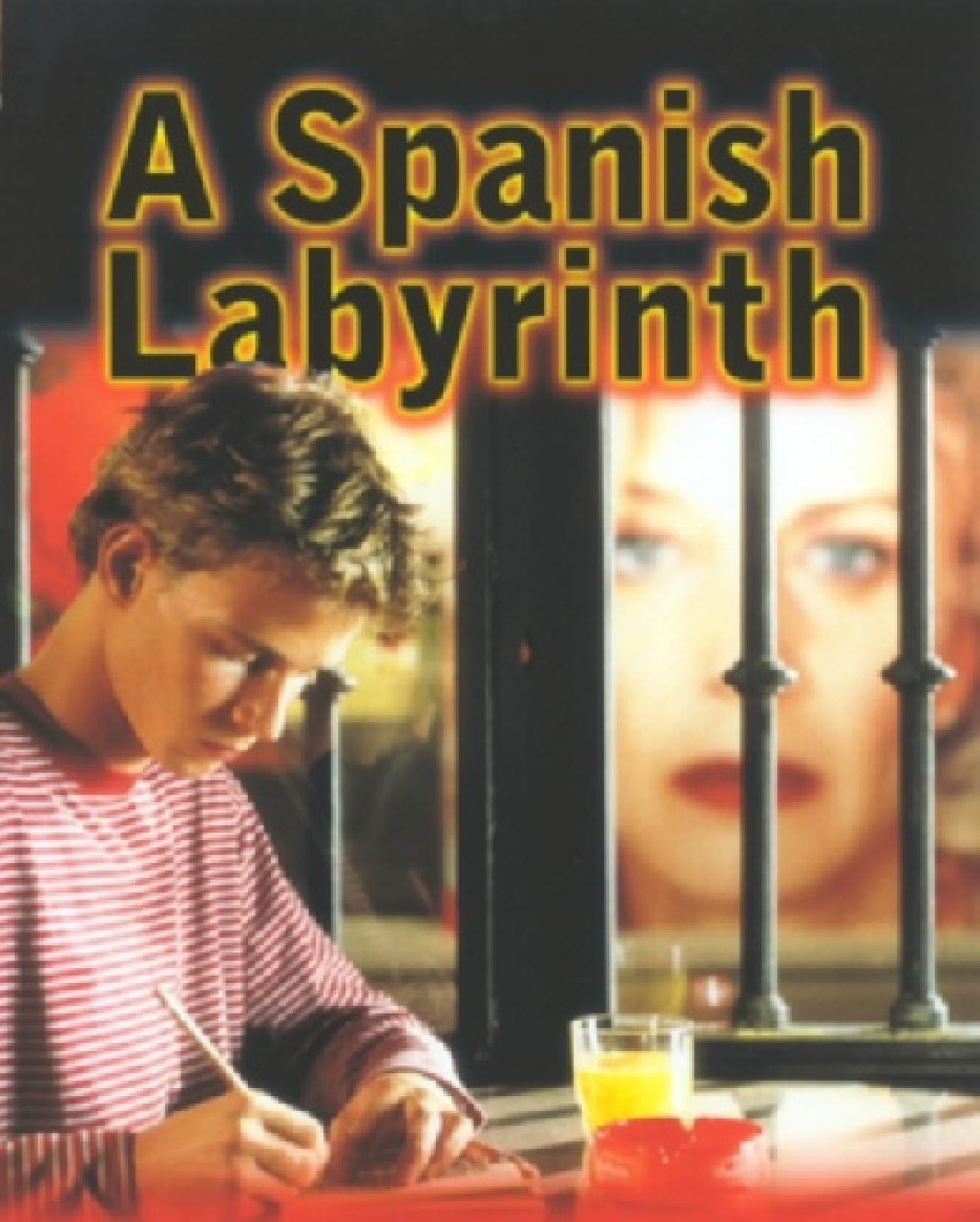
A Spanish Labyrinth



The Films of Pedro Almodóvar

Mark Allinson

I.B. TAURIS

This clear and comprehensive introduction to the films of Spain's most popular director gives a fascinating insight into the influences and ideas behind his inimitable mix of melodrama, farce and social satire.

A Spanish Labyrinth ranges from the international success of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, the critically acclaimed *Live Flesh* and 2000 Oscar-winning *All About My Mother* to early works previously unheard of outside Almodóvar's home country. Mark Allinson sheds light on the conditions surrounding production of the films and places them in the cultural context of a newly Democratic Spain, with Almodóvar as 'agent provocateur' and icon of this new-found freedom.

Highlighting Almodóvar's playful attitude to cinematic genre, his use of parody and satire and his distinctive visual style, Allinson also explores the director's controversial characterization of gender roles and the importance of social and national identity in his films. High-profile relationships with actors, actresses and the popular press – as well as his love of his adopted city Madrid – are also revealed as major influences on Almodóvar's unique cinematic vision.

An indispensable work for enthusiasts of Almodóvar's films and students of cinema and Hispanic studies alike.

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Mark Allinson

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Lauren Bacall was recently asked in an interview when she was going to star in another great film. Modestly, she replied that she had never appeared in a great movie, her first would be – she hoped – the first English-language film by Pedro Almodóvar.[1] Looking the world over for a great director, Bacall set her sights firmly on Spain's new man from La Mancha; she could yet have the chance if Almodóvar is tempted to make a film in the USA, as has long been speculated.[2] If the director does begin an 'American phase', then this book will prove timely, for it deals with twenty years of films made in Spain, very Spanish films which have nevertheless earned Almodóvar an international reputation, culminating in the Oscar for *All About My Mother* in March 2000.

The increasing interest in Almodóvar in the English-speaking world is my main reason for writing this book. Until now the only monograph available in English has been Paul Julian Smith's excellent *Desire Unlimited* (1994) which focuses on the themes of gender, nationality and homosexuality. My aim is to provide an introductory guide for anyone interested in Almodóvar's cinema, whether it be film specialists who want to read about the cultural context of the films, Hispanists who want to read about the films as cinematic texts, or the general film-goer eager simply to read more about Almodóvar. Part One contextualizes the films with a brief survey of their cultural background, including changing production

conditions and the effects of Almodóvar's own media-friendly persona. Part Two concentrates on the thematic 'content' of the films, covering questions of national identity, gender, sexuality and the less frequently addressed question of social structures. Part Three focuses on construction, with chapters on the use of Madrid as cinematic space, on Almodóvar's original use of genre, as well as on visual style and music. The conclusion analyses Almodóvar's relationship to the postmodern concepts of performance and parody. Short summaries of the plots of the films are provided in Appendix 2, for those who have not seen certain films or whose memories need jogging. I have also included a glossary of Spanish terms (Appendix 1). And as the chapters are not organized film by film, a degree of cross-referencing is included.

A number of people have helped to make this book possible and so deserve thanks. Kirsty Dunseath gave initial encouragement. Paz Sufrategui at El Deseo was enormously helpful with photographic material, Press Books and her well-kept archives. Esther García generously answered my questions on production. A special thank you goes to Jesús Robles of the 8½ bookshop (Alphaville cinema) in Madrid for locating (and donating) what even the Biblioteca Nacional could not find. Friends in Spain, among them Enrique, Merche, Alicia and Vincenç, Isabel, Javier, sent me articles and videos. Deborah Shaw kindly sent me a copy of her unpublished article. Antonio Sánchez shared his thoughts on postmodernism. Colleagues and friends read early drafts and gave helpful advice: Sarah Wykes, the Introduction, Penny Noble on Visual Style, Jill Hobson on Social Structures, Santi Fouz on Gender and Sexuality, Ian Biddle on Music, and Richard Pym on National Identity (as well as countless questions on bullfighting!). Chris Perriam and Stella Bruzzi each read the whole manuscript and gave expert advice about shaping the final book to meet the needs of both Hispanists and film specialists/enthusiasts. Finally, I thank my parents for relieving pressures elsewhere, and for taking me to Spain twenty years ago – the year in which Almodóvar made his first film.

All translations, both of dialogue from the films and of secondary material originally in Spanish, are my own.

For Gejo,
for understanding Almodóvar when I didn't
and for sharing my passion for the films.

Part One
Context

Introduction: Almodóvar – the *Auteur* of a Free Spain

In 1942, Gerald Brenan used the metaphor of the labyrinth to explain the complexities of Spanish history that led to one of the twentieth century's most bloody and bitter civil wars and, subsequently, to Western Europe's longest-surviving dictatorship.[1] Forty years later, Almodóvar's second feature, *Labyrinth of Passions*, uses the same metaphor to describe life in a Spanish capital suddenly liberated from decades of dictatorship, suddenly freed from the weight of recent Spanish history. That the name 'Almodóvar' should mean 'place of freedom' or 'freeing of slaves' is a happy coincidence.[2] For in 1999, Pedro Almodóvar symbolized free and democratic Spain – as its chronicler and as its *agent provocateur* – to the extent that Spain's most prominent national newspaper asked in its main editorial why Almodóvar had become the symbol of Spain's rupture with Francoism (Vidal-Beneyto 1999: 17). The director's clear identification with Spain's *movida* (the explosion of pop culture which followed Franco's death in 1975) partly explains his iconic status. The nature of Spain's transition to democracy – a gradual process of constitutional reform rather than a radical break with the past – necessitated a cultural revolution to compensate for the absence of a political one. Almodóvar was present in the right place at the right time, capturing with his films the excitement of a liberated nation. His films' disavowal of Francoism provided not only an image of Spain consistent with the national will

towards collective memory loss ('*desmemoria*'), but also a colourful, festive image of Spain which appealed to foreign audiences.

Almodóvar's adoption as national symbol combines with his status as the 'one true auteur to emerge in the 1980s' (Smith 1994: 5). More than most directors, he can lay claim to *auteur* status because he not only directs, but also controls the production and pre-sales of his work. Almodóvar's relationship with the people who work with him – both actors and his staff at El Deseo, the production company he runs with his brother Agustín – is central to his status as an *auteur*. Coinciding with the Spanish release of *All About My Mother* in the spring of 1999, El Deseo's press officer, Paz Sufrategui, wrote a short piece about the Almodóvar 'factory': 'an old family with parents, children, grandparents and lots of friends'. The accompanying photograph shows Pedro sitting in the middle of his factory/family. In the offices of El Deseo the impression given is certainly one of dedication to the films made by Almodóvar and others which El Deseo produces.[3] Among the 'friends' of the family are the many actors who have worked in the films: the Spanish press call them '*chicos* Almodóvar' (more often, *chicas* Almodóvar). Where Almodóvar's reception outside Spain is much the same as for other venerated *auteurs*, at home, his high-profile relationships with the actors and actresses of the moment provoke media coverage akin to that afforded royalty. This, in turn, reflects Almodóvar's personal estimation of the importance of actors. Initially, the actors came from Almodóvar's entourage: Fabio McNamara, Eva Siva, Alaska, Agustín. These were joined increasingly by professional actors, one of whom encouraged Almodóvar to make his first film and went on to become his first 'muse' and the actress most closely associated with him even twenty years later: Carmen Maura. Maura has been singled out by Almodóvar as exceptional among the other great performers in his films. The field of star studies is largely undeveloped in relation to Spain, nor is it within the scope of this book to engage with it. Nevertheless, the importance of actors and directing them is central to Almodóvar:

> I don't know if I have a method when directing; my directing is more and more precise, I give the actors so many details that I think they begin to fear that they can't do what I'm asking. But actors are the life of the cinema, everything is transmitted by them; lighting, mise-en-scène, all the rest, though important, are nothing compared to the actors. (García de León and Maldonado 1989: 221)

Almodóvar's adoration of his actors explains (and is explained by) his attitude to story-telling and to film genres. Narrative, the telling of stories, is what first attracted Almodóvar to the film medium. While working on short Super-8 films (all of them narrative, unlike much marginal film-making), he was also contributing stories to magazines. Almodóvar's prose and, unsurprisingly, his dialogue in the novel *Patty Diphusa* (1991) are engaging in style and enhance an entertaining story. His relationship with his characters is strong: he claims to know everything about them, and that he could write a complete novel about each one (Cobos and Marías 1995: 119).[4] And the importance of stories also relates to his distinctive use of genre.

Where many European *auteurs* have shunned genre films, Almodóvar is acutely aware of their potential, both to attract audiences and to provide narrative or visual frames of reference. Often, awareness of genre conventions becomes parody. Conscious of the multiple perspectives and interrelations of contemporary, postmodern culture, Almodóvar reworks and recontextualizes not only genres but also popular culture, especially music and television. Parodic recontextualization is not exclusively a source of humour: parodying television, advertising or folkoric music is one way of investigating and challenging gender or sexual roles, social or national identities. Marsha Kinder (1997: 3) describes how Almodóvar was able 'to perform a radical sex change on Spain's national stereotype'. Far from the *machista* men and passive women of Spain's mythical, reactionary past, Almodóvar, for better or for worse, places strong females centre-stage and brutally demolishes weak male characters. Almodóvar's deconstruction of Spanish national identity has ironically become a *re*-construction in that his films are now the most accessible (and most accessed) depiction of contemporary Spain for most of the world. The director frequently described as the *enfant terrible* of Spanish cinema is accused of superficiality when he eschews questions about Spain's political past. At the same time, he is accused of being politically incorrect in representing sexual difference, violence, even rape, in an off-hand or humorous manner. Part Two of this book revisits the themes of gender, sexual, social and national identities, contextualizing and summarizing their place in Almodóvar's films.

In spite of all the polemic, Almodóvar is increasingly recognized for his skill as a director (universally acclaimed in the case of *All About My Mother*). The construction of the films themselves has received far less attention, which is why this book is weighted more heavily to the *how*

rather than the *what* of the films, with extensive chapters on visual style, genre, urban space and music in Part Three. The colourful, glossy images of the 'high comedies' and the design-conscious world of the later films both stem from Almodóvar's background in theatre and amateur film-making. His career is an exercise in the art of the possible, from low-quality DIY to Oscar-winning mastery. The early conditions of production have clearly influenced all the films. These financial, technical and cultural contexts are the subject of Part One.

1

Cultural Context

From La Mancha to Madrid

Almodóvar's origins in backward, rural La Mancha – the desolate flatlands which drove Don Quijote to madness – and his migration to Madrid in time to witness both the later years of the Franco dictatorship and the new freedoms of democratic Spain, have clearly left their mark on his films. An overwhelming enthusiasm for urban life is tempered by nostalgia for a rural past which he often represents through the elderly in his films. His humble background stands in contrast to the middle-class origins of many film-makers, and his incorporation into the cultural life of his adopted city was a determining factor in his education and personality. Both affect his film-making: with no formal training at his disposal, his film trajectory represents the visible learning curve of the autodidact; and the changing cultural scene in Madrid determined the production conditions and values of the films, as well as Almodóvar's own status as entertaining eccentric in the 1970s, or increasingly respected celebrity in the 1990s.

Born in Calzada de Calatrava in the province of Ciudad Real at the start of the 1950s, Pedro Almodóvar's biography is split unevenly between the village of his birth, his schooling from the age of eight to sixteen in Cáceres and his entire adult life in the Spanish capital. While Calzada did not even have a cinema, the street where he lived in Cáceres contained not only the school, but also a movie theatre. Thus, for Almodóvar, his entire education took place in one street. He sang in the choir and believed his desire to see the films of Tennessee Williams's

plays was truly sinful (Cobos and Marías 1995: 76). He was taught by Salesian brothers whose abuse was one autobiographical element which he incorporated into *Law of Desire*, where Tina has been abused as a boy by the priests (Vidal 1988: 196). The films Almodóvar watched as a child were US comedies with Doris Day and 'very clean kitchens' (Cobos and Marías 1995: 83), but Spanish singer Lola Flores was equally significant to him, as were English and American pop music. In his late teens, Almodóvar went to Madrid, by now firmly under the spell of US pop culture and the British 'swinging sixties'. He travelled to Ibiza, London and Paris, and worked as an extra in films and television (Boquerini 1989: 16).

Almodóvar secured a permanent job in Telefónica (the Spanish national phone company) where he worked until three in the afternoon, leaving the rest of the day free for other pursuits. During his time at Telefónica, Almodóvar also began to write for the alternative magazines *Star*, *Vibraciones* and *El Víbora*. His Telefónica job brought him into contact with the lower middle class later depicted in his cinema, and, though he was very much the eccentric at work, at night he was among his own kind (Cobos and Marías 1995: 77). Madrid's nightlife provided a forum for Almodóvar's social talents, and brought him into contact with a range of artists, groups and individuals, including the members of Spain's first punk band Kaka de Luxe, which included the teenage Alaska who would star in his first film and figure among the foremost personalities of Spain's pop culture for more than twenty years. Through the well-connected director Félix Rotaeta, he began collaborating with the theatre group Los Goliardos (Boquerini 1989: 17). These last years of the Franco regime (the early 1970s) were marked by the final violent throes of cultural censorship, including battles with the press leading to newspaper closures (Boquerini 1989: 19). After the death of the dictator in November 1975, the limits of the censor were pushed back with the release of films and books prohibited under Franco, some of which held mythical status (Kattán-Ibarra 1989: 273). On 1 December 1977, film censorship was abolished altogether (Torres 1995: 369). Predictably, this led to a veritable avalanche of films with themes hitherto unimaginable. As Peter Evans (1995: 326) puts it, 'for the first time in thirty years, questions of history, politics and government, religion, ethnicity, regionalism, family, and sexuality could all be discussed openly and directly'. Almodóvar would be one of the first to make the most of this new freedom.

When Almodóvar arrived in Madrid in the late 1960s he already knew he wanted to make films. The Madrid film school (the only one in Spain) had been closed by Franco, so a formal training was out of the question. As soon as funds allowed, he bought a Super-8 camera and started to make short films with his increasing circle of friends. The Super-8 shorts gave him the freedom to film what he wanted, cheaply, and they also provided his only training in technique. Almodóvar describes his apprenticeship in the 1970s:

> If I wanted to make films I had to invent a means of distributing them […] I showed them in bars, in parties […] I couldn't add a soundtrack because it was very difficult. The magnetic strip was very poor, very thin. I remember that I became very famous in Madrid because, as the films had no sound, I took a cassette with music while I personally did the voices of all the characters, songs and dialogues. (Cobos and Marías 1995: 76–8)

This self-reliant *modus operandi* conditions all Almodóvar's work. Twenty years later, newcomer Candela Peña records that in pre-rehearsal discussions with his actresses, he explains all the parts by improvising their dialogues himself.[1]

Another feature of Almodóvar's Super-8 work which marks him out at this early stage is the primacy of narrative. The production of Super-8 films was largely based in Barcelona, where conceptual films were the norm. Almodóvar, though well-received because of the humour in his films, was anathema to Catalan abstract film-makers because he wanted to tell stories (Albaladejo et al. 1988: 31–2). For Almodóvar, these films clearly indicate the direction he was to take: 'I think the little Super-8 camera already contains elements of the narrative. If you want to move the action, you move with the camera or you climb onto a wheelchair. I have been a believer in the art of the possible' (Cobos and Marías 1995: 78).

After four years of working with short films in Super-8 format, in 1978 Almodóvar made both his first full-length film and his first 16mm short. A magazine-style melodrama, *Folle … folle … fólleme, Tim* (*Fuck, Fuck, Fuck Me, Tim*) is described by Almodóvar as the 'great success of all my Super-8 projects' and he even considered expanding it to 35mm format (Albaladejo et al. 1988: 35). While this film provided a further learning experience, *Salomé* was his first contact with the professional world of cinema (Boquerini 1989: 26). Carmen Maura and, through her,

Félix Rotaeta were the contacts who encouraged Almodóvar to seek funding for a script *Erecciones generales* (*General Erections*) which, with the new title *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap*, was to be Almodóvar's break into commercial cinema. The story of its production is now part of the Almodóvar mythology.

Almodóvar recalls that his flatmate kept a marijuana plant in the window of their apartment, and he worried that it might be discovered by the police. From this came the story of Pepi and the policeman (Cobos and Marías 1995: 122). Initially the money (half a million pesetas or £2,000) came from a variety of supportive friends and colleagues. Neither Almodóvar nor any of the actors received any payment. Even with the stretching of the film to 35mm, the total cost was between 3 and 5 million pesetas (£13,000–20,000), making *Pepi, Luci, Bom* by far Almodóvar's cheapest film. Shooting began in 1978 and finished in June 1980. The resulting problems of continuity also form part of the film's mythology. Almodóvar recounts the filming of the first scene: it began where Pepi (Carmen Maura) gets up from her Superman scrapbook to open the door in June 1979; in December 1979 she opens the door; but the close-up of Pepi with the policeman was not filmed until June 1980 (Albaladejo et al. 1988: 40). When the money ran out, Almodóvar, desperate to finish the film, considered standing in front of the camera and describing to the audience how he would have filmed the rest had he acquired the funding (Cobos and Marías 1995: 79). This meta-cinematic monologue of production problems was avoided. Producer Pepón Corominas saw the film's potential and found the funds to finish it. The film's many imperfections (such as the scene where Almodóvar himself appears with his head out of frame) were seized upon by commentators as part of a radical innovative technique. Almodóvar says his purpose was not to 'introduce a new cinematic language, but to convey immediacy and freshness' (Cobos and Marías 1995: 79). While the film is technically the most imperfect of all Almodóvar's output, it is also, in his words, 'the one which most clearly demonstrates my vocation as a film-maker' (Cobos and Marías 1995: 124).

During the shooting of the film, Almodóvar kept his job at the Spanish telephone company. The scripts for both *Pepi, Luci, Bom* and *Labyrinth of Passions* were written there, and Almodóvar took advantage of the Spanish state sector's unpaid leave scheme on five occasions, but he had to return when the money ran out (Cobos and Marías 1995: 78). The success of *Pepi, Luci, Bom* meant that his next film, *Labyrinth of*

Passions, would be properly produced. Madrid cinema Alphaville was looking to venture into production and their decision to produce Almodóvar allowed him to ask for leave of absence from his job. He never returned. *Pepi, Luci, Bom* took him eighteen months to shoot and cost less than 5 million pesetas (£20,000). Its production conditions are unique in Almodóvar's career. Twenty years later, his thirteenth film, *All About My Mother*, was filmed in ten weeks and cost about 600 million pesetas (£2.3 million including publicity). By 1999, Almodóvar's films were selling more in France and Italy than in Spain, providing excellent returns for the Almodóvar brothers' own production company El Deseo, and for their French co-producers (Renn Productions and France 2 Cinema). Although the cost and box-office returns of the films do not concern me directly here, money clearly affects production values and the finished film product.

Almodóvar's production manager, Esther García, identifies three stages in his film production: the films up to *Law of Desire*, which sought outside producers; the films from *Law of Desire* until *All About My Mother* in 1999 produced by El Deseo; and a potential new era, an 'American stage' which will probably begin with the US-filmed *The Paperboy*.[2] The films which comprise these stages are part of an upward trajectory in terms of budgets and box-office receipts. Almodóvar films become progressively more expensive and make more and more money. In Spain, box-office figures show a steady improvement until *Law of Desire*, which made twice as much as its predecessor, but *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* represents the big breakthrough, making five times as much money as the previous film, and, critically, taking more than twice the domestic box office in international receipts. As Angus Finney (1996: 248) puts it, 'The film allowed Almodóvar to break completely from a domestic market, and win an international following.' The conditions of production of Almodóvar's films clearly impact on the finished films themselves, affecting working conditions, schedules, technology, marketing and, crucially, 'author' freedom.

Labyrinth of Passions was made with 21 million pesetas and filmed over five weeks. This is no small achievement for a film with some fifty locations, but Almodóvar's focus is still very much on narrative. In *Dark Habits* Almodóvar began to experiment more widely with the technology now at his disposal and dispensed with the proliferation of characters used in the previous film. Despite the improved technical conditions of the films made for the producers Tesauro (*Dark Habits*

and *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*) and Andrés Vicente Gómez (*Matador*), certain 'unfavourable obligations'[3] left Almodóvar unhappy with producers controlling the finance of his films. A new director of cinema at the Ministry of Culture, film-maker and former Spanish Television chief Pilar Miró, was to provide the solution. For the director's brother, Agustín, the introduction of the so-called Miró Law in 1983 effectively 'allowed directors to become producers' (Vidal 1988: 245). The measure, inspired by French models of subsidy, offered planning investment grants and a range of subsidies to Spanish film-makers (Gubern et al. 1995: 400–3).[4] This new opportunity, coupled with the problems Almodóvar encountered searching for finance for *Law of Desire*, propelled him and Agustín into setting up their own production company, El Deseo, in 1986.

For Almodóvar, El Deseo represents freedom to write and film what he chooses. One of Spain's top five productions companies, its resources mean that he can shoot many more takes before editing, and film as near as possible to the order of the script. This would be most directors' preference, and Almodóvar can permit himself this luxury. Relative freedom from the demands of producers also allows modifications to the script during filming, consecutive editing while shooting, which enables extra takes to be filmed if the editing requires it, and even the filming of completely different versions (Cobos and Marías 1995: 118, 84). Almodóvar often shoots the same scene in two distinct tones, usually one realistic and the other as a gag. In *Matador*, for example, having Carmen Maura kiss Banderas awake was a gag which worked and was kept in the final version. However, in a film like *The Flower of My Secret*, all the 'amusing options' were removed in the final version (Cobos and Marías 1995: 85).

Production clearly affects *where* as well as *how* films are made. El Deseo is currently investigating the possible construction of their own studios.[5] While this would be principally a new venture for the company – not dictated by Almodóvar's needs as director – it would certainly offer him even greater artistic freedom. In Spain, the practice of studio set filming is not common. Almodóvar's early films make use of real interior locations until *What Have I Done*, the interiors of which were filmed in a studio. *Law of Desire* was filmed in two real apartments and in the Lara theatre in Madrid. Almodóvar's 'studio period' begins with *Women on the Verge*, where the artificiality of the décor is central to the film's aesthetic. *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, which foregrounds the film

production medium itself, was shot entirely in two different studios. *Kika*'s interiors were entirely shot in the aptly-named Los Ángeles studios in the Madrid suburb of Getafe. These strongly codified and stylized genre films are suited to studio filming unlike the more sober *Flower*, *Live Flesh* and *All About My Mother* which combine studio and location interiors with inspired exterior filming. Leo's house in *Flower* is a real flat. In *All About My Mother*, Manuela's home in Madrid is a real flat, as is Rosa's *eixample* apartment in Barcelona, and Agrado's flat opposite the Palau de la Música. Manuela's Barcelona flat is more hybrid: after much location hunting, Almodóvar combined elements of several flats and re-created them in the Los Ángeles studio in Madrid. Just as important for both the social context and the aesthetic of Almodóvar's films – the early films especially – is the transformation of the streets and plazas of the then unfashionable Madrid into a great studio. (See Chapter 6.) By taking his films out on to the streets of the Spanish capital, Almodóvar reflected, starred in and arguably directed the most exciting period in Spain's cultural history after Franco.

The *Movida*

> The cultural pluralism of contemporary Spain owes much to the accelerated change of the last two decades which has obliged Spaniards to live in different time frames at once: that is, to experience simultaneously what in the rest of Europe have been successive stages of development. (Graham and Labanyi 1995: 312)

In 1978 Spain's new constitution was adopted after a referendum officially ending nearly forty years of dictatorship. In the same year, Almodóvar began filming his first commercial feature, *Pepi, Luci, Bom*. The director's first two decades of film-making correspond to Spain's first twenty years as a democratic nation. During this period, Spain was transformed from being 'the pariah of the West, the last great bastion of the dictatorial days', to 'one of the most liberal states in the world' (Elms 1992: 2). Although the political transformation was a gradual one – transition rather than revolution – the change in the cultural environment was rapid and, at times, excessive. Thus, while for many adults Spain's new democracy represented the achievement of radical political ambition through peaceful means, for the younger generation it meant an instantaneous break with repressive social norms and regulations. The high

profile of social and cultural transformation contrasted with the gradual changes in the political process. This had two effects: first, it ascribed what is arguably an over-determined role to youth cultures as the ambassadors of the new Spain; second, the cultural legacy of liberated Spain originated mainly with a youth which would inevitably grow up.[6] The second point accounts for the demise of Spain's post-Franco, postmodern 'end of history' carnival (Fuentes 1995: 157). The first point accounts for its genesis.

Almodóvar was nearly thirty when he began to shoot his first commercial feature, though both he and his early films are none the less closely associated with youth culture. What distinguishes the Spanish youth culture of the late 1970s from other youth cultures or subcultures is its reception in a newly-liberated society as acceptable and even desirable, where youth is usually inscribed as resistant or deviant (Allinson 2000: 265). Rather than counter-hegemonic, Spain's youth subculture was eventually welcomed by Spain's political elite as 'the official image of Spain' (Graham and Labanyi 1995: 312). The social and cultural context for Almodóvar's early films – and arguably for the shaping of his persona and the future direction of his career – was, principally, the *movida madrileña* (the Madrid 'scene').[7] This explosion of new trends in music, fashion, design, art and film which centred on the Spanish capital took its name from the drugs subculture. The height of the *movida* is agreed by the majority of its protagonists to be between the years 1981 and 1985, though the energy released in those years was a build-up of social and cultural trends dating from the end of the Franco period. Those who lived through it argue about most aspects of the *movida*, but there is a clear perception that something exciting was happening in Madrid. José Luis Gallero (1991: 9), meticulous chronicler of the *movida*, recalls that 'from one day to the next, a worn-out city became the maximum emblem of modernity'. Music subculture led the way in the city with scores of new groups and artists taking up residence and guitars in the do-it-yourself spirit of British punk.[8] As in the UK and the USA, Spain's 'new wave' was in part a reaction against the perceived stagnation of rock music in the 1970s. Venues and record labels suddenly opened their doors to these new bands and the city became a magnet for aspiring talent. Almodóvar, who had served his musical apprenticeship providing a running soundtrack for his Super-8 films, took to the stage with his friend Fabio McNamara in performances which have become part of the *movida*'s folklore. Pedro, usually clad in a dressing-

gown, hair curlers and stockings at half-mast, was joined by Fabio, whose unpredictability made any rehearsal a pointless exercise (Holguín 1999: 306).

But the *movida* was not limited to pop music, as the contents of its emblematic magazine *La Luna de Madrid* demonstrate. Its first issue in November 1983 led with a piece about Madrid as a symbol of post-modernity. Its eclectic mix of articles and features included the first appearance of Almodóvar's fictional porn star Patty Diphusa,[9] articles on punk, pop music, painting, photography, film (new and old), theatre, free radio, football, poetry, as well as a month-planner, an advert for Almodóvar's second film, *Labyrinth of Passions*, cardboard cut-outs of Madrid buildings and lyrics for songs like 'Sexo chungo' (Bad Sex) by punk group Siniestro Total (Write Off). The editor of *La Luna*, Borja Casani, identified the Rastro, Madrid's fleamarket, as the site of the burgeoning subculture that would become the *movida* (Gallero 1991: 8). This market, the scene of the opening of Almodóvar's second film, *Labyrinth of Passions*, is a fitting place for a cultural phenomenon based largely on what Lévi-Strauss called 'bricolage', that is the 're-ordering and recontextualization of objects to communicate fresh meanings'.[10] The artists of the *movida* used whatever they could find in the market-place to create something new. Almodóvar's own part in this DIY culture included work on *fotonovelas*, comics, writing and performing music, even art. He claims his film-making was in this sense 'the sum of a lot of artistic frustrations' (Cobos and Marías 1995: 80).

Artists and designers were as much at the centre of the *movida* as musicians. Maldonado writes that the habitual introductory question 'Do you study or work?' became, during the period, 'Do you design or work?' (García de León and Maldonado 1989: 139). Almodóvar's films contain many plastic elements which contribute to their aesthetic. The artists Ouka Lele, Guillermo Pérez Villalta, Las Costus and Pablo Pérez Mínguez all feature in *Labyrinth of Passions* alongside Javier Pérez Grueso, Carlos Berlanga and Fabio de Miguel (alias McNamara). Ceesepe designed the titles and posters for *Pepi, Luci, Bom* and *Law of Desire*. Poster artist (and director) Iván Zulueta undertook the posters for *Labyrinth of Passions*, *Dark Habits* and *What Have I Done*.[11] This close link with the world of artists survived well into the 'post-*movida*' films of the late 1980s and after. Juan Gatti and his studio designed many of the films' title sequences and interiors. The work of Dis Berlin is featured from *Law of Desire* onwards, and that of Antonio de Felipe in *Live Flesh*.