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Crossing the sound barrier: *telefilms* and acoustic flow in early Spanish television

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ABSTRACT

This essay argues for the relevance of television to the interdisciplinary field of sound studies. For scholars R. Murray Schafer and Jonathan Sterne, the study of sound is deeply contextual and linked to the experience of social, environmental and technological change. While most television theory and history is based on US and UK models, I seek to understand the factors that shaped the development of the television industry in Spain, how the population perceived and responded to the changes to social habits and norms brought, or accompanied, by television, and the ways television altered the soundscape of mid-twentieth-century Spain in contexts both public and private. From Raymond Williams (2004, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge) I borrow the notion of televisual “flow” – used to describe the actual experience of television viewing structured as a continuous sequence of diverse fragments, less concerned with semantic content as with other sensory and affective inputs and responses – adapted here to foreground the sounds of television and audience perception of those sounds. I home in on a set of television programs and an especially charged acoustic space, that of so-called *telefilms*, imported American series dubbed into Spanish in Latin America and transmitted on the single Spanish channel during prime evening viewing hours.

KEYWORDS

Sound; television; Spain; dubbing; Latin America

The absence of television, arguably the most pervasive and influential audiovisual medium of the second half of the twentieth century, from the growing bibliography in the field of sound studies is striking. *The Sound Studies Reader*, a 2012 critical anthology edited by pioneering sound scholar Jonathan Sterne that includes both foundational and more recent, forward-looking work in the discipline, shows a scant three entries in the index referring to television, amid chapters devoted to the gramophone and phonograph, radio and telephone (also cell phones), the Walkman, cassette player and iPod, as well as cinema. What is it about television that explains this lack of interest in and attention to the sonic dimension of the medium? Sound media specialist Michelle Hilmes (2008, 153) asks a similar question, and finds the explanation in its differences from the two media it most resembles, radio and film.

Rather than pursue the reasons for television’s neglect, in this essay I will focus on the evidence and arguments for its relevance to some of the central preoccupations of sound

studies, using the case of early Spanish television as my textual focus. The notion of change is central to both R. Murray Schafer and Sterne in their formulations of the field's focus and interdisciplinary scope. Introducing the concept of the soundscape, the opening sentence of Schafer's 1977 book *The Tuning of the World* declares that "[t]he soundscape of the world is changing" (3), with researchers from a range of disciplines focused on "the relationship between man and the sounds of his environment" and the question of "what happens when these sounds change?" (3–4). Sterne amplifies these queries in his introduction to *The Sound Studies Reader*, inviting "sound students" to consider "[h]ow many of the sounds in everyday life existed ten years ago? Twenty? Thirty? Fifty?" and to explore "the contexts in which they [sounds] happen, the ways of hearing or not hearing attached to them, the practices, people and institutions associated with them" (2012, 1, 3). Both are attentive to the historical dimension of sound, since to measure change one must know what came before, "what the previous generation of sounds must have replaced, and what those sounds and their worlds replaced in turn" (Sterne 2012, 1). At the same time, Schafer acknowledges the difficulties inherent in historical sound research. In the absence of recordings and sound archives, scholars will need to "make inferences as to the changes of the soundscape" drawing on "earwitness accounts" from a variety of sources (1994, 8).

In the case of television in general and my study of Spanish television in particular, the primary, although not exclusive, context is the home, both in the sense of a private dwelling and as a projection or repository of specific cultural values, habits and standards. Much television scholarship acknowledges its role in the domestic space as a factor that connects and differentiates television from the sound technologies that preceded it. Karen Lury begins her discussion of television sound by establishing its domestic genealogy:

Television was not the first medium to introduce electrified or mediated sound into the home. Earlier media technologies – the gramophone, the telephone and the radio – were all sound-based media and were all familiar items in use in many homes before the mass take-up of television in the 1950s. (2005, 57)

What scholars describe as the predominant role of sound in traditional twentieth-century broadcast television, in a reversal of the image-sound hierarchy characteristic of cinema, is also at least partly a result of television's setting and design as a domestic appliance, whose screen and overall size are limited by room dimensions and furniture arrangements.¹ John Ellis points to the small size of the TV image, the head-on angle of viewing and speakers primarily "geared toward the reproduction of speech" as key factors in constituting the television experience (1992, 127–128).

Discussions of television sound by Rick Altman (1986), Ellis and others are also framed with respect to the habits of domestic consumption. In fully developed television ecologies, the TV, even when on, often recedes into the background, as a kind of unwatched but constantly present sonic wallpaper. For Altman, sound performs a paradoxical role, offering continuity from one program to the next in service of the somewhat contradictory goal "not to get anyone to watch television carefully" while "keep[ing] people from turning the television off" (1986, 42–43). This sense of continuity is central to a distinguishing feature of the television experience, what Raymond Williams, in his influential 1974 book, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, terms *flow*. His contention, based on personal observation and subsequent analysis of UK and especially US television in the

1960s and early 1970s, is that television viewing (“we speak of ‘watching television’ ... picking on the general rather than the specific experience”) is structured not by the reception of separate and discrete programs but by a continuous sequence of diverse materials, scenes and fragments of narrative, information, spectacle and advertising (2004, 89–92). Flow – at its origin a programming model designed to further the interests of both commercial and state networks by securing audience “buy-in” for an entire evening’s viewing in lieu of channel switching – can also, writes Williams, “and perhaps more fundamentally, be related to the television experience itself” (93–94). He evokes this experiential level of perception more directly in a description of his experience of American TV as “a single irresponsible flow of images and feelings” (92). I find this characterization of TV viewing and listening as taking place on a level less concerned with semantic content and units of meaning than with other sensory and affective inputs and responses, potentially useful in elaborating a concept of acoustic flow or what, returning to Schafer, we could also characterize as a televisual soundscape. With this notion of acoustic flow, I seek to foreground the sounds of television and the audience’s perception of those sounds.

Just as Williams’s conception of television flow was grounded in the analysis of actual programming on five UK and US channels,² my approach is rooted in an understanding of television sound as specific to its historical and geographical moment, as “an acoustic event heard and experienced by particular audiences occupying specific sites and spaces of reception” (VanCour 2011, 58). The great majority of television theory, including work on sound, is based on US and UK models and histories. The introduction and development of the television industry in Spain was *different*, although those differences played out in contradictory ways.³ How did the population perceive and respond to the changes to social habits, values and norms brought, or accompanied, by television? How, in particular, did television alter the soundscape of mid-twentieth-century Spain, in contexts both public and private? Drawing on my previous work on the effects of the dubbing of foreign language film on cinema sound and voices in Spain, I will focus on a specific set of television programs and an especially charged acoustic space, that of so-called *teleafilms*, imported American series dubbed into Spanish in Latin America and transmitted on the single Spanish channel during prime evening viewing hours. Relying on the testimonies of “earwitnesses” collected from the contemporary press, I examine the responses to divergent sounds and “foreign” voices as interventions in larger debates over questions of cultural identity and exchange, and the circulation of narratives, norms and values and the barriers to the same.

The introduction of TV in Spain

The inauguration of Spain’s first broadcast television channel took place on 28 October 1956, at a moment characterized by Manuel Palacio as both belated and premature in terms of the conception and development of the medium in national and international contexts (2001, 31–41). Trailing its European and Latin American peers, or rivals, whose networks began regular transmissions in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the first Spanish broadcast was a highly anticipated if improvised affair. Underfunded and understaffed, of indeterminate legal standing – as Palacio writes, officials close to the government were unclear as to its status as a state monopoly, private enterprise or some combination of the two (2001, 38) – Televisión Española was called to life by the words of the minister of information and tourism, Gabriel Arias Salgado:

Hoy, día 28 de octubre, domingo, día de Cristo Rey, a quien ha sido dado todo poder en los cielos y en la Tierra se inauguran los nuevos equipos y estudios de televisión española. Mañana, el 29 de octubre, fecha del vigésimotercero aniversario de la fundación de la falange española, darán comienzo, de una manera regular y periódica, los programas de televisión. Hemos elegido estas dos fechas para proclamar así los dos principios básicos que han de presidir, sostener y enmarcar todo desarrollo futuro de la televisión en España. (As quoted in Palacio 2001, 39)

In addition to speeches by Arias Salgado and others, the first broadcast included the retransmission of a mass, two chapters of the NO-DO newsreel, a piano concert and performances by the Coros y Danzas, the folkloric group organized by the Sección Femenina.

The initial programming day consisted of three hours with the signal's reach confined to Madrid. Service was expanded to Barcelona and Zaragoza in February of 1959, extending to Bilbao, Valencia, Seville and Santiago de Compostela that same year. By October 1961, coverage included the other major population centers of Andalusia while residents of the Canary Islands had to wait until February 1964 for their first experience of TV. By 1963, programming had grown to nine hours a day, beginning during the afternoon *sobremesa*, followed by a break, after which the evening schedule continued, only to conclude at or around midnight.

Despite Arias Salgado's pledge to uphold the nation's confessional-ideological identity and mission, program content on the then sole national channel closely adhered to the norms and categories developed in Western capitalist democracies. A sample weekly program for the new fall 1963 season published in *Triunfo* as part of a special issue devoted to Spanish television displays a lineup of news and current events, women's programming, "novelas" and educational programs filling the afternoon slots ("La nueva" 1963). It shows the evening schedule populated by variety and game shows and other light entertainment, news and weather, live, and later filmed or taped, theater pieces, with the central prime-time slot devoted to telefilms, those hour-length dramas imported largely from the United States. Beginning with the inclusion of the first paid advertisements in 1957, Spanish state television came to depend exclusively on a commercial financing model, whose growth in revenue made possible the territorial expansions of the late 1950s and early 1960s ("Cincuenta años míticos TVE" 2018).⁴ Under this regime, by 1966 Televisión Española (also known by the acronym TVE) was not only self-supporting but through the taxes collected on advertising fees it had become a net contributor to the national budget (Vázquez Montalbán 1973, 66).⁵

Beyond the geographical restrictions and limited programming day, early TV viewing (and listening) in Spain was shaped by the economic scarcity and industrial deficiencies that defined daily life in the second decade of the Franco dictatorship. Although accurate numbers are difficult to come by, figures cited by Palacio put the total number of TV sets at the time of the first broadcast at six hundred (2001, 40), all of which were imported and thus also subject to duties that raised their already prohibitive cost. Domestic production began slowly, with eleven thousand sets manufactured in Spain in 1957 (Rueda Laffond and Chicharro Merayo 2006, 42). Palacio cites totals (including domestic models and imports) of twenty-five thousand sets for late 1957 and fifty thousand by the end of 1958 (42). As the network expanded across the country, government policies worked to promote access, eliminating the luxury tax on TVs in 1961. Beginning in 1962, TVs became eligible for purchase on the installment plan ("2.3: La expansión" 2018).

Nevertheless, the TV set remained a luxury item priced well beyond the means of the great majority of the population, with the result that for many *telespectadores* their first television experience took place in a collective setting.

Television reception: social change and acoustic event

Writing in a special issue of *TeleRadio*, in observance of the ten-year anniversary of TVE, Jesús Frago del Toro waxes nostalgic in evoking memories of the early days of TV viewing as a communal experience, as he describes the growing presence of TV across the city, visible first of all in the “forest” of antennas sprouting from the roofs of buildings where:

[d]e cada antena partía un hilo que iba a colarse por la ventana del piso de don José o del abogado del cuarto y de la viuda del sexto. Los amigos de don José, las amistades del abogado del cuarto y las de la viuda del sexto acudían a invadir los pisos de los respectivos para ver aquella cosa nueva, aquel invento sorprendente, aquel cine metido en casa. Y encima, había que ofrecerles una cerveza, un whiskey, o una copa de anís. Pero compensaba, que el tener una tele era signo exterior de desahogo económico, de buen tono y de persona avanzada y progresista. (1966, 9)⁶

In many quarters, the arrival of television in Spain was greeted as evidence of progress, both cause and effect in the growth of a burgeoning consumer society. José Carlos Rueda Laffond and María del Mar Chicharro Merayo see no mere coincidence in the fact that the first television broadcast came less than a year before the first SEAT 600 rolled off the assembly line (2006, 44). Frago del Toro reads the expansion of TV ownership as a unifying force and concrete evidence of the unstoppable advance of prosperity, as the antennas belonging to the abovementioned *abogado* and don José

[s]e vieron acompañados de otras antenas. Los del tercero ... y los del quinto. Y lo que es el nivel de vida, un día se la compró el portero. ... Luego la televisión se fue, derechita en diagonal, hasta Zaragoza y Barcelona. Y siguió extendiéndose. ... En los tejados, enjambres de antenas, bosques de antenas, antenas a millares. ... La televisión estaba en todas partes. Ya como algo cotidiano, popular, al alcance de todos. (1966, 9)

TeleRadio, the official publication of the state parent organization of TVE, in its early issues also included regular reports from readers in Madrid and Barcelona on signal strength, with complaints over fuzzy pictures and garbled sound (“periodos de verdadero desastre”) gradually giving way to affirmations of much improved sound and image quality (“Cartas al director” 1960, 4). An article published in *Triunfo* by the Catalan novelist and regular contributor to the journal, Ignacio Agustí, links the technological progress achieved by television with its larger social impact, hailing the medium as the fulfillment of a promise only partially realized by earlier forms of audio-phonetic technology (1963, 34). He too begins his reflections by remarking on the seeming ubiquity of antennas, that “nueva arboladura metálica en la altura de las casas ... extravagantes y variadas figuras, lineales y geométricas, con un breve destello de sol, como arbitrarios pararrayos de formas paralelas y entrecruzadas”, continuing: “Como el rayo se mete en las casas, hasta el fondo del pozo, y queda allí sojuzgado, así se mete hoy la imagen en los interiores domésticos” (34). Melding technology and nature, his description seeks to convey the power and novelty of television as “un fenómeno absolutamente nuevo, que tiene innumerables implicaciones sociales, incalculables consecuencias de todo orden” (34).

Television is portrayed as the inheritor of previous “primitive” sound devices, such as the homemade crystal radio that “ponía de pronto a nuestro alcance lo que estaba más allá del silencio inexcrutable [sic] de los espacios” (34). But where early radio required the individual’s retreat into the solitary sonic realm of the *radioescucha* (headphones), television has achieved the seemingly unthinkable: “unir la imagen visual a los ecos indecisos, hasta crear en torno nuestro la vigencia y la presencia del realismo circundante” (34). While cinema’s role in the mechanical reproduction and transmission of synchronized sound and image remains unacknowledged in the piece, what impresses the author is the domestic setting for the deployment of TV technology, in which “[l]a autenticidad de un mundo que podemos escuchar y que podemos presenciar en imágenes forma parte de nuestro domicilio y de nuestra vida cotidiana” (34). For Agustí, it is the fusion of image and sound in television as domestic device that marks its superiority to the phonograph or radio as well as its power to compel attention through the delivery of a totalizing audiovisual “world”. In this telling, television claims an idealized place at the center of family life:

En centenares de millares de casas y aun en millones de casas de nuestro país hay un televisor, que es puesto en funcionamiento para ser contemplado en colectividad doméstica y que resulta ser compañía familiar y centro de gravedad de los ocios para los grandes y los chicos. (34)

We are far indeed from the notion of television in the home as background noise as described in the characterizations of “mature” television ecologies by Altman and others. Inclusive rather than exclusive in its domestic address, television acts to assemble an imagined community of spectators, universal and simultaneous in time, space and socioeconomic status, through the medium’s creation of “una imagen universal de coincidencias, un lenguaje sinónimo del que participan gentes de toda condición, en el que se encuentran socialmente unidos los más dispares elementos de la sociedad” (34).

Less taken by the utopian potential of the new medium in the abstract, other writers and commentators cast a more critical eye on the reality of Spanish television and its pernicious effects on social habits and the disposition of public and private space. Introduced by a back-cover blurb proclaiming television “el más perfecto medio de incomunicación”, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s 1973 study, *El libro gris de televisión española*, leaves little doubt about the author’s orientation toward the new form. In the progression from print to audiovisual media, first radio and then television, writes Vázquez Montalbán, the relation between text and receiver devolves into one of increasing passivity on the part of the latter. In contrast to the freedom exercised by the reader who can and must choose whether and what to read, the television spectator finds him or herself in “una situación de hipnosis ante un poder telúrico que va actuando sobre su subconsciente ... que no puede ser rechazado” (1973, 14). Also attentive to the broader social implications of the rise of TV, Vázquez Montalbán decries its role in the loss in interpersonal connectivity and exchange, with traditional spaces of social interaction, “plazas, parques, tabernas, cafés”, displaced by “el cerco de una familia de individuos obligatoriamente mudos en torno a un televisor” (15). Dominating the acoustic space and silencing other voices, television wields its hypnotic power, in this view, not as a spur to communal sociability and family unity but as a force for entrapment and isolation. Within the home, television is further seen as responsible for redirecting actions and activities and reconfiguring domestic space:

El televisor preside la vida familiar, arrincona la radio, centra la confluencia de miradas . . . [C]rea una nueva valoración de territorialidades dentro de un hogar, modifica el lenguaje decorativo, modifica incluso el diseño de los muebles, modifica finalmente el moverse, hablar, actuar, de los individuos de una familia que había mantenido estas normas prácticamente inalteradas desde la sociedad tribal. (Vázquez Montalbán 1973, 63–64)

As to the television content capable of generating the hypnotic hold on spectators, suppressing conversation and replacing radio as the dominant form of domestic media, Vázquez Montalbán points to the increasing popularity and influence of US telefilms. Spanish television had become the largest importer of US series among the European networks and the viewer surveys commissioned by TVE during the 1960s attest to the audience preference for programs such as *Perry Mason*, *Bonanza*, *The Untouchables* and *The Fugitive*.⁷ Warning against the “dependence” on US sources, he signals their creation of a “mitología” and “héroes que conllevan un símbolo y conforman un mito del que se desprenden unos valores en todo ligados a la concepción que el *establishment* norteamericano tiene de la vida, el mundo y los hombres” (51).

Similar concerns about the alienating effects of US programming had already been expressed by commentators on the right, although in a more overtly nationalistic key. In a recurring column in *ABC*, *Pantalla semanal*, TIC expresses exasperation with “[e]l aluvión irremediable de cintas americanas” that lack a “mínima relación con nuestro sentido de vida. . . . [N]os trae unas situaciones, unos problemas y unas reacciones tan distantes de la mentalidad celtibérica que ya está bien” (1965, 51). Juan Luis Calleja (1966, 35), also writing in *ABC*, criticizes the government’s failure to recognize the power of television to transform daily routines, opinions, tastes and even language. In terms that directly anticipate Vázquez Montalbán’s he describes the consequences whereby “los mejores amigos del hombre (la conversación familiar, el libro, el estudio, la soledad fértil y la meditación silenciosa)” have been “acorralados, arrinconados, disminuidos” (35). By leaving the development of television dependent on private capital rather than a “monopolio de todos los españoles”, that is, under state control, the result has been mediocrity, a commercially driven programming that, according to Calleja, favors the noisy bustle of “lo bullanguero, lo fácil y lo americano” (35) over the acoustic habits, whether conversation or silence, that characterized a “previous generation of sounds” (Sterne 2012, 1).

Juan Francisco Gutiérrez Lozano’s oral history of the first decade and a half of TV viewership in Andalusia, *La televisión en el recuerdo* (2006), provides further insights into the reception of television among actual audiences and its influence on habits, behaviors and the larger social fabric.⁸ His study offers qualitative and quantitative data on the first viewing experiences of spectators in the region, with findings that show that women primarily experienced TV in private homes – either their own or those of family or neighbors – while men were more likely to recall their first TV viewing as taking place in a bar or store (2006, 186–187). Audience interviews also detail the ability of TV to convene impromptu gatherings on the street, with rows of people gathered in front of shop windows for an hour or more, before the flickering image and muffled sound of one or more sets showing the same image. Banking on the novelty value of TV, stores of all types, not only those selling appliances, embraced its attraction as a “reclamo comercial”, this despite complaints over crowds blocking the walkways and the din coming from TV loudspeakers (190).

These specific social and spatial contexts and circumstances of television viewing (and *hearing*) strongly conditioned the impact of television in recasting the boundaries between private and public, home and street. Sound, more than the visual, is observed to play a particularly disruptive role in its potential assault on eardrums, sleep and social harmony. Gutiérrez Lozano reproduces a letter to the editor published in the Málaga newspaper *Sur* on 2 March 1962 in which the author complains about the sound blaring from a TV situated in the window of a local clothing store, “el cual comienza a funcionar a primera hora de la tarde hasta el final de la emisión, o sea más de las doce de la noche” (as quoted in Gutiérrez Lozano 2006, 191). What he objects to most is the unconstrained nature of the sound that impinges on the public space, affecting neighbors in their homes as well as other businesses:

Esto no sería anormal cuando fuese dentro de un café o similar, pero lo que creo que no debe ser permitido es que pongan un altavoz en la puerta del establecimiento, molestando enormemente a toda aquella persona que por diversas causas se tiene que levantar temprano ... y a los comercios de alrededor que tienen que soportar hasta la hora de cierre el continuo ruido del altavoz. (As quoted in Gutiérrez Lozano 2006, 191)

Another letter writer, on 7 July 1962, asks why private homeowners should not be governed by the same noise ordinances that limit the sound level of bars and cafés:

¿Hay derecho a que determinados señores coloquen los televisores en sus jardines o terrazas, y haciendo desprecio a las más elementales reglas de convivencia entre vecinos, e importándoles poco que están impidiendo el descanso y el sueño de los mismos, tengan sus receptores funcionando a todo volumen, día tras día hasta el final del programa? ... ¿no hay unas ordenanzas municipales que prohíban estos excesos y que a determinada hora de la noche deben cesar el estruendo y ruido para que el vecindario descanse y duerma? (As quoted in Gutiérrez Lozano 2006, 239)

A 1964 letter in *ABC*, signed by “un teleoyente forzado”, strikes a similar note, directed at the offending neighbor:

Por favor, vecino, baje el tono del televisor, ya que tenemos diariamente una ensalada de tiros, música, anuncios, etc. ... Podría repetir palabra por palabra todo lo que dicen, tal es la claridad con que se percibe. ... Que tengan en cuenta que ahora se abren las ventanas y Mr. Perry Mason, se introduce, pongo por caso, en casas propias y ajenas. (“Llamamiento” 1964, 56)

These repeated and insistent complaints make clear the potentially transgressive effects of television sound, unconstrained by walls and yet unchecked by social norms appropriate to the new medium.

The “war of accents” comes to the small screen

The hostility to offending sounds and foreign speech, especially as amplified via audiovisual media, has a long history in Spain. In their studies of linguistic nationalism in Spanish cinema, Ana Ballester Casado (2000) and Marta García Carrión (2013) point to written and especially oral language as a highly contested symbolic terrain in the relation between the *madre patria* and her former American colonies in the years following independence. The ensuing battles over linguistic origins and authority would take on added cultural and economic significance in the wake of “crisis” provoked in world cinema by the introduction of synchronized sound and spoken dialogue (Jarvinen 2012, 1). As the Hollywood studios

sought to satisfy the transatlantic demand for films in Spanish through the production of so-called Spanish versions adapted from English language originals, they failed to anticipate the national and regional differences that divided the Spanish-speaking market. US trade publications like *Variety* offer ample documentation of the conflicts that arose. An article from December 1929 taps into the difficulties in finding a “general accent” to accommodate spectators from Spain as well as across the Americas: “Actors having a Castilian accent are satisfying just a small portion of the Spanish speaking countries. ... All speak Spanish understandable to each other, but Hollywood is worrying about how to get away from the Castilian accent monopoly” (“Coast Worrying” 1929, 4). Just a month later in January 1930, a Madrid-based correspondent gives voice to Spanish audiences’ rejection of “[t]he doggerel Spanish of Latin American artists [which] is difficult to understand here” (“Spanish Film Actors” 1930, 4).

The reaction by Spanish journalists, film professionals and other guardians of national cultural and linguistic integrity was no less charged, or sectarian. Writing in 1930 in the pages of *Popular Film*, Juan Piqueras stressed the need in the “talkies” for “una dicción perfecta del idioma”, a requirement which would naturally exclude “todos los argentinos, todos los mejicanos, todos los chilenos, todos los americanos del sur, cuyo castellano es deficiente” (as quoted in García Carrión 2013, 266). Against those, be they American producers or Latin American intellectuals, who might question the dominance of Castilian Spanish on economic, demographic or geopolitical grounds, another writer, Armand Guerra, also in *Popular Film*, asserted the superiority of the “magnífica y única lengua castellana de Cervantes” and “el respeto y la consideración suprema de que goza en el mundo entero nuestra rica, fonética y melodiosa lengua única castellana” (as quoted in García Carrión 2013, 268–269).⁹ Tomás Navarro Tomás, the most distinguished Spanish linguist of his day, would also weigh in on the subject with an essay and subsequent book entitled *El idioma español en el cine parlante: ¿Español o hispanoamericano?* In arguing for the former, he celebrates the universality of the Spanish language in all its diverse national and regional forms and expression while insisting on the adoption in film of “la pronunciación normal española ... el resultado de una larga elaboración histórica y literaria” as the unifying factor among regional variants (as quoted in García Carrión 2013, 274).

Advances in audiovisual technology were soon to offer an apparent remedy to the challenge to Peninsular Spanish linguistic hegemony, thanks to refinements in the technique of dubbing, or vocal replacement, the substitution of the original performer’s voice with a second actor’s voice in the dubbing studio. While the practice of dubbing in Spain is closely associated with the Franco regime, whose 1941 imposition of obligatory dubbing became an important arm of film censorship, the first dubbing studio on Spanish soil was established in Barcelona in 1934 (Ávila 1997, 74) with thirteen studios in operation nationally by 1935 (Jarvinen 2012, 112). Although the blanket prohibition on the projection of films with dialogue in languages other than Spanish was lifted in 1967, the combination of ingrained habit among spectators who had grown up with the practice and an economically potent dubbing industry has meant that the majority of foreign films in Spain continue to be dubbed.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the preference for dubbing over other forms of cinema translation such as subtitles is read by many scholars as evidence of broader cultural attitudes and orientations, reflecting a “relationship to the foreign, with certain forms of nationalism preferring the cultural and linguistic insularity [reinforced by] dubbing” (Nornes 2007, 190–191).

These early battles over language provide an essential context for understanding the response in the 1960s and early 1970s to dubbed programs on Spanish TV as the accent wars flared anew with the arrival of US telefilms. How was it, after more than twenty years of linguistic “protectionism”, of hearing only the highly standardized speech of Spanish dubbed versions of foreign films on national screens, that TVE opened the door – in homes, bars and teleclubs – to the sound of other voices and accents? TV historian Josep María Baget Herms (1993) summarizes the decisions, so contrary to the preferences of Spanish audiences and the “teoría filosófica” that inspired the 1941 order (Ávila 1997, 202) that brought US telefilms dubbed primarily in Mexico and Puerto Rico to Spanish TV. The first measures were part of a government decree that authorized the importation of films for television broadcast and also opened the door to the more significant presence of TV series from abroad. To that point and before the introduction of videotape recording to TVE in 1963, domestic production was restricted to live broadcasts; the introduction of imported films and series had the effect, writes Baget Herms, of relieving “la tensión de la emisión en directo” for producers and studio personnel while also helping to fill the expanded broadcast day and, at the same time, attract the audiences prized by commercial sponsors (1993, 49). As to the translation of imported telefilms, the very first series, appearing in 1957, were dubbed into Spanish for both the domestic and Spanish American markets by a small US company located in Spain. However, strong opposition from the Sindicato Nacional del Espectáculo led to an order in fall 1958 that prohibited the sale and exhibition of programs dubbed in Spain outside the nation’s borders (Pérez Ornia 1989, 316; Baget Herms 1993, 49). Reduced to a single client, TVE, Spanish providers could not support the costs of domestic dubbing. The US studios moved to commission the production of Spanish dubbed versions of their series directly from companies in Mexico and Puerto Rico. Reviving the dream of satisfying a single transatlantic market, they implemented the use of a “general accent” often described (and denounced) as “español neutro”, a spoken Spanish that suppressed the most distinctive national/regional features in favor of a standard accent and vocabulary.

If the content of US series prompted criticism over themes and characters inimical to the Spanish mentality and way of life, the accompanying “invasión del castellano neutro”, in the words of dubbing scholar Alejandro Ávila (1997, 201), provoked waves of criticism over the threats to national (linguistic) identity posed by foreign sounds. In editorials, opinion pieces and letters to the editor appearing in *ABC*, the newspaper of record during the Franco years, the authors expressed with varying degrees of alarm their concerns and anxieties. Some of these earwitnesses argued that the dialogues heard in telefilms were imposing an impoverished version of Spanish, “blanducha, imprecisa y malsonante” (López Sancho 1970b, 28), with the effect that “están modificando su [Castilian’s] vocabulario y sintaxis con un repertorio de insipideces que repugna la riqueza léxica y potencia expresiva del castellano” (García Pavón 1969, 3). In the same column just cited, the novelist Francisco García Pavón further invokes a cluster of ethno-linguistic stereotypes in contrasting the Latin American Spanish employed in the dubbed programs, syrupy and by implication feminized, “con acento y melaza criollos ... corriente a los espectadores de allende la mar oceánica”, with the brawny, masculine and savory language of “los íberos, criaderos de un idioma macho, rezumante y salsero cual plato rural” for whom the Latin cadences and pronunciation “nos cae[n] sozo como melocotón en

almíbar, o castellano hablado con flauta" (1969, 3). The recourse to culinary metaphors, a cultural referent rooted in the domestic and corporeal, reveals the intimate stakes of the battles over television language. The sense of attachment to, and threatened loss of, Spanish sounds in the face of "voces disonantes" is palpable in writer and theater critic Lorenzo López Sancho's lament for "[n]uestras elles, nuestras equis, nuestras ces, nuestras jotas, nuestras ches ... destruidas por la poderosa influencia de los filmes doblados" (1970b, 28). Commentators also came armed with a detailed list of linguistic offenses perpetrated by programs "plagadas de 'occiso'", "vamos a regresarle", "que bueno que viniste", "rasurar", "correcto" and "mil expresiones más detestables, que nos destrozan los oídos" (Tachín 1963, 66; Gimeno 1967, 10–11; López Sancho 1970a, 14).

Another frequent theme, addressed in various letters to the editor, stressed the pernicious influence of television in modeling (incorrect) speech and vocal sounds for the youngest and most susceptible viewing populations:

Ya sabemos la facilidad que tiene el niño para imitar todo lo que ve y oye. Y es realmente una pena oír hablar a muchos niños con ese acento afectado de todas las películas de serie que nos ponen en televisión. (Castillo Gamallo 1968, 3)

"Una vez más hay que insistir ... sobre la nefasta influencia, sobre todo en los niños, del lenguaje que se emplea en las películas americanas de Televisión" (De Burgos 1965, 3). An ABC editorial on "La vigilancia del idioma" joined the chorus in urging the "defensa del idioma cuando todavía es tiempo de que los niños y los adolescentes, que son los que con más interés fijan su atención en la pequeña pantalla, no sufran el impacto de tantas incorrecciones, barbarismos y neologismos" (1964, 56), while the always militant López Sancho extended the warnings to the risks posed by "deformaciones prosódicas que son inmediatamente asimiladas por millones de televidentes de bajo nivel social y cultural" (1970b, 28).

In an escalating attack on the language employed in the dubbed telefilms, several contributors linked the programs' presumed betrayal of linguistic norms and standards with a larger process of cultural colonization. Decrying the "invasión de expresiones y giros horrendos", López Sancho points to the centrality of language to thought and identity: "No podemos pensar si no es mediante palabras, mediante estructuras lingüísticas. Al dejarnos colonizar en esas palabras y en esas estructuras es nuestro propio pensamiento el que queda colonizado" (1970a, 14). In increasingly charged rhetoric he rails in successive articles against "la tele" as "la quinta columna de nuestro idioma" (López Sancho 1970b, 28) and "el caballo de Troya del idioma, colado en cada casa por la televisión" (López Sancho 1972, 26). Another writer draws a link between the detrimental influence of "los filmes hablados de la televisión" and the "desvirtuación" of the Spanish language in the tourist zones of the Costa Brava which leave him feeling like a foreigner in his own country (Tojeras 1966, 21, 23). Many blame the policies and direction of Televisión Española, with one commentator fiercely denouncing TVE's role in giving free rein to a "lenguaje bastardo y encanallado en los doblajes" (Calleja 1970, 14) while García Pavón questions the role of "nuestras autoridades culturales y televisivas" in a process of reverse colonization that "permita que los sudamericanos nos impongan su fonética y melodía" (1969, 3).

In an extended essay in ABC, film director Rafael Gil charges TVE with selling out Spanish interests (1967, 38–39).¹¹ Describing the juxtaposition of a televised slogan urging

audiences to “Compr[ar] productos españoles” with the broadcast of a foreign telefilm, he underlines the contradictory messaging embedded in the Spanish televisual flow, in Williams’s original sense of the term. The patriotic exhortation to “buy Spanish” (38) has little chance to secure its hold in the spectators’ consciousness, he writes, when their attention is immediately captured by “los primeros acordes musicales que anuncian el ‘telefilm’ de turno” (38). Nevertheless, the first spoken scenes bring a new awareness of the disjunction between domestic and foreign:

a los pocos segundos de haberse olvidado el “slogan” motivo de este comentario tenga uno que acordarse otra vez de él ... [p]orque los actores han empezado a hablar. ¿En un idioma extraño? Eso sería lo de menos. ... Lo malo es que “hablan en español”. (39)

But the Spanish in question is not

el español que se aprende en las escuelas o en los hogares, sino de una jerga indefinible ... que en casi nada coincide con el idioma de Cervantes. Y sucede así porque estas películitas están dobladas en países hispanoamericanos y por personas nada rigurosas en el empleo del castellano. (39)

Gil’s discussion has notable value for its detailed depiction of the discontinuities and disruptions that characterized the acoustic flow of Spanish television during the period. In his close analysis of US television programming, Williams had identified a “mutual transfer” between advertising formulas and the ostensibly unrelated content of television news or narrative programs, a combination that transmits the underlying “meaning and values of a specific culture” (2004, 120). Gil’s reaction to the juxtaposition of US and Spanish sourced material reveals the anomalous nature of Spanish television. Framing the evening’s programming as a sequence of sounds, his account further highlights the dissonant impact of the speech heard in the dubbed dialogue as perceived against the homogeneous soundscape of Spanish voices across the broadcast day. He also evokes the seductive power of TV series’ musical themes – described by Lury as “complex audio signifiers of the style, pace [and] structuring narrative of the programs they identify” (2005, 75) – to instantly transport spectators to story worlds often distant in space and time. In the normal functioning of a developed broadcast television system, writes Altman, television sound exists in sync with what he terms “household flow”, the rhythm and routines of domestic daily life (1986, 44). During the 1960s in Spain, in contrast, TVE’s evening lineup, far from harmonizing and naturalizing the “foreign” presence in the home, kept these noisy differences on display.

Conclusion

In 1973, the era of Latin American dubbed telefilms on TVE officially came to an end (Ávila 1997, 205). From then forward, the non-Spanish language series and feature films transmitted on the expanding network of terrestrial, cable, satellite and streaming television services would be dubbed in domestic studios into standard Peninsular *castellano*, or less frequently, into Catalan or Basque. At the same time, TV has made it possible in Spanish homes to hear the voices of *hispanoparlantes* from across the globe. For sociolinguist María del Rosario Llorente Pinto, the success of Latin American *telenovelas* has brought about an increased acceptance of different varieties of *español americano* (2007, 951) with television assuming a powerful, and positive, role: “Las ondas han

rebasado las fronteras políticas y nos han puesto en contacto con un español de distintas melodías, de diferentes acentos y con palabras y expresiones desconocidas” (950). Nevertheless, as Paul Julian Smith has documented, the soundscape of Spanish television is, in some respects, more segregated than ever, with Latin American *telenovelas* inevitably slotted into the afternoon viewing hours of the *sobremesa* (2009, 123), at some distance from the more prestigious prime-time programming.¹²

Eva Bravo, a linguistics professor at the University of Seville, offers a pessimistic assessment of the transcultural dynamics at play in the media soundscape in Spain. Focusing on dubbing preferences and practices in Latin America and Spain, she notes the divergence between the two. Where both Latin American and US Latino productions and producers opt mainly for “[u]na traducción consensuada hecha en un español considerado neutro o internacional” those in Spain more often insist on a “doblaje propio utilizando exclusivamente una modalidad peninsular” (2009, 88). While this trend toward linguistic isolationism has immediate economic consequences (89), Bravo warns of the greater dangers of cultural localism and complacency in the face of a clearly shifting axis of linguistic uses and norms away from the “vieja metrópoli” and toward the American continents (96–98).

Although repeatedly breached, the televisual sound barriers protecting Spanish ears and sensibilities remain stubbornly pervasive. The response to a spring 2017 strike by members of the major television dubbing unions in Madrid brings fresh evidence of the strength of ingrained audience prejudices and habits. A press report details the profane reaction by one user on Twitter to the debut episode of the much anticipated second season of the Netflix science fiction series, *Sense8*, in which the Peninsular dubbed version was replaced by a Latin American dialogue track: “Que narices pasa con #Sense8 que de repente cambia el doblaje al castellano Latino, @NetflixES me habéis jodido el Primer capítulo!!” (Medina 2017). One can imagine that the guardians of culture and language writing in *ABC* and elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s, although no doubt decrying the influence of the media in the debased language wielded by the angry *telespectador* in 2017, would surely endorse the sentiments expressed.

Notes

1. Clearly much has changed in terms of technology, programming and viewing habits as regards television consumption today.
2. Williams (2004, 74–75) reports analyzing the programming of BBC 1 and 2, the local channel IBA, Anglia, Norwich in Great Britain and the public channel KQED and commercial station ABC, both in San Francisco, during one week in March 1973.
3. My phrasing here deliberately evokes the 1960s tourism campaign slogan, “Spain is different”, promoted by then Spanish Minister of Information and Tourism Manuel Fraga, that sought to turn the country’s perceived otherness (as politically and economically backward and isolated from the rest of Europe and European modernity) into a source of attraction (exotic, culturally authentic). As explored by Afinoguénova and Martí-Olivella (2008) and Crumbaugh (2010), the discourses generated around tourism provide insight into the convergences and contradictions between political strategies, economic structures, social values and cultural production and identity during the period that also saw the introduction of television in Spain.
4. Pavlović stresses the role of television as an advertising medium, “more prevalent in Spain than other European countries”, as a distinguishing feature of the country’s headlong pursuit of economic development beginning in the late 1950s (2011, 98).
5. Attempts to construct an alternative financial model, similar to that employed in Britain and Germany, based on the collection of TV license or canon fees were finally abandoned in late

- 1965 in the face of weak enforcement of the tax. See Palacio (2001) and the RTVE website, “Cincuenta años míticos TVE” (2018), which reports that the costs of collecting the fee ultimately exceeded the revenue obtained.
6. The 1962 film, *Atraco a las tres*, provides a different perspective on the attraction exercised on friends and neighbors by the possession of a TV. Offering evidence of the same picaresque spirit that motivates *Atraco*’s motley gang of would-be robbers, bank secretary Enriqueta, played by Gracita Morales, runs a side business in which she charges admission to the TV broadcast of a crime drama. In *Escenas de cine mudo*, novelist Julio Llamazares (2006) plumbs the real-life memories of another scene of collective viewing in evoking the arrival of television in the small Leonese mining town of his youth. See also the study on the representation of television in Spanish films of the 1960s by Camporesi (1999).
 7. See “Cincuenta años míticos TVE” (2018) and Vázquez Montalbán (1973, 51, 66). A 1961 survey of viewership published in *TeleRadio* (“Encuesta” 1961) shows *Perry Mason* in fourth place behind live broadcasts of football, bullfights and the weekend musical variety show, *Gran parada*. Other American series in the top ten were *Rin-Tin-Tin* (#8) and *Sea Hunt* (#10). Palacio summarizes the results of further surveys conducted in 1964 and 1966, which also reflect “un cierto predominio de los telefilmes angloamericanos entre los programas más valorados” (61–67). He also explains the frequency of and investment in surveys during the period as an indication that “en España desde los tiempos más iniciales el estudio de los públicos televisivos se ha concebido y realizado al servicio de los intereses de la industria publicitaria” (67).
 8. Reception studies such as Gutiérrez Lozano’s provide a corrective or at least qualification to the view of media consumption as a process undergone by passive spectators and as a top-down phenomenon, driven by producers and distributors: “Como ya se reconoce, siempre dentro de unos márgenes, por parte de los estudios de recepción, las audiencias son activas, igual que la memoria” (2006, 27).
 9. As García Carrión notes, many of the most ardent defenders of Castilian linguistic purity such as Piqueras and Guerra were Marxists or anarchists (2013, 269).
 10. The “normalization” of other languages and the establishment of regional channels has expanded the practice of dubbing of both films and TV series from exclusively *castellano* to also include Catalan and Basque.
 11. An October 1966 interview with the then director general of RTVE, Jesús Aparicio Bernal, published in *TeleRadio*, signals the general awareness of complaints over “foreign” dubbing and gives a good sense of the official policy on the practice. As we have seen, the first line of defense rests on economic grounds, given that

[e]l hacer el doblaje de todos los telefilmes en España significaría gastar en ello una suma muy superior a la que nos cuesta la película misma ya sonorizada, sin que, además, no pudiésemos utilizar esta versión más que nosotros. . . . Las empresas españolas difícilmente pueden resistir los costes con que trabajan las de Méjico y Puerto Rico.
 12. Restriction to the late afternoon has nonetheless hardly been an obstacle to achieving remarkable levels of viewership. Llorente Pinto reports that a number of episodes of the Colombian *novela*, *Yo soy Betty la fea*, drew up to six million spectators in Spain (2007, 949).

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