The State, Enterprise Culture, and the Arts

The Mass Media: A Problematic Modernization
ENRIQUE BUSTAMANTE

To talk of a mass communications sector or market in the late Franco years can be misleading. The dictatorship had imposed a primarily political function on the press, radio, and television which affected the way they, and almost all interested parties, worked. The press was subject to official sanction and advance censorship, and to Consejos de Fundadores (state-appointed management boards) instituted to keep an eye on political correctness rather than on market forces (prices were set officially); unofficial groupings, constituted by common shareholders or front companies, also existed within the press, largely representing financial and industrial groups using the press as a public platform in the in-fighting between the regime’s different families, even if this meant considerable financial losses.¹

In radio, Spain was unique in Europe with three private networks (SER, COPE under Church control, and CRI) which, despite legal restrictions on news coverage, enjoyed a politically tolerated joint monopoly from the mid-1950s. The rest of the news media—the newspaper chain controlled by the Movimiento;² state radio and television; the news agencies Pyresa and EFE; the press and radio run by the vertical trade unions³ (especially the newspaper Pueblo)—comprised a formidable pro-dictatorship
The apparatus in the hands of the state. By and large, the private media and communications groups coexisted happily with the interests of the political system. The Spanish media would themselves later put about the myth of 'the press' as a force generally in favour of change, if not a vital factor in securing democracy. Future historians researching the newspaper libraries will find ample evidence to the contrary. Those of us who lived through that period as active members of the broad democratic front of journalists which flourished particularly in the big cities, usually within the Press Associations, know from painful experience that the articles supporting change we fought so hard to get through constantly came up against the watchful eye and ultra-conservative attitudes of the vast majority of the public and private media.

In fact only a tiny, relatively marginal section of the media had from the 1970s openly lobbied for democracy. This consisted largely of magazines formed from various opposition alliances—including the legendary Cuadernos para el Diálogo and Triunfo—which paradoxically folded during the transition. To be fair, there were some daily newspapers—El Alcázar despite its name, Madrid which was closed down, Informaciones till the April 1974 Portuguese Revolution—that clashed with the regime over political issues or because reporting restrictions undermined their business dynamic. The intensification of repressive measures against the press in the dictatorship's last phases, or in the early stages of the inappropriately termed 'transition' under UCD,* indicates assorted managerial or professional conflicts of this kind, but not that the communications network was predominantly in favour of democratic rule.

The new press media created in response to the climate of change almost all (with the exception of Cambio 16, founded in 1971) started up in the first years of the transition (El País and Interviú were founded in 1976), and made relatively small inroads into the market. It was in the 1980s and 1990s, thanks to commercial successes at the centre of big communications groups, that they increased their profile.

A similar picture applies when we turn to the growing globalization of communications and of the culture industries generally. The Franco regime declared a no-go area all those sectors assumed to have immediate political influence—the press, radio, publishing, etc.—but opened up to foreign capital those cultural sectors felt to be of purely economic or entertainment value. In this way several big European groups got a foothold in the press and publishing by taking over the distribution networks (Hachette, Bertelsmann), and even covertly in actual magazine publication (Bertelsmann with Selecciones del Reader's Digest); by contrast, at the height of the Franco period, they swept the board with the record industry, film distribution, and advertising, acquiring a virtually irreversible degree of control over important sectors of the Spanish culture and communications industries.

This almost entirely political, instrumental conception of the media, divorced from any kind of cultural policy or objective, would leave its mark on the communications industry under democracy to the present day. Thus the neo-liberal,
mercantilist wave of the 1980s would invade Spain, as it did western Europe generally, without there having been a preceding experience or concept of the mass media as a mouthpiece of society. This is particularly worrying in television and radio where, contrary to the rest of Europe, deregulation and commercialization would occur in the absence of any concept of public service broadcasting.

**Government-led concentration**

The 1980s, especially after the PSOE* came to power in 1982, saw a number of fundamental structural changes in the Spanish media; in particular, a new concordance between political influence and the maximization of profits, through the introduction of market mechanisms automatically encouraging concentration and globalization. The communications policy of successive Spanish governments—never a coherent whole but manifest in their actions, laws, and omissions—acted as a trigger enabling the industry to restructure roughly on the lines of the more developed countries of western Europe.

Thus the dual process of lateral concentration within the same media, and of diversification across a range of media, was marked by a series of developments resulting from political decisions. First, the selling off in 1984 of the state-owned newspaper chain Medios de Comunicación Social del Estado started a rush to set up big regional press groups. Second, the concession in 1981–2 of 300 new FM radio stations consolidated the old radio groups of the Franco period, generating two new networks Antena 3 and Radio 80 which merged shortly after. Third, the concession in 1988 of three private television channels, despite the imposition of a ceiling on shares of 25 per cent per person or company, ended up benefiting existing big press groups and facilitating their links with international consortia (Telecinco, Antena 3, Canal+). Fourth, the concession in 1993 of television transmission franchises for the Spanish satellite system Hispasat gives a preview of the kind of configuration that is likely to be produced by new television markets.

At the start of the 1990s, the effects of these developments on the mass media are clear.

In the daily press, five groups own over 40 papers, amounting to roughly 55 per cent of registered sales. Apart from these, plus ABC and El Mundo (the latter a creation of the 1980s), there are 75 other daily papers with a total circulation of barely half a million. In the national press this concentration of the market in a few hands has not yet reached levels comparable to those of other European countries, but in the regional press four groups (El Correo, Prensa Ibérica, Zeta, and Grupo 16) have in recent years triggered an escalating cycle of mergers and take-overs (wiping out competition in some regions) which is reaching danger levels.

In radio, two networks with common shareholders—SER and Antena 3—own 417 out of a total of 800 commercial stations, claiming 58 per cent of the audience
63 per cent of profits for the commercial sector. These two networks plus two others—COPE and Onda Cero—account for 80 per cent of the total radio audience, including that for the state-controlled sector.

In television, two Spanish groups—El País, PRISA and ZETA—control two of the private channels—Canal+ and Antena 3—while the third is controlled by Bertusconi's Fininvest. Stock market dealing resulting from unstable share prices has made it impossible to determine the identity of a significant number of shareholders, despite the fact that all transfers of holdings require state authorization.

This recent pattern of take-overs has created a situation in which a tiny number of companies control a large chunk of the news media. Despite widespread use of the term, the number of Spanish multi-media groups can effectively be reduced to two, PRISA and ZETA; joint operations are, however, mainly restricted to finance, with little evidence of genuine collaborative practice or substantial savings.

PRISA, whose leading partner has beyond any doubt been the newspaper El País, has a majority holding in the biggest private radio network in Europe, SER; a significant holding in Antena 3 Radio; 25 per cent of holdings in the subscription TV channel Canal+ (jointly with French Canal+ and other Spanish financial groups); and close links with the book publishing chain Timón. In addition, through its subsidiaries, it has moved into audio-visual products, audio-visual copyright and advertising, and most importantly (together with Carat) into the area of holding companies. It is the only Spanish-backed group that has embarked on modest overseas expansion, with the Independent in the UK, Público in Portugal, the radio network M-40 in France, La Prensa in Mexico, among others.

ZETA, which grew out of the success of the magazine Interviú, owns a wide regional press chain, notably El Periódico de Catalunya; and has diversified laterally by taking over a broad range of general and special-interest magazines, subsequently launching into a vast range of economic sectors from construction to tourism and food. In initial partnership with Rupert Murdoch (who later denied collaboration beyond publishing) and with one of the biggest Spanish banking groups (Banesto), it now controls the television channel Antena 3 TV.

However, if one takes the term multi-media group to mean simply financial involvement in various media, the biggest Spanish multi-media groups by far turn out to be the four big banks. Banesto, the Banco Central Hispano, the Banco de Bilbao-Vizcaya, and the Banco de Santander have in recent years gained key positions in the press, radio, and television by putting a significant amount of money into the big communications groups. In addition, they already have a foothold in the leading companies preparing bids for cable television franchising in 1994, strong holdings in companies competing for the value-added services market in telecommunications, and have even started to move into specialized communications networks (the Banco de Santander-British Telecom and BCH-ATT partnerships) despite being shareholders in, and on the board of directors of, the Compañía Telefónica which has monopoly control of the Spanish telephone system.

The State, Enterprise Culture, and the Arts 359
Selective globalization

The globalization of communications and culture has followed a similar course, marked since the transition period by the lifting of legal obstacles to foreign investment in practically all sectors of the economy.

Between 1982 and 1986, the press was opened up to foreign capital. The Regulation of Telecommunications Law of 1988 also allowed investment in television and radio. Legal adjustment to the European Community will extend the process. But even with the single market, foreign groups have been signally cautious in their investments, consolidating established positions or building on their specialist expertise. With few exceptions (e.g. Hersant), moves into new sectors have been made in partnership rather than competition with Spanish groups.

The picture in the early 1990s is uneven but with enormous repercussions for the Spanish culture industries.

In the record industry, 5 international groups control 85 per cent of the market. In book publishing, 2 of the 5 biggest groups (Springer, Bertelsmann) are foreign, between them controlling 57 per cent of sales.

In cinema and video, the biggest distributors are now appendages of the US giants, with just 4 of them (Warner, UIP, Fox, and Columbia Tri Star) taking over 50 per cent of box-office receipts, which partly explains why Spanish film companies get barely 12 per cent of takings. In video, 7 US distributors control 70 per cent of sales.

In advertising, the ‘top 40’ agencies consist almost entirely of multinational groups and megagroups, only 3 being Spanish. In particular, the proliferation of holding companies has given the multinationals a lead in advertising investment in the media, especially in television.

In television, the legislation setting up private channels has directly encouraged partnerships between Spanish and multinational groups: French Canal+ has holdings in the similarly named Spanish channel; News Corporation Int. (Murdoch) in Antena 3 TV; while three-quarters of the shares in Telecinco are (to date) held by Berlusconi, Kirch, and the Bank of Luxemburg. Even as minority shareholders, the foreign partners’ technical input and control over programming gives them considerable leverage.

In the press and radio, foreign capital has only just begun to make inroads, but even these two sectors are no longer entirely under national control, as demonstrated by the holdings of Hersant in Grupo 16, Agnelli in El Mundo, and Hachette and even Televisa (Mexico) in Cadena Ibérica.

‘Big is beautiful’

The Spanish communications and culture industries—never sound, even financially—have, then, been catapulted into ‘modernity’. The mass media have in recent years popularized a dominant discourse that equates the big with the modern
With competitiveness in the international market. The praise which the media themselves heap on small and medium-sized businesses—seen as paragons of stability, growth, and increased employment—inevitably stops when it comes to the communications and culture industries. Here ‘atomization’ has come to be synonymous with backwardness, and bigness tends to be uncritically equated with having an independent line and even with pluralism.

Some academics and management theorists have compounded this obfuscation by reviving the ideas of US thinkers like Benjamin Compaine or De Sola Pool, now some fifteen years out of date, in order to pin our hopes of pluralism and democracy on that ‘other world’ of the new technology. However, the immediate picture is dominated by the big groups, Spanish and foreign, using their established positions in the traditional communications market to expand still further, for example into the satellite and cable sectors. The close links of some of the above-mentioned media groups with Spanish banks and electricity companies, and with French or Belgian banks and water companies, are sufficient evidence.

‘Postmodernization’ is, for the time being, taking place on a purely economic level, with a singular lack of cultural and social innovation. And there is no sign on the horizon of any ‘national champion’ ready to defend Spain’s colours in the great global tournament the media moguls keep announcing.

Note
1 A 1976 survey showed that 22 groups publishing 32 newspapers were closely connected through common board members or subsidiary companies to the biggest financial and industrial groups in the country. See E. Bustamante, Los amos de la información en España (Madrid, 1982).

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Redefining the Public Interest: Television in Spain Today
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In early 1994, public television in Spain—Television Española (TVE)—adopted a new strategy which appeared to reaffirm its public service role and distinguish it from its increasingly aggressive private competitors. Both state-run channels TVE1 and TVE2, as well as TVE’s international satellite channel, refashioned their news and current affairs output and from mid-April 1994 began offering a greater number
of slots designed to give their coverage more immediacy and relevance to the viewer (for example, more on-site reports on traffic and transport problems). TVE’s flagship current affairs programme Informe semanal was also given a harder, more investigative, more international profile, beginning with an analysis of the role of Chinese mafia gangs in Spain. Such changes seemed to suggest that TVE was at last responding to widespread concern and taking its public service obligations more seriously. These adjustments have to be seen in the context of a particularly intense and acrimonious period of competition for market share between the state-run provider and the three main private channels. TVE has also been under extreme political pressure to account for significant debts and losses. Moreover, the attempt to revarnish its public service image through the vehicle of current affairs has come only after mounting criticism of scheduling decisions which reflected a managerial priority with ratings over programme quality. For example, the prize-winning thirteen-part documentary series Mujeres de Latinoamerica [Women of Latin America] had to wait well over a year for its first screening in January 1994, when it was given a 10.00 p.m. Sunday-night slot on the minority channel TVE2; in protest, its director Carmen Sarmiento called on TVE’s management to respond more robustly to the need for peak-time quality programming.

The above media stories highlight the many contradictions and dilemmas faced by Spain’s national public television provider. In the context of the increasing deregulation of broadcasting and rapid development in cable and satellite channels, public television outlets are under greater pressure than ever to compete for audiences. This essay seeks to determine the extent to which, under a pluralist, democratic, and increasingly deregulated Spanish system, the definition of the public interest has become a matter for the advertisers and the conglomerates rather than the official authorities, regulatory bodies, and audience pressure groups.

Television in Spain

One of the key terms underpinning the public service television debate in the UK is that of the licence fee. Since the Spanish viewing public does not pay a licence fee, it does not have a direct contractual relationship with the national supplier of television output. As all television services in Spain are funded predominantly by advertising revenue, the notion of public service is problematic and the defence of the public interest tends to be left to the government of the day, its monitoring committees, and, to a much smaller extent, audience pressure groups.

With regard to government influence in broadcasting, it is now widely acknowledged that the acquisition in 1990 of the franchise for the private channel Canal+ by the media and publishing conglomerate PRISA (plus its take-over of Antena 3 Radio) owed much to the group’s political affinity to the PSOE* government in power. Also in 1992, at the height of the financial crisis suffered by Antena 3, it was again the PSOE government which allowed new entrants into the company
(Murdoch's News International, Banesto, and Grupo Zeta publishers) in exchange, it is said, for a less critical attitude towards government policy. TVE is rarely out of the media spotlight and its operations, the role of its managers, and the behaviour of its political masters are constantly under scrutiny. In July 1992, for example, Pilar Miró, ex-Director-General of TVE, was finally cleared of the charge of restocking her wardrobe through the unlawful appropriation of public funds. At the same time, Javier Arenas, media spokesman for the conservative Partido Popular (PP*), accused the present Director-General of TVE (Jordi Garcia Candau) of engaging in more than thirty instances of financial irregularities. Such accusations form part of a long-running campaign by PP to embarrass the governing Socialist Party.

Corruption, malpractice, alleged embezzlement, theft, political control, and bias are hardly news when it comes to the operation and management of Spanish television. In this sense, little seems to have changed in TVE's internal functioning or public image since the dictatorship. During the transition and after, successive governments have been unwilling to sacrifice the considerable advantages of political patronage they inherited from the dictatorship over appointments in the television industry. In other ways, of course, things have changed quite fundamentally since the dictatorship and although the two main national television channels remain the effective fiefdom of the party in power, Spain has become a diverse, competitive, multi-channel and indeed multi-media broadcasting arena. If anything, these developments have complicated the terms of the debate concerning the relationship between television as public service and the pressures of commercial imperatives.

Television and dictatorship

Needless to say, during the Franco dictatorship the media were without exception controlled by the state through laws, regulatory measures, and frequently through direct state ownership of outlets, such as newspapers and radio stations. Private companies wishing to establish press or radio outlets had to apply for administrative licences, a bureaucratic exercise invariably facilitated by the working of enchufe (old-boy network, political contacts) and bribery. When the first official broadcasts began in Spain on 28 October 1956, the service was established as a public state monopoly dependent on the government and funded by the state from its General Budget. What is perhaps less well known is that, right from its inception and unlike most other European services, Spanish television followed the American example by accepting advertising, and from around March 1958 began earning revenue from the primitive rótulos or cartones (posters, placards) used in its incipient advertising spots. Absent from the Spanish experience under the dictatorship would be any attempt to foster an educated, well-informed, and demanding viewing public. Indeed, the regime required the exact opposite and this repressive,
xenophobic, and paternalistic legacy would permeate attempts, after the dictatorship’s fall, to disengage broadcasting from the apparatuses of central state control.

Television after Franco

The main reference points for the post-dictatorship debate over the nature of television services in Spain are provided by the 1978 Constitution which, in Article 20, guaranteed freedom of expression for all, freedom of the press, radio, and television, and the dissemination of ideas, in and out of the country, without censorship. It also recognized and protected the rights of the different linguistic communities, foreseeing their eventual access to the media. At the same time, however, Article 38 recognized and protected the exercise of free enterprise, an obligation which would have far-reaching consequences in the broadcasting sphere. And finally, in Article 128, clause 2, the Constitution defined broadcasting as an essential public service requiring governmental regulation if not financial support. It is the apparent contradiction in the Constitution between the protection of free enterprise and freedom of expression on the one hand, and the designation of public broadcasting as an essential public service on the other, which has led to severe legal confusion ever since and numerous appeals to the Constitutional Tribunal, especially from interested parties in the television business wanting to establish their own channels.

Perhaps the most important move in the regulation of the media was the Radio and Television Statute of 1980. This reasserted the right of government to control the media through various committees. However, the new law said nothing regarding the rights of private enterprise and the eventual introduction in Spain of commercial television. Under the terms of the 1980 Statute, Radio Televisión Española (RTVE) was established as a public corporation providing television and radio services to the country through Televisión Española (TVE) and Radio Nacional de España (RNE). RTVE was given a monopoly over the two existing television channels, TVE1 and TVE2. RNE had one AM network and four FM networks, one of which would broadcast different programmes in the regions. Both TVE and RNE would be governed by an Administrative Council comprising twelve members, including parliamentary deputies chosen proportionally according to relative party strengths. The role of the Administrative Council would be to approve plans regarding the general principles and policies to which all broadcasting should broadly adhere. Separate advisory councils for television and radio were also established: these would present opinions and reports to the Administrative Council regarding programming policies. Ultimate responsibility for the service rested, however, with a Director-General who appointed the chief executives of TV and radio services. The post of Director-General, needless to say, was a highly sensitive political appointment made by the party in power; if and when parliament were dissolved, the incumbent would cease to hold office. As regards policies for the regions in each of the (now seventeen) autonomous communities,
there would be a regional advisory council of RTVE which would advise and report to the regional RTVE executive. In practice, neither the national nor the regional advisory councils appear to exert much influence on the management of television and radio services.

The 1980 Statute also foresaw the need to allow the autonomous communities to express their regional identities through the establishment of their own television services. To this effect, in December 1983 under the new PSOE government, a law was passed providing the legal basis for the establishment of the so-called ‘third channel’ in the various regions. This new law was curiously pre-empted almost a year in the Basque Country, where Euskal Telebista was set up in January 1983. In January 1984, Catalonia developed its own third channel TV3, followed in July 1985 by Galicia’s TVG. Since then, other third channels have come into being: Andalusia (Canal Sur), Valencia (Canal 9), Madrid (TeleMadrid). Moreover, both the Basque Country and Catalonia have created their own fourth channels, without any clear legal basis, it seems, and other regions are in the process of negotiating their own third channels. Let it be remembered that these third (or fourth) channels are dependent on the authority as well as financial support of the parliaments of the autonomous communities and thus, not unlike the national channels, subject to political pressures.

In 1988, after a long period of debate and numerous opposition amendments, the Spanish parliament finally passed a law allowing the PSOE government to grant licences to three private TV channels. Their remit would be national although the terms of the licence would require them to provide parallel regional programming. Virtually all opposition parties argued that the limitation on only three commercial channels be rescinded. The government refused any change here, conscious of the potential pressure on advertising revenue these new operators would exert. Ownership of the private channels had to be predominantly Spanish (an initial suggested limit of 15 per cent on newspaper ownership of the new channels was raised to 25 per cent after successful lobbying by groups such as PRISA and La Vanguardia). Foreign entrants would be allowed a maximum 25 per cent shareholding in any one company. Moreover, an emphasis was placed on domestic output: 15 per cent was supposed to be produced ‘in-house’ and at least 40 per cent drawn from Spanish or EC production. Initially, the PSOE government bill also included the provision of a supervisory body for the new commercial stations but this was later dropped. The licences were awarded in 1990, initially for a ten-year term, to: Telecinco (in which Berlusconi’s Fininvest has a 25 per cent holding, Anaya Publishers and Spain’s National Organization for the Blind (ONCE) also having 25 per cent each), Antena 3 (initially controlled by La Vanguardia, who lost their controlling position in 1992 when News International, Banesto, and Grupo Zeta took holdings), and Canal + (the French-owned subscription TV and film channel, in which the PRISA group, which includes the national daily El País, has a major holding). These commercial channels, like their national cousins, would be obliged to observe the same fundamental principles outlined in
clause 4 of the 1980 Statute. Save for the subscription-based Canal+, all channels depend financially on advertising revenue. It is worth recalling that, up to 1991, TVE was virtually the only public European television service to be financed almost exclusively by advertising and not dependent officially on the General State Budget (in practice TVE continues to receive government hand-outs, though these do not figure in the official accounts). In the regions, as previously mentioned, television financing derives from a mixture of commercial advertising and subsidies from autonomous community budgets.

Public service versus private enterprise

During the period of debate over the introduction of private television (1978–88), the PSOE—with the Communist Party—consistently rejected demands for the establishment of a National Commission for television, preferring parliament to be the controlling body; during the 1980s, it has maintained this position. Not surprisingly, the main opposition parties and pressure groups have claimed that the government has effectively 'nationalized' the main national services. This 'top-down' management style also affects the regional channels' operations, since they are subordinate to RTVE in Madrid and cannot act independently when Madrid demands priority in transmission. Notwithstanding such political interference, there are numerous legal norms and official guidelines governing the operations and output of all broadcasting services, which spell out the obligations of the broadcasters towards the public and the public interest. These deserve consideration.

According to the Preamble to the 1980 Statute, television and radio are regarded as essential public services on two main grounds. First, they are seen as essential vehicles for the provision of information, participation of citizens, formation of public opinion, access to and advancement of the educational system as well as of the languages and cultures of Spain’s regional communities. Second, they are viewed as an essential means for protecting the rights and freedoms of minorities as well as those of women. Such ideas clearly endorse civic values, national and regional identities, and the protection of minorities. Drafted over the period 1977–80, these norms were no doubt inspired by the desire to consolidate democracy in Spain. Article 4 of the Statute presents a series of recommendations applying to programming content and policy. It proposes the following principles: information should be true, objective, and impartial; information should be distinguished from opinion, and where necessary the opinion holder’s identity should be revealed; there should be respect for social, cultural, political, and linguistic pluralism; respect for individual privacy and reputation; protection of minors; respect for the principles of freedom and equality as outlined in Article 14 of the Constitution. Underlying these principles, there is clearly a desire to break with the past, to separate the operation of the media from the state, and to make them more responsive to the needs of the individual, the regional communities, and the various minorities, thereby enhancing their democratic and pluralist outlook.
In 1981 the RTVE Administrative Council produced a further series of Principles and Guidelines. Paramount among the general guidelines was the media's active promotion of the democratic, civic values underlying the 1978 Constitution. Also important was the need to foster national unity and solidarity among all Spanish citizens while respecting the linguistic, cultural, and political rights of regional communities. The media were also encouraged to promote dialogue and debate as a means of settling disputes, to encourage a respect for the authority of public institutions, to explain to the public the problems of the national economy (so as to avoid the association between democracy and economic instability, a serious problem in the early 1980s), and to reflect life as well as promote citizens' participation and cultural enrichment. Again we find the broadcasting services being involved in a pseudo-political role, that of disseminating the Constitution's pluralist, civic, democratic ethos. The statements of principle informing the establishment of regional television services largely repeat the above guidelines; most refer specifically to the protection and promotion of regional languages and cultures and to the goal of reinforcing regional identities.

Other rules and guidelines have been produced with regard to advertising. Till 1988, advertising in Spain was regulated by the General Advertising Law (LGP) first promulgated under Franco in 1964 and designed largely to protect the regime's institutions, its notions of good taste, and standards of good conduct. The LGP was modified in 1988, and in 1990 was complemented by a series of norms on advertising produced by TVE's Administrative Council: the latter are the main guidelines regulating television advertising in Spain. Apart from condemning the use of advertising to incite or promote bad behaviour, disorder, and violence, and protecting standards of good taste, especially in regard to language, these recent norms have imposed a series of restrictions on presenting alcohol in advertising in terms of personal, physical, and particularly sexual success. There is, in fact, little or no legislation or formal guidance regarding the portrayal of sex and violence on the small screen, unlike film where legislation passed in 1977 and 1982 controls the exhibition of films whose main subject is sex or violence. The only guideline on the regulation of pornographic material in relation to young people is Article 20.4 of the Constitution, which recognizes the need to protect the public against the corrupting effects of material which undermines 'the basic principles of collective sexual morality'. The fact that there is no specific rule book on the broadcasting of pornographic material on TV has allowed both the national and commercial channels, aware of the need to capture audiences for the advertisers, to broadcast material bordering on the pornographic.

Spanish broadcasting, then, is not short on legislation and sets of norms to provide a framework within which broadcasting activities ought to take place. However, these norms and guidelines mostly operate only at the level of general principles and have not been elaborated into more specific commitments and policies. So far the Spanish system has not been able to create an effective method of regulating programme output; nor has it managed to redefine the notion of
public service in relation to the more complex multi-channel and multi-media situation. Machinery to police the system and to provide an independent voice in defence of the public interest is either too politicized or simply unavailable. In principle, the Administrative Council of RTVE has considerable authority and wide-ranging powers to oversee the operations of the national channels. However, because a substantial number of its members are drawn from the political parties, its activities tend to focus on the politics of broadcasting rather than on programming standards. And as previously mentioned, the advisory councils linked to state and regional television have failed to step into the breach. The introduction of commercial television in Spain should have been a golden opportunity to take a serious look at programme standards and introduce some form of regulatory machinery. Where the government seems reluctant to get involved, Spanish people themselves are beginning to develop their own organizations and pressure groups in order to monitor and improve programme quality and standards. Indeed, a National Federation of Viewers’ Associations has recently emerged as an umbrella organization whose aim is to press government and the commercial operators to be more accountable on specific programming issues. The demands of the Federation include: exclusion of programmes dealing with sex and violence from prime-time scheduling; the exercise of more control over the use of obscene language; the need to avoid promoting certain stereotypical images as desirable role models; the non-exploitation of women as advertising stereotypes and sex objects. Other bodies, including the Catholic Church, are also beginning to throw their weight behind this viewers’ movement—which of course has the capacity to reinforce conservative as much as progressive values—with a view to putting pressure on advertisers and their sponsors.

Notes
1 El País (23 Apr. 1994), 56. In the ratings war with the private channels—esp. Antena 3, which has almost caught up with TVE1 in terms of audience share, see El País (5 Jan. 1994), 50—
TVE1 and 2 have engaged in a highly aggressive programming policy: for example, the last-minute peak-time scheduling of blockbuster films (Lethal Weapon, Batman) against popular, weekend variety shows (Antena 5’s Noche noche, Telecinco’s Querida Concha), resulting in startling shifts in audience participation in favour of TVE.
2 In 1992-3 TVE committed large sums to extremely generous redundancy/early retirement packages, adding to an already sizeable financial deficit, recently criticized by TVE’s Administrative Council, see El País (23 Apr. 1994), 56.
3 A. Sánchez Taberner, Media Concentration in Europe: Commercial Enterprise and the Public Interest (Manchester, 1993), 162.
5 The PSOE’s assumption that expansion in the number of broadcasting outlets would increase competition against a limited amount of advertising revenue was not borne out, since TV advertising expanded in the 1980s at the expense of advertising in other media, such as the press. However, in the 1990s the amount of TV advertising has remained virtually static, at c.200,000 million pesetas annually, though the number of advertisements shown has more than doubled, indicating greater competition and lower prices. See El País (28 Feb. 1993), 46.
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The Film Industry: Under Pressure from the State and Television

AUGUSTO M. TORRES

From cinema’s beginnings, politicians have capitalized on its ability to influence the masses by appearing in news features and instituting controls to regulate production, distribution, and viewing, and (more positively) to protect domestic production from overseas competition. Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Perón, Mao, Castro all took an interest in their national film industries; Franco, who had a film shown for him every night at the Pardo Palace, was no exception. For many years his protectionist film laws allowed most Spanish films to recoup their costs before being shown (though foreign films were made more popular by compulsory dubbing). This, together with censorship, created a dependence on the state which made the industry vulnerable.

In the two years after Franco’s death, new freedom plus the continued existence of the old structures produced a number of films unthinkable before, but which still had problems with the censors. This period also saw a revival of the documentary genre, almost non-existent under the dictatorship for obvious reasons, with new films and the release of others previously banned (e.g. Patino’s Canciones para después de una guerra). This was also a time when Spanish cinema started to make its mark abroad, winning several prizes at international festivals.

On 1 December 1977, new legislation abolished film censorship, setting up a board of classification (with three ratings: adults only, general release, and S for pornographic or violent movies). Controls on importing foreign films were scrapped, but a quota system required distributors to show one day of Spanish films for every two of dubbed foreign films. Additionally, shorts became entitled to automatic subsidy.
In 1978 the Ministry of Culture passed an overspend of 2,000 million pesetas, the result of bad arithmetic, on to film companies at a time when average production costs stood at 20 million pesetas. This, plus difficulties in adapting to a free market economy, brought production to a virtual halt. In the same year, automatic monitoring of box-office returns was introduced to avoid future miscalculations, but in practice the collecting of official information on box-office takings in Spain is still a cumbersome, inaccurate process open to fraud. To make matters worse, in 1979 distributors obtained a High Court ruling declaring the current quota system unconstitutional; in 1980 the ratio was reduced to one day of Spanish films for every three of foreign films, increasing the hold of the US distributors. In addition, during this period Spanish cinemas were flooded by foreign films previously banned.

The only films banned after 1976 were Pasolini's *120 Days of Sodom*, Oshima's *Empire of the Senses*, and Pilar Miró's *El crimen de Cuenca* (1979), which depicted a nineteenth-century judicial error in which the Civil Guard* extracted confessions from innocent victims through torture; after eighteen months the threat of court martial was overruled and the film authorized with an S rating.

No longer needing import licences, most production companies severed links with the big US distributors, allowing them to work more freely. Several film cooperatives also emerged around 1979-80, making some interesting avant-garde productions on a shoestring budget; this experiment, whereby technicians and actors invested their salaries in the production, was short-lived for economic reasons. Such new production modes combined with the problems mentioned above to bring down the annual output of feature films from 108 in 1976 to 89 in 1979.

In 1980 Spanish Television signed a collaboration agreement with the film industry, putting 1,300 million pesetas into the production of films that, after two years' cinema screening, would be broadcast. After various hitches, this scheme bore fruit with several popular TV series plus some top-quality films based on works by Spanish writers. The original scheme developed into a more flexible arrangement whereby Televisión Española bought the broadcasting rights for films it wanted. The disadvantage of this collaboration was that it excluded controversial projects on contemporary issues, without the economic benefits derived from the TV connection being sufficient to compensate for what amounted to an indirect form of cultural control.

After the 1982 elections, the PSOE government named Pilar Miró Director-General of Film. For the first time the post-holder was someone in the profession, who had directed and produced films and worked in television; some important long- and short-term changes were mooted to tackle the industry’s problems. Since domestic production comprised one-third each of S-rated movies, fraudulent co-productions with foreign companies made to secure dubbing permits, and potentially high-quality films, Miró decided to support the last, tightening up on co-productions, and creating 'X'-rated cinemas to show pornographic or violent films, making classification redundant. Subsidies for shorts became discretionary.
In 1984 the so-called ‘Miró Law’ was passed. Based on the French avance sur recette system, it introduced subsidies (up to 50 per cent of total costs) in the form of an advance on the 15 per cent of box-office takings for Spanish films which since 1965 had reverted to production companies. The aim was to promote successful high-quality, big-budget productions, but nowhere did the law tackle the basic, sensitive issue of increasing production companies’ cut of takings. The ‘Miró Law’ did however facilitate some excellent productions, several winning major international prizes, and encouraged a brief come-back by several middle-aged directors (Picazo, Olea, Patino, Camino, Regueiro).

In the same period, the new autonomous governments had a significant impact on the film industry, varying from region to region. These mostly funded the production of regional films that in many cases, being made in the respective ‘dialect’ banned under Franco, were reasonably successful with local audiences but made little impression in other regions where they were dubbed into Castilian. The Catalan autonomous government went so far as to subsidize the dubbing into Catalan of major US productions, to promote the language. The Basque government has adopted the most intelligent, effective criteria, subsidizing up to 25 per cent of the budget for productions made in Basque that treat regional subjects and use Basque technicians and actors.

In 1985 Miró resigned after increasing criticism from those who had been refused subsidies at a time when rising costs and the drop in cinema audiences made state funding vital. Unfortunately she did so without having pushed through a restructuring of the distribution and exhibition networks, increasingly dominated by the big US distributors, domestic production for 1984 having fallen to 75 feature films. Her successor Fernando Méndez Leite, also a film and TV director, continued the policy of subsidies in the form of advances, fighting for increases in state funding and fending off EC attacks on alleged excessive protectionism. He also abolished the requirement for cinemas to show a short with every feature film, killing off a useful low-cost form of apprenticeship.

In 1986 Spain joined the EC. The conditions, negotiated by the previous centre-right government, were disastrous for the film industry. Overnight, EC films qualified for inclusion in the screening quota for Spanish films; this, plus the fact that many US films masqueraded as British or Dutch productions, drastically reduced the proportion of Spanish films exhibited.

Accused of favouritism and serving vested interests, Méndez Leite resigned in 1988. In 1989 his replacement Miguel Márías, whose knowledge of cinema was purely theoretical, was forced under government pressure to dismantle the system of advance subsidies instituted by Miró, who meanwhile had been discredited as Director-General of Spanish Television. With cinema audiences dwindling (in Spain particularly), and the expansion of regional television and franchising of private TV channels offering the public an increased diet of films at home, domestic film...
production continued to plummet, falling from a 1981 peak of 137 films to 48 in 1989. Several talented producers moved to television, reduced their output to one film every four years, or stopped making films altogether, as did some directors.

In 1990 Marías was replaced by a civil servant, Enrique Balmaseda, in a return to the Francoist tradition of appointments. The PSOE’s policy towards the national film industry looks increasingly like one of concerted rationalization. Miró’s argument that funding should be concentrated on high-quality films was used as an excuse to reduce output, and in subsequent years funding was cut back further. Some subsidized films were undeniably poor, and during Méndez Leite’s period in office the press put about the notion that money was being wasted. Miguel Marías was then given the job of stabilizing production at almost a quarter of previous levels. Meanwhile the US distributors are taking over, and soon TV companies will not be able to comply with the broadcasting quotas for Spanish films (whose audience ratings are curiously rising) for lack of material.

The unpredictable take-off of private television has caused a big drop in advertising income for state-owned Televisión Española. The latter’s first measure, in 1990, was to cancel its collaboration agreement with the film industry, while also cancelling most of its own productions. It is a result, television no longer offers a haven for refugees from the film industry.

Relations between cinema and television have always been fraught. When commercial TV first caught on in the USA at the end of the Second World War, politicians realized its hold over the masses was potentially greater than that of cinema, and the power struggle began. It was not until the mid-1950s that television made inroads in Spain, and only in the late 1960s that there were enough private sets for it to become a political weapon. Under the dictatorship this power could not be contested; but with the advent of democracy it was up for grabs, the result being the franchising in 1990 of three private TV channels: Antena 3, Telecinco (strongly Italian-based), and Canal+ (a subscription channel modelled on the similarly named French channel). These years saw a proliferation of news programmes, while competition produced a notable drop in average programme standards. Figures are not available for the first few years of the private TV channels’ existence, but they seem to have turned initial losses into modest profits. Whereas in 1991 the two state-owned channels run by Televisión Española declared losses of 35,000 million pesetas, and the regional television channels (TV3 and Canal 33 in Catalonia, Canal Sur in Andalusia, TeleMadrid, ETB1 and ETB2 in the Basque Country, TVG in Galicia) sustained combined losses of 50,317 million pesetas. The entire deficit of 85,317 million pesetas has been written off by the respective political authorities on the sole condition that they be given prominent coverage on news programmes.

Set against this sum, the total subsidy to the film industry of 4,000 million pesetas (the figure at which funding has been pegged for several years) seems ludicrous. It seems equally unfair that there is no current collaboration between the various state and regional television companies and the film industry—the
private channels are now starting to fund productions—when, out of the total of 112 films broadcast weekly, 23 (i.e. 21 per cent) are Spanish and among the most profitable because of the low prices paid for broadcasting rights plus their high audience ratings.

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Artistic Patronage and Enterprise Culture
EMMA DENT COAD

During the dictatorship, there were varying degrees of control over the visual arts— as in all areas of culture—ranging from official support for exhibitions showing the ‘right’ sort of art to the blatant censorship of certain types of architecture. The nation-wide reconstruction scheme of the 1940s and 1950s employed hundreds of architects in the building of schools, sanatoriums, housing, and churches, but high-quality work was limited to that commissioned by private clients, mainly banks and private homes. Artistic innovation took place in spite of and not because of, government attitudes.

When democracy was established, the new Ministry of Culture (created in 1977) set itself the task—particularly after the PSOE* came to power in 1982—of promoting the arts both through state support and by encouraging private sponsorship for art-related areas. The latter was done on a grand scale. Tax incentives were offered and the arts became big business. Interestingly though, in a 1992 survey companies listed their prime incentive as being a desire to improve their corporate and public image, followed by publicity and the satisfaction of serving the community. Tax relief was listed eighth, just ahead of ‘altruism’.

Throughout the 1980s, commercial sponsors and the Ministry of Culture embraced the arts—and the visual arts most obviously—with unprecedented enthusiasm. In 1982 the Ministry set up the ARCO (Arte Contemporáneo) project, consisting of a government-sponsored annual art fair in Madrid and the Fundación Arco. This foundation’s brief is to build up a collection of world-wide contemporary art, with an annual buying budget of 29 million pesetas. It also organizes educational events and advises commercial concerns on prospective purchases: for example, in 1994 it advised the Coca Cola Foundation on how to spend its annual 20 million peseta art budget. Also in that year, the Fundación Nat West spent part of its annual 5 million peseta cultural budget on sponsoring Foto ARCO, a major international fine art photography fair. It was in the 1980s, thanks to this and other exhibitions, that photography became a high art form in Spain.
The pension fund La Caixa de Pensions became a high-profile sponsor, among other things setting up its own photography gallery in Barcelona. La Caja de Madrid, with a similar remit, has a 6 billion peseta cultural budget. Other major investors in this field are the Banco de Bilbao Vizcaya (BBV) with a staggering 14 billion peseta cultural budget, and Banco Central Hispano with a budget of nearly 6 billion. The fashion house Loewe makes two annual awards totalling 10 million pesetas (one of which is for poetry).

The results of this overwhelming support for cultural activities—covering fine art, public installations, theatre, music, museums, and architecture (the last being the most popular, taking 33 per cent of sponsorship)—have been well documented in the international press, as journalists responded to the orchestrated publicity campaigns. This ‘discovery’ process was given a particular boost by the publicity around the various cultural events hosted by Spain in 1992 (the Barcelona Olympics, Expo in Seville, Madrid Cultural Capital of Europe), leading to concurrent or subsequent exhibitions of Spanish painting, sculpture, and photography, festivals of Spanish cinema, theatre, dance, and music, and tours of Spanish writers throughout Europe (for example, the massive Spanish Arts Festival organized in the UK in 1993 with a mixture of state and private sponsorship).

By this date, most of the autonomous regions had opened brand new or impressively refurbished art centres, by local architects—most notably the Centro Reina Sofia in Madrid, and the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM) in Valencia, both opened in 1986. The arts—architecture in particular—became assimilated into popular culture as waiters and taxi drivers argued for and against the new public buildings. The initial refurbishment of the Centro Reina Sofia, with the intention of turning it into a national centre housing the best Spanish art from around the country, divesting regional galleries of their finest pieces, produced a major controversy. An uneasy compromise was reached—and Madrid kept Guernica—but the actual refurbishment was unsuccessful and had to be redone at tremendous cost in 1992. All this activity led to a terrific rise in the consumption of art, but there was no corresponding increase in analysis, research, cataloguing, archive work, and the various academic activities which the arts rely on for their interpretation and appreciation. The legacy of the lack of a critical forum during the Franco years was no doubt partly to blame. But far from seizing the opportunity to correct this lack, the Ministry of Culture treated art like a natural resource or product, to be promoted nationally or for export.

Paintings of the movida madrileña,* for example, were collected assiduously by wealthy patrons who stockpiled work, raising prices dramatically. But much of it was so closely linked with the ephemeral world of fashion and personality cults that its value was doomed to drop and not recover in the short term. Sponsorship of fringe artists and movements thrust experimental art directly into the mainstream. With so little critical analysis or guidance, the tendency towards support of personal favourites further unbalanced the normal progression from avant-garde marginalization to mainstream popularization. It was hard to know any
By definition, it had always represented rebellion against the establishment. But, once democracy was established, art was put to the task of political propaganda, as an emblem of Spanish youth, energy, diversification, creativity, and tolerance. This process coincided with the rise of market ideology in the 1980s generally, intensified in Spain by the process of integration into Europe in the second part of the decade. In addition to being taken up by big business in a previously unprecedented fashion, art was reclaimed by the state and the establishment. As Mar Villaspsesa wrote in 1989: "this collaboration is the golden dream of any dictatorship."

Autonomous government support of the arts was similarly criticized. In 1989, Juan Gracian said in an article on the growth of art galleries in Andalusia: "it is quite clear that the main concern is to imprint a political stamp on a building. No thought is given to creating an intelligent space in Seville or Granada where artistic events can flourish. What matters is to appear intelligent by creating a centre that provides monumental evidence of the way political developments are flourishing." In the 1990s, regionalist policies have come under discussion. For example, a crisis in regionalist architecture was caused by the insistence on distinct vernacular features, with many autonomous regional governments providing funds expressly for this purpose. There was a huge increase in research into and promotion of regional cultural heritages. For example, of thirty non-government-funded cultural foundations in the Basque Country in 1994, over half were devoted to regional history, language, music, and ethnography. In particular, research into historical and folkloric architectural styles was undertaken by regional architectural schools (for example, in Pamplona), to produce sets of variations on prevailing forms in a self-conscious postmodern mix which was often arbitrary. It could be argued that here sponsorship has been counter-productive.

In 1993, in a new climate of economic recession, Carmen Alcorch Bataller was appointed to the Ministry of Culture. Among her proposals were major cut-backs in foreign promotions and the encouragement of further private investment in the arts. More positively, she put forward plans for setting up debating forums for the arts, and for improving the level of cultural awareness. But the problem remains that, in Spain today, art is publicly seen as an item of consumption, a highbrow, elitist activity where connoisseurs, intellectuals, and patrons mingle: coverage in the gossip magazine *Hola* of the Thyssen entourage epitomizes this phenomenon. The PSOE government's negotiations to secure the Thyssen collection for Spain resulted in considerable publicity—the opening of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum coincided fortunately with the 1992 cultural bonanza—at the expense of striking a deal that was singularly advantageous to the collection's owner. Unfortunately, many choose to ignore the tremendous interest in the arts of the Spanish general public, as shown in the wide-ranging survey published by the Ministry of Culture in 1992 to attract sponsorship. But most investment was going to high-profile, elitist projects of a short-term nature. Little was being invested in middle- or lowbrow cultural activities or in long-term research and education.
Notes
1 'Absolute Majority Syndrome', Arena Internacional del Arte, 1 (Feb. 1989), 86.

Further reading
Jiménez-Blanco Carillo de Albornoz, M. D., Arte y estado en la España del siglo XX (Madrid, 1989) (on creation of state—including regional—museums of modern art from 1894 to present).

The Ministry of Culture produces regular reports on cultural activities, financing, and consumption. The following are particularly useful:

Equipamientos, prácticas y consumos culturales de los españoles (Madrid, 1991).
El patrocinio empresarial de la cultura en España (Madrid, 1992).

Designer Culture in the 1980s: The Price of Success
EMMA DENT COAD

During the Franco regime the design of innovative products was officially deemed to be a subversive activity, too strongly linked to individual or regional expression, both of which were controlled by the censorship laws (these particularly affected cultural production in Catalonia). In the 1940s and early 1950s, the policy of autarky meant that industry was geared towards import substitution, which in practice meant that foreign products were copied, usually in an inferior manner to make them cheaper. It was thus virtually impossible to get original ideas manufactured.

Since no new organizations could be set up without government permission, it was also impossible for designers to form any kind of mutual support group or lobby. From the start of the 1950s, some designers made use of existing organizations mainly connected with the fine and decorative arts, such as El Foment de les Artes Decoratives (FAD, founded in Barcelona in 1903), setting up groups within their structures which met to discuss issues. Towards the end of the 1970s, the lack of manufacturing capacity led a number of designers to set up small manufacturing units themselves. Among them were BD (Barcelona Diseño) and Vinçon (also of Barcelona), which had their own retail outlets, together with a small number of furniture and lighting companies. With the arrival of democracy, Spaniards wishing to celebrate their new sense of cultural identity began to buy these locally made products in large numbers; in Catalonia it became a way of expressing regional pride. A combination of political and cultural freedom, increased personal income, and the desire to break with the past of a new generation born in the 1950s and 1960s, created a market hungry for new aesthetic ideas.

This phenomenon was first identified in Madrid, where underground rock bands suddenly became folk heroes. The bars and clubs where they performed served as
As a new, young, active, articulate avant-garde. Film-maker Pedro Almodóvar was a linchpin, using many of its protagonists as actors and as set and costume designers. Painting, sculpture, fashion, jewellery, film, music, theatre, and dance blossomed overnight and were quickly hailed as the new hope of a new Spain.

One of the hundreds of foreign ‘style’ journalists—which one is a matter of dispute—christened the movement la movida.* Journalists and artists fed off each other in a mutual admiration society that had its own magazines, its own clubs, and its own galleries and shops.

Barcelona saw a similar explosion, which found concrete expression in the creation of new interiors both for clubs, restaurants, and bars, and for the shops where those benefiting from the new affluence could buy original, exciting products. While Madrid excelled in avant-garde fine arts and music, Barcelona specialized in fashion, furniture, and accessories. By the mid-1980s Barcelona had over twice as many design shops (30) as the entire British Isles (12). Large stores like BD, Vinçon, and Pilma sold furniture, lighting, accessories, and kitchen equipment. They were also the first to sell Italian goods, which became highly influential in the design world. These same stores—like the large number which sprang up nation-wide to satisfy the demand for designer objects—also sponsored designers to produce limited editions, and had fine-art galleries within the store (Vinçon in Barcelona, Lluís Adelantado in Valencia), firmly placing art and design in the same cultural category.

Architecture enjoyed a similar vogue. The demand for designer products in the domestic market took everyone by surprise: by 1986, for example, production of furniture was doubling every year, demand coming almost entirely from the domestic market.

The cult of the designer bar began in Barcelona, spreading throughout Spain. As a meeting-point for architecture, interior design, fine art, fashion, and socializing, designer bars epitomized the spirit of the age: a coming together of culture, commerce, and, most important, youth. The celebration of youth was the starting-point for style in this period. It made fun of authority (whether Franco, parents, religion, or local government); it used and abused cultural clichés such as bulls, flamenco dancers, bourgeois taste; and it imbued a sense of meaning—real or imagined—through the use of metaphor and irony.

In 1978 Fernando Amat, together with a young designer/artist Javier Mariscal, had created Merbeye, arguably the first designer bar: avant-garde, built in a warehouse, characterized by visual jokes and the subversive treatment of materials and surfaces. Architect and designer Alfredo Arrías, in collaboration with Mariscal and/or others, created more designer interiors—shops, restaurants, but especially bars—than any other in the course of the 1980s. Arrías’s style was rich in metaphorical references, employing the colours and materials of seduction—deep blues and reds, purple, velvet, suede, billowing curtains, opaque glass—and pounding music. His inspirations were a postmodern mix of 1950s design (the Italian Carlo Mollino), American-style movies (Bladerunner, Blue Velvet), and a local fascination...
27 Interior of the designer bar Las Torres de Ávila, created in Barcelona in 1991 by Javier Mariscal and Alfredo Arribas, showing the 'female' tower in which tables and stools, arranged in a circle under a rising-and-falling canopy, look down through a hole on to the bar itself. (The 'male' tower has a piston travelling up and down it, in a deliberately vulgar joke.) This totally designed environment constructs a typically postmodernist self-contained, parodic space that turns everything into play and representation: a world with no 'outside'.
This was the ultimate designer experience, with everything—decor to toilets, menus, logos, and even the music—designed by Arribas in a totally designed environment, offering the youth of Barcelona release in their crowded family apartments and—above all—fun.

This movement reached its climax in 1991, when Arribas and Mariscal designed their most ambitious venture, Las Torres de Avila. Over the past years, each successive bar had achieved new decorative excesses. Las Torres outdid them all, but it was the last bar of the 1980s rather than the first of the 1990s. Unlike its predecessors, it failed. For, located at the gates of the touristic Pueblo Español, Las Torres de Avila played on the very clichés that Arribas himself had created, reducing itself to self-parody in a self-conscious reconstruction of the mottoes and motifs of the design world. It was not so much a designer bar as a simulation of a designer bar. Almost immediately it became the place where businessmen would bring overseas clients to view the cream of the city's youth, but not enough young people came. It marked a crisis point in the history of designer culture.

Another problem was that, once the dynamism and originality of Spanish design had been acknowledged, government policy did its best to promote it abroad. A wide-reaching, costly marketing strategy was implemented, sending Spanish designers on subsidized trips to foreign fairs, and bringing journalists to Spain by the plane-load. The strategy was highly successful and the image of Spanish design prospered. But, without the corresponding investment in industrial modernization and management training, many of these organizations could not cope with the enquiries and orders that flooded in. Most designers had never worked in mainstream industry and had little business acumen. Some companies had no foreign-language speakers; some had only small manufacturing units which could not cope with increased orders. Others used a number of different manufacturing or assembly studios, making quality control a nightmare. Orders were late and clients began to send products back.

In short, it all happened too quickly. There was a constant flurry of new shop openings, new bar openings, new exhibition openings, fashion weeks, furniture weeks. The spur of the 1992 Olympics—and the government and corporation money it attracted—set the machine of designer culture working at ever greater speed. What got lost in this orgy of cultural consumption were the ideas, ethos, and originality which had brought Spanish design to prominence in the first place.

The year 1992 was a tough one for Spain. Recession was beginning to hit tourism world-wide, and financial institutions—banks, savings banks, and investment foundations—were suffering. The Seville Expo, the celebrations for Madrid European Capital of Culture, the Barcelona Olympics went ahead with almost enough visitors who spent not quite enough money. In the aftermath, the design community paused to take stock. Bars are still opening and new furniture is still being launched, but at a much less frantic pace than previously. In this relative...
lull, the design community is learning from the mistakes it made in the 1980s, and refocusing on self-reflexion and theory.

Further reading