

ON THE ROAD TO SOMEWHERE by Toby Miller

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As I write, I'm on the road in Colombia from Barranquilla ([see this impressive citizen journalist seeking to enter Shakira's home there](#)) to Cartagena de Indias, which Francis Drake briefly captured from the Spanish in 1586.

Cartagena's cruel, crude, and failed siege by the English 150 years later was embarrassingly, controversially, and temporarily celebrated when Charles Philip Arthur Windsor/Duke of Rothesay/Prince of Wales/Duke of Cornwall/Baron of Renfrew/Earl of Carrick/Prince and Great Steward of Scotland/Lord of the Isles/Earl Chester or whatever his current aliases are (you know the guy—baptised with water from the Jordan River?—I've left out all the military ranks because we do love brevity), [visited last year](#).

The vehicles I make this journey in are frequently stopped to ensure there are no arms or kidnap victims aboard. Sometimes I have to prove I'm traveling voluntarily. Not this time.

I'm headed to [Cartagena's Mercado Cultural del Caribe](#). It showcases music, drama, dance, and other artistic talent in this extraordinary place. There is a scholarly segment, dedicated to the culture industries, which is where I come in; leaden-footed by contrast.

Next week I'll be in my beloved Mexico. I have two events to attend, both in Guadalajara. It is in Jalisco province, scene of some of the terrible [narco-violence that has migrated from Colombia over the past few years](#). Some distance from the debates over whether torture provides useable intelligence, these people torture for fun. It is autotelic.

My first conference there is a distance-education event, the [22nd Encuentro Internacional de Educación a Distancia](#) and [2nd Encuentro de Educación y Cultura en Ambientes Virtuales](#). I'm running a workshop on the culture industries and offering another keynote, this time on greenwashing culture and the way that corporate social responsibility shields business-leech polluters under cover of doing good by doing culture.

The second congress is TVMorfosis: [Creatividad en la era digital](#), a remarkable event, now in its seventh year. Run by many prominent people, among them the [noted TV scholar Guillermo Orozco](#), television scholars will be familiar with the work published as part of TVMorfosis and other contributions from Guillermo and his crew, such as the [outstanding Orbitel publications](#).

TVMorfosis does something that Anglos, especially in the United States and 'England,' find very difficult: it brings together major figures from media management, government regulation, and radical academia (honorable mention to Janet Wasko's "What Is...?" conferences).



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We're all familiar with events that convoke managers and bureaucrats and perhaps invite compliant economists, law professors, or aca-fans.

TVMorfosis puts hegemony into dialogue with genuinely opposed views. Executives and administrators smile more or less faintly as political economists, textual analysts, historians, and audience researchers confront them. The attending faculty are far from swooning in the presence of corporate and state money and authority.

By contrast, consider BBC Radio 4's *The Media Show*, hosted by Steve Hewlett ('[a topical programme about the fast-changing media world](#)'). You will see a sharp difference.

Every now and then, Hewlett interviews a prominent media professor, such as [Annabelle Sreberny](#) or [Natalie Fenton](#), but that is generally because they are experts about a region of the world or protagonists in a domestic controversy that is in the news.

Otherwise, the only academics welcome are superannuated journalists and newsreaders who don't publish in refereed journals or with significant scholarly houses and lack basic research qualifications.

Consultants, executives, and regulators hold sway. Many are articulate and interesting, but few hold views that rock any boats other than in a Schumpeterian sense offers a loving account by credulous chorines) that celebrates the rise and fall of fractions of the capitalist class as if this were of more than passing social importance.



So take a peek at TVMorfosis, distance education, and the Mercado Cultural. They proffer different ways of challenging the devotion to both the magic thing called 'industry' that is making UK higher education cheesier and cheesier by the hour, and the failed relationship between the social sciences and US media.

That is, of course, if people think they can learn anything about media studies from Colombia and Mexico ...

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