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Promoting a Theatre in Crisis: Poster Design and the Marketisation of Culture on the Madrid Stage

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Abstract:

This article examines a paratextual element of stage productions, the promotional poster, a detail often overlooked in analyses of theatre. I show that, far from being of minor importance for academic approaches to the subject, the study of posters sheds light on many of the concerns of the industry, and can reveal more about such matters than the study of a play text or performance.

The industrial concerns at the heart of this article are the recent economic crisis and the austerity measures taken by successive governments to resolve it. I focus on the specific case of Madrid, where the three tiers of government (state, autonomous community and municipality) overlap to the greatest extent in the domain of publicly-owned theatre, where there is a prominent private theatre industry, and where I have been able to investigate and evaluate in person the question of the visibility of theatre publicity. My analysis of the posters of a number of publicly-owned theatres reveals a burgeoning culture of branding in response to falling audience numbers and ticket sales, a commercial initiative at odds with the perception of culture as a public good in the 1978 Spanish Constitution. I also show that economic hardship in the capital's private sector is manifest in the aesthetics of publicity for productions at such theatres. Poster design, I argue, is an element of theatre in which the broader move, in both public and private sectors, towards the corporatisation of Spanish culture and its devaluation as a means by which to edify the population, are not merely explicit but also contested.

KEYWORDS: THEATRE, ECONOMIC CRISIS, POSTERS, MADRID, BRANDING, CULTURE.

Resumen:

Este artículo examina un componente paratextual de las artes escénicas, el cartel publicitario, un detalle a menudo ignorado en análisis del teatro. Demostramos que, lejos de ser de poca importancia para los acercamientos académicos al tema, el estudio de los carteles arroja luz sobre muchas de las preocupaciones de la industria, y puede descubrir más acerca de las mismas que el estudio de un texto dramático o un montaje. Las preocupaciones industriales que son el foco de este artículo son la reciente crisis económica y las medidas de austeridad adoptadas por gobiernos sucesivos para resolverla. Nos centramos en el caso de Madrid, donde los tres niveles de gobierno (estado, comunidad autónoma y municipio) se superponen más ampliamente dentro del dominio del teatro público, donde hay una fuerte industria teatral privada, y donde hemos podido investigar y evaluar en persona la cuestión de la visibilidad de la publicidad teatral. Nuestro análisis de los carteles de un número de teatros públicos muestra una cultura creciente de 'branding' ante la bajada en la asistencia de espectadores y en las recaudaciones, una iniciativa comercial que no concuerda con la percepción de la cultura como bien común según la Constitución Española de 1978. Además demostramos que las privaciones económicas en el sector privado de la capital se manifiestan en la estética de la publicidad para montajes en dichos teatros. El diseño de los carteles, sostenemos, es un componente del teatro en que el movimiento más extenso en el sector público y en el privado hacia el corporativismo dentro de la cultura

española, y la devaluación de la cultura como medio por el que edificar al pueblo, no son simplemente explícitos sino también un sitio donde dichas transformaciones se debaten.

PALABRAS CLAVE: TEATRO, CRISIS ECONÓMICA, CARTELES, MADRID, BRANDING, CULTURA.

‘Los poderes públicos promoverán y tutelarán el acceso a la cultura, a la que todos tienen derecho’

Article 44.1 of the Spanish Constitution, 1978

(Subsecretaría del Ministerio del Interior 1987, 17)

Cries of ‘crisis’ are virtually a leitmotif in the discourse surrounding Spanish theatre throughout its history. While in the past such lamentations were directed largely at theatre’s supposed immoral content, creative dearth and/or political inefficacy, the economic crisis (triggered in 2008 when Spain’s housing bubble burst, exposing corrupt banking practices, unsustainable government expenditure and a huge trade deficit) shook the theatre to its foundations and in ways not experienced before. Prior to this moment, the industry across Spain had benefitted from some twenty years of increased public spending (Colomer 2013, 51), and reached levels of activity unprecedented in the democratic period. Indeed, the yearly *Anuario de Estadísticas Culturales* produced by the Ministry of Culture and the SGAE *Anuario* published by the Sociedad General de Autores y Editores reveal ten years of vast, uninterrupted growth in each of the three principal areas of theatre activity quantified in such reports. Between 1997 and 2008, the number of performances surged from under 38,000 to more than 68,500 per year, and the number of spectators from less than 9.7 million to over 16.6 million. In the same period, box-office takings rose from 12.28 billion pesetas (equivalent to 73.8 million euros) to just over 200 million euros.¹ Afterwards, however, the number of performances fell on an annual basis to under 47,000 in 2015. Between 2009 and

¹ These figures are taken from the *Anuario SGAE* for 2011 (Sociedad General de Autores y Editores 2011, 4-6) and the *Anuario SGAE* for 1999 (Sociedad General de Autores y Editores 1999, 45, 55 and 63).

2013, the number of spectators slumped to 11.2 million, and box-office takings to 169 million euros.² The state budget for theatre during the same period fell 32.9% (Rubio-Arostegui and Rius-Ulldemolins 2016, 50). Even more shockingly, in the first four months after the Partido Popular effectively raised IVA/VAT on theatre tickets by 13% in September 2012,³ attendance numbers dropped by 31%, ticket sales by 33%, and 600 people lost their jobs (García, R. 2013). While signs of recovery can be seen in the levelling off of audience numbers at just over 12 million a year since 2014, the increase in box-office takings (to 201 million in 2016) must be considered in light of the escalation of ticket prices as a consequence of the aforementioned rise in IVA.⁴ Spanish theatre, therefore, is still mired in an extremely difficult situation, making any return to the jubilant expansion of the decade prior to the crisis and the ambitions of the Plan de Teatro 2007 and its revision in 2011 (see Colomer 2013, 49-50) seem some way off. This remains so despite the government's announcement in March 2017 that theatre is to be reclassified as subject to the reduced rate of IVA and taxed at 10% rather than 21%.

This article considers the impact of the economic crisis on Madrid in particular, and examines how this appears to have prompted or intensified certain developments in the ways in which theatres and companies promote and market their productions, specifically as regards poster design.⁵ Due to the structures of state past and present, Madrid is a glaring exception to the rule that operates in Spanish theatre generally as regards both the number and type of productions. On the one hand, the city has a far higher percentage of privately-owned

² These figures are taken from the Anuario SGAE for 2016 (Sociedad General de Autores y Editores 2016, 16-17).

³ This increase was the result of a reclassification of theatre and a tax rise. Until this point, theatre had been subject to the 8% reduced rate of IVA. From September 2012, it was subject to the general rate of IVA, which was raised at this moment from 18% to 21%.

⁴ These figures are taken from the SGAE Anuario 2017 (Sociedad General de Autores y Editores 2017, 14-17).

⁵ A number of the productions I consider in this article are from the 2014-2015 season, when several trips to the capital allowed me to explore in situ the matters that concern me here over a period of time. Unless otherwise indicated, all productions referred to in this article ran (or were running) in this season or the second half of 2015.

commercial theatres in comparison to the rest of Spain, that is, those theatres for which ‘la taquilla representa como mínimo el 50% de sus ingresos’ (Colomer 2013, 59).⁶ This disparity has been attributed to the general indifference shown by the state during the Franco dictatorship to the omnipotence of Madrid and Barcelona as centres of theatrical creation, and to the fact that such activity in those centres was in private hands (Bonet 2009, 14; Rubio Arostegui 2008, 59-60). Such an infrastructure remained in place with the transition to democracy, even as the Autonomous Communities founded in 1978 slowly emerged as the principal sources of funding for stage productions and theatrical activity nationwide. So, while the Autonomous Communities’ contribution to total public expenditure on theatre across Spain as a whole had risen to 81.2% by 2004 (Bonet 2009, 15), the Comunidad de Madrid took a relative back seat as regards developments in the capital’s theatre scene.⁷

Thus, at the time of writing, those theatres in Madrid which are run by the Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas y de la Música from within the Ministerio de Cultura are the Teatro María Guerrero and the Teatro Valle-Inclán (seats of the Centro Dramático Nacional), the re-opened Teatro de la Comedia (seat of the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico), and the Teatro de la Zarzuela;⁸ Teatros del Canal and the Teatro de la Abadía are managed by the Comunidad de Madrid (the latter in collaboration with José Luis Gómez); while the Teatro Español and the Teatro Fernán Gómez are owned by the Ayuntamiento de Madrid (Naves Matadero having just been turned into a venue for dance and performance art (‘artes vivas’) rather than theatre, as it had been under its previous name of Naves del Español). This is a very small number when compared with the abundant commercial theatres in the city, all of

⁶ This is the fourth of the five types of theatre which Jaume Colomer identifies in his analysis of the contemporary Spanish stage. The others are the municipally-owned ‘teatros públicos de proximidad’, the state-run ‘teatros públicos de centralidad’, those heavily subsidised private ventures (including the many salas alternativas) and non-profit organisations (Colomer 2013, 58-9).

⁷ In 1984, the Comunidad de Madrid took control of the Teatro Albéniz, and helped found the Teatro de la Abadía in 1995. Teatros del Canal was opened in 2009 following the closure of the Albéniz the previous year.

⁸ I do not include here INAEM’s other performance space, the Auditorio Nacional.

which have a significant capacity: Nuevo Teatro Alcalá, Teatro Alfil, Teatro Amaya, Teatro Arlequín Gran Vía, Teatro Calderón, Teatro Coliseum, Teatro Lope de Vega, Teatros Luchana, Teatro Maravillas, Teatro Muñoz Seca, Teatro Nuevo Apolo, Teatro Pavón, Teatro Quevedo, Teatro Reina Victoria, and Teatro Rialto, as well as those groups of theatres owned by individual companies: Grupo Marquina (Teatro Marquina and Teatro Príncipe Gran Vía), Pentación Espectáculos (Teatro La Latina and Teatro Bellas Artes), and Smedia (Teatro Cofidis Alcázar, Teatro Fígaro, Teatro Infanta Isabel, Teatro Galileo, Capitol Gran Vía, Teatro de la Luz Gran Vía, Pequeño Teatro Gran Vía, and Teatro Lara). This state of affairs contrasts vividly with Spain as a whole, in which 73% of theatres are publicly owned (Colomer 2013, 52). Consequently, in the capital's theatre listings, the number of productions staged by INAEM, the Comunidad de Madrid and the Ayuntamiento is dwarfed by what is on show at private commercial venues. In the domain of theatre, therefore, Madrid stands at variance with the circulation and consumption of culture envisaged in the 1978 Spanish Constitution (Bouzada 1999, 465). This has far-reaching consequences for the declaration made in the prologue (Preámbulo) to this document that the Spanish nation will strive to '[p]romover el progreso de la cultura y de la economía para asegurar a todos una digna calidad de vida' (Subsecretaría del Ministerio del Interior 1987, 3; my emphasis). Indeed, it may well be that the very three-tiered administrative model of government put into effect by that same Constitution, when theatre depends to such an extent on money from each of those tiers (Colomer 2013, 64), prevents such collective goals from being achieved fully on stage.

For the above reasons, the downturn in the economic power of public institutions, private organisations and population in 2008 and 2009 has affected theatre in Madrid less severely than in the rest of the country. Granted, the location in Madrid of the theatres of INAEM means the cuts to this institution's budget have been perceived more acutely in the capital

than elsewhere (see below). Yet the hardships of the post-2008 era have had less serious consequences for theatre in the capital because it does not rely on public funding to the same extent as other areas of Spain. As a result of swingeing cuts to the budgets of autonomous communities and municipalities as part of the general austerity measures rolled out by central government, the number of performances commissioned by ayuntamientos across Spain between 2008 and 2013 fell by 60% (García, R. 2013). Thus, while audience numbers have continued to drop (or at best levelled off) in the vast majority of Autonomous Communities over the past few years, Madrid's powerful private theatre sector has helped buck the national trend, attendance figures in the region increasing by over 600,000 between 2013 and 2014, and continuing to edge upwards since then. As a consequence, the weakening of Madrid's position of dominance in Spanish theatre that took place between 1997 and the onset of the crisis has reversed. Recent *Anuarios de Estadísticas Culturales* show how, of the total number of annual performances nationwide, the percentage of those in Madrid has risen from 25.7% in 2008 to 32.7 in 2015. Likewise, vis-à-vis the number of spectators, those in Madrid comprised 35.1% of the total number across Spain in 2015 in comparison to 26.2% in 2008.

Even so, in isolation, the impact of the economic crisis on theatre in Madrid was huge. With regard to state-run theatres, the Centro Dramático Nacional saw its budget slashed annually from €9 million in the 2007-2008 season to €4 million in the 2013-2014 season (Torres 2013). Although the CDN has recovered slightly since then, its 2014-2015 budget of €5 million (Alvarado 2014) was still barely half that of the pre-crisis period. What is more, while the CDN budget for 2015-2016 enabled it to tour its productions to a larger number of theatres outside Madrid, restrictions allowed for only 12 in-house productions to be staged, as opposed to 14 the previous year. Likewise, the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico has been compelled to reduce its number of productions from four to two in recent years (Riaño

2015). At municipal level, theatre in the capital was irrevocably transformed by alcaldesa Ana Botella's outsourcing of the city's venues to the empresa mixta Madrid Destino, which she created in 2013. As a consequence, by the middle of 2014, funding for the Teatro Fernán Gómez had fallen over 90% from €4.5 million to €350,000. Such was the effect of this and similar cuts that, by the summer of 2014, none of the Ayuntamiento's theatres were able to confirm an entire year's programme for the season about to commence (Corroto 2014).

Furthermore, the increase in the number of residents of the Autonomous Community of Madrid citing costliness as a reason for not going (or for not going more) to the theatre in the Encuesta de Hábitos y Prácticas Culturales en España 2014-2015 (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2015b, 209) – a figure markedly higher than for inhabitants in other areas of Spain – may indicate that ticket prices in Madrid are becoming prohibitively expensive for many.

Such changes have had a significant knock-on effect on the money available to promote these theatres and the stage productions that they host. At the Teatro Español, for example, the marketing budget in 2015 was a quarter of that before the crisis. As a consequence of such cuts – and following developments in other areas of Spanish culture during this period – the promotion of theatre in Madrid has changed. Below I outline the various strategies – both traditional and new – employed by publicity, press and communications officers to boost audience numbers and ticket sales. I then focus on the design of posters to this end. I examine the use of posters and other visual elements of certain publicly-owned (or part-subsidised) theatres to create a brand image which serves as a seal of quality of both in-house productions and the productions of visiting companies at those same venues. In contrast, economic hardships in the prominent private sector in Madrid have led to scant attention being paid to the aesthetics of poster design.

In interviews with me over the course of 2015, the press and marketing teams at the Teatro de la Zarzuela (press officer Ángel Barreda), the Centro Dramático Nacional (website and social media managers Teresa Romero and Alejandro González), the Teatro Español (publicity officer Gema González) and the Teatro de la Abadía (media officer Elena Pascual) spoke of a number of factors which encourage people to attend a particular theatrical production besides the choice of play itself. There are many reasons why people visit the theatre that, they acknowledged, are not the direct result of the publicity used for that production. For example, while not necessarily foremost among these, there is the factor of cost. In recognition of this, there are websites such as www.entradas.com and www.atrapalo.com which sell tickets at discount prices or by means of special offers (such as two for the price of one) for commercial venues, in addition to the long-established día del espectador deal at public theatres. Likewise the ‘Minuto Joven’ scheme rolled out by the CDN in 2013 gives anyone under 30 a 75% discount on tickets purchased half an hour prior to performance. Other reasons for going are audiences’ loyalty to the theatre concerned,⁹ word of mouth, and the casting of well-known actors.¹⁰ Those factors for which press and marketing teams are responsible include media presence in the form of reviews and articles, as well as electronic and social media such as their own websites and Facebook pages. The importance of an on-line presence for theatres nowadays is exemplified by the fact that, by 2015, the CDN employed two dedicated staff to, among other things, upload clips of performances on YouTube and tweet regularly.¹¹ Free magazines such as Teatros (since 2000) and

⁹ The Teatro de la Zarzuela sells between 70% and 80% of its tickets in this way (Ángel Barreda, interview, February 10, 2015).

¹⁰ One particularly successful example of this third reason was the casting of Carmelo Gómez as Pedro Crespo in the production of *El alcalde de Zalamea* with which the CNTC inaugurated its long overdue return to the refurbished Teatro de la Comedia in October 2015: so successful was this production that it returned to Madrid in January 2017 following a lengthy tour of Spain (and a run in Colombia).

¹¹ Teresa Romero and Gema González noted the importance of this means of generating publicity for the Centro Dramático Nacional and the Teatro Español respectively, although they also noted that both theatres, unlike many others, have funds to pay for this (interviews, March 25, 2015; November 12, 2015).

Prográmate (since 2010), available to pick up at theatres and other cultural spaces (cinemas, libraries and bookshops to name just three), also provide much needed publicity. One other low-cost means that marketing teams have devised in light of budgetary cuts to raise awareness of their activities is the intercambio: the offer of complementary tickets to the media (for radio stations to give away to listeners, for example) in exchange for publicity. This strategy was said by Elena Pascual to be particularly crucial for the activities of the Teatro de la Abadía (interview, December 21, 2015).

Despite stagnating budgets and the growing importance of the aforementioned strategies, Teresa Romero of the Centro Dramático Nacional stated that ‘la publicidad tradicional tiene que existir con lo nuevo’ (interview, March 25, 2015). According to Ángel Barreda at the Teatro de la Zarzuela, the traditional poster – on the side of kioskos, on mupis,¹² in the Metro, on buses, in newspapers – is crucial in selling new productions or titles by lesser-known composers (interview, February 10, 2015). Indeed, even if that image reaches its widest audience in electronic form on the internet, the poster retains its role as principal icon of a production. For this reason, 80% of the marketing budget of the Teatro Español is spent on designing and displaying posters (Gema González, interview, November 12, 2015). The poster is also important for companies that tour provincial theatres following a run in Madrid.

Elena Pascual, on the other hand, noted that posters at the Teatro de la Abadía were seen less as a promotional tool than as a means by which to engender a corporate identity and thus a sense of self (interview, December 21, 2015). The overt branding of a theatre by means of posters in publicly-funded theatres in Madrid began shortly before the crisis hit, when, at the behest of its artistic director Gerardo Vera, the Centro Dramático Nacional commissioned

¹² Mupi is an acronym of Mobiliario Urbano para Publicidad Integrada (which might be broadly translated as 6-sheet).

Isidro Ferrer to design the posters for the second half of the 2006-2007 season. Thus began a collaboration which lasted until the close of the 2011-2012 season (during which time Vera's directorship of the CDN ended), which recommenced in 2014 under Ernesto Caballero, and which continued until summer 2017.¹³ Ferrer trained as a graphic designer and illustrator, and brought both sets of skills with him to the creation of a unique visual style for the posters of the CDN and related materials such as book covers and programmes: a large, single image on a plain white background accompanied by the title of the play, the name of the playwright and director (their relative size in accordance with their renown), as well as production details in much smaller lettering. In this way, the posters are instantly recognisable from a distance even if the title of the production being advertised cannot be made out. The type of image created by Ferrer for each season has varied: silhouettes in black or red in the first two seasons, collages using colour photographs of real objects in 2008-2009, grainy black and white images in 2009-2010, black and white images with a splash of bright red in 2010-2011, masks made from everyday and found materials in 2011-2012, black and white letters in an assortment of media (prints, wood, paper, etc) in 2014-2015, black and white images of objects and letters in 2015-2016, and red and blue collages of cut-outs and photographs or drawings in 2016-2017.¹⁴ Yet all these images form a coherent whole in that each juxtaposes ideas at the core of the production concerned. Thus, Ferrer's image for the in-house production of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (2007) – a merging of a tap and a pistol that plays on the similarities between the spout of the former and the handle of the latter – highlights the danger posed by the water at the centre of the play (Figure 1). As the designer himself noted in interview: 'La idea es que el agua es la riqueza y también la provocadora de la tragedia' (Díaz de Tuesta, 2008). The image of a child on a swing – in which the seat is a

¹³ Between 2006 and 2008, Ferrer produced the posters with Nicolás Sánchez, while in the following two seasons he worked alongside collage maker Sean Mackaoui.

¹⁴ See Ferrer's own website (<http://www.isidroferrer.com/index.php?/proyectos/centro-dramatico-nacional/>) as well as that of the Centro Dramático Nacional (<http://cdn.mcu.es/prensa/carteles/?temporada=2016-2017>).

book – created for Ireala Teatro and La Caja’s production of *La esfera que nos contiene* (2017) is a metaphor of the progressive pedagogy underpinning education in Spain during the Second Republic, which is the subject of Carmen Losa’s play (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Poster for *Un enemigo del pueblo*. © Isidro Ferrer. Reproduced by kind permission of Centro Dramático Nacional.

Figure 2. Poster for *La esfera que nos contiene*. © Isidro Ferrer. Reproduced by kind permission of Centro Dramático Nacional.

Ferrer’s poetic branding functions as a metonym for the creativity and value of the actual productions of the Centro Dramático Nacional in general. Such an approach continues following Javier Jaén’s appointment as poster designer in the 2017-2018 season, the only marked difference between old and current designs being Jaén’s use of coloured backgrounds and a different typeface.¹⁵ On the one hand, therefore, Ferrer’s and Jaén’s posters help the CDN meet the first of the strategic objectives detailed in its most recent Estatuto: ‘[s]u consolidación como institución de referencia en el Estado en el ámbito de la creación y la puesta en escena de la dramaturgia contemporánea y actual’ (Boletín Oficial del Estado 2011, Article 4a; my emphasis). With respect to the theatre-goer, on the other hand, this move by the CDN ought to be seen less as an income-generating activity, but viewed in the wider context of brand culture. As Sarah Banet-Weiser writes of this phenomenon:

Broadly defined as the deliberate association of products and trademarked names with ideas, concepts, feelings and relationships, brand culture creates a context within which consumer participation is not simply (or even most importantly) indicated by purchases, but by brand loyalty and affiliation, linking brands to lifestyles, politics and social activism (2013, 299).

Thus all productions of the CDN, whether in-house or not, are subtly presented as a lifestyle choice – not merely as what is already an elite activity, but as a particularly salient example

¹⁵ See <http://cdn.mcu.es/prensa/carteles/?temporada=2017-2018>.

of that elite culture – to which madrileños in particular and (less so) Spaniards in general can sign up. Perhaps it is because theatre – and especially publicly-funded theatre – is often held up as a cultural activity which stands at one remove from the commercial environment in which brand culture has emerged, the CDN does not make use of a logo as part of its marketing campaign, preferring instead to list its full name in all publicity materials.

The Teatro de la Abadía flirted with branding in the 2011-2012 season, for which Barcelona-based graphic design company Marion and Merche created a series of uncluttered poetic images on a white background for each poster: a hand-coloured photograph of a young girl from the turn of the twentieth century surrounded by oversized bees for Federico García Lorca's *Los sueños de mi prima Aurelia*, a giant cockroach typing at a 1980s-style home computer for Paco Bezerra's *Grooming*, and a gramophone from which flowers bloom for a recital of Juan Ramón Jiménez's *Diario de un poeta recién casado*. The colour scheme of each image is echoed in that used for the text in the top left-hand corner, which states the title of the production (each word followed by a forward slash), performance dates (in grey), the names of the playwright and director, and the production company, using a stylish sans-serif typeface and underlining. As in the case of the CDN, this design was used for productions by visiting companies, too. The branding of the Teatro de la Abadía's activities reappeared in the 2014-2015 season, for which graphic design company Tres Tipos Gráficos produced a number of posters consisting of a large, atmospheric photographic image, often positioned asymmetrically on a background of a single pastel colour. This image partially obscures the title of the play in black (again in a single, stylish sans-serif typeface). The deliberately gauche approach to design is also adopted as regards the rest of the information provided: performance dates and author's and director's names tend to lie partially over the photographic image. In relative isolation, in a discreet section of the background, is the

theatre's logo (the building's dome atop a capital T) in bright red. Only the name of the production company and the logos of public institutions at the bottom of each poster exhibit a sense of order and predictability. This second phase of branding was again dropped after a year. The Teatro de la Abadía's rather inconsistent approach to poster design in this respect is epitomised by the fact such images are not uploaded on the theatre's website.¹⁶

In the emergence of and subsequent changes to the branding of the Teatro Español, one can observe the recent upheavals that have taken place in the capital at municipal level, upheavals described by many as a privatization of culture (see, for example, Calleja 2014 and Corroto 2014). One of the first decisions taken by Mario Gas on becoming artistic director of the Teatro Español in 2004 was to dispense with its logo, which – in its seriffed Bernard Condensed typeface from the beginning of the twentieth century and its early 1990s' computer-generated version of the building's classical portico – seemed to encapsulate so well the outdated approach to theatre with which his predecessor Gustavo Pérez Puig was associated. The new logo signalled the new artistic direction in which Gas wished to move: a voguish sans-serif typeface (Iris UPC) and a sketch-like drawing of the portico. This continued to be used under the directorship of Natalio Grueso in 2012-2014. On the arrival of the next artistic director, José Carlos Pérez de la Fuente, however, the Teatro Español underwent a more comprehensive branding that was much more in step with what might be referred to euphemistically as the entrepreneurial spirit that Madrid Destino had brought to cultural production in the capital. Firstly, a new logo, designed in early 2015 by Perricac Compañía Gráfica, riffed on the theatre's initials: a capital E on its back, its seriffed central arm rising upwards in the shape of a T. In the logo of sister venue Naves del Español, opened by Gas at the Matadero de Madrid in 2007, the T was replaced by a capital N. Secondly,

¹⁶ For this reason, these posters are only available to see at <http://www.m-m.es/m/teatroabadia.html> and <http://trestiposgraficos.com/project/posters-teatro-abadia>.

while previously Gas's sketched portico had been the sole constant in what were otherwise very different posters, the new logo formed part of a distinctive approach to overall poster design inaugurated in April 2015: the logo at the top left, a black and white photo of cast members to the right, a specific font (Bodoni MT) for the title and other information, and a plain background chosen from a selection of nine pastel colours (García, M. 2015). Just as in the case of the CDN, the same format and colour scheme was used for the posters of the theatre's own productions and those of visiting companies (Figure 3). It also made it easy to identify such productions, not merely on the canvas posters hanging from the ladder-rests of the lampposts that line the streets of central Madrid, but also when advertised on the digital screens attached to the walls around the Plaza de Callao in the centre of the city. In this overt branding, I believe, we can observe a culmination of the business model approach to the city's culture advocated since early 2012 by Fernando Villalonga (Ortega Dolz 2012), a business model which took concrete form when Villalonga merged Madrid Arte y Cultura S.A. with Madrid Visitors & Convention Bureau and Madrid Espacios y Congresos to form Madrid Destino Cultura, Turismo y Negocios in the second half of 2013. Such a brand identity was to stimulate the cultural tourism which Madrid Destino was clearly created to promote.¹⁷ Yet both the new logo and poster composition were abandoned barely a year later, with the sudden removal of Pérez de la Fuente from his post by the new Mayor of Madrid, Manuela Carmena. What is more, the attitude of his replacement, Carme Portaceli, as regards his directorship and her own plans were left in little doubt when she resurrected Mario Gas's sketched portico in a new poster design for productions in her inaugural season 2016-2017, once productions already programmed by Pérez de la Fuente for the first few months of the

¹⁷ Unfortunately, cultural tourism statistics in the *Anuario de Estadísticas Culturales 2016* are not sufficiently detailed to enable one to see the contribution of Madrid's theatres to the city's cultural tourism industry, let alone the theatres owned by the Ayuntamiento de Madrid. At best, these statistics reveal that Madrid is the second most popular destination for Spaniards: 10% of all cultural trips are to the capital, some way behind Andalucía (14.2%) (Ministerio de Cultura, Educación y Deporte 2016, 163).

season had run their course.¹⁸ This simple design, in which the logo, date and a large photograph occupy the top half, and in which the bottom half is dominated by the title of the production in a bold, sans-serif typeface in red or black, all on a plain white background (see Figure 4), continues to be used in the 2017-2018 season.

**Figure 3. Poster for Mujeres y criados.
Design: Teatro Español. Photograph: Javier Naval.
Reproduced by kind permission.**

**Figure 4. Poster for Ushuaia.
Design: Teatro Español. Photograph: Javier Naval.
Reproduced by kind permission.**

The branding of theatre that I highlight here also ought to be understood in the broader context of a re-assessment in Spain of its global economic position, epitomised by the creation of Marca España in 2012. According to this re-assessment, ‘[I]a cultura es interpretada cada vez más para las administraciones como un recurso para competir en el mercado global, ya sea para las ciudades grandes o medianas [...] o bien para los estados con la promoción de la marca-país’ (Rubio-Arostegui and Rius-Ulldemolins 2016, 46). The fact that the activities of the Teatro Español continue to be presented as a brand under Portaceli, and that the Madrid city brand logo continues to feature on its posters, as it had under Pérez de la Fuente, indicates that the Ayuntamiento de Madrid under Carmena remains aware of the value of branding to the capital’s economy.¹⁹

The fourth and final theatre in Madrid to experiment with overt branding is Teatro del Barrio in Lavapiés. Founded in the old Sala Triángulo in 2014 as part of the 15-M movement, this

¹⁸ At the same time, Mateo Feijóo was awarded the directorship of Naves del Español, now renamed Naves del Matadero. The official separation of this space from the Teatro Español was completed in early 2017. It is unclear what attitude Feijóo will adopt as regards branding, although a logo has already been designed and is in use on the Naves del Matadero website.

¹⁹ A certain – and not insignificant – rebranding of the city under its current mayor was undertaken when this logo was shorn of its exclamation marks in June 2016.

theatre wears its ideological heart on its sleeve in the form of the posters designed to publicise not only its stage productions but also the other awareness-raising events that it hosts. This takes the form of a photographic portrait in black and white on a plain red or black background, and lettering in red, white and black capital letters, as seen in the poster for Ruz-Bárcenas, a co-production with Teatre Lluire in Barcelona (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Poster for Ruz-Bárcenas. Designed by Jacobo Gavira.
Reproduced by kind permission of Teatro del Barrio.**

The many private commercial theatres in Madrid, on the other hand, make no attempt to brand the activities they host. Instead, productions are promoted by each individual company and in accordance with their specific selling points. Nevertheless, the posters created to this end do possess certain features in common that enable a typology of such advertisements to be determined. By far the most popular design feature is that of the cast photo. All such posters contain the image of an actor or actors starring in the production, sometimes in the manner of a portrait, at other times posing as if in performance. In the former type, the more famous the actor, the larger his or her photograph is. For example, María Castro, star of television series *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*, dominates the poster for *La novia de Papá* at the Teatro Infanta Isabel, while the close-up of Carlos Sobera – best known as the host of the Spanish version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* – is much larger than the busts of the rest of the cast on the poster for *El ministro* at the Teatro Cofidis.²⁰ Conversely, the lack of such star figures in the cast of *Burundanga* at the Teatro Lara is reflected in their positioning and size on the poster, which is dominated instead by the title of the production. Sometimes, the cast photo is combined with other images, as in the posters for *Los hombres son de Marte* at the Teatro Fígaro and Guillem Clua's *Smiley* at the Teatro Lara.

²⁰ Unfortunately, my repeated efforts to obtain permission to reproduce these two images for this article were ignored by Arequipa Producciones. The former can be found at <https://arequipaproducciones.com/la-novia-papa/>. The latter, it seems, has disappeared from the company's website.

The other common type of poster design is strictly speaking a sub-category of the cast photo in that it portrays the sexualised body. This reflects the popularity of sexual and erotic themes, mostly in order to titillate, on the capital's privately-owned stages. Examples of such posters are those for Luna the show at the Teatro Alfil, and Obscenum at the Teatro Galileo.²¹ This design model is dominated by the male body, more of which can be revealed in posters to be shown in public than the female body, and also perhaps in recognition of the fact that women make up a higher percentage of theatre audiences than men. Topless men abound, almost invariably with an impressive six-pack, as in the poster for a modern version of Terence's *El Eunuco* at the Teatro La Latina. Breasts are always strategically concealed; at most, women's nipples are covered with tassels or tape, as in some of the posters for *The Hole*.

Only on very few occasions do posters at privately-owned theatres eschew the use of cast portraits and advertise productions by other means. The poster for a revival of José Luis Alonso de Santos's *Trampa para pájaros* at the Teatro Lara is sparse in its use of an illuminated birdcage, while *El secreto de las mujeres* at the Teatro Galileo opted for a pop art-inspired illustration and colour scheme. *El Rey León* at the Teatro Lope de Vega, on the other hand, employs the black and yellow woodcut of the titular animal used by all versions of Disney's international franchise, a standard – it would seem – for many musicals (and a form of branding).

The cast photo is also used to publicise the majority of productions at publicly-owned institutions, often as part of a brand design (see Figures 3 and 4). Yet these posters are of a higher quality, undoubtedly on account of the larger budget available to such theatres, even

²¹ The publicity materials created for *The Hole* and its sequels at the Teatro Calderón are part of what has made these productions such an enormous commercial success, both in the city and on tour.

following the aforementioned cuts; the poor quality of those created for productions at privately-owned theatres is visual evidence of the economic crisis: with little or no money to employ a professional graphic design company, many of these posters appear to have been assembled by someone with little aesthetic sensibility or knowledge of graphic editor software. For example, the upper and lower halves of the poster for *El ministro* appear unconnected in terms of colour, tone and lettering, while the tagline stands rather incongruously in the vast black space to the left of the photographic portrait. These general defects are typical of many of the posters for private theatres in Madrid, even before the crisis. It is at a more microscopic level of detail, I think, that the economic hardships of the crisis are to be seen in this poster. The horizontal shadowing down the edges of the title is not matched by any vertical shadowing. Thus a slightly disconcerting effect is created, especially noticeable on the arms of the E and L. Moreover, the space at the top above and below the title is unevenly distributed, the names of the writer and director being squeezed in at the bottom. A similarly slapdash approach to design is displayed in the poster for *La novia de papá*, produced (like *El ministro*) by Arequipa Producciones. The numerous typefaces employed generate a general disconnectedness between the component parts of the poster as a whole. There is excessive kerning between the letters of ‘de papá’, and a failure to justify the wording immediately below (‘Basada en...’) with the title. Likewise, at the bottom, the names of Eva Isanta and Armando del Río (and the line in between) are not placed at an equal distance from their head-shots. Nor has any attempt been made to remove the grey lines around these photos. Neither was care taken to ensure a margin around the logo of Smedia, the company which owns the Teatro Infanta Isabel; instead this logo is positioned at the very edge of the poster.²²

²² I am indebted to my friend, illustrator Michael Levett, for his help identifying and naming some of these design flaws.

The individual (and rather unsophisticated) use of photographic images that I see as the principal design model for productions in privately-owned theatres can be seen in posters for productions at the Teatro Fernán Gómez, owned by the Ayuntamiento de Madrid. As noted above, the Fernán Gómez saw its annual budget decimated in 2014. One consequence of this cut was that the theatre started to demand that companies performing there cover a significant percentage of the costs associated with publicity.²³ This is no small amount of money since, as part of Madrid Destino, the Teatro Fernán Gómez has access to prominent advertising spaces across the city. The tasks undertaken by production companies in this respect include designing the poster. Many of the posters from this period, therefore, display similar characteristics to those of productions at private theatres (the mildly salacious content implied by the poster for *Insatisfechas*), and sometimes the same amateurish approach to design (the overly-busy poster for *Historia de un cuadro*). Here, therefore, is evidence of a quasi-privatization of theatre in recent years that might also be seen in the experiments with branding culture of the CDN and other venues.

As noted above, the costs of publicising productions at the Teatro Fernán Gómez were substantial because of the locations owned by the Ayuntamiento where posters appear. This includes kioskos and mupis across the city, and the screens at the Plaza de Callao. The potential benefits of reaching such a large number of people are significant, since productions at the Teatro Fernán Gómez are given ninety percent of box office takings. Yet, as Gema González indicated (interview, November 12, 2015), the theatres of the Ayuntamiento never have access to the best of these locations. Instead, they only have access to advertising spaces that are located outside the very centre of Madrid, are placed on the sides of mupis facing away from the most crowded spaces, or are screened at the Plaza de Callao outside peak

²³ I have my colleague Alejandro Melero to thank for this and other information about the Teatro Fernán Gómez.

times (never at weekends, for example). The best spaces, such as the kioskos lining the Gran Vía and in the Puerta del Sol, are occupied by advertisements for productions at the private commercial theatres. The fact that such productions feature so prominently on central kioskos implies that companies value access to such spaces far higher than the design of the poster displayed there.

Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that, even if such publicity were prominent, it may be of little commercial benefit. The only theatre-related publicity to catch the attention of a friend when walking through central Madrid to meet me in January 2015 was the huge hoarding for *El Rey León* on the Gran Vía.²⁴ This was despite the fact that a great deal of money had been spent that winter to advertise on the sides of buses by both the Teatro de la Zarzuela and Pentación Espectáculos (promoter of *El Eunuco*), and despite the fact that the largest outdoor advertising corporation in the world, JCDecaux, has devised an advertising strategy specifically for theatre companies (which combines its standard display strategy with a more focused campaign in central metro stations and near the theatre concerned). Recently, the company has also placed television screens above a select number of Metro platforms, which screen subtitled reports on productions (including vox pops of members of the audience singing the praises of what they have just seen). More likely to result in attendance at a production are: recommendations by friends, loyalty to a particular venue, the *Guía del Ocio*, dedicated television programmes such as *¡Atención obras!*, and reports on the news. In light of this, one wonders how effective the theatre poster displayed in the street is. Perhaps this is why JCDecaux has seen a dramatic fall in money spent by theatre companies on such forms of advertising (Raquel Martín Salinas, email communication, April 6, 2015).

²⁴ I am grateful to Sonia Ruiz Casas for the generous giving of her time to this end.

To conclude, Juan. A. Rubio Arostegui and Joaquim Rius Ulldemolins note that the economic crisis in Spain not only destabilized its model of the welfare state, its quasi-federal structure, and its position in a globalised market, but also prompted a ‘crisis de valor’ (2016, 46) in the field of culture. Theatre in Madrid has responded to its predicament in many and diverse ways that illustrate such a crisis of cultural values. According to Ángel Barreda, production runs have become shorter as theatres are no longer able to cover the costs of keeping auditoria open if half empty (interview, February 10, 2015). There has also been a boom in plays about financial and political corruption. The aforementioned Ruz-Bárcenas, for example, is a piece of verbatim theatre which stages the interrogation at the Audiencia Nacional in 2013 of the former treasurer of the Partido Popular. A third response to the crisis is a more creative approach to where and how performances take place. This sometimes involves more economical use of existing spaces. The Teatro Lara, for example, hosts an average of three different productions a day. Many productions also exploit non-traditional spaces such as flats, bars and offices, often as part of the trend of microteatro that took off in the capital a few years ago.

This article has focused on two other responses, specifically with regard to how theatrical productions are promoted. One is a conscious attempt to brand activities in many publicly-owned theatres. The other is an unthinking lack of professionalism in the private domain that can only stem from financial hardships and cuts to personnel. Both responses in their way exemplify recent features of Spain’s economic strategy as it moves ever further in the direction of a market economy. The former endeavours to tap the financial benefits of a burgeoning brand culture, described by Banet-Weiser as ‘a normative context for individuals to understand themselves as “free agents” in a “free market”’ (2013, 299). This compromises the state’s endorsement of culture as a public good, as enshrined in the Constitution. It also

sits uncomfortably with the ostensibly anti-capitalist stance advocated by Teatro del Barrio and with the more nebulous anti-corporatism implicit in the activities of publicly-funded theatres.

What is more, when considered together, the branding of theatres funded by the central government (CDN), the Comunidad de Madrid (Teatro de la Abadía) and the municipal government (Teatro Español) can be viewed as part of a flourishing city brand. Most obviously, these theatres attract cultural tourists to the capital from elsewhere in Spain, rather than foreign visitors for whom the language barrier is likely to be an issue (although it is interesting to note that Teatro de la Zarzuela includes a plot synopsis in English in its programmes). It might also be argued that the brand identity of these theatres – created in collaboration with graphic designers – contributes to other more general aspects of city branding which endeavour to present Madrid as an ‘attractive place to live, work, and play’ (Insch 2011, 8) and as a ‘creative city’ (see Rius Ulldemolins and Martín Zamorano 2015, 20-1). Yet this is not a concerted effort by the three-tier system of government to brand the capital. City branding is clearly one of the objectives of the Ayuntamiento de Madrid, as is plain to see in the creation of Madrid Destino. It was also an important component of the Ayuntamiento’s (unsuccessful) bids to host the Olympic Games in 2012, 2016 and 2020. The contributions of state and Autonomous Community to the Madrid city brand via the CDN and the Teatro de la Abadía raise the question of whether the administrative complexities of the Spanish state since 1978 aid or hinder the realization of the Ayuntamiento’s plans. The extent to which these developments can be seen as part of an instrumentalization of culture within the wider nation branding project Marca España (Rius Ulldemolins and Martín Zambrano 2015) is also unclear.

This corporate shift in the sphere of culture was consolidated and enshrined in public policy in March 2017, when the Secretary of State for Culture, Fernando Benzo, officially presented Plan Cultura 2020. In this document, conceived to develop and build on the previous Plan Estratégico 2012-2015, culture was again defended as a ‘factor esencial de desarrollo y bienestar’ (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2017, 9). Indeed, it would have been simple to put a positive spin on those proposals which concern theatre directly: a restructuring of INAEM (19), subventions for theatre in municipal spaces in the form of the Platea programme (20), the creation of on-line resources to assist and assess attendance at theatre (50), the greater use of theatre as an educational tool (51), the promotion of Spanish theatre internationally (63), and the creation of a theatrical biennale entitled ‘La Farmacia: Centro Nacional de Creación de las Artes Escénicas’ (74). Yet, of considerable concern to many was the Plan’s desire to ‘dinamizar y apoyar el mecenazgo cultural’ (43). Although lacking in specificity as regards the shape this bringing together of public and private interests was to take, Benzo’s proposal seemed to confirm what many had dreaded. As an anonymised contributor to the annual report of the Observatorio de la Cultura had warned several years earlier: ‘El mecenazgo conlleva censuras; el neoliberalismo busca privatizar también la cultura por razones económicas, no por el interés de las personas’ (Observatorio de la Cultura 2011, 5). Whether and how such fears materialize in the theatre, and on the Madrid stage in particular, is for future research to ascertain. An examination of paratextual material, such as promotional posters, is essential to such research if a nuanced understanding of developments in this respect is to be reached.

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