The City as Stage: Rebuilding Metropolis after the Colonial Wars

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For Javier Arbona, architect

The following pages address the notion of re building an urban stage not so much by associating it with general architecture or urban design, as with that specific, resilient space that is the façade or the building's frontage. During the second half of the nineteenth century and, more keenly, around the *fin-de-siècle*, something quite extraordinary occurs to this architectural border. The design of great avenues and systematized expansions, typically represented by the Baron de Haussmann's transformation of Paris, offered the urban stroller's gaze not only the high aesthetic standards of its large surfaces, but also a latitude for contemplation that the old tangle of small streets had never allowed. Walter Benjamin can thus conclude that "Haussmann's urban ideal was of long perspectives of streets and thoroughfares. This corresponds to the inclination, noticeable again and again in the nineteenth century, to ennoble technical necessities by artistic aims" (*Reflections* 159). The bourgeoisie could now liberally inscribe its political, economic, and aesthetic hegemony on that surface which mediated public and private spheres; the great ornamental façades, previously the patrimony of the aristocracy and other institutions of power during the *ancien régime*, were now available for the documentation of the middle classes' prosperity and sensibility. Ben-

jamin actually makes an indirect reference to the cult-like regard of these façades when he writes:

> The institutions of the secular and clerical dominance of the bourgeoisie were to find their apotheosis in a framework of streets. Streets, before their completion, were draped in canvas and unveiled like monuments. (159)[1]

At a major turning point in the novel *Tormento* (1884), Galdós incorporates this change and its connotations through a single but significant detail. After announcing that the wealthy *indiano* Agustín Caballero "had acquired a new and very beautiful house, on Arenal Street, and had taken for himself the whole first floor" (68), Galdós describes Amparo's reaction, as she is about to knock on the door of the new building:

> She had never seen a more venerable door; not the doors of a sacred cathedral, nor those of the Palace of the Pope, and even the Gates of Heaven could hardly be compared to it. Goodness gracious! Would this one finally be the door to her home? (109)[2]

But the sight of the new façades, with their more or less prominent decorations, provoked diverse reactions among urban strollers. Galdós's view—or, at least, his character's—represents only one of those reactions, one shared by eminent critics and theoreticians like John Ruskin (1819-1900), who referred with enthusiasm to "the great concerted music of the streets of a city... a sublimity... capable of exciting almost the deepest emotions that art can strike from the bosoms of men" (Maffei 16). Walter Benjamin would later identify a similar reaction in the nineteenth century *flâneur*, designating it as the pleasure of the gaze in that interior enclosure created by the new streets of the city:

> The street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen in his four walls. To him the shiny, enameled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. (*Charles* 37)

However, alongside the pleasure of the gaze, there also emerged a critical view, or more concretely, an eye that looked critically at certain forms of engaging such a pleasure of the gaze. One of the earliest and more authoritative manifestations of this critical view can be found in Engels's 1845 book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England.* Towards the middle of the chapter titled "The Great Towns," Engels observes that modern Manchester is roughly divided into three parts: a downtown commercial district—The Exchange—, a periphery of great mansions for the upper bourgeoisie, and, in between, a ring of misery and squalor inhabited by the working classes. But Engels appears as struck by this shameless zoning as by one specific strategy to negotiate it:

> the finest part of the arrangements is this, that the members of this money aristocracy can take the shortest road through the middle of all the laboring districts to their places of business, without ever *seeing* that they are in the midst of the grimy misery that lurks to the right and the left. For the thoroughfares leading from the Exchange in all directions out of the city are lined, on both sides, with an almost unbroken series of shops, and are so kept in the hands of the middle

> and lower bourgeoisie, which, out of self-interest, cares for a decent and cleanly external appearance and *can* care for it. True, these shops bear some relation to the districts which lie behind them, and are more elegant in the commercial and residential quarters than when they hide grimy working men's dwellings; but they suffice to conceal from the *eyes* of the wealthy men and women of strong stomachs and weak nerves the misery and grime which form the complement to their wealth. (86)

There is evidence in Spain of at least one other reaction to the new façades that "decorate"—in the sense of both *ornamentation* and *decorum*—great nineteenth century towns: that of the sober and rather excising eye of the writers and painters who gather in Madrid, and who will come to be known as the Generation of '98. This generation's view appears as distant (if not as remote) from "the pleasure of the gaze" as from Engels's critical insight. It could even be argued that if Engels, Ruskin, Galdós, and Benjamin's *flâneur* represent alternative modern ways of looking, the focus of the best known members of the Generation of '98 betrays a form of resistance to modernity, a somewhat ascetic curtailing of the modern gaze for the benefit of seemingly more elevated, if antiquated, priorities. For one thing, it does not prove easy to find an explicit conception of the façade in the writings and paintings of that generation, much less a depiction of the modern metropolitan façade. The proverbial, willful lack of descriptions in Unamuno's plays and stories, Baroja's and Valle Inclán's predilection for the underworld, the peripheral slums, or the maze of old streets in their more urban works, all appear to point to a simple void, a circumstantial absence of new bourgeois monuments. Some historical studies of turn of the century Madrid offer a similar view: "downtown there were no big constructions, great avenues, nor ornamental elements which would testify to the vitality of a great city" (Hidalgo 13). However, this presumed absence acquires a different luster in light of Unamuno's comments about Barcelona. The standards of some perceptive and cosmopolitan turn of the century eyes—the eyes of experienced Latin American travelers like Rubén Darío and Manuel Ugarte, for example—, judge Barcelona as the emblem of the most pleasant modernity this side of the Pyrenees, due in part to its splendid, original façades. Raimundo Cabrera, one of the Cuban travelers more finely attuned to such modernity, wrote of Barcelona in 1905:

> The buildings appear magnificently proportioned, beautiful to look at, with superb staircases and balconies, as well as perfect comfort in the interior distribution.... Barcelona does not have Madrid's refinements and artistic wealth, but it is a better and more grandiose city.... Barcelona is Spain's most cosmopolitan city. To the foreigner who looks for a permanent or a temporary residence in Barcelona, the city offers the best attractions and facilities. (60-63)[3]

Unamuno, however, visits Barcelona in 1906 with quite a different sense and sensibility. He records his negative impressions in two documents that serve to complement each other: a public note, which appeared in the Argentinean newspaper *La Nación*, and a series of private letters addressed to several Latin American writers, Ortega y Gasset, and Joan

Maragall, the foremost Catalan poet and a respected nationalist. In the press article, Unamuno's opinions are somewhat muffled. He writes:

> Without a doubt, next to architectonic absurdities and extravagances in stone, there are houses pleasant to the eye. Barcelona is not suffering from a scarcity of façades; one could even say that it is the city of façades. Façades dominate everywhere, and most everything is *fachadoso*, if I can be allowed the neologism. But then, in this splendid city of superb façades apparently built to surprise and astonish visitors and guests, yellow fever is wreaking havoc with the population because they lack a good sewage system. This is understandable: façades can be seen, and sewage systems cannot. This feature may be considered symbolic of much of what occurs in Barcelona. (*Obras* 257)

In his private letters, particularly those directed to Latin American friends, Unamuno feels free to abandon what little caution he used in the public piece, and concludes:

> this, my last trip to Barcelona, has reassured my belief that Spain's restoration will come from the Cantabrian more so than from the Mediterranean shores. In Barcelona there are too many façades and too much arrogant vanity. Sometimes you feel as if you were in the suburbs of Tarascón. The natives of the Cantabrian shores are more serious, modest, and quiet. (*Epistolario americano* 257)

In another letter he states: "Barcelona was my last disappointment. It was a sad experience. Barcelona is like Tarascón: façades, façades and more façades" (265).[4] Architects have often complained about this facile switching between the literal and the figurative meaning of the term façade. Schumacher, for example, writes: "The term *façade*, as applied to architecture in this century, has taken on the same negative connotation that it has when applied to people" (5). Among the writers of '98, Unamuno was the foremost advocate of a virile and resolute march towards the inside—"hacia dentro"—which invested all immediate surfaces with that negative connotation and promoted the contemplation of empty, expansive Castillian plains instead of crowded and enclosing urban perspectives. It was, of course, wholly consistent with this position to reject the profuse ornamentation of modern façades, in Barcelona or elsewhere. Yet it was not purely an issue of privileging the old *versus* the new (as has been suggested) or the country *versus* the city, but also the invisible over the visible, the intimate over the exposed, isolation over conviviality, depth over shallowness. At the same time, in Unamuno's eyes, as in the eyes of most writers of his generation, façade ornamentation represented more a foreign intrusion than a national contribution. In principle, anything decorative was alien and, specifically, French (thus sensual, even feminine).[5] What was truly and genuinely Spanish (thus austere, masculine) was the kind of restraint manifested in the absence of decoration, as well as in the respect, and even admiration, for any predictable sign of deterioration on exterior surfaces.[6] The disenchanted, adamantly male generational eye would take advantage of these unadorned, decayed frontages as physical springboards for more metaphysical interior meditations.

Thus, Unamuno's analysis of Catalan buildings sheds new light on the general absence of façades and the contemplation of them in the writings of the Generation of '98, especially those writings concerning Madrid. They adopted neither the modern "pleasure of the gaze," nor the more or less contemporary Marxist or proto-Marxist critiques of the economic implications of such pleasure. Rather they expressed a puritan, somewhat religious and acutely nationalistic combination of ethics and aesthetics that necessarily ignored or rejected all of the more modern positions. The prevalent perspective among writers, painters and draftsmen of the Generation of '98 warded off not only Barcelona's modernist façades but also the modest perspectives of Madrid's new avenues and the pleasures (whether guilty or not) proffered by their moderately elaborate façades. If we can rely on Pío Baroja's narratives (and his brother's illustrations of them), this third way of looking seems to accept but two objects of contemplation in metropolitan architectures. First, and most coveted, was Madrid's skyline, as it could then still be embraced from the near outskirts of the city. In *La busca*, Manuel goes down to Las Vistillas to sit in the sun and contemplate one of those panoramic but contained views revisited with fervor throughout the novel. These views fail to convey any sense of modern urban developments, and seem to conjure up, instead, the old engravings of city vistas:[7]

> With half closed eyes, he was seeing the arches of the church of La Almudena, above a garden wall. Further up, the Royal Palace, white and shiny; the sandy clearings of the Principe Pío mountain, its long, red barracks, and the string of houses lining the Rosales promenade, with their windows set aflame by the dying sun. (190)[8]

The second arena, contemplated more closely and invested with a more explicit allegorical character, exhibits the signs of decrepitude and deterioration, as inscribed on what Martín Santos would sarcastically refer to, many years later, as the citadels of misery ("alcázares de la miseria"); anti-monuments which, in the eyes of Baroja and his characters, seem to represent most accurately the human condition in general, and in particular the state of postcolonial Spain. Manuel's crossing of Madrid has its turning point at the ragmen's slums:

> Manuel remained alone... contemplating the house, the yard, the lowland. He didn't know why, but he felt attracted by that black depression of the land, with its heaps of debris, its sad shacks, its comical, dilapidated merry-go-round, its lame swing, and its ground full of surprises.... He thought that if he could eventually have a little shack, like Señor Custodio's, along with his cart, his donkeys, his hens, his dog, and also a wife who loved him, he would become one of the almost happy men of this world. (266-67)

Only in such a territory are the eyes allowed a close-up so as to make a minutely detailed inspection of walls that cannot possibly be defined as "façades", constructions that can in no way be associated with any modern notion of "architecture" (258-59). Baroja's protagonist justifies such a strange privileging of the eye in terms that seem to complement Unamuno's contempt for Barcelona's façades:

> Manuel was very enthusiastic about that kind of nearly wild existence in the outskirts of the capital. He had the impression that everything dumped there by the city, everything rejected and scorned by the Metropolis, became pure and dignified as it came into contact with the soil. (267)

We find in the case of both Unamuno and Baroja a significant tendency to favor time over space, a desire to read the traces of age, climate and history on humble, sensitive materials, along with an ethical disdain of harder surfaces such as those made of iron, stone, and brick, resistant to the imprint of natural phenomena and human action. For similar reasons, their writings reveal a general mistrust of old ornamental motifs (e.g. columns, caryatids, etc.) which were at the time returning to modern façades, suggesting (among other things) the durability of ageless spatial presences against the marks of impermanence and death that the passing of time left.

While apparently displaced by those two favorite vistas—embraceable skylines and ragmen's slums—modern urban façades were hardly scarce or inconspicuous in Madrid at the turn of the century. The problem was rather in the eyes of these beholders who would not accept, nor even take into account, for good or for bad, the presence of the modern façade and its various strategies for prioritizing space and matter over time and spirit. At best, the building frontages that appear in the Generation of '98's writings are perfectly unobtrusive, primarily blank surfaces, without the distraction of ornamentation, or any features but the merely quantitative. Imported symbols and allegories that might distract the urban stroller from his or her meditation with an allure of pleasant but alienating tableaus are likewise absent. Baroja provides this example:

> the façade was short, narrow, whitewashed; it gave no indication of the depth and size of the house. It had a few windows and holes asymmetrically distributed, and a doorless archway leading to a passage paved with pebbles. (81)

At worst, the observed façade shares with the slum the punctuating and always punctual marks of deterioration, thereby deserving much closer attention from the writer's eye:

> The house was neither small nor foreboding but it looked like it desperately wanted to fall apart, because here, there, and everywhere it showed flaking stucco, holes, and all kinds of scars. It had two floors, large and wide balconies with very rusty railings, and small, green glasses held together by strips of lead. (61-62)

Occasionally, the eye of such a beholder allows new buildings into its field of vision, but from such a distant, slanted, almost perverse position that the frontage and its ornaments hardly come into sight while side and back walls continue to monopolize the eye's attention. Thus, Manuel observes from afar:

> new white houses; their brick sidewalls pierced with symmetrical small windows; the roofs, the cornices, the *balustrades*, the recently built red towers, the armies of chimneys. (210 emphasis mine)[9]

The most indicative word here may be "balustrade": from the last decades of the

nineteenth century to the Civil War, there were hardly any fashionable new constructions in Madrid which did not make various uses of balustrades on façades. The disdain of these writers for such ornamental motifs becomes quite explicit in one of the few descriptions of new buildings that Azorín allowed himself in *La voluntad*:

> To the right, the reddish bulk of the bullring, sharp against the bright, splendid blue sky; to the left, the tiny villas of Modern Madrid, an assemblage of crudely decorated walls, stained in yellow and red strips, balustrades with vases, blue and green glasses, small domes, dwarf windows, red and black roofs, all very loud, small, insolent, brassy, fragile, built with the aggressive bad taste and boasting vanity that characterize a village of shopkeepers and bureaucrats. (197)[10]

At this juncture in the history of European architecture, the ornamental façades of the metropolitan bourgeoisies were perhaps the most telling feature of the period. The gaze of Madrid's Generation of '98 not only appears clearly divergent, but also suspiciously univocal. Literary historians, particularly those who agree with Laín Entralgo's portrait of the generation, have underlined the connections of its narrative with turn of the century Madrid, and have granted it—directly or indirectly—significant authority on the city's representation, however subjective that representation may be. Laín Entralgo writes:

> The literary image of Madrid that we have inherited from the young writers of 1898 is, simply put, the consequence and symbol of their profound disagreement with contemporary historical developments in Spain. Their arrival in Madrid and their experiences with the city are two decisive and, to a certain extent, final steps in the historical configuration of these youths. What they see, breathe, hear and read in turn of the century Madrid gives a final sense to their previous experiences and puts the finishing touches on the building of their individual personalities. (161-63)

On the other hand, however, this historical identification with the city, this near monopoly of the representation of the Spanish capital, ignores or underestimates the writers' most typical sleight of hand: the act of deleting from their map of the city anything that could have disturbed the melancholy homogeneity of their views. The fact is that, besides the conventionally canonical writers and painters, a more complete picture of the so called Generation of '98 would have to include a group of architects who conceived and designed a very different capital. Indeed, they partially built it, leveling out in the process certain areas of the city of which the writers and painters were characteristically fond. A history of Madrid describes this other group in the following manner:

> the men who graduated from the School of Architecture between 1888 and 1903, and who would in time constitute a cursed generation [una generación maldita] silenced and overlooked by official culture. (Alonso Pereira 60)

Moreover, both architects and writers seem to have been especially engaged by one particular street of the city, in such a

way as to have made it impossible for them to ignore each other. Azorín wrote that "life in Madrid has its most intense manifestation" in a section of Alcalá, near Seville Street (*Madrid, guía* 1255-56).[11] It is precisely this incessantly crowded section of Alcalá, from Cibeles to Puerta del Sol, that will become the arena of the great transformations designed by the architects of the Generation of '98; the circuit with the highest concentration of modern buildings in turn of the century Madrid. This dense monumental text now appears in stark conflict or, at best, in mute dialogue with the literary profile of the more humble and decayed neighborhoods of the city. Thus, we are historically confronted with two active forms of territorialization that are in part defined by the ways they erase each other, that is, by their identity as positions adopted *vis-à-vis* the other. In this sense, their preference in building fronts amounts to turning their backs on each other.

The architect's city generally promoted the modern over the traditional, the monumental over the inconspicuous. Above all, it embraced what has been called a language of international forms (Alonso Pereira 57), in which a cosmopolitan combination of French, Belgian, Viennese and North American models was unabashedly mixed with traditional Spanish motifs in order to offer the metropolitan stroller's eye a series of distinctive and pleasant assemblages for contemplation.[12] More than anything, the architects of 1898 began taking into account that European gaze which demanded not only the latitude and perspective of long, wide and straight avenues, but also the artistic quality of the building's ornamentation, particularly as manifested in the façade. Precisely around the turn of the century, an apparently trivial but widespread debate attempted to determine whether architecture was an art or a science. As was to be expected, most architects agreed that architecture should strive to be a combination of the two (Isac 87-96; Tovar 8). The debate became especially intricate and definitively influential when the object in question was the façade.[13] The fact is that, between the years 1889 and 1910, that is, between Otto Wagner's elaborate frontages and Adolph Loos's naked exteriors, façades, and, in particular, the volume and significance of their ornamentation, evolved radically all over Europe, but especially in Vienna. Architectural historian, Werner Goehner, writes that "Only in the «Capital of Decoration», as Herman Broch dubbed Vienna, would ornament be a crime" (Goehner 57). Otto Wagner believed that decoration, with its symbols, allusions, and illusions, played a prominent role in the design of buildings, because "façades are consciously seen as determining and qualifying urban space" (Goehner 58). In contrast, Adolph Loos characterizes as follows that which he took to be the formal imperative of his time: "We have overcome the ornament.... Soon, the streets of the cities will shine like white walls." Goehner concludes:

> By excluding architecture from the realm of art, Loos overcame the conceptual split between the technical and the artistic, which in the past had reduced artistic phenomena to applied art on the façade. (Goehner 60)

Meanwhile, in Madrid, a number of architects learned of new developments in the profession through foreign magazines (Navascués 554; Isac, Passim). These architects intensely advocated the ornamentation of monumental façades, as

much for the benefit of the now old *flâneur*, as for that of the average citizen and for the enlightenment of the masses of ignorant peasants who were then migrating in unprecedented numbers from the country to the city.[14] The notion of "art in the streets"—directly related to "façade ornamentation" (Repullés 46)—became at that point the talk of the town, at least among prominent architects who were then elected as members of the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Typically, their inaugural lectures at the Academy addressed the issue of ornamentation on building fronts. In 1896, Repullés y Vargas, the architect of Madrid's Stock Exchange, delivered a talk entitled "The Modern Residential House from the Artistic Point of View," declaring that

> the external appearance of the house is a kind of homage to the public at large who will see it, a form of acquiescence to the prevalent taste, and a submission to the laws of the whole. (27)

Moreover, his explanation of the hybrid symbolism of exterior design demonstrates a liberal mixture of gender categories that writers of the Generation of '98 had strived to keep separate and subject to a strict hierarchical order:

> Nobody doubts that a straight line represents virility, justice, honesty...; the curve means flexibility and yielding; in a jagged line you can see movement, life, fluctuations. (32)

In turn, his respondent from the Academy—Lorenzo Alvarez y Capra—emphasized the relevance of the construction materials on the façade. Spanish architects had observed the rapid deterioration of certain Parisian façades where costs had been cut by substituting decorations in stone with plaster imitations. In order to preclude such a threat, Alvarez y Capra proposed:

> When stone is out of the question, it is indispensable to resort to a combination of ceramics and exposed brick, without any stucco, if we are to avoid [the Parisians'] problems. (66)

Thus, the architects' discourse exposed a telling, complex divergence not only between the loud and joyous proliferation of symbolic ornaments and the traditional silence of somber, unobtrusive façades, but also between the soft surfaces subject to the melancholy imprints of history and age, and the hard surfaces resistant to most traces of wear. While the writers chose to surrender to the authority of time—or History as destruction—the architects predicated and secured the durability of space—or History as resistence, in the physical, if not also in the political sense of the word.

At least two other lectures at the time underlined the public function of façades. José Urioste y Velada, who in 1898 designed the Spanish pavilion for the 1900 World's Fair in Paris, was elected as a member of the Fine Arts Academy in 1901. His inaugural lecture was significantly titled "The Street from an Artistic Point of View." In rather pompous words, Urioste claimed:

> It is the mission of art to cloak in artistic ornaments anything related to the street, and transform it until it has become a powerful instrument of public education.[15]

In 1909, the Duke of Tovar devoted his inaugural speech to *The House and the*

Modern City. It included statements such as:

> The concourse of a constantly circulating crowd prevails everywhere, with an always increasing exteriorization of our life. The width of modern streets was unheard of and inconceivable not long ago. Façades lose their timorous austerity as they become more cheerful and transparent, open to foreign echoes. (16)

Thus, these architects share with the likes of Otto Wagner a certain understanding of the city as stage—the city as another kind of interior no less welcoming than the bourgeois salon, as Walter Benjamin discovered—with the façade as backdrop for the familiar performances of everyday life in the street.[16] From this point of view, when the Modern Movement displaces, a few years later, the previous notions of the façade with the concept of the "curtain wall" (Schumacher 10), one can't help but think of the closing of the stage at the end of a performance, and the subsequent departure. The spectators are almost expulsed and the public space that has been designed to be filled as often as possible with an involved crowd is emptied. Before the Modern Movement (or after, as a form of resistance to it), architects paid as much attention to the comfort of the dwellers of a certain building as to the general quality of street life in front of it. They thoughtfully designed its façade not only as a projection of the life style of its interiors but also with an interest in the ethical and aesthetic reactions of those who view it. Perhaps the character of the façade would invite urban dwellers to gather in front of the building for the pleasure of contemplation or to derive other ethical or aesthetic comfort as they strolled through the city. As an architect from Harvard's School of Design put it: "perhaps one of the oldest ideas in Western society is to see itself as existing within a theatre." The architects of Ancient Greece had already designed façades and building fronts that served as "backdrops to a way of life unique to that civilization, a society with close spiritual and emotional ties to the theatre" (Maffei 10). Such a concept of the world, and more concretely, of the city as stage, was particularly forceful in the Renaissance, when influential architects, from Palladio to Iñigo Jones—a contemporary of Calderón—understood urban design as the composition of "stage sets... creating both individual buildings and street frontages primarily as architectural scenery" (Richards 28).

In Spain, this conceptualization of urban design, as well as the ornamental motifs that it favored—columns of the classical orders, caryatids, bas-reliefs and, more than anything else, balustrades—appear to have been directly adopted and adapted by the architects who refurbished the famously crowded stretch of Alcalá around the turn of the century, that is, during, and immediately after, the loss of Spain's last colonies. Disregarding both the unobtrusive, blank stage set advocated by Unamuno, and the kind of backdrop that would be entirely overdetermined by certain actions in the political, social or economic script of its time, these architects propounded a stage that would influence—if not determine—city dwellers' moods, social attitudes and ways of seeing. This lay not far from the tenets of at least one contemporary playwright. Valle Inclán, forever the prodigal son of '98, would be the only writer of his generation to bring similar demands to the the-

atre stage. In 1933, in response to a general question about the theatre, he declared:

> The conventional assumption, which is to believe that the situation creates the stage, is a fundamental mistake. It is a fallacy, for, quite to the contrary, it is the stage that creates the situation. That is why the best playwright will always be the best architect. (Dougherty 263)

In this sense, José Grases's 1901 monument to Alfonso XII presiding over the Retiro pond was emblematic. A colonnade which cannot be classified as a façade, yet uninhibitedly stretches the tendency of modern Madrid's most spectacular buildings, the monument was designed as a stage (Guerra de la Vega, *Madrid* 26).[17]

The first of the modern products (or, at least, the first of the generational products) by one of the turn of the century architects, was the Equitativa building, now Banesto. It was designed by Grases, a classmate of Gaudí's at Barcelona's School of Architecture, and built between 1882 and 1891 on a corner lot between Sevilla and Alcalá streets. For architectural historians, Grases is an "example of the eclectic architect who follows foreign models almost without exception" (Navascués 541). Indeed, he is above all considered to represent the French connection, both in the Equitativa building and in the more residential New Club of 1899, at the corner of Cedaceros and Alcalá. With regard to the New Club, another historian writes: "[Madrid] had ceased to be that boring city whose only public activities had to do with Church liturgy and the cumbersome ceremonials of the monarchy" (Guerra de la Vega, *Guía* 160). This notion of a new backdrop for a scenario that would be both secular and sensual reappears indirectly in Gómez de la Serna's biting comments on the impact of the Equitativa. It has often been repeated that Gómez de la Serna was a child of the writers of '98; in this particular case he is a spokesman for their mostly unpublicized dislike of the architectural and urban developments that were doing away with the quaintly decayed buildings of inveterate Madrid. Gómez de la Serna precisely denounced the "ornamental" character of the Equitativa, the ostensible change in backdrop it represented, along with its clear reference to foreign spaces and behaviors. Thus, Gómez de la Serna declared: "The entire Equitativa is an ornamental building, one of those buildings that students of architecture learn to design in a course on ornamentation" (19). He also explained:

> Madrid admired that building which had the grandiosity of a temple and yet was not a temple; it was a building everybody had seen in the views of great cities reproduced in tea-table books.... It is a New York or a London building which brings to its sidewalks a fragment of a city that is not quite Madrid. Everything in that stretch of the [Alcalá] street has always turned out to be of foreign make. (17-18)

Almost at the same time, Eduardo Adaro designed and built the Bank of Spain (1882-1891) on the same side of Alcalá as the Equitativa. In 1901, he designed the Bruno Zaldo mansion on Alfonso XII Avenue, across the street from the Parterre del Retiro; and later, in 1903, the Banco Hispanoamericano, situated between Canalejas Square and Sevilla Street. The latter's façade, unlike that of the Bank of Spain, constituted a harmonic

whole with the façade of the Equitativa. As for the long façades of the Bank of Spain, they

> ... provide one of the strongest images of nineteenth-century Spanish architecture, in which, within one simple monumental line, two characteristic traits of the institution coexist: industry and representation. The first applies to the base, in a good granite ashlar, for the ground floor and mezzanine. The second is to be found on the main floor. There you can see a special treatment with arches, columns, and banisters, which speaks of its condition as the noble floor, that in which the galleries and offices of representation are located. (Navascués 474)

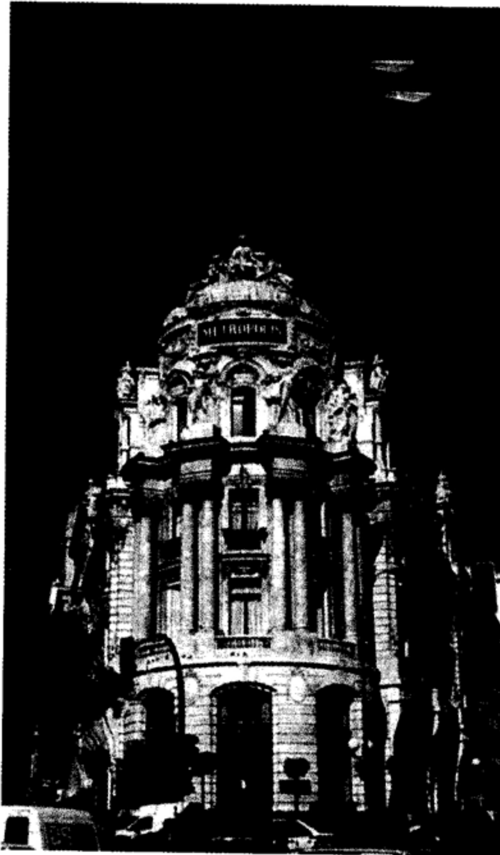
This architectural historian's analysis abides by the notion of the façade as an exterior surface that translates or reveals to the outside, in a more or less symbolic manner, the function of the corresponding interior. But, beyond that function of representation, what the façade of the Equitativa achieves for the street through its sensuous elephants and the bow-like thrust of its curvaceous corner, the Bank of Spain's façade accomplishes with its straight, massive (and at the time apparently overwhelming) presence. Its meticulous transcription of classical order and stability onto a surface of hard, durable materials appears to counteract the general atmosphere of defeat, deterioration and stagnation that allegedly pervaded the streets of Madrid during the years of its construction, the years of the Cuban war.

Two other monumental works, originally designed by French architects, contributed in a major sense to the new staging of business and pleasure in the setting of old Alcalá: in 1903, Farge and Esteves's Casino de Madrid, and, in 1905, the Febrier brothers' "La Unión y el Fénix" building, now known as "Metrópolis," which became the area's key point of convergence and divergence for the urban stroller's gaze. These buildings were constructed close to the time of the first demolitions that would clear the space for the Gran Vía. Years later an historian wrote:

> Madrid began to resemble Paris when the Ritz and Palace hotels, the Casino, and the Metropolis building were completed. All of them were designed by the best architects of a neighboring country. The consequences for Madrid were spectacular. New projects were challenged to surpass these magnificent compositions, and the incorporation of enormous decorative wealth: sculpture groups, classicist order, and elegant copper, slate, and lead domes. (Guerra de la Vega, *Madrid* 38)

I would add that the consequences were equally spectacular for Madrid's inhabitants, for the type of appearance, pace and demeanor they would be invited to adopt in view of these distinguished backdrops (whose ornamental vocabulary had been, not long before, the almost exclusive domain of the official buildings of power, knowledge and art: the Parliament, the National Library, the Prado museum, etc.).

The architect who perhaps best appropriated such vocabulary in response to that challenge was Antonio Palacios (1874-1945: two years younger than Pío Baroja, a year younger than Azorín, a year older than Antonio Machado). Palacios may be considered to best represent the architecture of the Generation of '98, hav-



Metropolis Building

ing contributed the largest number of memorable milestones to the new architectural scenery of the old metropolitan center. There now seems to prevail an appreciation not only for the beauty of his ornamentations, but also for the fact that Palacios

> was the only one in his generation who was able to create a personal style through the combination of North American monumental architecture and Spanish details borrowed from the Gothic and the Rennaissance; from the French he would take the composition by means of volumetric units. (Guerra de la Vega *Madrid* 189)

Others have also traced his inspiration to the Modernist architects of Viena's Secession, to Greek buildings of the hellenistic period (Hidalgo 102), and even to the vigor and heavy grandeur of German monumentalism (Ucha Donate 116). Four buildings that stand among the most spectacular—in the literal sense of the word—and which are certainly among those that best define the area, are the work of Palacios. The first building, the Palacio de Comunicaciones (Post Office) was designed in 1904; the second, the Banco Español del Río de la Plata (known today as the the Banco Central), in 1910. Then in 1919, the Círculo de Bellas Artes was erected on the corner of Alcalá and Marqués de Cubas; and, finally, in 1936, further up the street, the Banco Mercantil e Industrial (today an office building for the administration of the Comunidad de Madrid).

Palacios's monuments have at least two features in common. One is the architect's understanding of architecture as a stage presence in the city. His building's façades functioned like enormous backdrops that attracted a kind of gaze, a disposition, and even a demeanor, entirely different from anything suggested or facilitated by the squalid backdrops they were replacing. Secondly, they both exhibit the incessant search for monumentality (Guerra de la Vega *Madrid* 171), which in each and every case led him to a characteristic conflict with the local government (ironically more in line with the writer's somber eye than with the architect's penchant for European magnificence). For instance, the old urban laws did not allow any construction in the city center exceeding a modest 20-meter elevation on the widest streets (Anguita

Cantero 312). The project for the Banco Español del Río de la Plata called for 43 meters. In the end, the administration was forced to yield to Palacios's prestige, to financial pressure, and to the demands of modern times. They authorized construction with the explicit acknowledgement that it was "a building of a monumental nature and for *public ornament*" (*Guía de arquitectura y urbanismo de Madrid* 189, emphasis mine).

This first set of new buildings in downtown Madrid was completed in 1919 with the construction of the Bank of Bilbao, exactly across the street from the Equitativa, thus having come full circle. Designed by Ricardo Bastida, and obviously influenced by Palacios, it was crowned—and crowned in turn the entire set—with two oversize four-horse chariots, exhilarating symbols of the economic progress that Spain enjoyed during (and thanks to) World War I. For a time, the laborious installation of the chariots on two turrets that frame the curved façade became one of Madrid's greatest public spectacles. This prominent Bank of Bilbao proved that Unamuno had been partly right when he declared that Spain's overall economic development rested in the hands of the Basques rather than in those of the Catalans. Raymond Carr has confirmed that, "from 1900 on, and leaving the Catalans aside, Spain's truly rich came from the Basque country with very few exceptions" (390).[18] It also proved that Unamuno was clearly wrong when he attributed a more serious, and demure character to the capitalists born on the Northern shores: the Bank of Bilbao's façade was responsible for the most solemn and imposing corner of new Madrid.

So far, I have discusssed the new façades as aesthetic productions and dramatic events in the development of a metropolis whose public surfaces were otherwise heavily marked by traces of the desintegration of its colonial empire, then in its final stages. Now I would like to turn to the overwhelming fact that virtually all of the monumental façades that redefined the most populated downtown area of turn of the century Madrid were also capitalist icons: the fronts of banks or of bank-related businesses such as insurance companies, and service providers for the supposedly small leisure class that was directly associated with them, like the Casino and the Palace of Fine Arts. A few nagging questions are inevitably raised by this coincidence, particularly if we look at it in light of Engels's comments on the urban development of Manchester. Are these façades not typical products of enormous wealth, an ostentatious exhibition of sheer economic power, more so than a projection of the ethical and aesthetic principles of liberal architects?[19] Furthermore: at a time of predictable and predicted economic depression, as well as widespread poverty and illiteracy (Carr 382), are these façades not an obscene, intolerable form of concealment, sheer disguises that betray more than uplift the condition of metropolitan society at large? Were they conceived for the pleasure of the eye or for its submission and humiliation? As for the aesthetic lineage they claimed in their ornamental vocabulary, was it not an illegitimate appropiation, a dignifying cultural mask hiding, in Engels's words, "the misery and grime which form the complement to their wealth?"

There are indications that the writers of the Generation of '98 may have had a clear cut answer to these questions.

Ganivet, for example, in a little known short story, has a depressed character take a walk through this part of Madrid and react to the new buildings with angry cries: "The Equitativa building was blocking my way. I would suppress all Insurance Companies!" With reference to the Bank of Spain, he states:

> What a disgraceful waste of millions in a monstrosity of a building that has no unity, no character, no harmony...! Foreigners can't complain that we don't know how to spend our money. (285-90)

However, the gut reactions of Ganivet's character, the lack of moral reasoning or convincing argumentation, as well as the general absence of a critique on the part of the other generational writers—when apparently a critique would have been so easy—point to a more difficult and complex situation. A more nuanced answer to those disturbing questions would have to take into account two consequential factors, according to which the new façades were not exactly betraying the economic status of the country but rather translating, in a more or less emphatic way, a financial development that was being readily overlooked by patriotic laments. Firstly, the economic depression caused by the loss of the last colonies appears to have been sufficiently compensated by the return home of a considerable capital, a return made evident in the names of some of these banks (Hidalgo 20; Sanz García 337).[20] Secondly, recent studies demonstrate with numbers and statistics that turn of the century colonial events did not create a real discontinuity in Spain's long term economic development, which was, in fact, so similar to that of other European countries:

> Between 1830 and 1910 the rate of industrial expansion in Spain was at least as high as that of some of the more developed countries.... Around 1910, without the empire, Spanish foreign trade represented 13% of an economy that was between 3 and 4 times more productive than in 1792. (Ringrose 106, 122)

Thus, the new urban façades, however offensive both to intellectuals and to large numbers of destitute citizens that were roaming the streets of Madrid like soldiers from a lost war (literally so, no doubt, in many cases), accurately represented, or set the stage for, an economic performance of European proportions. In this sense, the façades were at least as transparent and truthful to the economic reality, as were the mournful representations of the city in the wretched scenarios favored by the generation's writers. The architects were also considerably ahead of the writers in the process of efficiently introducing Spain onto the European stage, a project the writers apparently shared but to which they contributed very little indeed. Both as modes of representation and as foresights of future urban developments, the large façades of turn of the century architects, with their poised, uplifting, and almost aggressive optimism, proved to be more atuned to the developing Spanish scenario than the writers' stories, with the pessimistic and introverted nationalism they staged around condemned urban settings.

Such divergent positions about the look, the function and the meaning of urban surfaces came to a final and more open confrontation during the construction of Madrid's Gran Vía.[21] Forever postponed since it was first conceived in the late 1850s, the final project for the av-

enue was not commissioned until January of 1899 (hardly a month after the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish American War) and was not approved until August of 1904. A French banker was predictably awarded the construction contract in 1909, but, for the most part, the buildings were designed by Spanish architects, beginning with those of the Generation of '98, such as Palacios, Eladio Laredo and Eduardo Reynals.

Demolition began in April of 1910 across the street from the Metropolis building. Soon after, it became overwhelmingly clear that the most ambitious avenue of the metropolitan area had not only been conceived as an unevenly successful showcase of American and European architectural trends,[22] but that it responded above all to a commercial vision. On the one hand, the buildings were generally designed to lodge modern offices, hotels and department stores. On the other, the street's most innovative contribution was not just its large, often sumptuous façades, but more concretely the style and prominence of storefronts and display windows at street level. These were large, open and well lit day and night, for the pleasure of the newly demanding, untiring urban gaze. It is in this sense—so indebted to the nineteenth century Parisian boulevard—that Gran Vía has been called Madrid's last street.[23]

Used to the dark, secretive and almost sinister atmosphere of the most characteristic stores and bars of traditional Madrid, city strollers now found their ways of seeing and being seen, as well as their habits of moving, dressing and acting in the streets, considerably influenced by the Gran Vía enclosure. In 1953, a special issue of the magazine *Cortijos y rascacielos*, directed by Secundino Zuazo, one of the younger (and truly great) architects of the Gran Vía buildings, summarized the character of the avenue with words that bring to mind Benjamin's analysis of Parisian arcades:

> Perhaps the main appeal of Madrid s Gran Vía is this opportunity to never stop looking; perhaps its charm resides in the good taste, the diversity and the uninterrupted series of shop windows and display cases in its luxury stores.... A distance that on any other street could be walked in ten minutes or less, will take an hour on the Gran Vía; people stop continually to make all sorts of comments. (Hidalgo 26)[24]

A few of those stores with large windows and lavish lighting began as modern cafeterias and American bars; such was, for example, the first function of the space that Alexandre Grassi later made famous as a jewelry store.[25] A new dress code and a series of social attitudes or poses were immediately adopted by patrons, changes promptly reflected in the fashion illustrations of contemporary magazines, particularly the glossy and immensely popular *La Esfera*. The Gran Vía itself had been the object of a stage production long before it became a glamorous avenue: in 1886, a Spanish operetta of that title dramatized the fears and expectations of the general population with respect to the as yet nonexistent but already famous boulevard.

Then came the uninhibited, almost cynical reaction of the writers of '98, revealing the highly uncritical quality of what could be called "their aesthetics of degradation," providing a stark contrast to Engels's ethical dismantling of Manchester's great avenues.[26] Baroja, for example, complained:

> The Gran Vía has greatly changed Madrid's urban character. The great avenue has taken away some of the population's liveliest and most picturesque features, thereby modifying its inhabitants' customs and manners. The little alleys of the old metropolitan downtown, while terrifying, sordid, narrow and dark, were also very picturesque. (*La busca* 1116)

It is a painter turned writer, Gutiérrez Solana, however, who best (or, at least, most crudely) represents the criteria of the generation in a long-winded report full of morbid details and seemingly absurd complaints. Solana finds nothing less admirable or acceptable than the "squandering of light" and the "huge shop windows" of the Gran Vía stores (20). He misses the old façades:

> the great beauty of the grossly scaled stucco, the cracks in the dividing walls, the iron grids of convent windows. On an overcast day threatening to rain, the black holes of the doorways and balconies stood out darker than ever. (24)

By contrast, the new façades are too modern, petulant, white, Catalan, artless and impersonal (20). But he misses more than anything the "calle de Ceres", a notorious stage set for sordid prostitution and idiosyncratic knife fights (36-39). Solana concludes:

> the one thing that compensated for the sight of such barbarous demolition was the very beauty of destruction, the romantic hours around a wreckage that transported us from the metropolitan capital to a sort of Castilian village ravished by the winds of ruin and destruction. (21)

Contemplating the turn of the century conflict through metropolitan perceptions of our own turn of the millenium proves curiously pertinent. The time that has since elapsed has contributed a sort of poetic justice to that largely ignored collision between such divergent views of the city. Recent, mostly critical, re-readings of the literary works of that generation often unveil the not so graceful aging of their more characteristic texts, as well as the generally conservative slant of their ideological claims. Its architects' buildings, on the other hand, seem to have reached an age of cult and representation. This is especially so in the case of the urban settings of Cibeles-Alcalá and the Gran Vía, which over the years have lent themselves to a great variety of social and political performances. First identified with turn of the century upper classes, in the 1950s and 1960s they accommodated comfortably, even happily, the postwar bourgeoisie and the tourist avalanche of Franco's times.[27] In the 1970s and 1980s, throughout the so called political transition, they were newly adopted—or better yet re-constructed—both by the hyperrealist eye of Antonio López García and by the more or less ironic cult of the so called *movida*, a youthful and allegedly frivolous movement that coincided with the incorporation of Spain into the European Common Market.[28] Both types of postmodern sensibility are in good part responsible for the fact that these frontages still constitute, in the public eye, the emblem of Madrid's metropolitan identity. My own way of reading the writers of '98, as reflected in these pages, has been greatly determined by an awareness of this urban scenario, an awareness stimulated by both of these artistic manifestations. Looking back from this end of the century, time

appears to have been at the service of space; the architects, not the writers, have the last word, at least for the time being.

Notes

[1]Even in Haussmann's Paris there was a *fin-de-siècle* development: "By the 1890s, a taste for a more sculptural treatment of façades had made the buildings of the Haussmann era seem flat and monotonous in their form, timid and insipid in their decoration" (Olsen 83).

[2]There is, of course, a stark contrast between Caballero's door and Polo's, in the miserable neighborhoods of the South (Pérez Galdós, II, 47), but also between these two and the equivocal middleway represented by Bringas's door, in their somewhat narrow street (19). In Galdós's Madrid even the palaces of the old aristocracy (as in *La desheredada*'s Palacio de Aransis) failed to contribute but a vulgar façade to the ornamentation of the metropolitan streets (Pérez Galdós, I, 1042).

[3]Raimundo Cabrera, like his son-in-law Fernando Ortiz, and most Cuban intellectuals from that first postcolonial phase, finds in New York a point of reference for Modernity (unlike other Latin American travelers such as Darío, Gómez Carrillo, Ugarte, Nervo, etc., for whom only Paris had that privilege). Thus, Cabrera writes: "Barcelona is in many ways Spain's New York [...]. It is not attached to things old. It loves novelties and keeps growing year after year" (60).

[4]Ten years later, after another visit to Barcelona, he repeats obsessively the same comments (*Obras* 437-38). The letter to Ortega is number 6 in *Epistolario completo Ortega-Unamuno* (45). The letter to Maragall has been collected in *Epistolario Miguel de Unamuno Juan Maragall, con escritos complementarios* (72).

[5]I have studied this generational perception of everything French in another article, "Apasionadas simetrías: sobre la identidad del '98."

[6]This is a tradition that would later be appropiated (in part) by the so called Modern Movement: "Modern-movement theory shunned the façade and gave us the skeleton or the skull" (Schumacher 5). But both aesthetic positions were in part generated by a decisive economic reality. Carr explains as follows the seemingly ideological priorities of the Generation of '98: "It was necessity that promoted sobriety to national virtue" (384). Goehner considers that the disappearance of low cost artisans, experts in applied arts, and the untenable high cost of skillfull manual labour brought about by the industrial era, may have been ultimately responsible for the aesthetic sobriety favored by the Modern Movement.

[7]And yet, at that time in Madrid, the spontaneous and disorderly growth of the periphery prevailed over the organized growth in downtown and in planned expansions (Hidalgo 18).

[8]Even when the panorama is more melancholy, it retains that static character of a fixed image, a classic painting that offers to the visitor of the exibition a feeling of something permanent and unalterable: "Madrid, flat, whitish, coated by the humid air, sprang from the night with its roofs cutting the sky in a straight line; its turrets, its tall factory chimneys; and, in the silence of sunrise, the town and the remote landscape had a touch of the unreal and of the stationary quality of a painting" (Baroja *La busca* 210).

[9]This kind of disappearing act is readily justified in the more self-conscious intervention of *La busca*'s narrator. Part II opens:

> A person from Madrid who happens to walk by chance through the poor neighborhoods close to the Manzanares River will observe with surprise the spectacle of misery and squalor, sadness and ignorance, that pervades the outskirts of Madrid with its miserable roads, dusty in the summer, muddy in the winter. The capital is a city of contrasts; it brings to view strong lights next to dark shadows; a refined, almost European lifestyle downtown, and an African, tribe-like life-style in the periphery. Not too long ago, there used to be next to Segovia Road and the Campillo de Gil Imón a suspicious looking house whose reputation, widespread rumors had it, wasn't exactly clean. I had great faith in this paragraph and others like it, because they clothed my novel in an

> air of mystery and phantasmagoria. My friends, however, have convinced me that such paragraphs should be erased because—according to them—they would be fine in a Parisian novel, but not in a novel set in Madrid. Here, they add, nobody walks by chance anywhere, even if he wants to, and there aren't any observers, nor suspicious-looking houses, nothing like that. (59-60)

[10]Azorín also spent some time in Barcelona in 1906 interviewing its most prominent public figures, among them, architects Domenech y Montaner and Puig y Cadafalch. He later published these interviews in a book, *En Barcelona.* The reader of this short volume might be surprised by the fact that Azorín, so prone to long, minute descriptions, does not devote here a single line to a depiction of the city, the city's façades, or the stage of his interviews. Not a trace appears of the impressions the urban expansion's great avenues and brilliant façades must have caused him; rather there is a ponderous silence which oppresses the reader as another form of censure, as radical as Unamuno's is explicit. Meanwhile, Azorín favored the remains of the old Madrid as the capital's most significant architecture. He wished to show this architecture precisely to those Spanish Americans whose gaze had been educated by the great façades of New York, Paris, and Barcelona: "Our brothers from America should visit Spain and stop off in Madrid. Here we will effusively shake their hands. Here, arm in arm, we will visit the hidden recesses and all the places of learning and entertainment Madrid has to offer.... In Madrid, the artistic areas that most resemble the old cities—Argentinian travellers should take note—are the Segovia and Sacramento neighborhoods" (*Madrid* XXVII).

[11]He then adds, somewhat tongue in cheeck: "Puerta del Sol is the center of Spain.... The most important, serious, and capable men of today's Spain gather at the Puerta del Sol, in the section between Fe's bookstore and Arenal Street.... Everyday, the most typical and genuine characters of the Hispanic race get together in this stretch for a few hours" (*Madrid, guía* 1276).

[12]Another interpretation of that mix gives it an especially meaningful character: "In between these two principle tendencies (the inertia of a past and the urgency of a future) a present was forged, composed of unconnected additions, as invertebrate as a country unable to solve its inner contradictions, nor even to set them out clearly" (Baldellou "Escuela" 37).

[13]This seems to be a sort of ongoing debate. After World War II, for some architects—*pace* Louis Kahn—the façade is only the exterior skin. For others, the façade doesn't necessarily have to translate, or adapt to, the interior distribution of the building, and could become—in the words of Le Corbusier—"a pure plastic event", that is, the point or the plane where the scientist is replaced by the artist (*AA. VV.* 55). Furthermore, many twentieth century architects believe that there are public, social, and cultural responsibilities involved in the design of the façade, beyond the mere representation of the status of the building and its owners (Maffei 6). It has been recently written that "every façade concerns as much what it covers as the landscape and the city that surround it. Of course, the façade must reflect the plan of the building, but it must also reflect one other thing: a certain urban order" (*AA. VV.* 56). Robert Venturi concludes his lengthy argumentation in favor of complexity and contradiction in the relationship between interior and exterior: "Because the architect has to take into consideration environmental forces, contradiction, or at least contrast, between the inside and the outside is an essential characteristic of urban architecture.... And by recognizing the difference between the inside and the outside, architecture opens the door once again to an urbanistic point of view" (84-86).

[14]The new architecture of Madrid would be European but somewhat outdated. Thus, it has been written about one of the most representative buildings of the period: "La Unión y El Fenix building proves to be a bit out of step, for its construction [1905] coincided with the years of the various modernisms. However, this was the more conservative style prefered by the less daring European burgeoisie" (Hidalgo 78).

[15]This is part of one of the fragments quoted by Isac (101). As far as I know, Urioste's complete text is available only at the Academy's library, where

outdated but strictly enforced laws limit access to those personally sponsored by a member of the Academy.

[16]Perhaps the architects were thus adjusting their work to the gaze of the nineteenth century *flâneur*, what Muñoz Millanes has called the theatricality of the *flâneur's* gaze: "And it not only had to do with the street itself, where in passing, strangers exposed themselves to the scrutiny of the idle passer-by, but also to the numerous boxframes which, from far or near, above or below, inside and outside, outlined them in the same way as would have an optical apparatus or the threshold of the theatre stage" (Muñoz Millanes 159).

[17]Gómez de la Serna, who in *Elucidario de Madrid* (1933) described in some detail the history and appearance of the Retiro pond, completely fails to acknowledge, much less describe, the grand new monument that unequivocally dominates it since 1901; this willful erasure, this resistance to play along with the new stages, seems to characterize the entire Generation of '98.

[18]Santos Juliá overstates the case (although only in part) when he adds that all, or almost all, the architects who build this new Madrid are from the Basque country (457).

[19]In this case, David Harvey's reading of Parisian boulevards would be applicable not only to the urban development of Alcalá Street, but also to the upcoming Gran Vía: "Haussmann tried to sell a new and more modern conception of community in which the power of money was celebrated as spectacle and display on the grands boulevards, in the grands magasins, in the cafes and at the races" (quoted by Gregory 220).

[20]"From 1875 on, one of the most important and possibly least studied economic phenomenons of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century takes a radical turn: the total or partial transfer of the patrimonies originating in the Greater Antilles. For our purposes, the importance of said transfer is the economic effect it had in Madrid on all levels;" especially investments made in real estate and stock market shares (Cayuela Fernández 682-83).

[21]"Among other things, the Gran Vía can be interpreted as the materialization of a collectivity's unconscious desires, a collectivity lacking an identity, a collectivity that was somewhere between Castillian and cosmopolitan, dynamic and contradictory" (Baldellou "Gran Vía" 44).

[22]Corral refers to the Gran Vía as a product of a moment of artistic disorientation; moreover, after the solid constructions of Alcalá, Madrid's Gran Vía was the great triumph of plaster over noble materials (377).

[23]The expresion is Baldellou's, in a 1993 article where he reviews the architectural value of Gran Vía buildings. For Baldellou, the Gran Vía represents Madrid s strongest effort to look like a big city, an American or European metropolis. "In the same way that Madrid's ruling class had traditionally been foreign, its architecture was, as a result, a melting pot of various tendencies, especially from the Restoration onward" ("Gran Vía" 46).

[24]Gómez de la Serna, who began to reconcile himself with the Gran Vía when its white buildings began to acquire the patina of urban filth which cover-coated the old façades of downtown, wrote the characteristic script for the Gran Vía stage: "If the appearance of a conversation in the Gran Vía and in the middle of another street is studied, it will be noted that the conversation that takes place in the Gran Vía will be oriented towards great projects, and will be held with more anxiety, than the one that is had in more tranquil streets" (274).

[25]Indeed, the first store to open in the new Gran Vía was a *salón de té* lit by 14 arc lamps, with a neon sign that announced: "Confitería, pastelería, fiambres y café bar" (del Corral 376). Chicote's American Bar would become a Gran Vía icon almost from the very beginning. Agustín de Foxá, who in *Madrid de corte a checa* (1938) portrays the most representative areas of the capital in the late 20s and early 30s, has his *señorito* protagonist visit the bar right before the Civil War starts: "He took a taxi and went to Chicote, on the Gran Vía. A bellhop in green uniform opened the door for him. Soliciting florists surrounded him. Inside, white, electric globes of light, rows of cactus bristling with needles, semi-box seats with mirrors, and silvery tubes on which to hang coats" (Foxá 174).

[26]And yet, the Gran Vía lent itself easily to

that kind of critique. In 1993, Baldellou wrote (without a reference to Engels, of course): "The new façades which make up the street barely disguise the fact that, a few meters behind, a very different reality subsists: that of poverty and the marginal" ("Gran Vía" 44).

[27]In Almudena Grandes' short story "El vocabulario de los balcones," a characteristic middle class family of the 1960s constructs its own native map of Madrid around the Metrópolis building: "Look! look! —The mother used to tell visitors, bringing them to the balcony and forcing them to twist their necks to an impossible angle, while pointing with her index finger to a remote building—. What you see there is the dome of la Unión y el Fénix. We are virtually living in Gran Vía!" (55).

[28]In 1974, upon painting it for the third time, Antonio López declared in an interview: "It is a street that I like, but not because it symbolizes anything, nor because of any theory. Just as there are fruits that you like, and so you paint five cumquats but no fig tree. Its architecture very much attracts me, its breadth and the unity of all its façades. It is like the nave of a cathedral, something which I like very much" (in Herrera 50). As regards the *movida*, the whimsical and ubiquitous postcards of the area are hard evidence of its representative character.

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