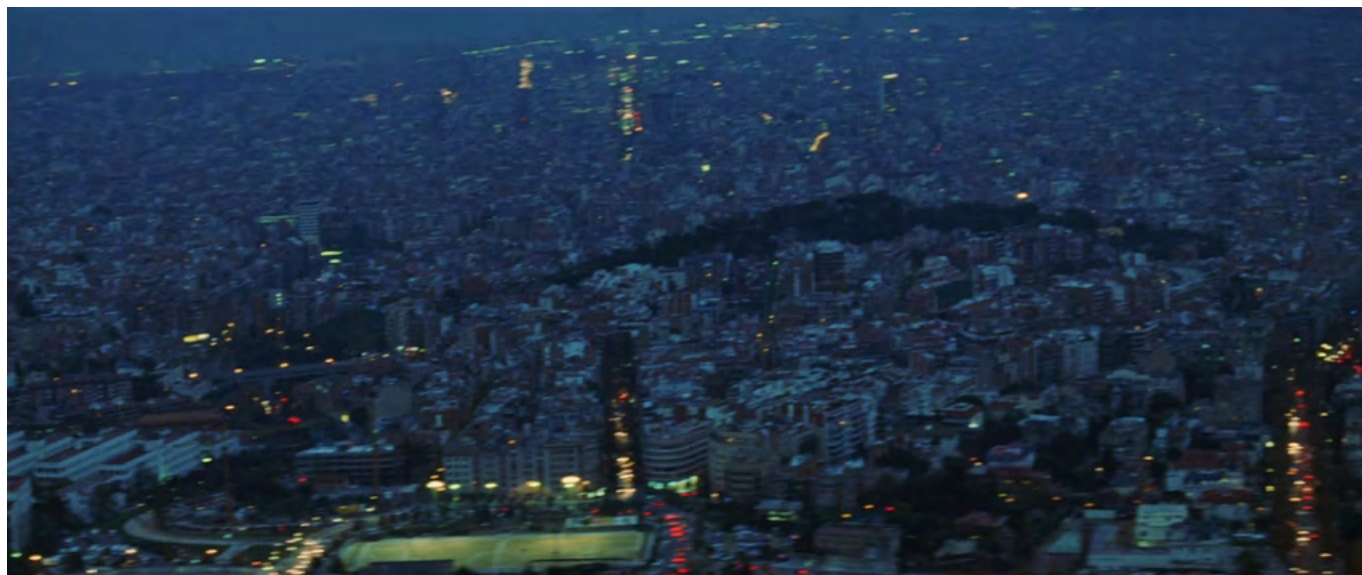
My Mother would be his first movie filmed away from Madrid.

That change of location is profusely underlined in the movie. A train crossing a tunnel depicts the change of location, from Madrid to Barcelona. That same tunnel shot will set down the different parts of the film. After crossing the tunnel, Manuela (and the spectators), are introduced to Barcelona: firstly, with a night aerial shot; secondly, in an unusual taxi ride that allows her to admire two of the best-known icons of the city: the Monument dedicated to Columbus at the end of La Rambla and the Basílica de la Sagrada Família. It is revealing that Manuela make this trip in an unexisting high speed train (AVE), since the route Madrid-Barcelona was officially opened in 2008. The arrival of this transportation facility not only fostered the cruise and low cost airlines businesses, but also the tourist visits to the city. The tunnel, we dare to say, also represents the maternity (leitmotiv of the movie) through an uterin voyage (Seguin, 2014: 38). Finally, the tunnel becomes a symbol of this new *almodovarian* phase, in which the director would compete, for the first time in his career, for the international recognition.

The latter aspect leads to what Marvin D'Lugo labels as “geocultural positioning” (2006) in Almodóvar’s filmography. In other words, Barcelona becomes for Almodóvar the best scenario to build up an intertextual universe of references from all over the planet. As Almodóvar claimed during the filming: “I am a Spaniard, we (Madrid) are not that far and now I have discovered that Barcelona is, at the same time, Marsella, La Habana and Nápoles” (Bonet Mojica, 1998: 76). Almodóvar takes profit from one of the traditional virtues of the city: its stereotype as a cosmopolitan and multicultural location against the -alleged- traditional provincialism associated to Madrid, an imaginary that was already present in another relevant events such as the Universal Exhibition of Barcelona in 1888, and the Olympic Games of 1992 (Martínez Expósito, 2015: 165).

All these cultural and transnational references deployed by Almodóvar find its place in the geography of the city. Of course, the traditional and authorial quotes to Hollywood drama — *Opening Night* (John Cassavetes, 1977), *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Elia Kazan, 1951)— are found in the film. But there are many new references: the arrival of Ma-

Image 1. A Bird’s-Eye shot welcomes the spectator to Barcelona



nuela is accompanied by the music of Senegalese Singer Ismael Lô, and the mother of Sister Rosa – Penélope Cruz –, played by the actress Rosa María Sadrá, spend her time faking the work of the Belarussian—as well as Parisian and Jewish— artist Marc Chagall.

The movie goes further: the plot is focused on two exiled Argentinians living in Paris that finally move to Barcelona. Some parallelisms between the character and the actress that incarnates her are explicit, since Cecilia Roth also run away from Argentina with her family in 1976 due to Videla's Dictatorship. The joyful tone used by Almodóvar in the political references of his previous films – like the running gag about the Chii terrorists in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*– has completely vanished. His older mild and soft view of the political issues, subject of a parody in one of the best-known songs from the popular Spanish singer Joaquín Sabina - *Yo quiero ser una chica Almodóvar* / I want to be an Almodóvar girl - turns into dramatism.

Therefore, following Manuela's adventures Barcelona is shown as a melting pot of cultures and a welcoming destination for all kind of citizens. Perhaps this feeling of solidarity is best represented in the travelling shot in Allada Vermell street, where Rosa and Manuela walk amongst children and parents of different ethnic origins that enjoy their leisure in broad daylight.

THE PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

From the very moment it is announced and during all its production process, the film becomes an event for both the city and the institutions. «I am showing a really beautiful Barcelona in *All About My Mother*» (Bonet Mojica, 1998: 76) confess Almodóvar to the press in October 1998. To accomplish his aim, the director worked in close collaboration with his Art Director, Antxon Gómez, who lives in Barcelona. It is not by chance, then, that the «Beautiful Barcelona» matches the attributes

of the already mentioned diving competition at Picornell pools: the weather, the cultural heritage and the sea. Let see how this three features are exposed.

Almodóvar depicts a Barcelona where the sun bathes the protagonists walks surrounded by friendly outdoors, a place full of pedestrian streets, where cars are a rare exception. Almodóvar's camera especially focuses on the alleys of La Ribera neighbourhood, which at that moment lives a gentrification process. During their walks, the characters roam the modernist Barcelona, the one that possesses a rich cultural heritage: the *Basilica de la Sagrada Família* - an essential symbol of maternity - the *Plaça del Duc de Medinaceli* or the *Casa Ramos*, most of them included in the Barcelona Plató catalogue of locations. Special mention to the *Palau de la Música Catalana*, absolute protagonist of one of the most celebrated - but also criticized - shots of the film: the scene in which Manuela opens the windows of Agrado's apartment (Antonia San Juan) and the spectator finds out that despite the low income of the owner - that we guess due to her dedication as a street hooker- she can afford a flat with views to the Domènech i Muntaner masterpiece. This is not a meaningless image: in 1997, the two most important works of Domènech i Montaner - the *Palau de la Música* and the *Hospital de Sant Pau*- were declared universal patrimony of UNESCO. A happy event for a city (and a City Hall) eager and proud to publicise its modernist past beyond world famous Antonio Gaudi's work.

On the other hand, the degraded scenarios are presented decontextualized. When she arrives to Barcelona, Manuela looks for Agrado in the wasteland where she works as a prostitute, an inhospitable place that is, in fact, a fake location filmed in Madrid. *The Fossar de les Moreres*, where Manuela goes accompanied by Huma (Marisa Paredes) to find the drug addict Nina (Candela Peña), cannot be easily recognized due to the scaffolds and building materials. Only the *Carrer de*



Image 2. Manuela hangs clothes in the window of Agrado's apartment, overlooking the Palau de la Música Catalana, which became a UNESCO heritage site in 1997

les Caputxes, where Nina talks to some other addicts, appears identified. But even this scene vibe is more funny than dramatic.

The trio of virtues is closed with a sea that, curiously, surprisingly, Almodóvar didn't want to show in his first draft, as he recognised to the press: «Although I did not expect it, the sea will appear in the movie. It is very civilized and wonderful the fact of your beloved ones are buried on a sea-sight» (Bonet Mojica, 1998: 76). The Mediterranean Sea, linked to the death, will appear twice: behind the large windows of the Hospital del Mar where Sister Rosa's disease is diagnosed and during her burial, celebrated at Monjuïc with the sea in the background. The recovery of the seafront is probably the most important urban change in Barcelona in its last 150 years of history. This process started in 1854 when the walls that at that moment constricted the city were demolished. In 1981, the major, Narcís Serra, would obtain from the army the cession of the military area that today is occupied by the *Passeig Colom*. The final push toward the full recovery of the seafront took place thanks to the Olympic Games: the *Vila Olímpica* was erected in the old manufac-

turing neighbourhood of Poblenou, at the same time that the urban beach was regenerated. This last change is probably the most celebrated by its inhabitants, to the extent that it was appreciated even by intellectuals that were always critic with the new Barcelona, like the writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (1987: 45).

To develop his more aesthetic view to get a «very beautiful Barcelona», Barcelona Plató not only supported Almodóvar with the suggestion of different locations but also with technical assistance during the shooting. This is shown in two of the most memorable and symmetric shots of the movie: the reflection of the *Sagrada Família* on the window of the taxi that rides Manuela and that constitutes a sort of welcoming to the city, and the reflection of the *Plaça del Duc de Medinaceli* on the windows of the cab that takes Rosa to the hospital, a farewell to the city before dying during her childbirth. The lighting of the Gaudí's monument was modified for the former, the direction of the traffic was reversed for the latter.

Other minor - but also relevant - proofs of Almodóvar's aesthetic passion for Barcelona can also be observed in the film. For example, there

is a bag on Manuela's flat floor. It is not a random element: it keeps the tricolour logotype of the «B» designed by Pepino García in 1984. From the eighties, that «B» had currently appeared in the landscape of Barcelona since its purpose was to identify the municipal campaigns of the City Hall: *Barcelona posa't guapa*⁸ (Barcelona, get beautiful) for the recovery of old buildings, or *Barcelona més que mai*⁹, (Barcelona, more than ever), created to generate a sense of pride in the citizens.

POLITICAL AND AFFECTIVE ATTRIBUTES

However, the «very beautiful Barcelona» is not only aesthetically reflected. Beyond its fabulous architecture, quality of life or the good climate, the city represented by Almodóvar is the most suitable scenery for the resolution of the conflicts, according to the «non-conflictive city» concept raised by Delgado (2017). Martínez-Expósito also considers this idea a constant element in the representations of Barcelona, which is often shown as «space of encounter, the Madrid antithesis» (2015: 164). Almodóvar praise this feature during his interviews: «I have seen a lot of people sleeping at any bench in any square, and this can only happen in a city that inspires confidence to do that» (Bonet Mojica, 1999: 47). In Paul J. Smith's opinion, the movie shows «a feeling of solidarity» (Smith, 2000), which was quite evident during its release, when the journalist Gregorio Morán wrote for *La Vanguardia* that the director «has reflected an open society, distressing in its complexity, but free» (1999: 33). These comments suggest that the non-normative maternities issues, that are the key element of the movie, find in Barcelona the ideal city to be solved out.

At this point, the question is: would this image of a new kind of family in the new century - the main idea of the film- by possible in Madrid? Madrid is on the other side of the frequently quoted tunnel. It is far more conservative than Barcelona: from 1991, conservative José María



Image 3. The Montjuïc cemetery and its sea views. Although Almodóvar was reluctant to show the Mediterranean, the collaboration with the institutions would modify his decision

Álvarez del Manzano has become mayor of Madrid; later, in 1995, the also conservative Alberto Ruiz Gallardón get to Presidency of the region of Madrid; finally, from 1996, Spain is governed by conservative Josér María Aznar. In the late nineties, the right-wing party (the Popular Party) has a power never seen in Democracy until that moment. In 1999 municipal and regional elections will confirm the absolute majority of PP in most of the territories. There is one exception, though: in Barcelona resists a social-democratic party in the City Hall. The local government has passed from Narcís Serra to Pasqual Maragall and, later, to Joan Clos. Moreover, for the first time since the first regional elections in 1980, Pasqual Maragall has real possibilities of defeating the nationalist right-wing government of Jordi Pujol. Indeed, Maragall would win the elections on October 17th in number of votes, but not in seats, and he would not be able to become President. Precisely, in that 1999, Donald McNeill publishes his well-know *Urban Change and the European Left: Tales from the New Barcelona*, an essay that claims that «the urbanism of Barcelona in deeply ideological and an example of European social democracy» (1999:15).

From this point view, the depiction of Barcelona in *All About My Mother* involves a different interpretation. Barcelona is represented as a progressive political city, in accurate contrast to the wave of conservatism of the rest of Spain. There-



Image 4. Reflection of the Basilica of the Sagrada Família in the glass of the cab in which Manuela travels through Barcelona. To make this shot it was necessary to modify the lighting of the building. Barcelona Plató mediated to obtain this permit

fore, its appeal is not only aesthetic but also ethic. The new motherhood endorsed by Almodovar, and that spirit of solidarity expressed by Smith can only be developed in Barcelona, a place where even the conservative character of Rosa María Sardá can accept the peculiarities of her grandchild's birth. Moreover, if until this moment Barcelona was, in Eduardo Mendoza famous words, «the city of wonders» (1986), in Almodóvar's universe it becomes the city of miracles, where Rosa's little baby can modify his HIV antibodies, something never seen before by any scientific study.

A TOO MUCH BEAUTIFUL BARCELONA?

The synergies between the promotional interests of Barcelona's City Hall and Almodóvar's film reputation will determine the reception of the film, which will differ national and internationally. The aesthetic view of Barcelona presented by Almodóvar would reap more success outside than inside Spain. As an example, in 2011, outstanding members or Barcelona film criticism were asked about the representation of Barcelona in cinema. *All About My Mother* was far from being highly praised.

For instance, Àlex Gorina stated: «I have never understood how joyful the film was embraced [...] I like the movie a lot and it helps the city to a certain extent, but from my point of view what we see it is not Barcelona» (Salvá, 2011). Other

journalist disregarded the "postcard image" -in terms of Mestre, Reguillo and Stanishevski (2008: 191)- of the city shown in the movie, such as the critic Mirito Torreiro, who declared that «there are movies like *All About My Mother* that do not fit to the topographic reality of the city, however, they offer an amazing image of the city [...] The different pieces of city are assembled to recreate an invented place that, at the same time, is very real» (Salvá, 2011).

On the other side, the international film critics and scholars embraced the film rather enthusiastically. According to D' Lugo, the film became «the most awarded and honored on film history, whether Spanish or of any other nationality» (2006). The many prizes won by the film endorse that affirmation: The Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, Cannes Best Director Award, César Award for Best Foreign Film, BAF-TA Award for Best Film Not in the English Language and seven Spanish Goya Awards, inter alia. The film had a huge repercussion with 2.580.496 spectator in Spain and 5.108.709 in the rest of Europe between 1999 y 2000.

CONCLUSION: AN EVERLASTING INFLUENCE

Obviously, the City Hall was hugely satisfied with the international recognition acquainted by the film. Barcelona Tourist Office soon launched a

tourist route based on the film - which included eleven locations and the Coliseum Cinema where the movie was premiered - hosted in the Barcelona movie.com webpage¹⁰.

Afterwards, the City Hall created a new virtual space, Barcelona Move Walks, to stimulate both the shootings and film tourism in the city. Four movies were selected to represent the contemporary cinema made in Barcelona: *All About My Mother*, *L'auberge espagnol* (Pot Luck, Cédric Klapsich, 2002), *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (Tom Tykwer, 2006) and *Manuale d'amore 2* (*Manual of Love 2*, Giovanni Veronesi, 2007). If *Perfume...* illustrated the versatility of Barcelona as a movie set - the Patrick Süskind's adaptation turned parts of the city into Paris -, the other two internationally successful films followed the Almodóvar's formula of associating Barcelona to both a concrete topography (modernist) and social class - middle or middle-upper class- and the idea of the city as leisure paradise. As expected, not everyone praise these representations of the city and some complained that it was far away from being real and just «a political image and aesthetic construction of the urban space» (Balibrea, 2005: 265).

It goes without saying that, in a lot of films supported by the Barcelona Plató Office, there is an overrepresentation of the modernist and bourgeois Barcelona, the more tourist one, and a consequent underrepresentation of their peripheral neighborhoods. If we analyzed the City Hall data, we will see that most of the sets of *All About My*

Mother are amongst the most visited by Barcelona tourists: La Rambla (therefore, the Columbus monument), the Sagrada Família, and the Born or the Port (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017). A recent study (Martín-Fuentes et al, 2020) compares the popularity on Tripadvisor of the twelve locations included in the *All About My Mother* route, finding that 33% of them were included in the 40-most-visited places in Barcelona. According to the authors, this result is due to the "film tourism" phenomenon.

Over time, *All About My Mother* will become an essential reference for those who want to film in Barcelona, and especially for foreign filmmakers. Eugeni Osácar has stated that: «In terms of tourism, we usually say that 1992 put Barcelona on the map, but I would say that it was in 1999, with the release of Pedro Almodóvar's *All About My Mother*, the one that put Barcelona in the map from a cinematographic point of view» (Interview with Eugeni Osácar, 2018). *All About My Mother* will established a aesthetic but also production pattern exploited by Barcelona Plató (and its subsequent names). Let's see two successful examples in both aspects: *L'auberge espagnol* will revisit most of Almodóvar's film locations but also some of its master shots, such as the use of the reflection of the Sagrada Família in one of the climax scenes¹¹, while in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (Woody Allen, 2008), the City Hall granted the American director the rare privilege of filming inside the *Sagrada Família*. Barcelona Plató also allow Allen to reduce the water flow of the Drac fountain at the Park Güell to improve the direct sound.

The passion unleashed by *All About My Mother* also had a stimulating effect in local filmmakers. They felt encouraged to work on less friendly images of the city as the ones provided by Almodóvar and Barcelona Plató. That will be the case of José Luis Guerin's *En construcción* (2001) or Joaquim Jordà's *De niños* (2003). Both deal with the human cost paid to erect that «very beautiful Barcelona» that fascinated Almodóvar. This idea

"ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER IS GOING TO BE A MAJOR STEP IN PEDRO ALMODÓVAR'S CAREER, BUT ALSO, A HUGE CHANGE IN THE WAY THAT BARCELONA IS GOING TO BE PORTRAYED IN MOVIES, AND IN HOW INSTITUTIONS ARE GOING TO COLLABORATE IN THIS PORTRAIT, THUS IMPROVING ITS TOURISM"



Image 5. Shot including a “B” (standing for Barcelona) by Pepino García. It was a specially successful graphic design for a City Hall campaign in 1984

will crystallise in the mockumentary *El taxista ful* (Jo Sol, 2005), a film influenced by Guerin’s and Jordà’s work, where the opposition to the tourist Barcelona is explicitly shown.

The city as a space for a living has become a key problem for the citizens of Barcelona. The progressive touristification and the rise of platforms such as Airbnb has pushed the population further than the peripheral neighborhoods. The demographic weight of Barcelona city has been reduced from 44,2% in 1977 to 33,6% in 2017⁴¹. While the city has lost population, —from 1.751.136 citizens in 1975 to 1.620.809 in 2017—, at Barcelona’s periphery the population increased from 4.019.713 citizens in 1975 to 4.823.361 in 2017.

All About My Mother involves a qualitative change in Almodóvar’s career, but also a modification in the way Barcelona is represented in cinema and how the institutions collaborate in the configuration of the image of the city according to its promotional interests. It is not surprising that in the final credits the first acknowledgments go to Barcelona Plató: with its help, a perfect symbiosis between the «Barcelona model» and Almodóvar’s universe was created, aesthetic and ethic at the same time. In doing so, the genius filmmaker and the institution created an irresistible place for any tourist cinema lover. ■

NOTES

- 1 This work is developed in the context of the Research Project “Film and Television in Spain in the Times of the Digital Turn and Globalization: (1993-2008): Identities and Practices of Production and Consumption” (PID2019-106459GB-I00), Agencia Estatal de Investigación, Ministerio de Ciencia, Government of Spain.
- 2 Barcelona City Hall Statistics, 2018.
- 3 According to International Euromonitor 2019, in 2018 Barcelona was the 8th most visited city in Europe.
- 4 Although there are several definitions of this model, they share the main features, as stated by Degen and García (2008: 27): local leadership; social cohesion and participation of the citizens in the decision making process; and public-private partnership.
- 5 Since then, the Barcelona film commission has adopted different names. Barcelona Plató in the period 1996-2000, when it was renamed as Barcelona Film Commission until 2006. Afterwards, it would be called Barcelona-Catalunya Film Commission (2007-2013). Its current name is Barcelona Film Commission.
- 6 Almodóvar’s film was not the only recognition that Barcelona received during 1999. Sir Richard Rogers praised the transformation of the city in his influential essay *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (1999); The Mercer Consulting agency included Barcelona as one of cities with the highest quality of life; and the city will receive the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, a prestigious award never before obtained by a municipality.
- 7 Barcelona get pretty.
- 8 Barcelona more than ever.
- 9 Although the route is still available on the website, political and administrative issues avoided its update.
- 10 Another sign of the international popularity of the film will be that two prestigious filmmakers as Alan

Parker and Wim Wenders decided to film *The Life of David Gale* (2003) at Casa Ramos.

11 Idescat.

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«UNA BARCELONA MUY BONITA»: ALMODÓVAR, TURISTA EN TODO SOBRE MI MADRE (1999)

Resumen

El presente artículo analiza la representación de la Barcelona contemporánea en la película *Todo sobre mi madre* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999). En primer lugar, describimos la transformación de la ciudad desde la democracia, el llamado «modelo Barcelona», incidiendo en la importancia que concede al sector turístico. A continuación, damos cuenta de la creación de Barcelona Plató, primera de las *film commissions* españolas, destinada a vender las bondades de dicha transformación y procurar atraer tanto rodajes como visitantes a la Ciudad Condal. Finalmente, analizamos la influencia de dicha institución en la película *Todo sobre mi madre*. El film va a asociar la ciudad a una serie de virtudes estéticas, pero también éticas. Finalmente, concluimos que dicha representación, debido al éxito transnacional de la película, va a hacer fortuna en las representaciones posteriores de Barcelona y, por ello, el film puede y debe ser visto como una obra capital en la promoción turística de la ciudad.

Palabras clave

Cine; turismo; Barcelona; Almodóvar; *Todo sobre mi madre*; turismo cinematográfico, *film commission*.

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"A VERY BEAUTIFUL BARCELONA": ALMODÓVAR, A TOURIST IN ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER (1999)

Abstract

This paper analyzes the representation of contemporary Barcelona in the film *All About my Mother* (Todo sobre mi madre, Pedro Almodóvar, 1999). First, we depict the transformation of the city during the democratic period, the so-called «Barcelona model», emphasizing the importance it attaches to the tourist sector. Next, we give an account of the creation of Barcelona Plató, the first of the Spanish film commissions, aimed at promoting the benefits of this transformation. Finally, we analyze the influence of this institution in the film *All About my Mother*. Almodóvar will recreate the city through a series of aesthetic but also ethical virtues. Finally, we conclude that such representation, due to the transnational success of the film, will be highly influential in the subsequent representations of Barcelona. Therefore, the film must be seen as a capital work in the city's tourism promotion.

Key words

Film; Tourism; Barcelona; Almodóvar; *All About my Mother*; Film Tourism; Film Commission.

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