

# Making Madrid Modern: Globalization and Inequality in a European Capital

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## Introduction

How to tell the story of a city? There are millions of narratives, from the residents, to the policy makers, to the holiday goers. The city of Madrid, capital of Spain, once the seat of a vast empire, has long struggled to write a narrative of metropolitan life that would position the city as an international cosmopolitan center. Paris and Amsterdam easily outshone the Spanish capital city. Within Spain, Barcelona and Sevilla managed to capture the global imaginary with the 1992 Olympics and World Expo. In reference to Saskia Sassen's global city analytic, this paper will look at the urban development of Madrid as it relates to image-making and to the ambitions and aspirations of a city struggling both to place itself on the world's stage and to wrest itself from the grips of the memory of Catholic authoritarianism. This paper examines how new development in the 1990s sought to remake the image of the city as a center of multinational capital accumulation, forsaking its role as a cultural capital. Drawing on the work of Marshall Berman and David Harvey, I argue that this new development relied on a process of creative destruction that sought to annihilate the recent memory of Franco's authoritarian regime. This process of creative destruction, in turn, produced new images for the young democracy, re-inventing the city as a space of flexible capital accumulation and corporate strength.

Meanwhile, this kind of urban planning produced a particular image of the modern city without addressing underlying inequalities. By looking at cultural artifacts like the novels and films of an era, we can approximate a different narrative than the one told by official publications, design books, or even simple observations. The alternative urban images from films and novels allow us a window into a different reality that challenges the notion of a global city. Through creative destruction, a new Madrid has developed, but it remains only a façade that does not touch upon some of the bleaker realities of life. In the end, the urban development of Madrid reflects the shifting of hegemonic power from the old dictatorial regime to a new regime of multinational corporations aided by neoliberal

economic policies, offering a glimpse into the ongoing dynamic that provoked Spain's most recent protest movements.

### **The Glittering Façade of Millennial Modernity**

Throughout its recent history, Spain has had a troubled relationship with modernity. The state's attempts to make Madrid a modern metropolis of postindustrial capital accumulation were part of an effort to place the country on the global map. An anxiety that Madrid and by extension Spain have not realized their full potential within a larger international order is an ongoing narrative in Spanish culture. Francisco Franco tried to reposition the country as a power of equal weight to other European countries often using the image of Madrid as a tool.<sup>1</sup> Upon Franco's death in 1975, Spain was reborn after a peaceful transition to democracy. Now Madrid's reference points are no longer other European capitals, but rather global cities. In the global city scheme put forth by Sassen, certain powerful nodes on the map act as command and control centers within the world's economy. In her analytic, these specific nodes on the world map defy national borders and act on a truly global level. The world's ecology has been re-written into a giant hierarchical schematic where London, New York, and Tokyo are the elite members of a trifecta of financial power. In the wake of the success of these capitals of capital, many other cities have tried to play up to this "worlding." As Roy, Goldman and others have demonstrated, cities attempt to attain global city status through a "worlding" process of planning. This process involves star architects, multinational corporations, and public-private partnerships that collude to produce new urban landscapes that are often highly unequal.

In Madrid, new urban projects after the dictatorship took place on a grand scale. While aided by the state, the private sector largely funded either directly or indirectly these projects. The Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) was in power when Madrid began to formulate its grand plans. The PSOE emphasized issues of social justice and the right to the city in its planning documents, influenced by the work of French Marxist urban scholar Henri Lefebvre. In his short work *The Right to the City*, Lefebvre defends the right of residents to make the city as they see fit. Despite the theoretical importance of Lefebvre, architects and government officials formulated plans in which "the emphasis on slick outward appearances did not always coincide with the planner's diagnosis of the city's problems or the solutions they presented" (Compitello 405). For large-scale projects, the

government turned to star architects forged in the crucible of the private corporate sector. One of the most celebrated projects of the late 1980s-early 1990s was the new train station at Atocha designed by the increasingly prominent Rafael Moneo. The train station, which promised a rational, simplified design to untangle the messy rail lines, was immediately celebrated in Spain and abroad. Many biographies of Moneo, who went on to design many museums and public buildings, do not mention that he got his start designing massive office blocks for major Spanish corporations. He first designed emblematic buildings for the Spanish banks Bankuni3n and Bankinter. When the Bankuni3n building was unveiled, “it became a monumental presence on Madrid’s Paseo de la Castellana, and to the man in the street it stood for architecture at its most modern” (Larson 397).

Indeed, this development along the Castellana has come to define the new Madrid. At one end, Moneo’s Atocha station welcomes travelers to the new Spanish capital. However, Spanish planners, architects, and politicians conspired to develop the urban landscape at the other end of this grand avenue, as a new landscape of corporate Spain rose along the edges of the capital. Malcolm Alan Compitello writes, “From the 1970s on, the Castellana began to replace the Gran Vía as the central axis of Madrid’s urban development” (209). This transition appears in architectural magazines from the era including *Arquitectura y Vivienda* and *Urbanismo*, the official publication of the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid. Local government promoted the new corporate development along the Castellana as being central to the contemporary image of Madrid. Published by the Comunidad de Madrid in 1998, *Urbanismo y arquitectura en el Madrid actual* serves as a didactic guide for schools about the capital city. The cover displays an image of the Castellana, with the corporate headquarters of BBVA, one of the largest Spanish banks. The text privileges the corporate development along the Castellana. The first architectural projects presented as emblematic of the contemporary city are the new skyscrapers located along the northern section of the Castellana.

Projects relying on a complex web of land, capital, and construction capabilities are symptomatic of the Spanish economic climate in the 1980s. Spain encouraged rapid privatization, as well as high rates of foreign investment. The governing party preached the language of socialism, yet pursued neoliberal economic policies: “The PSOE solution to fixing the crisis in capitalist accumulation that had gripped the Spanish economy since the late 1970s was to

embrace the economic policies of neoliberalism” (Compitello 406). The “worlding” of Madrid and the Spanish economy is evident in the very pages of the architecture magazines that reported on new urban developments in the capital. *Urbanismo* printed English translations at the foot of every page, thus anticipating a foreign audience of professionals. A perusal of copies of *Urbanismo* from 1992 reveals advertisements for an Italian industrial design firm, Greggotti Associati, and reviews of architecture works written in English. Articles covered different architectural and urban projects throughout Spain and Europe. We see in these cultural artifacts the logic of flexible accumulation, as described by Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, in which a whole host of items become commodities for exchange. New architectural projects were not only sites of leisure, work or domestic life, but also images that entered into circulation.

The urban development that emerged out of this privatization and foreign direct investment was concentrated around the northern segments of the broad avenue of the Castellana. Central to this development was the construction of the Plaza Castilla, which would act as a new gateway to the city from the north, a counterpart to the Puerta de Atocha. The 1992 article on Madrid’s urban development in *Urbanismo* mentions the new construction of the Plaza de Castilla as one of the important urban projects underway with “architecture of quality” (Martínez-Campos 5). The crown jewel of the Plaza Castilla development is a pair of towers designed to angle over the wide street towards one another (Fig. 1). The *Torres KIO* reveal the new transnational nature of capital, speculation, and talent.<sup>2</sup> London-based Kuwaiti Investment Office (hence the KIO) financed the buildings. The architecture firm of Philip Johnson, Burgee, Johnson and Associates designed the towers, which were constructed on land made available by the “dos Albertos,” Alberto Alcocer and Alberto Cortina, both married to heirs to the Spanish department store *Corte Ingles*. Upon construction, they were rechristened the *Puerta de Europa*, “indicating in this way that that at the end of the Paseo de la Castellana, these inclined towers would finish off the city’s North-South axis, creating an allegorical gate along the road that lead towards the Europe of prosperity” (Fernández Herráez 52).

By baptizing these towers with this particular language, the city appropriated them into a specific urban tradition. At two ends of the old city, the *Puerta de Toledo* and the *Puerta de Alcalá* are reminders of the city’s Baroque past, etched in stone and unchanged for centuries.

If those arches serve as ceremonial gates of an imperial past, these inclined towers of glass and steel emerge as the modern counterpart, the gateway through which Madrid will pass into a new millennium. While the *puertas* of old referenced the medieval Spanish towns of Toledo and Alcalá de Henares, this *Puerta* led to Europe and to the world beyond national borders. The *Puertas de Alcalá* and *Toledo* were visions of kings realized with the colonial gold lining state coffers, while this new arch was the product of private, transnational capital.

### **Creative Destruction: Excavating an Urban History**

The Castellana, crowned by the twin specters of the tilted *Torres KIO*, emerges as the image of this new Spain of multinational corporations and unbridled capital accumulation. In keeping with Harvey's analysis of urbanization as a process of capitalization, the city of Madrid was produced through international money making schemes. However, this imagining of the Castellana relies on a process of creative destruction that sought to erase the collective memory of the Franco era. Drawing on Marx, Berman describes creative destruction as the power of capital to both annihilate and make new, forever both obliterating the past and re-inventing the future. Development along the Castellana, in fact, re-created this space, destroying its previous meaning. The fevered dreams of national power played out along this avenue are not a new invention of a young democracy at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Instead, this reshaping of the Castellana as a place of international investment and commerce seeks to do away with an earlier concept of the Castellana, one in which other dreams of national image and power were articulated through built forms.

In the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, Franco used Madrid and its public space as a means of declaring the legitimacy of his dictatorship and establishing his authority. Immediately following his ascent to power, Franco commissioned new plans to make Madrid a capital to rival Paris or Rome. Further, emerging victorious from the bloody wreckage of the Civil War, Franco planned a giant celebration throughout Madrid. The *New York Times* reported that the Falange had constructed three makeshift triumphal arches along the Avenida de la Castellana, down which Franco would proceed surrounded by his army ("Madrid is Bedecked for Victory Parade"). The Castellana was a monumental space upon which he could boldly write his dreams of empire. His attachment to the street is evident in the name he re-christened the Castellana as he went about renaming the streets to honor Catholic martyrs, figures

from Spain's imperial past, and leaders within his Falange party. For this avenue, the longest in Madrid and many car-widths across, he chose the name Avenida del Generalismo, thus honoring his own image and position.

The Castellana was not just a place of spectacle and self-congratulation for Franco, but rather the linchpin in his urban redevelopment of Madrid. Planning and urban development reconfigured the city along this street, pulling economic activity and tourism out of the center towards the northern periphery. One of the landmark projects of the early years of the regime was the creation of the Hotel Castellana Hilton, its location "the most appropriate place in Madrid for a building of this category" ("Hotel Castellana Hilton"). The hotel was at the corner of the Castellana and the new Paseo de María de Molina, a recently constructed, wide boulevard connecting Madrid to the airport. The hotel was located just south of the new ministries complex and the Santiago Bernabeu soccer stadium. The new soccer stadium was inaugurated in late 1947, a few years before the hotel's opening. Construction companies were erecting new middle class apartment complexes in the area to draw in local residents. Charging the equivalent of a half month's rent, 100 pesetas, for a night for a single room, the hotel was not intended for the middle class (Delgado Paez de la Cadena 8961). By placing such an important tourist destination distant from the traditional center, the company responsible for the construction of the hotel, the Inmobiliaria del Carmen, followed the dicta of the regime. As specified in the *Plan Bidagor* for Madrid, the Franco regime embarked on extending the Castellana, whose area would "constitute the new commercial center" and "contain a new grouping of commerce and spectacles" (Dieguez and Bidagor Section 7.71). A hotel far from the historic Puerta del Sol would immediately inject money into the area as noted in *Gran Madrid*, the regime's publication on urban planning ("Hotel Castellana Hilton").

The Franco government used images of this public space to sell Spain, whereas contemporary Madrid sells itself. A half-page advertisement in the newspaper *Informaciones* commemorating New Year's 1945 proclaimed the glory of "*madrileño* commerce" (Fig. 2). A pen-and-ink illustration of the Palacio de Cibeles, the giant post office at the center of the city, stands in the middle with the Castellana spreading out elegantly before it. Imprints of various Spanish companies, from electrical installation companies, artistic reproduction services and other Spanish companies surround the image. A variety of commerce declares the capital's strength as an

urban beauty and an economic power to readers in 1945. Today, democratic Madrid contains a new panoply of urban symbols of commerce and culture. Buildings have been drawn into the process of capital accumulation to become their own urban advertisements. While prior attempts to sell products by tying them to the built environment relied on pen-and-ink drawings in the pages of a pedestrian publication, the new buildings of the democracy bear corporate logos upon their outer shells, explicitly declaring the previously unseen movements of capital that contributed to their development (Fig. 4). Henri Lefebvre instructs us that space is a social production that allows the hegemonic classes to maintain their influence and perpetuate capital accumulation. The production of space, as a capitalist enterprise, in the corporate landscape of an international Madrid is suddenly blatant.

### **Two Madrids: Behind the Façade**

If we look to film and literature, we can see the ways in which this urban development gained visual currency, while also failing to substantively alter the daily lives of the metropolis' denizens. The new buildings of urban development along the Castellana and also within the old city quickly became emblematic internationally. Popular culture quickly made use of this new landscape, as evidenced in the films of Pedro Almodóvar. The 1995 film *La flor de mi secreto* narrates the story of Leo Macías, a romance novelist struggling with her personal life. The story unfolds in her apartment, located along the Gran Vía, a central artery running perpendicular to the Castellana. From her window, Leo sees a massive billboard advertising her newest novel. It spans the height of the FNAC building. FNAC is a French chain of stores selling books, records, movies, and electronics, and it opened its store in Madrid in 1993. The new economy of multinational corporations appears writ large across the Spanish silver screen, meshed with the undeniably Spanish face of Marisa Paredes. Two Madrids merge into one: the Madrid of Almodóvar, whose profane imaginings of his capital city make frequent reference to its camp traditions of the bullfight and flamenco, superimposed upon the landscape of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century corporate Madrid. Indeed, even while Leo operates within a society marked by globalization – her wayward husband is a military officer stationed in Brussels and Belgium – she still wanders through a landscape of kitschy signs. Susan Sontag writes that camp “is love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration.” Flamenco as encapsulated in the movie in the form of the famous *bailador* Joaquín

Cortes has certainly taken on this quality of camp, the exaggerated movements of its dancers internationally recognized as “authentically Spanish.”

The visible cloaking of the FNAC building serves to appropriate the built landscape into the camp aesthetic, revealing the fallacy of globalization. Is Almodóvar appropriating this landscape of transnational capital into his visual encyclopedia of Spanish camp? Or has the new Madrid thus controlled the auteur, inscribing his filmic spaces with a new pattern of capital accumulation? I would argue that this physical cloaking is an act to counter the hegemony of these multinational corporations that have invaded the old Baroque city. This film betrays the spectacular quality of Madrid’s neoliberal urbanism, as daily life is constantly mediated through images, representations, and consumer goods. The spectacle of mass consumption is now the dominant paradigm, but it can be subverted and ultimately obscured through film. Further, the filmmaker indicates a paradox. While the political class and the financial masters of the universe clamor for a global city where capital can roam free, Almodóvar’s public – both Spanish and international – yearn for the Madrid *castizo* of bullfights and *bulerías*. As the landscape takes on a uniform quality, in which the financial centers of major cities are indistinguishable from one another, the movie-going audience wants the “authentic” experience that only camp can provide.

In *Carne trémula* (1997), a film made after *La flor de mi secreto*, but concerned with the years around the Barcelona Olympics, reveals this corporate Madrid to mask the bleaker reality of uneven development. In the age of flexible accumulation, urban development takes on a frenzied pace, but concentrates itself in certain geographies, thus producing territories highly differentiated by inequality. This unevenness, glossed over in a flurry of seductive images in architectural magazines, is evident in Almodóvar’s film. After a stint in jail, Victor returns home to Madrid, to a house located right next to the *Puerta de Europa*. Almodóvar identifies Madrid as part of a new global system through other mechanisms. The love interest in the film is an Italian woman, a reminder of Spain joining the European community in 1986. Further, one character is a professional athlete whose image bedecks ads for Champion, the American sportswear brand. The *Torres KIO* are embedded in this world where people, images, and consumer goods circulate freely. Moreover, Almodóvar adapted the screenplay from the work of British mystery writer Ruth Rendell, which locates this

film in a larger circuit of transnational cultural consumption. In this film, however, these new buildings trumpeting the advent of a long-desired modernity appear in fact as a façade. The house that Victor returns to behind Madrid's twin towers is in a *chabola* settlement, a Spanish shantytown in the urban periphery. The day is overcast, but through the mist emerges the specter of one tower, an illusive ghost that taunts the slums. While the tower is a testament to Madrid's new place in the global economy, its surroundings betray a different reality. Through film, Almodóvar manages to draw attention away from these towers and all that they symbolize towards the world ordinary Spaniards occupied. As Madrid is trying to remake its image as a global city, Almodóvar produces a film that, opening internationally, reveals the superficiality of this new image.

Further, the portrayal of these slum neighborhoods reveals a continuum with the urban projects of the Franco era. One of the regime's goals, upon the conclusion of the Civil War, was the task of cleaning up Madrid, and abolishing the vast areas of shantytowns around the city. According to the regime, the republicans had left the city disgusting, with "the most repulsive dirtiness that invaded everything" (Iniesta Corredor, Gonzalo Calavia, and Bernal 10). Franco spoke of the experience of entering the city, "contemplating the miserable slums, these districts that surround the city" (Franco 1). The city was encased in a ring of misery and sewage. Areas of the city "suffered from unsanitary households and excessive density" (Bidagor Lasarte 16). Outlying communities, without the infrastructure that could keep vigil on inhabitants, were seen as both politically and physically dirty. In a *New York Times* article from 1947, the author, whose tone is particularly sympathetic to Spain and Franco, described the city, finishing his article with an anecdote about the Gomez family living in the Tetuan district north of the center, also known as "Little Moscow." The family lived in "four tiny rooms, each about eight feet square, on the fourth floor of a tenement" (Brewer 28). Such districts were poorly cared for with rampant poverty and filthy conditions. Moving to the present, Almodóvar's films reveal the persistence of these shantytowns. His cinematographic depiction of Madrid suggests the failure of both the regime's urban project and democracy's attempts to remake the city.

The feeling that progress, while seemingly manifested in the cold figures of new skyscrapers or the greasy wares of international fast food chains, remains elusive is a reoccurring trope. The 1994 novel *Historias del Kronen* by José Angel Mañas is particularly emblematic of a middle-class adolescent experience in this new Madrid. The name comes from the sign at the neighborhood bar that a group of

teenagers frequent, in which Kronen is short for Kronenberg beer, a French brand that has penetrated the Spanish market. The teenage protagonists move about the modern city in their cars, driving down the Castellana only to stop at intersections to be propositioned by prostitutes. Carlos, the young narrator, wants nothing more than to get laid, get drunk, take drugs, and hang out. His outlook is decidedly provincial, even as the world around him is rapidly changing. In the first chapter, annoyed with other *fútbol* fans who support Atlético Madrid instead of Real Madrid, he says:

No hay más que rencor, y en toda España están igual. En todos lados pasa lo mismo: en el País Vasco, en Cataluña. En Baleares y en Canarias nos llaman godos, en Asturias te tachan Oviedo para escribir Ovieu; hasta una andaluza me dijo el otro día que era la tiranía de Madrid lo que empobrecía Andalucía. Estamos en una situación de preguerra civil. Aquí va a pasar como en Yugoslavia y en Rusia. (Mañas 2)

His stream of consciousness moves rapidly from rival fans to civil war with very little understanding of the world around him. He thinks only as a *madridista* (Real Madrid fan), completely egoistic in his appraisal of the rest of the world.

In one scene, he visits his elderly grandfather, who speaks at length about the changes Madrid has experienced in his lifetime. He remembers when sheep grazed near the Puerta de Toledo. Carlos is completely blasé, observing his grandfather as a relic living in a past divorced from the present. In another scene, the young characters go to the central neighborhood of Lavapiés, which is full of junkies, delinquency, and disorder. The glittery new skyscrapers along the horizon are merely seductive holograms, their sweeping declaration of unbridled capital unable to penetrate the inner reaches of the city. The promise that progress would bring not only a culture of consumption, but also enlightenment and a better future, is dead. Progress has simply brought a wider variety of beer, the Big Mac, the allure of more sex and more exotic drugs, and the luxury of leisure.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The “worlding” of Madrid created a sparkling landscape of corporate power and prestige, but failed to address the underlying inequalities of the urban landscape. The towers that hover along the Castellana proclaim a myriad of transnational transactions of capital that have flowed from all parts of the globe, pooling in the urban

spaces of the Spanish capital city. Madrid was able to reinvent itself as a space of corporate culture. The long, wide Avenida de la Castellana served as the site of this gamble, which wagered the future of a city with a troubled past on dreams of glass and steel. This incarnation of the space was merely a reinvention of the avenue as a place of capital accumulation and globalization, rather than one of authoritarian victory and national hubris. The history of the Castellana reveals to a certain extent the history of a nation whose aspirations shifted from Catholic totalitarianism to global cosmopolitanism. In the process, this previous version was lost and buried under the weight of frenzied development. Madrid is only now confronting the uglier realities that lie beneath its asphalt, coming to terms with almost forty years of dictatorship and then democracy's inability to address the underlying inequalities that period produced. In the late spring of this year, thousands of people took to the street to rally against the government and the multinational corporations. Rampant inequality, as it manifests within the city, is a central complaint of the *indignados* who congregate in Sol. The banks with their neoliberal logic have had an intractable hand in molding this city, irrevocably altering an increasingly exasperated society.

#### NOTES

1. We can see evidence of this within many instances where authors chose to compare Madrid, and by extension Spain, to other European capitals and countries. Madrid was often referred to in the same breath as Paris, London, Berlin, and Rome, even though the populations and areas of these cities far exceeded those of Madrid.

2. From here on, I interchange *Torres KIO* with *Puerta de Europa*.

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FIGURES



Fig. 1. The Torres KIO and the Plaza Castilla.



Fig. 2. Advertisement. Reprinted from *Informaciones*, Jan. 1, 1945: 6.

